

The employability dispositif, or the re-articulation of the relationship between universities and their environment

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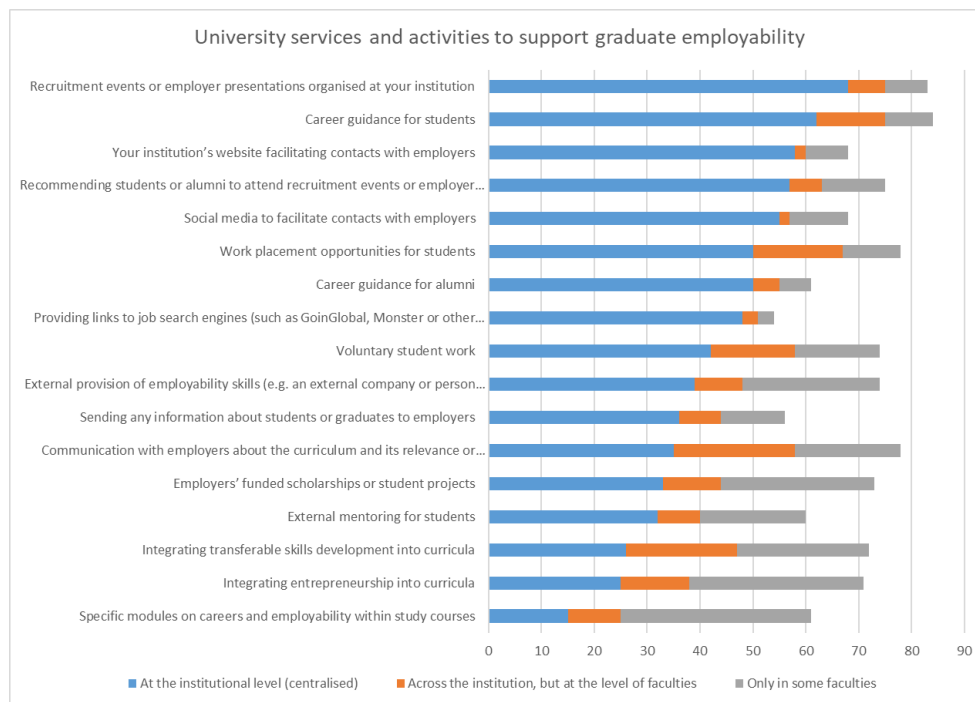


Figure 1. The number of answers on the services and activities offered by respondent universities to facilitate graduate employability

Table 1. The number of answers on a 7-point Likert scale about the extent of the general use of social media.

	Never	1 – very rarely	2	3	4	5	6	7 – very often
LinkedIn	10	5	9	12	7	10	14	17
Facebook	0	0	1	0	4	11	24	44
Twitter	7	7	3	9	3	11	18	26
YouTube	10	6	5	9	10	19	14	11
Instagram	19	6	3	11	9	8	12	16
Pinterest	71	3	1	2	2	2	3	0
Xing	70	3	2	1	2	5	1	0

Table 2. The number of answers on a 7-point Likert scale about the use of particular LinkedIn features.

	Do not know	1 - very rarely	2	3	4	5	6	7 - very often
Students jobs portal	24	10	4	3	6	1	1	11
Alumni groups	15	4	2	2	2	8	2	25
University pages	13	1	0	1	5	8	5	27
Alumni tool	21	7	3	2	4	4	5	14
Other	45	7	1	2	2	1	1	1

Annex 1: The survey sample

Table 3. Characteristics of the sample

Variable	Category	Sample	
		N	%
University status	Public	76	90.5
	Private	8	9.5
Highest level of qualification	Doctoral level	78	92.9
	Master's level	6	7.1
Age	Among older universities in the country	54	64.3
	Among younger universities in the country	30	35.7
Rank	Ranked among the best in the country	47	56.0
	Ranked average in the country	36	42.9
	Ranked below average in the country	1	1.2
Varieties of Capitalism	Coordinated market economies (CMEs) (AT, BE, DK, FI, DE, SE, CH, NL)	18	21.4
	Liberal market economies (LMEs) (IE, UK)	14	16.7
	South European Countries (SEC) A : 100 and above GDP/capita measured in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) ¹ (FR)	1	1.2
	South European Countries (SEC) B : Below 100 GDP/capita measured in PPS (IT, ES, PT)	28	33.3
	Eastern European countries (CEEC) A : 60 and above GDP/capita measured in PPS (HR, CZ, HU, PL, SK, SI)	13	15.5
	Eastern European countries (CEEC) B : below GDP/capita measured in PPS (BIH, BG, MK)	5	6.0
	Emerging economies (BLR, KOS)	2	2.4
	Advanced emerging economies (TR)	3	3.6

Notes: All institutional demographics are self-declared. Countries that universities were based in were Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), Belarus (BLR), Switzerland (CH), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Kosovo (KOS), FYR

¹ For further information on PPS see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tec00114>

Macedonia (MK, FYR), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Turkey (TR), United Kingdom (UK).

Annex 2. Services offered by universities.

Table 4. The number of answers to the possible activities and services for facilitating graduate employability

	Yes, at the institutional level (centralised)	Yes, across the institution, but at the level of faculties	Yes, in some faculties	No, but we are planning this	No
Career guidance for students	62	13	9	0	0
Career guidance for alumni	50	5	6	12	11
Work placement opportunities for students	50	17	11	2	4
Voluntary student work	42	16	16	1	9
Recruitment events / employer presentations organised at your institution	68	7	8	0	1
Recommending students / alumni to attend recruitment events / employer presentations outside of your institution	57	6	12	4	5
External mentoring for students	32	8	20	15	9
Integrating transferable skills development into curricula	26	21	25	7	5
Integrating entrepreneurship into curricula	25	13	33	7	6
Specific modules on careers and employability within study courses	15	10	36	7	16
Communication with employers about the curriculum and its relevance or content for the job market	35	23	20	1	5
External provision of employability skills (e.g. an external company or person coming to the institution and training students)	39	9	26	4	6
Your institution's website facilitating contacts with employers	58	2	8	8	8
Social media to facilitate contacts with employers	55	2	11	3	13
Sending any information about students or graduates to employers	36	8	12	4	24
Employers' funded scholarships or student projects	33	11	29	4	7
Providing links to job search engines (such as GoinGlobal, Monster or other local international engines)	48	3	3	9	21

The employability dispositif, or the re-articulation of the relationship between universities and their environment

Abstract

This paper focuses on how universities address graduate employability and their use of social media in this context. It joins critical studies which link the employability imperative to a neo-liberal transformation of the higher education landscape. However, we also highlight important differences in the degree to which this concern, framed as the employability dispositif, has become institutionalised and put into practice. Consequently, we can speak of a variegated graduated employability dispositif. The overview that we present in this contribution draws on the findings of a survey that we conducted in 2018, receiving responses from 84 European universities in 26 European countries, which makes our study the most comprehensive in the field to date. Following an abductive approach, we aim to find the best explanations for the differences that we have identified in the survey. We show that a high youth unemployment rate has little explanatory power for the strength of the employability dispositif, in contrast to tuition fees and the country typology that we develop. The dispositif is most advanced in Liberal Market Economies, where universities are on the way to becoming labour market institutions in their own right.

