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# **Performance-Based Funding of Higher Education: Analyses of Policy Discourse Across Four Case Studies<sup>i</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*Performance-based funding (PBF) for public colleges and universities is increasingly prevalent worldwide, as a part of a broader pattern of marketisation in public education. This study focused on developing an empirical view of how, and in what contexts, policy makers use the concepts of neoliberal economics to design and support Performance-Based Funding (PBF) policies in higher education. We analysed 121 policy documents, white papers, evaluation reports, and news items related to PBF policies in four case jurisdictions: Tennessee, Washington, United Kingdom, and Italy. We employed critical discourse analysis methods as framed by Fairclough and colleagues and implemented this approach within the broader methodological guidance of Carspecken's critical qualitative research. Grounded in social theory, this study illuminates the role PBF policies play internationally in moving higher education institutions closer to markets. Moreover, it provides an empirical view of the mechanisms and networks built into PBF policy debates. Finally, it contributes to a theoretically and empirically*

*grounded view on the discursive uses of neoliberalism in education policy.*

**Keywords:** *Performance-Based Funding; Higher Education; Neoliberalism*

## **Introduction**

Performance-Based Funding (PBF), or the funding of public higher education based on institutional outcomes, is increasingly prevalent worldwide. As of 2016, 32 US states had adopted this type of policy in some form (National Conference of State Legislators, 2017), and Performance-Based Funding policies are also in place in many European countries (Jongbloed, 2010), Australia (Benneworth et al., 2011), and Canada (Pakravan, 2006). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have also promoted similar policies in various Asian and African countries (Butler, 2010; Essack, Naidoo and Barnes, 2010; World Bank, 2010; Ahmad, Farley and Naidoo, 2012). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) included Performance-Based Funding among its top ten policy issues for each of the last five years (c.f. AASCU, 2016).

Performance-Based Funding policies create pseudo-markets for public funding of higher education within which institutions must then operate (Jongbloed, 2010; Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012; Letizia, 2015). Questions about the desirability of this move toward marketisation rarely play a role in policy debates. Instead, the positive potential, or the inevitability, of marketisation is often assumed (Ball, 2012; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Prominent

critiques have recently emerged, however, highlighting the ways in which overemphasis on markets can lead to increasing inequality and instability in the broader economy (c.f. Piketty, 2013). Because proponents and critics of PBF have linked these policies to the broader pattern of marketisation in public education (Ball, 2012; Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012; Letizia, 2015), it is important that policy deliberations subject the issue to open and participatory public debate.

Understanding the barriers to open debate is a key step toward supporting a more participatory and balanced process in guiding future policy in this area. From a sociocultural perspective, critical discourse analysis can show why and how a policy discussion may include some viewpoints and not others (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). A critical discourse analysis of PBF policies could, therefore, contribute to a better understanding of these dynamics, creating room in future debates for a more democratic, participatory process.

This critical discourse analysis study focuses on developing an empirical view of how, and in what contexts, policy makers use the concepts of neoliberal economics to design and support performance-based funding policies in higher education. Building on our team's previous work in a large-scale policy inventory of 29 jurisdictions, this paper presents four case studies (two US states, Tennessee and Washington, plus the United Kingdom (UK) and Italy) and addresses the following research question:

- To what extent, if at all, are neoliberal concepts present in the discourse surrounding performance-based funding of higher education in different jurisdictions? If present, how and in what contexts do discourse participants use these concepts?

## **Theoretical Framework and Literature**

Dougherty and Natow (2010) and Dougherty and Reddy (2011; 2013) have noted that the most prevalent theory of action implicit in PBF policy discussions assumes that PBF models incentivise institutions to adopt behaviors that will result in higher student achievement or other desired institutional outcomes. This logic model is more focused upon the steps leading from funding to institutional practice and less on how the institutional changes actually lead to improved outcomes; this model sidesteps the inherent complexity of improving student outcomes and frames the problem, mainly, as a matter of influencing institutional aims and priorities via incentives. This mismatch between the logic model and the mechanisms of improving student outcomes “on the ground” can be further examined by exploring the role of neoliberalism in PBF policies.

The logic model Dougherty and colleagues cite relies on “incentivising” and “performativity” (defining success by establishing standardised measures). These are two principal concepts also at the core of neoliberal policy (Ball, 2012), especially when the performance measures are market-oriented (i.e. workforce development, public-private collaborations and external funding). Arguably, the impulse to incentivise higher education institutions (HEIs) to improve student outcomes via PBF is actually an example of looking to the market as the solution to whatever problems arise; a strategy that is essentially at the core of the neoliberal policy agenda (Santos, 2006; Mudge, 2008; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012).

Extending this observation, we draw on theoretical frameworks rooted in the critique of neoliberalism to frame our analyses. Like Slaughter and Cantwell (2012), we base our analyses on the assumption that neoliberal economics form an underlying structure for the emerging changes in the funding of higher education institutions, as well as for the broader discourse surrounding

institutional accountability. For our analysis of PBF policies, however, we approached the role of neoliberal concepts (i.e. their presence, importance, and use) as an open question, not assuming, but rather questioning whether and how these concepts have been used in the policy discourse.

### **Framing Neoliberal Policy**

Neoliberal economics has dominated global policy discourse in the last three decades or more (Chang, 2003; Peck, 2010; Venugopal, 2015). Defining neoliberal policy is a complex undertaking, but prevalent themes include globalisation/mobility; human capital frames; lifelong learning; marketisation of education; and general orientation toward markets as the solution for policy problems (Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012). One important characteristic of neoliberal globalisation has been its hegemony; the fact that it has become so prevalent as to take on the status of common sense (Ball, 2012; Peck, 2010).