Keywords: graduate employability, social media, varieties of capitalism, university, labour market, Foucault

Introduction¹

This paper focuses on the role of the employability imperative in rearticulating the role of universities. Graduate employability has become a buzzword in the last decade, taking a prime position in policy documents as well as in newspaper articles pondering the role of universities. It has been incorporated into the strategy documents of universities and led to a mushrooming in academic literature on the topic (see e.g. Griffiths et al. 2018; Minocha et al. 2018; Grosemans et al. 2017; Donald et al. 2017; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios 2017). Many of these academic studies support the claim that higher education needs to change in order to improve the employment prospects of graduates. Some underline the importance of encouraging students to develop an entrepreneurial mindset if they want to

¹ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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3 be more successful in the labour market (see e.g. Bell 2016; Henry, Hill, and Leitch 2005).
4 Unlike many of these studies, our paper does not accept this claim unquestioningly. Instead,
5 we situate the employability imperative in the broader context of an important
6 transformation of universities that is currently under way. We agree with scholars who link
7 the employability imperative to a broader neo-liberal reform of universities (e.g. Sin,
8 Tavares, and Amaral 2017; Kalfa and Taksa 2017; Hall and Smyth 2016; Frauley 2012;
9 Bacevic 2014). Making universities responsible for improving graduate employment
10 prospects risks overlooking the fact that it is an employer who makes the decision to employ
11 someone, and the likelihood of finding employment depends on the general labour market
12 situation as well as the specific context. In other words, there are many external factors that
13 universities cannot control which determine whether someone finds employment or not.
14 By accepting the employment imperative for universities without question, many of the
15 employability studies themselves risk becoming part of a neoliberal agenda aiming to re-
16 articulate the role of universities for and in society. In order to avoid such a reification, we
17 will first develop a critical notion of the employability imperative following Michel Foucault
18 and his Governmentality Studies. This perspective raises the question whether universities
19 have become a key feature of the active labour market policy being introduced in most
20 OECD countries, essentially turned into labour market institutions while other important
21 societal roles of universities are pushed aside. However, we know far too little about the
22 extent to which this emphasis on graduate employability has gained material reality beyond
23 policy and strategy papers. Most critical studies content themselves with analysing these
24 types of documents in line with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (for CDA, see e.g.
25 Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 2011; Reisigel and Wodak 2009). They fall short of a
26 broader scrutiny of the organisational changes introduced in the name of the employability
27 imperative. In other words, what they risk overlooking is the material dimension of the
28 employability dispositif.²

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47 In contrast, many of the more affirmative studies provide interesting information about the
48 structural transformation, if read against their grain. They show how universities have
49 started to offer courses to teach students discipline-unspecific, soft skills like teamwork,
50 entrepreneurship or commercial awareness (Jones et al. 2017; Holdsworth 2018).
51 Universities have also established organisational units like career centres, which provide
52 career advice and counselling or help students in finding work placement (Staiculescu and
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² For an interesting controversy about the differences between discourse analysis and institutional theory as well as the possibility of integrating them, see Lok and Willmott 2006; for a good introduction to New Materialism, see Coole and Frost 2010.

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3 Dobrea 2017; Penttinen and Vesisenaho 2013; Wilton 2012; Wendlandt and Rochlen 2008).
4 In addition, alumni networks have been discovered as another way of facilitating the
5 transition from graduation to employment (e.g. Renuga and Ezhilan 2014). However, these
6 inquiries tend to be case studies, focusing on specific universities or faculties without
7 providing a systematic overview of the different responses of universities and the extent to
8 which their findings can be generalised. In this contribution we will present the findings of
9 a survey we conducted in 2018, to which we received responses from 84 universities in 26
10 European countries, making our study of graduate employability and its institutionalisation
11 the largest of its kind so far. A particular focus is on how universities use social media in
12 this context, a dimension that has hitherto received little attention. Our findings highlight
13 important differences between universities in terms of their employability-related activities
14 and structures. Drawing on authors like Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck and Neil Theodore, we
15 examine how variegated neoliberalisation translates into different institutionalisations of the
16 employability dispositif (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010).

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18 Our contribution also seeks to go beyond a descriptive account and to explore possible
19 explanations for the differences deriving from quantitative methods, following an abductive
20 approach informed by that of Charles Peirce (Peirce 1992). We link our empirical findings
21 to information provided by the three data bases ETER, EURYDICE and EUROSTAT in
22 order to examine whether it is institutional characteristics or country-specific differences
23 that better explain the differences we identified in the survey. We are aware that such a
24 quantitative approach, seeking to identify the best available explanation, has limits. It cannot
25 do justice to the peculiarity of specific contexts as qualitative methods do. The explanations
26 may need revision at a later stage in the light of new evidence (McKaughan 2008). However,
27 our study provides important insights into differences between countries and sheds light
28 on enabling conditions of the employability dispositif.

47 **The emergence of an employability dispositif**

48 A Foucauldian perspective draws our attention to the genealogy of the term employability
49 and to how its meaning has changed over time, each time responding to a different societal
50 need identified as urgent (for a historical analysis, see Teichler 2015). In the 1950s, the term
51 was mainly used for people with significant difficulties in finding work due to mental health
52 issues (Feintuch 1955; McQuaid and Lindsay 2005; Forrier and Sels 2003). Today the term
53 still refers to the mental ability, although in a more generalised way. The Cambridge
54 Dictionary describes employability as “the skills and abilities that allow you to be
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3 employed”.³ The dictionary goes on to explain why these skills and abilities are particularly
4 vital today. “There will no longer be jobs for life, but employability for life.” (ibid.) In other
5 words, looking for new employment has become a common experience for many.
6 Employability has thus become closely associated with substantial changes in working
7 careers, which are no longer characterised by employment security and a straightforward
8 transition from education to employment. The active labour market policies that many
9 OECD countries adopted in the 1990s should be seen in this context (Jacobsson 2004).
10 These policies transfer the main responsibility for finding employment to the job-seeker as
11 part of their duty as a citizen (Bonoli 2010; Fejes 2010). A Foucauldian perspective helps
12 to reframe employability as a key feature of the attempt to govern the (working) population.
13 In line with Foucault’s notion of governmentality, we can understand the employability
14 dispositif as a part of a modern form of governance that constitutes the very subject that it
15 pretends to merely regulate (Foucault 2008; Dean 2010). Individual inscribes him or herself
16 into society in the very moment where she or he seeks to become an autonomous subject:
17 “[...] the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of the self, these
18 practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are
19 patterns that he finds in his culture, and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him
20 by his culture, his society and his social group.” (Fornet-Betancourt 1987: 122).

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22 In the very moment where the subject decides to choose freely it submits itself to a specific
23 social order. Foucault’s vantage point makes use of the double meaning of the subject: The
24 subject with a free will and the subject of a king.

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26 Employability promotes a specific subjectivity, an individual that does not want just to
27 follow directives, an individual that is rather keen to govern themselves, an individual that
28 is entrepreneurial in orientation, and that seeks to create their own opportunities instead of
29 waiting for them to emerge. In the last two decades employability has become an important
30 discourse in the higher education sector as well, and this has been reflected in a
31 mushrooming of academic literature on the topic.⁴ Many studies highlight the importance
32 of rethinking the skills students need (Hager, Holland, and Beckett 2001; Barrie 2007). A
33 number go a step further and underline the importance of entrepreneurship and application

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³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/employability>. This definition was echoed in the UK by New Labour under Gordon Brown, who defined employability as “development of skills and adaptable workforces in which all those capable of work are encouraged to develop the skills, knowledge, technology and adaptability to enable them to enter and remain in employment throughout their working lives.” HM TREASURY (1997) Treasury Press Release 122/97, 13th October: Gordon Brown unveils UK Employment Action Plan. London: HM Treasury, p. 1.

⁴ An inquiry in the database Web of Science shows a steady increase of publications on employability and higher education since 2001, with a sharp rise since 2008. 2017 alone saw 1123 new publications on the topic.

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3 orientation going hand in hand with another more risk-oriented type of self-governance that
4 differs from the ideal subjectivity of a researcher as well as that of a civil servant (Morley
5 2001)⁵.