Nevertheless, we, as researchers and stakeholders, should not assume this is the only, or natural, way forward. While neoliberal economic theory provides a pervasive context underlying current education policy internationally, in the case of PBF policy, it is possible that neoliberalism is mixed with other concepts or used in evolving ways. Our analyses provide case studies on how policy makers and institutional leaders use these concepts in framing, describing and navigating current PBF policies. In this way, our paper contributes to an empirical basis from which to explore questions related to what comes next for higher education. This is the kind of research that Slaughter, and Cantwell called for, in describing analysis of discourse and social technologies as a “powerful lens for understanding” neoliberal public policy in higher education (2012, p. 587).

Drawing from the wider literature on neoliberalism, we focus on Mudge (2008) and Santos (2006) to frame our study. Mudge (2008) forwards a nuanced historical view of neoliberalism that captures three faces of this phenomenon: the political, bureaucratic, and academic fields. The political network that supports the wide transnational use of neoliberal concepts and the historical background of the academic field provide important context for understanding the complexity and contradictions inherent in the policies (bureaucratic field). More precisely, in Mudge's view, neoliberal policies entail among others: the privatisation of public institutions and resources; deregulation of markets; and a reliance on free markets to stabilise the economy. While Mudge theorises how neoliberalism works in its social context, we turn to Santos' (2006) alternative vision of accountability in higher education, one based on democratic accountability to communities, and centered on sustainability and contribution to the public good, instead of to the market.

Santos (2006) outlines a "crisis of legitimacy" defining the role of the university through most of the twentieth century and into the present day. This "crisis of legitimacy" was created by a contradiction in the central purpose of universities: On the one hand, universities "elevated specialized knowledge through restrictions of access and credentialing of competencies;" on the other, universities met with "social and political demands for a democratized university and equal opportunity" (Santos, 2006, p. 61).

Santos's essay is not an exercise in nostalgia, longing for the days before the "crisis of legitimacy". Instead, the purpose of his essay is to describe how universities gain legitimacy from us, as participants in the public sphere. To gain legitimacy in society, Santos recommends universities emphasise the following: 1) working for equity in access, retention, and outcomes, and addressing stratification of opportunity; 2) actively participating in service to

communities and in the “construction of social cohesion, [. . .] and the defense of cultural diversity” (Santos, 2006, p. 86); 3) conducting participatory action research in service to communities; 4) the incorporation of knowledge from communities into universities; and 5) direct collaborations to improve practice and conditions in public schooling. Santos offers these priorities as a direct alternative to universities’ legitimization solely through service to - and competition in - commercial markets.

In contrast, neoliberal policies may erode and detract resources away from institutional efforts to promote equity, ecologies of knowledge, and so on. Santos observes, furthermore, “It is crucial that ‘opening to the outside’ not be limited to opening to the market” (2006, p. 90). If universities ally themselves with dominant groups’ interests alone, he notes, this will in many cases signify “illegitimacy and irresponsibility in relation to subaltern interests and social groups” (2006, p. 90).

Santos’ (2006) model and Mudge’s (2008) framework guided us in forming interpretations and subsequent implications for policy and practice. To guide our analyses at a more detailed level, we considered how neoliberal policies were described in the wider literature.

### **What are neoliberal concepts?**

Economists, critics, and theorists, focused on neoliberal politics, consistently identify a set of concepts at the core of neoliberal economics, such as competition, privatisation (i.e., external revenues for public institutions, private partnerships, patents), involvement of intermediating organisations, emphasis on human capital, and international economic competitiveness, as key components of neoliberal policy frames (Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012). The



social networks surrounding the adoption and use of neoliberal economics are complex.

Mudge (2008) has noted that the most effective advocates for neoliberal policies in Europe have come from the political left and center-left, a counterintuitive point in some contexts, given that in the US, neoliberalism was historically adopted mostly by neoconservatives. Several commentators have observed, moreover, that promotion of neoliberal performance management in HEIs has come not just from external pressures, but from within institutions as well (Singh, Kenway and Apple, 2005; Santos, 2006). Slaughter and Cantwell (2012) noted that institutions are not simply buffeted by changes and forces imposed from the outside, but that institutions and actors within them also have participated in bringing universities closer to markets. They cite the Bayh-Dole Act (1980), which guarantees for instance the funding of US universities patents and intellectual property rights for work by federal research grants and contracts. They summarise further examples noting that prevalent internal discourses and structures emphasise: “competition for external resources, cooperation with industry, attainment of bench marks, and success in rankings” (Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012, p. 593). Further efforts often take the form of ‘interstitial organizations’, such as incubators, technology transfer centers, and research centers.

Others have similarly pointed to new management styles (Santos, 2006; Feller, 2009; Ball, 2012), and themes of human capital and workforce development (Santos, 2006; Ball, 2012). The imposition of standardised measures in order to define success and facilitate comparison and competition across institutions and sectors, a practice Ball (2012) terms “performativity”, is also present within postsecondary education policy (Feller, 2009; Singh et al., 2005). Finally, scholars have consistently pointed to the central theme of ‘desacralising’

formerly protected sectors (i.e. education and healthcare) by making them subject to markets (Mudge, 2008), privatisation (Mudge, 2008; Lincove, 2009) and the reliance on global markets for regulating the economy and as a solution to problems as they arise (Singh et al., 2005; Santos, 2006; Mudge, 2008; Lincove, 2009; Ball, 2012).

Underscoring the above idea, Ball summarises “The point is to make ‘the market’ the obvious solution to social and economic problems” (2012, p. 26). Related to this last point, Santos (2006) noted that the state and public institutions are placed in the service of the market, leading to the creation of quasi-markets for public institutions to operate in, and reducing public financial support of education. This pattern shows in an emphasis on accountability and efficiency. Santos notes, in particular, “the [neoliberal] project is linked but not limited to the reduction in public funding” (2006, p. 67). In some sense, this approach removes policy makers and administrators from the need to have underlying core values about the purpose of higher education. Instead, the logic holds, the market will decide.

This study is an instance of what Singh and colleagues (2005) have called researching “globalization from below.” That is, rather than reviewing broad patterns of neoliberal globalisation, we explore how neoliberal policies work on the ground, through the discourse used by participating individuals and institutions. Specifically, we aim to understand how policy makers and institutions, in four case jurisdictions, use and enact neoliberal ideas through PBF policies. Describing research on globalisation from below, Singh et al., (2005) noted:

“One focus in this research [research on globalization from below] is on the extent to which and manner in which globalizing processes are mediated on the ground.[ . . .] Attention is paid to diverse peoples and places, and their complex and contradictory experiences of, reactions to, and engagements with various aspects of globalization as these intersect with their lives and identities over time”. (2008, p. 8)

Following this line of inquiry, we have collected data in the form of policy documents, advocacy documents, evaluation reports and social media activity surrounding four different policies enacting performance-based funding of higher education institutions (c.f. Table 1). We analysed these as constituent of the discourse surrounding PBF, and as documentation of how participants in this discourse (policy makers, institutions, advocates, and researchers) make sense of and use the concepts implied by neoliberal economics. We analysed these documents, in part, using a list of concepts associated with neoliberalism, synthesised from the authors cited above (c.f. Table 2).

## **Methods**

In this article, we present a critical discourse analysis study of policy documents, white papers, evaluation reports, and news items related to PBF policies in four case jurisdictions. We employed critical discourse analysis methods as framed by Fairclough and colleagues (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012) and implemented this approach within the broader methodological guidance of Carspecken’s critical ethnography (1996) in order to develop four case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). We defined Performance-Based Funding as any policy entailing the public funding of higher education institutions based on institutional outcomes (i.e. student completions and research productivity).

Yin (2013) proposes the replication of studies rather than sampling logic as the more suitable model for guiding case selection. In following this guidance, we looked for cases that would have some similarities across contexts, and some differences. After conducting a policy inventory and review of literature for the larger study of 29 individual states and countries, we selected two case jurisdictions in the EU (considering a study period of 2008-2016) and two in the US.

More precisely, we selected the UK and Italy as case studies to represent different conditions within Europe; considering region, population size, economic conditions, and history of reforms in the higher education sector during this process. We also included Tennessee and Washington as additional cases because they introduce further variation in terms of national, economic, and policy contexts for reform. Tennessee has the longest history of extensive activity related to performance funding and is seen as a model in national discussions of PBF. In contrast, Washington has a relatively brief history with PBF, but is also the site of an innovative funding model emphasising intermediate student outcomes at the state's community colleges (i.e. student gains in basic skills and credit completions).

Our purpose in this article is to shed light on policy makers' use of neoliberal concepts in four jurisdictions. In presenting the four case studies, we are able to forward some observations about the discourse in each of these contexts. However, we do not attempt to draw causal conclusions regarding differences and regularities observed across the cases, or to make systematic comparisons on specific variables. We believe that the four case summaries and discussion highlight important themes, showing both similarities and differences across the selected jurisdictions, but our aim is to describe how policy makers use

neoliberal concepts across various contexts, in a way that does not abstract, collapse, or prematurely boil down the complexity of the policy contexts.

The use of Yin's logic of replication of studies, rather than the sampling logic, in selecting cases had further implications on the structure and presentation of our results. Because the four jurisdictions constitute individual, complex, situated cases, the summary of findings from each jurisdiction lent itself more clearly to a case-by-case presentation rather than a thematic structure, whereby examples of a given theme are presented drawing from across the case jurisdictions.

The themes played out differently in each jurisdiction and were conditioned by complex variation in contexts. For these reasons, we felt we could best preserve the complexity of the cases in our construction of findings by discussing each jurisdiction separately. Finally, our discussion section returns to the theoretical framework to highlight conclusions that are illuminated by the multi-case design. While our goal is not comparison per se, the collection of findings across the four jurisdictions is useful in showing some patterns and some range of complexity in how policy makers use neoliberal concepts in forming PBF policies. Illuminating these patterns and complexities is useful, furthermore, because it provides an empirical basis for linking PBF debates to theory and research relevant to neoliberalism more broadly.

Data collection centered on both primary and secondary sources for each case, discovered using a systematically developed set of keywords, searching selected bibliographic databases and targeting news sources. The document data set consists of items of four types: 1) primary policy documents (government policy documents, government websites, and summaries of policies released by government agencies); 2) advocacy documents (white papers, or other examples of "policy intermediation" (Peck and Tickell, 2003) released by advocacy

organizations); 3) evaluation studies; and 4) news coverage and outreach media (news items and advertisements) (c.f. Table 1). Documents were considered eligible if they explicitly referred to the specific policy identified for the case study: the *Complete College Tennessee Act (CCTA)* of 2010; Washington state's *Student Achievement Initiative (SAI)*, revised in 2012; the *Evaluation of Research Quality (Valutazione della Qualità della Ricerca, VQR)*, program implemented in Italy in 2011; and the UK's *Research Excellence Framework (REF)* instituted in 2014.