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8 Most governmentality studies focus on the “activation” of the subject. Our study seeks to
9 show how universities have also become “activated” as part of a major reform that took
10 place in most continental European countries in the late 1990s, early 2000s (for excellent
11 historical studies see Neave and Amaral 2012; Rüegg 2011). This reform introduced an
12 institutional form of governmentality that fundamentally changed the relationship between
13 the government and universities, which used to be closely related to public administration
14 and subjected to strict surveillance by the education ministry (Estermann, Nokkala, and
15 Steinel 2011, 38).⁶ New public management reforms frame universities to take their own
16 initiative. The universities have to constitute themselves in an active fashion. But like in the
17 case of the subject, they do not invent their own practice but rather inscribe themselves into
18 a culture of new public management in the very moment they take initiatives. In addition,
19 they are increasingly assessed in terms of their output (Claeys-Kulik 2015). Traditionally, the
20 output was framed in terms of academic publications and graduation rates, reflecting the
21 two key roles of universities. However, the employability dispositif shifts the focus and
22 promotes the employment rate of their graduates as a measure of university output (Christie
23 2017).⁷

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25 Drawing on Foucault, we understand employability as a strategic dispositif (apparatus); he
26 describes this as a “formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment
27 that of responding to an urgent need” (Foucault 1977: 195).⁸ A dispositif is thus strategic,
28 and claims to provide a solution to an urgent need. The need itself is historically situated as
29 part of a social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1991[1966]). In our case, the
30 new need is part of a more general repurposing of universities (Mittelman 2018).
31 Understanding employability as a dispositif helps us to study its role in transforming
32 universities from a critical perspective, which was defined famously by Robert Cox as
33 standing “apart from the prevailing order of the world and (...) [asking] how that order
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52 ⁵ For an interesting analysis of cross-border student mobility programmes as part of the neoliberal reform see
53 Courtois (2018).

54 ⁶ The situation in the UK looks different since British universities had traditionally such autonomy. However,
55 the former polytechnics gained such autonomy when turned into universities in 1992.

56 ⁷ See www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/employability-rankings/2019

57 ⁸ We will use the term dispositif here, even though many English translations prefer ‘apparatus’. We share
58 Jeffrey Bussolini’s view that these translations fail to account for the important theoretical differences between
59 dispositif and apparatus (Bussolini, 2010). The notion of apparatus is heavily informed by Louis Althusser’s
60 theory of state apparatuses. Dispositif, in contrast, puts more emphasis on the dynamic nature of social
ordering.

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3 came about. (...) [Critical theory] is directed towards an appraisal of the very framework for
4 action, or problematic, which problem-solving theory accepts as its parameters.” (Cox 1981:
5 129) This critical distance draws our attention to how the *dispositif* gives employers more
6 say in what higher education should look like and simultaneously weakens other rationales
7 and justifications of higher education (e.g. Cai 2013; Lowden et al. 2011; more critically
8 Handley 2018). We can also understand the rise of the *dispositif* as a reaction to the
9 massification of HE and diversification of the student body (Lujan and DiCarlo 2006; Lai
10 2011; Figueiredo 2017). In this sense, the employability imperative is also a specific
11 intervention into a competition between different types of knowledge, each keen to become
12 disseminated by way of university study programmes. As a *dispositif*, it is “always inscribed
13 in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which
14 issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus [*dispositif*]
15 consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of
16 knowledge.” (Foucault 1977: 196)

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18 These types of knowledge constitute a regime of truth that contributes to a normalisation
19 of the new framing of universities and their purpose. This helps the employability
20 imperative to become a new *doxa*, as Pierre Bourdieu calls the experience by which “the
21 natural and social world appears as self-evident” (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]: 164). But Foucault
22 also reminds us that this regime of truth needs to be coupled with a set of practice to
23 become a *dispositif* (Foucault 2008: 19).⁹ The employability *dispositif* does accordingly not
24 only inform policy and strategy papers. It also helps in a much more comprehensive way to
25 re-arrange an assemblage “of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory
26 decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and
27 philanthropic propositions - in short, the said as much as the unsaid.” (Foucault 1977: 194).
28 Following Foucault, we gain a better idea of the heterogeneity of governance that goes
29 beyond a Weberian top-down imposition of directives. Governing through the micro-
30 management of individuals and institutions has become pivotal. Foucault’s emphasis on
31 heterogeneity also helps to avoid a too narrow functionalist reading of this change of
32 governance. The different strategies of a *dispositif* are driven by intentions and interests.
33 They may re-enforce each other or enter into contradiction with each other. The interplay
34 between these different interests and intentions create a functional overdetermination
35 “because each effect - positive or negative, intentional or unintentional - enters into
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59 ⁹ We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for reminding us of this important argument made
60 by Foucault in his lectures on the birth of biopolitics.

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3 resonance or contradiction with the others and thereby calls for a readjustment or a re-
4 working of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points.” (Foucault 1977:
5 195). Such a perspective brings the role of context, contingencies but also path dependency
6 to the fore, that each actor needs to take into account when developing their own strategy.
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10 11 **The digitalisation of the employability dispositif**

12 Our study also seeks to explore the role of social media in rearticulating the relationship
13 between universities and the labour market. We understand them as part of the
14 employability dispositif with their own subject constituting effects (Romele 2017).
15 Following Bruno Latour and his actor-network theory, we expect social media and digital
16 devices to have their own dynamics and rationales (Latour 2007). They create a new
17 infrastructure that enables new types of interaction between institutions as well as
18 individuals (Peters 2017). So far, only a few studies have examined the use of social media
19 in the context of employability (Starcic et al. 2017; Lancaster 2014; Osborn and Lofrisco
20 2012). The most exhaustive study of the role of LinkedIn was conducted by Enrique
21 Orduna-Malea and his colleagues (Orduna-Malea, Font, and Ontalba-Ruipérez 2016). They
22 used digital methods like web scraping to examine how LinkedIn has established new forms
23 of interaction between universities and employers in Spain. URLs created through LinkedIn
24 were taken as proxies for the relationship between universities and employers, which makes
25 it possible to distinguish two types of links: the direct URLs connecting universities and
26 companies and the indirect ones established via individual user profiles. In other words, not
27 only the institutions as such but its individual members, hence the students and staff,
28 contribute to the re-articulation of the relationship between universities and the labour
29 market. As a consequence, universities have started to pay attention to the self-management
30 of the students and staff on social media as part of their overall attempt to create new links
31 with the labour market.
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47 However, Orduna-Malea’s study falls short of situating LinkedIn in a wider context. We
48 learn little about other types of social media and their role for the employability dispositif.
49 Furthermore, using digital methods and URLs as a proxy for measuring the
50 interconnectivity between universities and employers risks overlooking other ways by which
51 universities seek to reach out to the labour market.¹⁰ As a consequence, the study may
52 overestimate the importance of social media in re-articulating the relationship between
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58 ¹⁰ A recent survey of the Swiss labour market conducted by Credit Suisse indicates that small and middle size
59 enterprises conduct much less of their recruitment through job portals than do large companies, particularly
60 in the high-tech sector (Suisse 2017: 18).

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3 universities and the labour market. In contrast, our survey is better equipped to account for
4 the different strategies used to implement the employability imperative. Those who
5 responded to our survey were university staff who are directly involved in establishing
6 different types of contacts with the business world or at least are very knowledgeable about
7 the process. In addition, our study went beyond the borders of one country.
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13 **Methodology**

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15 Our methodology is informed by the ‘abductive approach’ as developed by Charles Peirce
16 (Peirce 1992), and consists of two main moves. First, we seek to identify different features
17 of the employability dispositif. Second, we move on to ascertain their causes by inference.
18 This second step acknowledges that the exact cause of a specific feature might be difficult
19 to determine in the light of the complexity of social life, which fundamentally differs from
20 an experiment set up in a controlled laboratory environment. It might therefore be more
21 appropriate to speak of conditions that enable a particular feature of the dispositif. These
22 conditions may underpin the institutionalisation of a phenomenon, but often only when
23 they co-emerge in a specific constellation. An abductive approach does not claim to do full
24 justice to this complexity. It rather seeks to identify the best available explanations, which
25 may need revision at a later stage in the light of new evidence (McKaughan 2008). In this
26 sense it is best equipped to explore and develop concepts and new research avenues
27 (Swedberg 2012).
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37 Following a multi-method research design, we made use of different sources of data. First,
38 we developed a questionnaire informed by the literature review and our own research
39 interest. The European Association of Universities (EUA) endorsed our survey and invited
40 its 751 members to answer our questionnaire, which was available online between 26
41 February and 30 April 2018.¹¹ Other organisations like the European Association of
42 Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) invited their members via Twitter to answer
43 our survey. The respondents at universities were administrative staff responsible for
44 graduate employability, typically working in the career or alumni offices. As we were
45 focusing on university practices, we asked the respondents to answer the questionnaire
46 based on their practice and to the best of their knowledge without providing official
47 university policy or data. The majority of questions were choice questions (35 questions) or
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58 ¹¹ EUA represents more than 800 universities and national rectors’ conferences in 48 European countries.
59 Being a recognised representative body, we took it as a proxy for established universities in Europe. This left
60 a considerable number of higher education institutions out of our research, who are not EUA members. We
thank the EUA for distributing the questionnaire.