Data analysis procedures began with low-inference coding of key documents (Carspecken, 1996). In later-stage analysis, we built gradually toward pattern coding (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2013) and codes derived from the critiques of neoliberalism (i.e. competition, efficiency and privatisation). A complete list of codes is included in Table 2. We organised and documented our analyses using qualitative data analysis software (*ATLAS.ti*).

Low-inference coding, qualitative research memos, and a reflexive and collaborative approach helped to support the trustworthiness and relevance of our analyses. For example, while we felt our later analyses were well supported by the gradual and iterative coding process we followed, we grappled at times with the application of the critique-of-neoliberalism concepts to each jurisdiction's documents. We also struggled with how best to support the trustworthiness of our findings in making choices about how to represent the variation and incommensurability that naturally emerges in case studies of this kind. In both instances, reflexive research memos and collaborative debriefing helped us to challenge ourselves and to stay close to the data.

Our analyses naturally have limitations owing to methodological choices and trade-offs we made in conducting the study. The study cannot support causal

conclusions regarding why policy makers' use of neoliberal concepts may differ from case to case. Furthermore, the collection of cases cannot be understood as neatly or fully representing the broader phenomenon of PBF policy debates as they play out globally. The layered complexity of policy contexts and policy formation in practice cannot be encapsulated in the four cases described here. Nevertheless, we believe it is useful to explore the policy discourse as it played out in four purposeful examples, as even this beginning can illuminate some patterns and variation in whether and how policy makers use neoliberal concepts in defining and explaining PBF.

### **Case Summaries**

Findings in this study focus on how and in what contexts concepts related to marketisation were used in the policy documents. Key background and contextual information for each case study is summarised in Table 3. Although we discuss themes that emerged across all cases and address key findings, similarities, and differences across the jurisdictions in the Discussion section, we aim to explore each jurisdiction as a single, self-contained case.

### **Tennessee**

Tennessee has a long history and high profile of performance-based funding of postsecondary education. In 1979, it became the first US state to establish Performance-Based Funding for postsecondary education institutions, and although the policy has changed over the years, PBF has been continuously in place, in some form, since its inception. In the decades since, proponents of PBF have pointed to models implemented in Tennessee as exemplars (Complete College America (CCA), 2010; Jones, 2011; Wright, 2016).

The legislative language surrounding the CCTA suggests that the state of Tennessee sought to stimulate economic and workforce development through

incentivising varied outcomes (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010). In the CCTA, promotion of economic growth and development was central, and more specifically included advancement of research in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, as well as clean energy sciences (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010).

### Markets, Quasi-Markets, and Competition

Our thematic analyses of policy, advocacy, and media documents showed that policy makers, intermediating organisations, and media reporters used market logic in framing and describing the CCTA. For example, the CCTA legislation itself includes examples of how policy makers point to incentivising a change in institutional priorities to become more attuned to standardised measures of quality aligned with the state's market-oriented, economic development priorities. The stated purpose of the policy was identified as establishing “[. . .] performance funding policy solutions [...] to influence institutional behavior and to align campus and public priorities” (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010, p. 1).

Similarly, news stories highlighted policy makers' perceptions that performance funding is a natural and necessary vehicle to align institutions' priorities, portraying the turn toward markets as natural and inevitable. A 2011 National Public Radio story, *A Carrot for College Performance*, framed the issue by saying “Only about half of the students [...] will get a degree within six years from this school [...]. Until now, Tennessee Tech had no financial incentive to do anything about that” (Abramson, 2011). The report highlighted this rationale, even while also quoting a Tennessee Tech dean as saying: “[...] faculty have always talked about ways to help students succeed [...]. We have always known it was important”.



Passages explicitly referring to markets in the Tennessee case prevalently highlighted workforce development for particular energy-related industries. For example, one of the CCTA's enumerated goals was to "accelerate the state's economic and workforce development efforts in the field of energy sciences and engineering" (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010). In addition, the legislation referred to entrepreneurial approaches in general, further identifying the promotion of STEM research, "to encourage entrepreneurial opportunities in Tennessee" (2010, p. 7).

On a subtler level, Tennessee policy documents and advocacy white papers also included repeated references to human capital, presented in the context of international economic competitiveness. A *Lumina Foundation Report* focused on Tennessee's PBF as an exemplar and framed Tennessee's policy within college completion, educational attainment and economic competitiveness, prevalent themes in US higher education policy, referring to "widely acknowledged [...] escalating standards for economic competitiveness" (Wright, 2016, p. 1). This thread is worth noting because it appears to ignore findings from research suggesting that university efforts to increase human capital for economic development are effective only when the targeted industries already have a presence in the state (Powers, 2003).

Interestingly, media reports and policy summaries suggested that policy makers and institutions in Tennessee were not sparring with each other over the central, arguably, market-facing, concepts built into the CCTA policy: incentives tied to funding; market-oriented performance measures; and participation in quasi-markets and privatisation via partnerships and external funding. A 2011 *National Crosstalk* article quoted one campus administrator: "we've all drunk the Kool-Aid" (Jones, 2011, § 48), indicating that these aspects of the CCTA were uncontroversial.

Controversy did arise, however, between institutions and policy makers over the uncertain prospects for growth within the PBF system, or the looming alternative of flat or declining funding for higher education overall. This broader concern connected to another, secondary discomfort mentioned by institutional leaders in the press; a concern about competition for funds built into the CCTA policy. While the primary policy documents make only indirect mention of competition, the policy is structured in such a way that gains by one institution result in losses to others, especially under the scenario of flat funding or cuts over time. The same *National Crosstalk* article, mentioned above, quoted a college president, expressing overall support for the policy, but highlighting a concern about competition between institutions:

If I have a target of 100 in a certain area and [using the state’s dynamic modeling tool] I type in a result of 110, I can see how much we get, and then I can see who’s going to be mad at me because I took their money. When someone wins, someone else loses. (Jones, 2011, § 44).

### Performativity

Consistent with the US discourse on college completion in recent years, policy and advocacy documents surrounding the CCTA focus on attainment rates and national and international economic competitiveness. Almost by definition, the standardized measures built into the CCTA articulate targets and definitions for success. In the Tennessee policy, performativity is prevalently directed toward human capital, i.e. “degree production” (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010, p. 2), and workforce development “workforce training contact hours [. . .] job placements” (Johnson and Yanagiura, 2016, p. 6), but also “intermediate outcomes” (i.e. credit completion and progress through developmental coursework) (Johnson and Yanagiura, 2016, p. 6). Evaluation studies have so far concluded that, while some evidence of institutions changing their practices

after CCTA exists, it is unclear whether the policy can be linked to improved student outcomes (Johnson and Yanagiura, 2016).

### Partnerships and Privatisation

Privatisation is most obviously built into the CCTA in that an institution's success in attracting external funding is one of the performance criteria. Institutions' and individuals' ability to gain external funding is widely viewed as a competitive indicator of excellence in the US and an enhancement to an institution's status and reputation (if not to its actual budget), and so this point may seem simply intuitive.

Nevertheless, the incremental shift from public to private support of public HEIs in the form of external research funding is itself a form of privatisation. We note this to assemble a fuller picture of how policy makers use neoliberal concepts and goals in the CCTA. Public-private collaboration was likewise among the goals outlined for the policy. The CCTA legislation includes the following provision, for example:

Recognising the potential leverage and synergy that can be achieved by collaboration among the public and private entities, it is hereby declared that the University of Memphis, the University of Tennessee Center for the Health Sciences and St. Jude Children's Research Hospital are lead collaborators in the Memphis Research Consortium. (T.N. Legis. Assemb. HB 7006, 2010, p. 8)

This excerpt from the legislation illustrates that partnerships with private entities are highlighted in the policy itself, both generally and in the creation of specific collaborations.

The Tennessee case illustrates the subtle dynamics of a mature and participatory process, and some of the ways neoliberal concepts are present not only in

legislation but internal to institutions as well. Turning to the case of Washington, where the PBF policy had a shorter history and affected community colleges only, we can examine the process unfold from a different angle.

### **Washington**

The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) implemented the SAI policy in 2008, after its adoption in 2007. The SAI focuses on student gains in basic skills and credit completion, gaining attention in the literature for this emphasis (Jenkinset al., 2012; Dougherty et al., 2013; Lumina Foundation, 2016). In one evaluation study, institutional stakeholders reported feeling the SAI reflected support for the success of students from varied backgrounds and respect for institutional differences statewide (Jenkins and Shulock, 2013). On the other hand, recent analyses have raised questions about whether the policy has actually improved student outcomes (Hillman, Tandberg and Fryar, 2015).

### **Markets, Quasi-Markets, and Competition**

Our analyses showed that primary documents from the Washington SBCTC reflect policy makers' use of the market logic of incentives and rewards in framing the SAI. Descriptions of policy documents relevant to the Washington SAI emphasised workforce development and economic competitiveness of the region. This may seem logical, as workforce development is closely tied to the missions of community and technical colleges throughout the US. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the stated purpose of the initiative was to incentivise community colleges to improve student success rates; a market solution (incentives) to improve, based on standardised measures defining student success (performativity).

The SBCTC's documents frame the policy as incentivising the alignment of goals, although, as with Tennessee, improving student outcomes may already have been among institutional goals. In addition, the policy included new support to institutions in its inaugural year to support improvement efforts. This new support was small, however, approximately \$500,000 total for 34 colleges, and because this was likely not enough financial support to fund new programs or efforts, we argue that these funds also functioned mainly as an incentive (SBCTC, 2007, p. 2).

SAI policy documents included relatively few references to competition among institutions, framing the point system around continuous improvement as opposed to zero-sum comparisons across colleges. The SBCTC resolution notes, for example, that one of the principles driving the SAI's use of incentive funding is its structure, by which "colleges compete against themselves for continuous improvement, rather than competing with each other" (SBCTC, 2007, Attachment A, p. 3).

In comparison to the Tennessee case, the SAI evaluation studies made only intermittent use of the incentivising logic. Jenkins and colleagues (2012) identified one of the two goals of the SAI as "to provide incentives to colleges [...] for increasing student success". However, evaluations of the SAI also raised questions about resources and institutional capacity available to significantly improve student success outcomes, thus stepping out of the neoliberal framework. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) final report, for example, highlights the importance of a cumulative effect, whereby financial awards accrue as a stable resource for continued improvements in practice (Jenkins, et al., 2012). A 2015 American Educational Research Association (AERA) press release highlighted Hillman and colleagues' (2015) *Falling Short* study, which pointed to the complexities beyond incentivising

institutions with financial rewards.

There is no easy solution to improving college performance [said Hillman]. Most schools do not have the capacity to make improvements with current resources. That's especially true of community and technical colleges, which are already known for having to do the most with the least amount of resources. (AERA, 2015, § 12)

### Performativity

The Washington case illustrates a participatory process with an emphasis on intermediate outcomes (i.e. credits completed and first college-level credit). These are distinguishing features of PBF in Washington, and evaluation studies have attributed the sustainability of the policy to these steps (Shulock and Jenkins, 2011). However, they in themselves are not inconsistent with neoliberal policy.