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3 open-ended (14 questions), with a few questions using a 7-point Likert scale (7 questions).
4 The questionnaire consisted of five sections: institutional employability strategy, activities
5 and measures to support employability, institutional structures supporting employability,
6 social media practice concerning employability, and institutional demographics. We
7 received a total of 84 answers from 26 European countries, which represents an 11%
8 response rate based on the EUA membership, though it is possible that some universities
9 answered who were not EUA members. This relatively low response rate sets clear limits
10 to generalisation. However, our findings nevertheless provide the broadest overview done
11 so far. In addition, the sample is fairly representative in terms of the diversity of the
12 universities that replied (see Annex 1 for information on the sample).

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15 The second source of data are publicly available databases of EURYDICE¹² and
16 EUROSTAT¹³. We collected various country-specific information as explained below.

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19 We analysed the data in two steps. In the first step, we conducted descriptive statistics of
20 data from our survey, with which we provide a broad overview of the employability
21 dispositif. In the second step, we were interested in the differences in answers to our
22 survey between respondent universities. To investigate those differences, we applied
23 inferential statistics and a basic correlation statistical analysis between the survey variables
24 and contextual factors that we collected from the Eurydice and Eurostat databases. These
25 factors were the youth unemployment rate or employment rate in the country, the presence
26 of tuition fees and the type of economy that the respondents are based in. The reference
27 year for these data source varied between 2015 and 2018, which means there are different
28 reference years that might be compared. However, these three factors (un/employment
29 rates, presence of tuition fees and variables of the type of economy) are relatively stable in
30 time, which still makes the analysis relevant. Nevertheless, caution needs to be taken when
31 interpreting the correlation between variables. Moreover, the type of economy is a
32 compound variable that we created based on data from the mentioned databases. For each
33 particular contextual factor, we provide a detailed explanation below.

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¹² https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/home_en

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

First level of analysis: mapping the employability dispositif

In this section, we will map the variations of the employability dispositif based on our survey findings using basic descriptive statistics. We focus on what we call the institutionalisation of employability where we focus on the strategies developed by the universities, the services they offer to graduates to help them to find employment, as well as their social media engagement.

Strategic dimension

The answers to the survey clearly demonstrate how the responsibility of universities for the employment of their graduates has become a doxa. All respondents saw the employability of graduates as their university's responsibility, at least to some extent ($M=5.21$, $SD=1.10$).¹⁴ A vast majority of universities (86%) explicitly included employability in their main institutional strategy, giving it a high priority in relation to other strategic orientations ($M=4.93$, $SD=1.32$).¹⁵ More than half of respondent universities (61%) have developed a specific employability strategy.

Employability services

We were also interested in learning more about the different services universities offer to facilitate the transition of their graduates to the labour market (see the full list of answers in Annex 2). Based on the literature review and a pilot survey, we have compiled a list of 17 such services or activities. As seen from Figure 1, the most popular activities include organising recruitment events or employer presentations and offering career guidance for students. Less popular measures include offering specific modules on careers and employability within study courses and integrating entrepreneurship into curricula. This finding questions the idea that the employability imperative mainly translates into entrepreneurship training within the study programmes. The rationales underpinning the dispositif seem to be more diverse.

¹⁴ 7-point Likert scale, where 7 means full responsibility and 1 no responsibility at all.

¹⁵ 7-point Likert scale, where 7 means great importance and 1 little importance in comparison to other strategic orientations.

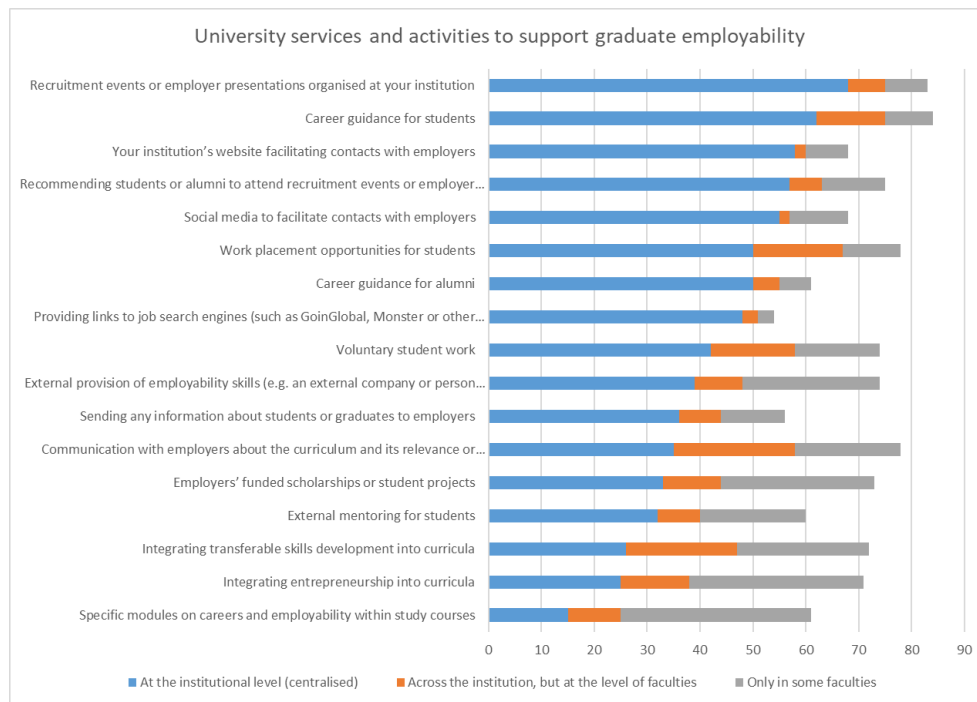


Figure 1. The number of answers on the services and activities offered by respondent universities to facilitate graduate employability

The survey indicates that students as well as alumni are beneficiaries of the employability services that universities provide. Eighty per cent of respondents said they include alumni in the above activities. In addition, a clear majority (71%) of respondents said they have also established cooperation with employers' associations to promote graduate employability. Tracking graduates is also vital for all but nine respondents, although the level varies. Twenty-eight universities do it themselves at the central level, 28 do it as part of the national tracking system, and 24 do it at the faculty level. In addition, the method of tracking varies. Graduate surveys are most popular with 51% of the respondents using this tool, while 21% use LinkedIn, 11% Facebook and 4% other Internet tools like Google. Overall, 66% said they know how long it takes their graduates to find employment.

Institutional dimension

Our survey identified different degrees of institutionalisation of the employability dispositif in terms of staff employed. The findings indicate a significant variation, ranging from 0 to 60 staff employed (full-time equivalent) to support explicitly the students transition to the labour market ($M=10.79$, $SD=12.32$). Forty-six universities have created the position of an employability director or similar, and 53 said they had a post like employers' liaison or similar. All but one respondent reported that they have a career office in one form or

another (either separate or organised together with another office, most commonly with student counselling, student affairs or study offices and sometimes with the alumni office). In other words, a career office has become as important as an alumni office, which 90 percent of the respondents have in place. These findings clearly indicate an important shift of attention towards the labour market. The administration of universities has thus started to accumulate knowledge and expertise about labour markets. It would be interesting to explore the implications for the recruitment of university administration staff members. Is there a new qualifications profile emerging for the ones running the universities on an operative level?

Social media

We examined how universities make use of social media in their employability strategy. The survey highlights the widespread use of social media, with Facebook being the most popular platform followed by Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram (see Table 1). Pinterest and Xing were less popular, though Xing is only used in Germany and German-speaking countries, which may distort the picture.