Focusing on participatory process, Jenkins and Shulock's evaluation study of the SAI (2013) shared lessons learned from its development and implementation. Following collection and analysis of interview data, they concluded that college leaders generally supported the metrics built into the initiative's funding model. However, these stakeholders also perceived a lack of transparency within the complex model, inhibiting their ability to see why an institution's performance had improved, making it difficult to identify new ways to improve. Furthermore, the authors reported that some college leaders felt too much funding tied to student outcomes could potentially destabilise institutions. While Jenkins and Shulock's results (2013) suggested that inclusion of varied stakeholders, open communication, and regular evaluation were instrumental to the program's successful implementation, Dougherty, Natow and Vega (2012) cited participating institutional leaders' perception that the

performance funding system was not wholly responsive to diverse institutional missions.

Another CCRC evaluation study revealed evidence of dissonance between Washington's SAI measures and their targeted student outcomes (Jenkins and Shulock, 2013). Analyses showed, for example, that even when colleges' points, under the SAI rating system, increased, overall student progression did not improve; a finding that calls into question the validity and implementation of the performance measures themselves.

Research has shown scarce evidence that PBF policies result in improved student outcomes in US HEIs (Hillman et al., 2015). This may be because longer time frames are needed before effects can be observed (Tandberg, Hillman and Barakat, 2014), or it may on the other hand further bear out the view that the problem of student success is more complex than market solutions can necessarily solve.

There are additional disadvantages and advantages to consider with regard to performativity in Washington. One disadvantage is that workforce development needs of certain industries are foregrounded, prioritizing those industries' human capital needs. At the same time, accountability for equity and service to communities were backgrounded, and, in fact, not mentioned in primary policy documents. One advantage, however, is that equity was part of the discourse surrounding the SAI; evaluation studies and media reports focused on the potential danger of unintended consequences of the policy. Shulock and Jenkins' policy brief, for example, asked, "How can performance funding systems best provide incentives for colleges to serve underprepared students?" (2001, p. 15).

Next, the SAI's orientation toward intermediate outcomes is an important dimension of performativity in Washington. As mentioned previously, the state's use of intermediate outcomes as measures of performance are considered particularly innovative and influential within the *Performance Funding 2.0* generation of new policies (Dougherty and Reddy, 2013; Jenkins and Shulock, 2013). Incentivising intermediate outcomes, such as gains in basic math and writing skills, has gained support from stakeholders for several reasons. Study participants averred that rewarding a diverse range of achievements had allowed for the progress of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to be valued more equitably, acknowledging that degree completion is more likely for students from more privileged backgrounds (Jenkins and Shulock, 2013). Additionally, stakeholders viewed policies that considered student background in measurement of performance to be supportive of community colleges as institutions, highlighting the relevance of intermediate outcomes as useful measures across diverse institutional types.

### Partnerships and Privatisation

The SBCTC resolution includes collaboration among the goals for the SAI. The board's third principal objective for the next ten years was to "use technology, collaboration and innovation to meet the demands of the economy and improve student success" (SBCTC, 2007, p.A1). Nevertheless, public-private partnerships and privatisation were not a prevalent theme in either the policy documents or the media coverage related to the SAI. However, the case of Washington does illustrate the role of foundations and other agenda-setting organisations in the discourse surrounding performance-based funding in the US. The Gates Foundation, for example, funded the initial development of the SAI in 2006 and a three-year evaluation study of the policy conducted by the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College (Long, 2015). The SAI is among the policies highlighted in the *Lumina Foundation for*



*Education FAQ* website explaining the benefits of outcomes-based funding (Lumina, 2016).

Washington's SAI policy shows a contrasting example in which incentivising logic is used somewhat intermittently, and where policy intermediating organizations are a prominent voice. Articulated goals focus on human capital and economic development, but equity concerns seemed to remain a part of the discussion at some level.

### **United Kingdom**

While higher education policy is differentiated in the UK across national contexts and institutional types, HEIs are generally funded based on a combination of enrollment and results of regular research assessment exercises, now framed under the Research Excellence Framework (REF) policy. The UK employs centralised evaluation of institutional performance focused on multiple indicators including access, completion rates, student learning outcomes, graduate workforce outcomes and research productivity (Jongbloed, 2010). However, the REF policy is the main vehicle of performance-based funding in the system.

The majority of the 163 higher education institutions in the UK are non-profit organisations and receive substantial public funding. However, Geuna and Piolatto have characterised the UK as a “competitive system” (20015, p. 41), tying approximately half of total university funds to private funding. Although the UK's first experience with systematic assessment of research was in 1986, the current REF system was instituted in 2014 by the four UK coordinating boards for tertiary education: Higher Education Funding Commissions for England (HEFCE) and Wales (HEFCW); the Scottish Funding Council (SFC);

and the Department of Employment and Learning (DEL) for Northern Ireland (Geuna and Piolatto, 2015).

Although responsiveness to national needs is expressed differently in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England, there appears to be a concentrated effort across the UK to increase efficiency and achieve “better value-for-money from the higher education sector” (Middlehurst, 2013, p. 278). HEIs in the UK face pressure to be internationally competitive in research, faculty and student recruitment, and programming and services (Middlehurst, 2013). This context has naturally shaped discussion around REF performance indicators and has become embodied in the general concept of ‘impact’.

### Markets, Quasi-Markets and Competition

The policy discourse surrounding the REF included specific references to incentivizing HEIs to align their goals with those of the state and to improve their performance in producing research. These were presented as the aims of the policy in the following quote, for example:

We have taken into account the UK Government’s aims for the publicly funded research sector and its expectations as to the role that the REF should play in delivering these. The Government has made plain its view that maintaining the capacity of the HE sector to produce world-leading research across a broad range of academic disciplines is essential to underpin economic growth and national well-being; and that to this end the HE sector can and should do more to ensure that its excellent research achieves its full potential impact. (HEFCE, 2009, p. 4)

This excerpt illustrates the policy makers’ use of the typical logic model for PBF, stating explicitly that HEIs can and should contribute more to the economy (“economic growth and national wellbeing”). According to this and

other similar examples, only the will is missing; thus, incentivising HEIs with the REF is posed as the natural solution.

### Performativity

In the main document for the second consultation process defining the REF, HEFCE, HEFCW, SFC and DEL quoted directives from the Secretary of State for Education, noting that the REF “should take better account of the impact research makes on the economy and society” (HEFCE, 2009, p. 4). This orientation of performativity toward ‘impact,’ i.e., defining success in part by contribution to “the economy and society,” became a central and controversial feature of the REF. Moreover, the funding agencies noted the relevance of international competitiveness, and identified contributions to both the economy and national wellbeing as the measure of ‘impact.’

The UK funding bodies each aim to develop and sustain a dynamic and internationally competitive research sector in their country or territory that makes a major contribution to economic prosperity, national wellbeing and the expansion and dissemination of knowledge. Research assessment is a key means through which we pursue this strategic aim. (HEFCE, 2009, p. 5)

### Partnerships and Privatisation

The discourse surrounding the REF is characterised by high-volume exchanges in social media outlets, such as Twitter, where #REF2014 is an active hashtag, blogs (i.e. wonkhe.com; the London School of Economics “Impact of Social Science”), and in reports released both by institutions and a growing consultancy sector (i.e. “Fast Track Impact”). Debates about the appropriateness and fairness of the impact assessments abound in these forums, as does discussion of strategies for planning for and increasing the impact of ‘outputs,’ as counted under the policy. Our analyses revealed that institutions and university-affiliated researchers affected by the policy were active participants

in these exchanges, although consultants and firms offering services were also prevalent. Critics highlighted questions about the assessment of impact under REF, wherein impact is generally defined as social, economic, or cultural contribution or influence outside of the academy. One common critique noted, for example, that prioritising economic impact of publicly funded research (a concept associated with neoliberalism) effectively devalues scholarship in the arts and humanities (Shepherd, 2009).

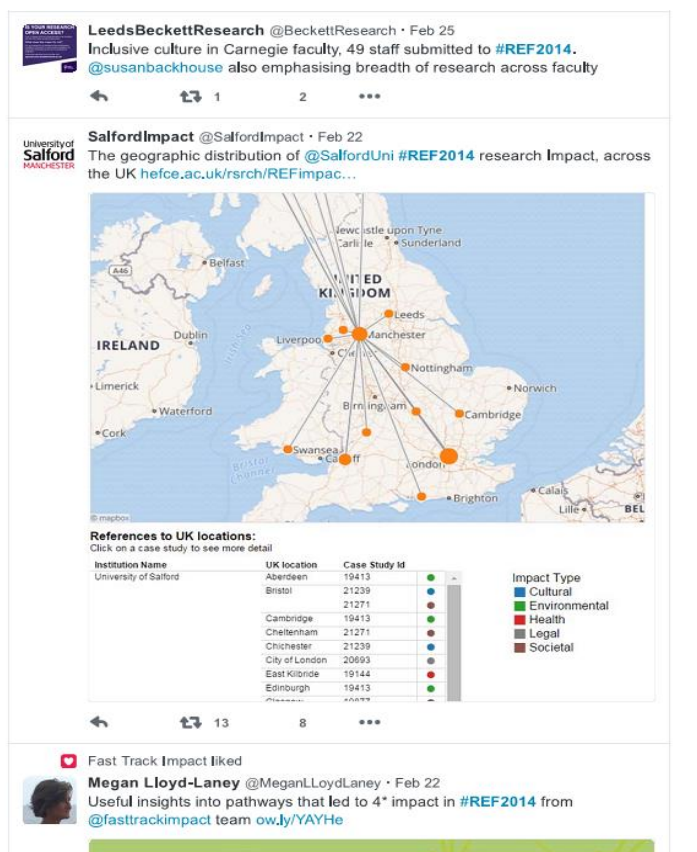
Another aspect of privatisation shown in REF policy documents pertained to an ancillary goal of encouraging university researchers to move across public and private sectors. During the second consultation, for example, policy makers outlined the issue as follows:

Significant benefits can flow from the movement of researchers between HE and other sectors, including business and industry and the public and voluntary sectors ... Its benefits can include the achievement of more frequent and more significant outcomes, harnessing research findings to real world problems, and the development of a culture within HE that values and supports interactions of all kinds. Encouraging researcher mobility is a specific policy aim of the REF and we wish to ensure that the framework creates a positive environment for researcher mobility. (HEFCE, 2009, p. 24)

This excerpt illustrates the importance REF policy makers assigned to public-private partnership in addition to the orientation of publicly funded research and higher education toward the private sector. Both of these concepts are forms of privatisation and are among the concepts regularly identified with neoliberal policy.