Table 1. The number of answers on a 7-point Likert scale about the extent of the general use of social media.

	Never	1 – very rarely	2	3	4	5	6	7 – very often
LinkedIn	10	5	9	12	7	10	14	17
Facebook	0	0	1	0	4	11	24	44
Twitter	7	7	3	9	3	11	18	26
YouTube	10	6	5	9	10	19	14	11
Instagram	19	6	3	11	9	8	12	16
Pinterest	71	3	1	2	2	2	3	0
Xing	70	3	2	1	2	5	1	0

In relation to employability, our findings show that social media are widely used to inform students about employment-related opportunities (72 respondents) and to bring students and alumni into contact with employers (57 respondents). Furthermore, they are used by the universities to promote students (46 respondents) as well as alumni (45 respondents).

But respondents also indicate that they use social media to inform themselves about job offers and the labour market in general (43 respondents) and, interestingly enough, to collect information on their own graduates (41 respondents). Social media thus increase the permeability of the institutional boundaries enabling new information flows outside the limelight of the official self-presentation and branding strategy of universities.

Table 2. The number of answers on a 7-point Likert scale on the use of particular LinkedIn features.

	Do not know	1 - very rarely	2	3	4	5	6	7 - very often
Students jobs portal	24	10	4	3	6	1	1	11
Alumni groups	15	4	2	2	2	8	2	25
University pages	13	1	0	1	5	8	5	27
Alumni tool	21	7	3	2	4	4	5	14
Other	45	7	1	2	2	1	1	1

We explored the use of the different digital platforms for graduate employability purposes. LinkedIn plays a starring role in this context. Respondents believe that students having a LinkedIn profile is important for finding employment ($M=4.82$, $SD=1.61^{16}$). They also believe that employers use this platform in their recruitment procedures ($M=5.43$, $SD=1.69^{17}$). The respondents believe that employers use other platforms too, but to a lesser extent (for Facebook, $M=4.37$, $SD=1.73$; for Twitter, $M=3.42$, $SD=1.94^{18}$). Although LinkedIn seems to be the key social media platform for employability purposes, not all of its features are considered equally important (see Table 2 above). The respondents indicated that they made most use of the platform's university pages, followed by alumni groups and alumni tools. The LinkedIn student job portal was least used.¹⁹

The survey also revealed the active role of LinkedIn in promoting the use of its services by the universities. Forty-one per cent of our respondents indicated that they had been contacted or even visited by LinkedIn offering support for using its diverse services which

¹⁶ On a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means they do not agree at all and 7 means they fully agree.

¹⁷ On a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means no use at all and 7 means extensive use.

¹⁸ All on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means no use at all and 7 means extensive use.

¹⁹ This may change in the future in this rapidly changing environment, and with Facebook launching its own job search feature in 2017 (see Abed 2018). LinkedIn is also changing its features in time (cancelling some and introducing others), but stays strategically focused on higher education (AUTHOR).

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3 has led in a number of cases to active partnerships with LinkedIn (AUTHOR). The
4 increasing use of LinkedIn by universities is thus also market-driven with digital platform
5 providers keen to gain universities and their students and staff as new costumers.
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10 The majority of respondent universities (70%) provide training to their students on how to
11 develop and manage their LinkedIn profile. Far less training is offered for the use of
12 Facebook (34.5%), Twitter (25%) and YouTube (14.3%). Sixty-eight per cent of
13 respondents said they motivate students already during their studies to create a LinkedIn
14 profile as a way of increasing their visibility on the job market.²⁰ Furthermore, 56% of
15 respondents²¹ encourage their students at the time of graduation, while half²² also contact
16 their alumni with the same objective. Slightly less, 37% of universities, also encourage their
17 staff to create LinkedIn profiles.²³ Students are, in order words, the main target groups of
18 universities aiming to promote a digitally mediated micro-management for employability
19 purposes. By providing these training courses, universities have become essentially a co-
20 producer of the value that LinkedIn seeks to sell to employers. The better the quality of the
21 information, the more likely are employers to pay for the service. We get an idea here of the
22 complex market-making process (AUTHOR). Universities may have their own interest in
23 improving the quality of information on LinkedIn about their graduates as part of their
24 branding efforts. Many of the respondents consider it to be important that graduates
25 acknowledge they graduated from their university (M=5.94, SD=1.38).²⁴
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37 To sum up, the survey illuminates the overall penetration of the employability dispositif.
38 However, we also found important differences between universities, their different
39 strategies to activate students and to transform their expectations. It also identifies different
40 degrees of institutionalisation of the employability dispositif, each with its own materiality.
41 Furthermore, new digital technologies and in particular social media are an important part
42 of the neoliberal transformation of universities, although here as well to a different degree.²⁵
43 We could speak of a variegated employability dispositif. We next turn to these differences
44 and explore them.
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54 ²⁰ A further 12% did not know whether their institution does so. The number that motivates students may
55 therefore be even higher than 68%.

56 ²¹ A further 13% did not know, so the number might be higher in reality.

57 ²² A further 19% did not know, so the number might be higher in reality.

58 ²³ A further 20% did not know, so the number might be higher in reality.

59 ²⁴ On a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means they do not agree at all and 7 means they fully agree.

60 ²⁵ For an interesting analysis that considers the new technologies as part of an neoliberal ideology see Jandrić
and Hayes (2019).

Second level of analysis: finding explanations

In the remaining part of the paper we will seek to identify the most plausible explanations for the differences between universities that we have identified. Using an abductive approach, we develop different hypotheses in the light of available data and then test if they apply by correlation analysis. This process of eliminating less plausible explanations can only provide rough explanations. However, they can help to develop ideas for future research that may also include qualitative data.

Institutional factors

Our first hypothesis was, that the differences between universities could be explained by the institutional factors. In other words, we

first explored the explanatory power of institution-specific data. Using inferential statistics and correlations, we checked for differences between respondent universities based on the following factors: legal status of the university (public, private not-for-profit, private for-profit), the highest level of qualification offered (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral), age of the university, rank of the university, share of international students out of all students, size in terms of the number of students, and size in terms of the number of all staff and administrative staff. All of the data on these institutional factors was self-reported in the questionnaire (see Annex 1 for more information). To our surprise, none of these factors could explain the differences between the universities as there were no statistically relevant differences between samples..

We were also curious about the discursive and material dimensions of employability dispositif. Thus we explored the relationship between the proportion of staff working on graduate employability out of all administrative staff, and the importance given to the employability dispositif via university strategies. The results clearly indicated a positive correlation. The more employability is considered a core strategic aim, the higher the number of staff in charge of facilitating the graduate transition.²⁶ In addition, universities with more staff dedicated to employability, also tend to have a more differentiated institutionalisation, often with separate career and alumni offices. This result might not come as a surprise. However, it is relevant for the validity of CDA. It shows that the analysis

²⁶ Based on our respondents, the more a university considers employability as its responsibility, the more staff it employs (for yes to mentioned employability, $M=1.46$; for no, $M=0.62$). This result is supported by the Spearman correlation indicating a significant positive association between the share of staff dedicated to employability out of all administrative staff and the importance of employability in relation to other strategic orientations of respondent universities ($r_s=.31$, $p<.005$).

of strategy papers may well work as a proxy for a much more complex institutionalisation process with its own practices and materiality.

Country unemployment rate

We expected that a higher youth unemployment rate²⁷ and correspondingly lower employment rate²⁸ in the country put more pressure on universities to ensure a smooth transition from graduation to employment. We thus conducted correlation analysis between data from our survey, and the youth unemployment/employment rates we collected from Eurostat.

To our surprise, we did not find any relevant correlation between a given country's youth unemployment or employment rates and the importance of employability in the universities' overall strategy.

Interestingly enough, this finding does not apply to the use of social media. Here, Spearman correlation indicates a positive correlation between and the respondents' general use of social media and the youth unemployment rate in their respective country (LinkedIn ($r = .23$, $p < 0.046$), Facebook ($r = .34$, $p < .003$), and Twitter ($r = .47$, $p < .000$)). There was also a positive association between the youth unemployment rate and respondents' opinions on (i) the importance of having a LinkedIn profile to finding a job ($r = .50$, $p < .000$), and (ii) the extent to which they think employers use LinkedIn in their recruitment processes ($r = .26$, $p < .022$), Facebook ($r = .30$, $p < .090$) and Twitter ($r = .30$, $p < .009$). In other words, respondents in countries with higher youth unemployment rate, have a higher association of general use of LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter,²⁹ even though there is not higher correlation for the employability disposition institutionalisation. Hence social media use seems to be a key dimension of the employability disposition in countries with high

²⁷ Youth unemployment refers to young people (aged 15 to 24) who are neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET): Eurostat, Youth unemployment figures, 2007-2017 (une_rt_q) and (lfsi_act_a). <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tipslm80>

²⁸ We took employment rates based on ISCED levels 3 to 8, and for ISCED levels 5 to 8, for the reference year 2017. ISCED refers to the International Standard Classification of Education with eight levels. See more here:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_\(ISCED\)#Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_28levels_of_education.29](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/International_Standard_Classification_of_Education_(ISCED)#Implementation_of_ISCED_2011_28levels_of_education.29) [last accessed 1 October 2019].

²⁹ We also tested the other way around, and found a negative association between the employment rate at ISCED 3-8 and (i) the general use of Facebook ($r = -.27$, $p < 0.016$) and Twitter ($r = -.28$, $p < 0.013$) and (ii) the importance of having a LinkedIn profile to finding a job ($r = -.34$, $p < .002$). Similarly, there is also a negative association between the employment rate at ISCED 5-8 and (i) the general use of Facebook ($r = -.30$, $p < 0.007$) and Twitter ($r = -.26$, $p < 0.018$) and (ii) the importance of having a LinkedIn profile to finding a job ($r = -.31$, $p < .005$).

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3 unemployment rates. At the same time, however, a high youth unemployment rate is not a
4 good predictor for the degree of the dispositif's institutionalisation. This result made us
5 look for better predictor.
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8 9 10 *Tuition fees*

11 Next, we explored the relation between the commodification of the higher education sector
12 and the employability agenda in terms of tuition fees. We collected the country-level
13 information on tuition fees from Eurydice (Eurydice, 2017) and classified countries in three
14 groups (where no students pay tuition fees, where all students pay tuition fees and where
15 some students pay tuition fees). We expected universities charging tuition fees to be more
16 concerned about the employment prospects of their graduates due to the commodification
17 discourse accompanying tuition fees. Hence employment prospects might be an important
18 criterion for students when they choose their university. In particular, in countries with high
19 tuition fees, higher education has become increasingly framed as a personal investment that
20 needs to pay off in terms of a good job afterwards, not least in order to be able to pay back
21 the loans. A case in point are England and Wales with their high tuition fees and the 'value
22 for money' paradigm that frames students as consumers (see Morrish 2019). We compared
23 between groups based applying inferential statistics.
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33 The findings illustrate a positive correlation. Respondents from countries with
34 tuition fees report more often that employability is mentioned in their main institutional
35 strategy than do respondents from countries with no fees ($\chi^2= 11.866$, d.f.=2, $p=0.003$).
36 Similarly, more respondents in countries with tuition fees reported having a specific strategy
37 on employability than respondents from countries with no tuition fees ($\chi^2= 13.337$, d.f.=2,
38 $p=0.001$). Universities charging tuition fees also tend to have a more elaborated
39 institutionalisation of the dispositif. While almost all universities have a career office,
40 respondents from countries with tuition fees are more likely to have an employability
41 director ($\chi^2= 18.402$, d.f.=4, $p=0.001$), often situated at the central level rather than the
42 faculty level. They are also more likely to have an alumni office ($\chi^2= 22.037$, d.f.=10,
43 $p=0.015$). Tuition fees are thus a more important predictor for a high institutionalisation of
44 the dispositif than youth unemployment. The findings corroborate the hypothesis that the
45 employability imperative is closely related to a neoliberal reform of higher education and
46 not so much a response to high youth unemployment. We also identified a positive
47 correlation between the presence of tuition fees and the use of social media. Respondents
48 from countries with tuition fees reported higher general use of LinkedIn ($\chi^2= 29.65$,
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3 d.f.=12, p=0.003) and Twitter ($\chi^2= 34.64$, d.f.=12, p=0.001). They equally considered it to
4 be important for graduates to have a LinkedIn profile to a higher extent than respondents
5 from countries with no tuition fees ($\chi^2= 63.411$, d.f.=12, p=0.000).
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8 So far, we were able to identify two main enabling conditions for the use of social
9 media: 1) Tuition fees that underpinned a strong institutionalisation of the dispositif in
10 terms of activities and services, and 2) a high unemployment rate that otherwise did not
11 have a positive effect on the institutionalisation of the dispositif. This interesting finding
12 made us look for another possible explanation for the differences between the universities.
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20 *Varieties of Capitalism*

21 Finally, we explored the role of broader contextual factors, in particular the labour market
22 of the country and the organisation of the economy in more general terms. We decided to
23 make use of the differentiation between Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs) and
24 Liberal Market Economies (LMEs) that the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach
25 introduced. This approach, developed by David Soskice and Peter Hall, draws on historical
26 institutionalism to better account for the diversities of market coordination (Hall and
27 Soskice 2001; Hall and Thelen 2009). CMEs and LMEs differ in five important respects:
28 1) The way they organise industrial relations and hence the relationship between workers,
29 trade unions and employers and their negotiations over wages and productivity; 2) The way
30 relations between employers and employees are organised within firms; 3) The degree to
31 which corporate governance depends on the stock market and short-term capital to finance
32 companies' activities; 4) The way these economies organise inter-firm relations, and most
33 importantly for our case study; 5) The way they ensure the right qualifications of the labour
34 force (Hall and Soskice 2001: 7). The market plays a pivotal coordination role in LMEs in
35 contrast to CMEs where extra-economic corporatist arrangements prevail.
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47 The two country types also differ fundamentally in respect of their qualification regimes. In
48 line with a higher degree of coordination and specialisation, CMEs have a qualification
49 regime that is characterised on the one hand by a generic higher education and on the other
50 hand by an application-oriented specialisation and diversification of skills. Company-based
51 initial vocational training (IVET) and corporate education play a key role in providing the
52 latter type of skills (Estevez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice 2001; AUTHOR). Accordingly,
53 vocational qualifications are widespread in CMEs. In Germany, a classic case of a CME,
54 most 25-64 year-olds (55%) have attained a vocational qualification at either upper
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3 secondary or post-secondary level (OECD 2017:44-5). Conversely, post-secondary
4 education in LMEs is more general in orientation, with more people with a higher education
5 degree.
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8 We agree with Peck, Brenner and Theodore that the VoC approach has a significant bias
9 since it privileges the perspective of firms and fails to account for the fact that both CMEs
10 and LMEs are capitalist economies and have therefore much in common despite their
11 differences (Peck and Theodore 2011; Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010; AUTHOR). In
12 addition, both types of economies have experienced a neo-liberalisation where coordination
13 through the market has gained in importance. However, they differ in the way they have
14 increased the role of the market as a coordination mechanism. Peck and Brenner speak
15 therefore of variegated neo-liberalisation. We can explain the difference with important
16 country-specific dependencies that influenced the way the neoliberal strategy was
17 articulated and pursued. Consequently, we consider the distinction between CMEs and
18 LMEs still a useful one for our study, which is particularly interested in the organisation of
19 the labour market and its qualification regime. It also made it possible to aggregate the 26
20 European countries in groups, resulting in a larger number of universities per group. The
21 danger is, of course, the risk of oversimplification that may no longer be able to account
22 for important differences between countries within one category; or for differences
23 between universities within one country.
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26 We developed two hypotheses in the light of the important differences between the
27 qualification regimes of LMEs and CMEs. A strengthening of the employability dispositif
28 within CMEs would indicate an important shift of the responsibility for providing a more
29 vocationally-oriented education from employers to universities and would thus challenge
30 the established arrangement where over 50% of the 24-65 year olds had attained a
31 vocational education and training, the majority provided by firms. A strengthening of the
32 employability dispositif in the context of LMEs would have very different implications, since
33 in these countries the main educational providers of higher education are already the
34 universities. In this case, a strengthening of the employability dispositif would indicate an
35 attempt to overcome the general qualification regime in order to increase the specialisation
36 of the education in anticipation of employers' qualifications needs. In other words, it would
37 be a change in content but not so much in terms the main provider of education.
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40 Given that our survey includes European countries that do not fit either of these categories,
41 we had to further diversify the typology beyond these two categories. Following Michael
42 Witt et al., we added the category of European Peripheral Economies (EPEs) which we
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further differentiated into Southern European economies (SEC) and Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) (Witt et al. 2018: 23).³⁰ To better account for intra-categorical differences regarding economic wealth, we used Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) in order to further differentiate.³¹ These additional criteria made it possible to distinguish within South European countries (SEC), whose regulations, or rather lack of them, have much in common with LMEs, while the past of Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) brings them closer to CMEs with their extra-economic corporatist structure. In addition, we paid attention to important differences between the countries in terms of wealth. We further differentiated between SEC-A and SEC-B, as well as between CEEC-A and CEEC-B (see Annex 1).. The constructed typology is thus:

- Coordinated market economies (CMEs): AT, BE, DK, FI, DE, SE, CH, NL
- Liberal market economies (LMEs): IE, UK
- South European Countries A (SEC-A) - 100 and above GDP/capita measured in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) : FR, which was left out of the analysis due to a small response rate.
- South European Countries B (SEC-B) - Below 100 GDP/capita measured in PPS: IT, ES, PT
- Eastern European countries A (CEEC-A) - 60 and above GDP/capita measured in PPS: HR, CZ, HU, PL, SK, SI
- Eastern European countries B (CEEC-B) - Below 60 GDP/capita measured in PPS: BIH, BG, MK
- Emerging economies: BLR, KOS, which was left out of the analysis due to a small response rate.
- Advanced emerging economies: TR, which was left out of the analysis due to a small response rate.

We expected countries of both country typologies (hence SEC or CEEC) at the lower PPS end to have more in common with LMEs since extra-economic regulations require public

³⁰ Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) is a term used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the group of countries comprising Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Witt et al. also use the category Advanced Emerging Economies (AEE), which we did not include since our sample for this category was too small.

³¹ We use the relative wealth measurement of the EU, i.e. General Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) expressed in relation to the European Union (EU28) average set to equal 100 (tec00114). For further information see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tec00114> [last accessed 1 January 2020].

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3 funding through tax revenues. These country clusters turned out to have considerable
4 explanatory power. We found a strong correlation in terms of respondents' strategic
5 orientation. Universities from CMEs and both CEECs included employability in their main
6 institutional strategy as well as had a specific employability strategy to a far lesser extent than
7 the other groups (main strategy: $\chi^2=18.866$, d.f.=7, $p=0.009$)(specific strategy: $\chi^2=23.294$,
8 d.f.=7, $p=0.002$). In contrast to LMEs, they seem to refrain of making use of universities as
9 labour market institution. We can expect them to build on existing well-established extra-
10 economic, corporatist structure. The trend of resembling CMEs was more pronounced for
11 CEEC-A countries than for CEEC-B countries, hence the level of wealth seems indeed to
12 mattered.

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14 LMEs also stand out in terms of the degree of institutionalisation of the dispositif. All
15 universities from LMEs have the alumni office as a separate unit. The situation in CMEs
16 and CEECs is more mixed in terms of general institutionalisation. All of them have,
17 however, a lower degree of institutionalisation. Respondents from LMEs and SECs
18 indicated more often than those from CMEs and CEECs that they have an employability
19 director and employers' liaison (for the employability director, $\chi^2=46.490$, d.f.=14,
20 $p=0.000$; for the employers' liaison, $\chi^2=35.409$, d.f.=14, $p=0.001$). This indicates a decisive
21 structural distinction between LMEs and SECs on the one hand and CMEs and CEECs on
22 the other.

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24 These country groups also differ in terms of the staff employed for student and graduate
25 career support, graduate employability or graduate recruitment, although there are some
26 important differences between universities within types of economies and even within
27 countries (large Standard Deviation). We should therefore treat the result with some
28 caution. Most employability staff are employed in LMEs ($M=28.40$, $SD=17.9$), followed
29 by SECs (for SEC-A, the one answer was 10, for SEC-B, $M=9.36$, $SD=8.02$), then CMEs
30 ($M=6.41$, $SD=4.73$) and CEECs (for CEEC-A, $M=3.62$, $SD=3.63$, for CEEC-B, $M=6.40$,
31 $SD=7.70$). When adjusting for size of university based on student numbers, the only group
32 that differed significantly from the rest was the LMEs ($F(7,73)=9.51$, $p=0.000$). At a
33 country level, the UK was the only one significantly different from the rest ($F(7,73)=9.508$,
34 $p=0.000$) after adjustment for size in terms of student numbers, in that it employs by far
35 the most administrative staff to support graduate employability.

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37 Another very interesting finding is that universities from all types of economies (with the
38 exception of CEECs) consider social media, in particular LinkedIn, to be vital for the labour
39 market and for graduate employability. However, the countries differ significantly in terms
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3 of the level to which they engage with social media and in particular with LinkedIn.
4 Universities from LMEs and SECs tend to encourage their students to create a LinkedIn
5 profile to a greater extent than others.³² The UK stands out in particular in this context,
6 with all responding universities encouraging their students to create a LinkedIn profile,
7 followed by Italy and Spain (both SECs). Many of these universities also provide specific
8 training on LinkedIn to students and graduates.³³ Conversely, universities from CMEs are
9 far less active in this regard.³⁴ Interestingly this also applies to CEEC-Bs which questions
10 at least in this context our assumptions that CEEC-As are more similar to CMEs than
11 CEEC-Bs. It seems that the use of social media follows its own logic. But more research is
12 needed.

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14 We were also interested in learning what type of employability training the universities
15 offered. Workshops, clinics, practical skills sessions, employability training, IT technology
16 courses, student or career guidance, and online training are the most common forms of
17 training. In some cases the courses are even obligatory, requiring students to pass before
18 graduation. Some of the training is provided by external professionals or even staff provided
19 by LinkedIn.

20
21 To sum up, even more than tuition fees, the country typology developed along the VoC
22 differentiation is a good differentiating factor for the degree to which the employability
23 dispositif has become institutionalised in terms of strategies, services and organisational
24 structures. Respondents in particular from the UK but also from Italy and Spain indicated
25 the institutionalisation of employability and the sophisticated and intensive use of social
26 media for this purpose, even though they differ in terms of tuition fees and youth
27 unemployment. The fact that the response rate from these countries was higher strengthens
28 this conclusion. The findings for the other countries need to be treated with more caution
29 given the quality of our data.

30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Conclusions**

48 In this paper we focused on graduate employability. Instead of offering advice on how
49 universities could better serve this policy, our broader aim was to offer a critical reading of
50 the increasing emphasis on graduate employability. We understand it as part of a political
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56 ³² From LMEs, 9 said yes, 5 said no and 4 did not know. From SECs, 23 said yes, 3 said no, and 3 did not know.

57 ³³ For LMEs, all reported providing this, with 13 saying they do this regularly and 1 occasionally; for SECs, 3 reported they do not do it, 11 said they do it regularly, and 15 said they do it occasionally.

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59 ³⁴ For CMEs, 5 said they do it regularly, 4 do it occasionally, and 9 do not do it. For CEEC-Bs, 0 said regularly, 1 said occasionally, and 4 said they do not do it.

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3 agenda aiming to redefine what counts as the core environment for universities and to
4 strengthen the influence of employers and labour market needs on higher education. It is
5 thus a strategic dispositif or, to paraphrase Foucault, an intervention into relations of forces
6 that support and are supported by specific types of knowledge. We agree with critical
7 scholars who link the employability imperative to a neo-liberal reform of universities. This
8 reform gives more weight to the market in terms of funding and provision. In addition, the
9 employability dispositif shifts the attention from “classical outputs” of universities like
10 academic publications and completion rates to graduate employment. Accordingly, new
11 rankings focus on the employment rate of graduates have emerged in recent years (Christie
12 2017).³⁵ These rankings completely ignore all the contextual factors that determine the
13 absorption rate of a labour market and put pressure on universities to frame themselves as
14 labour market institutions. Part of the reform is a fundamental transformation of the
15 relationship between the government and universities with universities becoming much
16 more independent (Estermann, Nokkala, and Steinel 2011, 38).³⁶ Performance-based
17 funding besides rankings make sure that unviersities have no other choice than taking
18 initiatives and exploring new market opportunities. We have identified two types of
19 activation that this new public management reform underpins in the context of the
20 employability dispositif. It firstly encourages the university administration to find new ways
21 of relating to the labour market. Secondly, it seeks to “activate” students via the institutions
22 to think entrepreneurially and to find their own employment, or even better to create it.
23 We understand the employability dispositif an extension of active labour market policy into
24 the sphere of higher education. Social media play a vital role in both cases.

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Most critical studies of employability focus on strategic texts using CDA as a method. As a
consequence, they risk ignoring the more organisational dimension of the governmentality
of the dispositif with its own materiality. Conversely, more affirmative case studies, which
do not question the reform claim of the employability imperative, provide interesting
insights into the different activities and services offered by universities with the aim to
facilitate the transition of their graduates into the labour market. However, their case studies
are not only uncritical, they also remain restricted to a few institutions. Our study intended
to overcome these two shortcomings. We have used the information provided by these case
studies to develop a questionnaire to which 84 universities from 26 European countries
responded, making our study the largest of its kind so far. In addition, we explored the role

³⁵ See www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/employability-rankings/2019

³⁶ The situation in the UK looks different since British universities had traditionally such autonomy. However, the former polytechnics gained such autonomy when turned into post-1992 universities.

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3 of social media for the universities' employability dispositif, something that has been rarely
4 studied thus far.

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6 Our survey highlights an important variegation of the employability dispositif. There are
7 significant differences between the universities, in terms of the degree of
8 institutionalisation, division of labour, services provided as well as the use of social media.
9 At the same time, the findings corroborate the assumption that there is a positive
10 relationship between the universities' emphasis on employability as a strategic goal and the
11 institutionalisation of the dispositif in terms of personnel, services and other activities.
12 This finding is particularly relevant for critical employability studies. It shows that an
13 analysis of key strategy texts can indeed serve as a proxy for the more complex
14 institutionalisation process with its own materiality.

15
16 However, these studies can still not explain the differences between the universities. In
17 order to overcome this shortcoming, we used an abductive approach to identify possible
18 explanations of the difference. To our own surprise, institution-specific variables such as
19 the legal status of the university, the highest level of qualifications offered, the age of the
20 university, the size in terms of the number of students or staff, the rank of the university,
21 and the percentage of international students out of all students, all turned out to have little
22 explanatory power. In contrast, tuition fees were a much better predictor, interestingly
23 enough much stronger than the youth unemployment rate. This finding thus corroborates
24 the link between graduate employability and the neo-liberal reform of the higher education
25 landscape.

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27 In order to deepen our insights into the enabling conditions of an employability dispositif,
28 we tested the explanatory power of additional contextual factors making use of the data
29 provided by EURYDICE and EUROSTAT. The country typology that we have developed
30 in line with the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) approach had the highest explanatory power.
31 LMEs, with the UK standing out in particular, have embraced most the employability
32 dispositif, followed by Southern European Countries (SEs) that have many commonalities
33 with LMEs in terms of their qualification regime. Both country types have a more general
34 qualification regime in contrast to the more specialised regime of the CMEs where
35 companies play an important role in designing and providing education as part of vocational
36 education and training. The employability dispositif thus helps in LMEs and SEs to
37 increase the influence of the employers on higher education without them taking more
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responsibility to provide and fund the specialisation in education they need.³⁷ This finding is particularly relevant for VoC studies. It brings to the fore a new role of universities as labour market institutions in LMEs where coordination tends to be market-based. It can be taken as an indication of the limits of existing arrangements in these countries to provide for the level of skill specialisation that the economy requires. The universities in these countries also make more use of social media than the others which allows them to re-articulate the relationship with the labour market by way of the digital micro-management of students. In many cases, the use of social media was actively supported by providers of social media, in particular LinkedIn, which brings a new public-private coordination to the fore, driven by for-profit interests. We understand our conclusions as preliminary, not least because of the nature of our data. However, these findings make it possible to develop interesting hypotheses that could inform future research on the changing role of universities.

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³⁷ The British employers stand in particular out with their unwillingness to provide and fund the specialist education and training they need also in the context of further education. A recent survey of the thinktank *Learning and Work Institute* identifies a drop of 10 percentage in the number of adults taking part in training since 2010, which is equivalent to 3.8 million fewer adults (Smith, Egglestone, and Aldridge (2019)).

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30 Annex 1: The survey sample

31 Table 3. Characteristics of the sample

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Variable	Category	Sample	
		N	%
University status	Public	76	90.5
	Private	8	9.5
Highest level of qualification	Doctoral level	78	92.9
	Master's level	6	7.1
Age	Among older universities in the country	54	64.3
	Among younger universities in the country	30	35.7
Rank	Ranked among the best in the country	47	56.0
	Ranked average in the country	36	42.9
	Ranked below average in the country	1	1.2
Varieties of Capitalism	Coordinated market economies (CMEs): AT, BE, DK, FI, DE, SE, CH, NL	18	21.4

Liberal market economies (LMEs): IE, UK	14	16.7
South European Countries A (SEC-A) - 100 and above GDP/capita measured in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) ³⁸ : FR	1	1.2
South European Countries B (SEC-B) - Below 100 GDP/capita measured in PPS: IT, ES, PT	28	33.3
Eastern European countries A (CEEC-A) - 60 and above GDP/capita measured in PPS: HR, CZ, HU, PL, SK, SI	13	15.5
Eastern European countries B (CEEC-B) - Below 60 GDP/capita measured in PPS: BIH, BG, MK	5	6.0
Emerging economies: BLR, KOS	2	2.4
Advanced emerging economies: TR	3	3.6

Notes: All institutional demographics are self-declared. Countries that universities were based in were Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), Belarus (BLR), Switzerland (CH), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Croatia (HR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Kosovo (KOS), North Macedonia (MK), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Turkey (TR), United Kingdom (UK).

Annex 2. Employability services offered by universities.

Table 4. The number of answers to the possible activities and services for facilitating graduate employability

	Yes, at the institutional level (centralised)	Yes, across the institution, but at the level of faculties	Yes, in some faculties	No, but we are planning this	No

³⁸ For further information on PPS see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tec00114>

Career guidance for students	62	13	9	0	0
Career guidance for alumni	50	5	6	12	11
Work placement opportunities for students	50	17	11	2	4
Voluntary student work	42	16	16	1	9
Recruitment events / employer presentations organised at your institution	68	7	8	0	1
Recommending students / alumni to attend recruitment events / employer presentations outside of your institution	57	6	12	4	5
External mentoring for students	32	8	20	15	9
Integrating transferable skills development into curricula	26	21	25	7	5
Integrating entrepreneurship into curricula	25	13	33	7	6
Specific modules on careers and employability within study courses	15	10	36	7	16
Communication with employers about the curriculum and its relevance or content for the job market	35	23	20	1	5
External provision of employability skills (e.g. an external company or person coming to the institution and training students)	39	9	26	4	6
Your institution's website facilitating contacts with employers	58	2	8	8	8
Social media to facilitate contacts with employers	55	2	11	3	13
Sending any information about students or graduates to employers	36	8	12	4	24
Employers' funded scholarships or student projects	33	11	29	4	7
Providing links to job search engines (such as GoinGlobal, Monster or other local international engines)	48	3	3	9	21