Patterns within the UK case seem to illustrate Feller's point (2009), showing how various forms of privatisation (i.e. consulting, infrastructure, relying more on tuition and emphasising impact) are being pursued and implemented not

solely from external pressure, but from within institutions as well. News and media sources included regular participation by institutions touting their results as a vehicle for enhancing their reputations (c.f. East Anglian Daily Times, 2014; Chaudhari, 2017). Moreover, consultants’ posts were prevalent, recommending strategies for individual researchers, programs, and institutions; advice about how they might document and expand their impact as defined in the REF. In this way, by 2016, the collected news and media documents for the UK case reflected a high-level of buy-in among HEIs overall, at least as seen in social media.



**Figure 2. Excerpt from Twitter Feed on #REF2014**

The discourse surrounding the REF highlights several important themes, particularly regarding the various forms of privatisation, and the ways in which neoliberal concepts were sometimes used within and by institutions as well as by external policy makers.

## **Italy**

In the case of Italy's VQR policy, we saw language foregrounding: 1) a division between policy makers and academics regarding the desirability of marketising tertiary education; 2) performativity organised around "international standards," which are referenced frequently; and 3) external funding via partnerships with private organisations and patents. This last aspect, arguably a form of privatisation, is the focus of the so-called "third mission" built into the policy (VQR, 2010). Interestingly, Italy's case also offers examples of how performativity can reinforce the legitimisation of public funding going to private entities. These patterns will become clearer as we discuss our three topical themes below.

## **Markets, Quasi-Markets, and Competition**

Our thematic analyses revealed that the marketisation of higher education was widely portrayed as inevitable in Europe-wide policy intermediation documents. In 2010, for example, the European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities (ESMU) wrote:

"All across Europe, government still is the main funding source for higher education institutions. At the same time, it is widely recognised that securing alternative, private revenue sources will be necessary in the years ahead". (Jongbloed, 2010, p. 9)

This reflects a common theme found in several reports and documents produced by the European Commission (EC) and Brussels think tanks, especially in earlier documents included in the study (i.e., those from 2005 to 2010). The same ESMU report included the following summary, further illustrating this position:

A mass higher education system requires a greater reliance on markets and their decentralised decision-making by individuals and institutions [...]. In the words of

Nicholas Barr: “The days of central planning are gone! (Barr, 2003)”. (Jongbloed, 2010, p. 31)

Policy intermediating organisations, including the OECD, the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research, and Education (NIFU), the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), and ESMU, consistently associated PBF policies, described as market-based strategies, with progress itself, and with the necessity of modernising European tertiary education. In one example, a 2010 CHEPS report on PBF policies in Europe centered in part on the question: “what could be the further courses for action towards the modernisation of higher education institutions towards 2020?” (de Boeret al., 2010, p. 2).

In 2015, however, a report released by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) (as the EC’s science agency), urged “reconsidering [...] the emphasis on competitive funding for R&I excellence,” (Nascia and Pianta, 2015), especially with regard to Italy. This is a particularly interesting development that warrants further discussion. Although the EC was a strong proponent of PBF and other market-based competitive approaches to funding research (and eventually tertiary education overall) through the first decade of the century, more recently their agencies have begun to acknowledge that some barriers may exist that market-solutions are ill-suited to address. These include under-resourced universities, funding inequalities defined by region and institution type, and a brain drain problem for the country (Nascia and Pianta, 2015).

Problems with marketisation were likely more visible from within the institutions, which may explain in part how institutional buy-in has unfolded differently in Italy, as compared to our other three cases. Researchers at several universities notably boycotted the process, and in at least one case at the

University of Salerno, the rector submitted materials for the boycotting researchers without their participation or permission (Giordano, 2014; 2016; Baccini and De Nicolao, 2016).

### Performativity

The legislation establishing the Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario e della Ricerca (ANVUR), an external organisation founded in 2010 specifically to manage the VQR, specifies that a principal goal of the agency will be to “evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of public financing programs and incentives for research and innovation” (Presidente Della Repubblica Italiana, 2010, n. 76, p. 2). Generally, therefore, performativity was organised broadly in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness. Effectiveness was further framed partially around a managed peer-review process, and partially around frequent references to international standards:

- [...] definition of quality standards recognised at the international level” (Presidente Della Repubblica Italiana, 2010, n. 76, p. 10);
- evaluation of the results at an international level (Parlamento Italiano, 2009, n. 1, p. 2);
- The activities of the Agency [center on] its insertion in the international context of the University evaluation, and research activities are assessed regularly by committees of international experts appointed by the Minister also based on designations of European organizations in the sector. (Parlamento Italiano, 2009, n. 1, p. 2)

As shown in these examples, international standards and comparisons were priorities built into VQR the policy itself. This emphasis on international competitiveness and comparisons was equally clear in the policies guiding the process for identifying the expert panels that conducted the peer review during the VQR.



Moreover, policy documents from the Italian Ministry of Instruction, Universities and Research (MIUR) also highlighted “ability to attract competitive international and federal funding” as a criterion for evaluating the quality of research productivity in universities and private research institutes that receive public funding (*MIUR Linee Guida VQR 2011-2014*, p. 3). This dovetails with our final theme.

### Partnerships and Privatisation

One aspect of the VQR particularly relevant to our analysis is the “third mission”, which highlights several issues related to the privatisation of public higher education in Italy. The third mission focuses on indicators such as “management of intellectual property, business creation [ ... ] and research-industry relationships” (VQR, 2010, p. 4). As noted above, this section of the policy also generally refers to institutions’ ability to “attract private resources” and “attract competitive funding internationally” as indicators of quality. This is a form of privatisation in that the public support of research is supplanted by private support. The extent to which this is happening, in fact, is used as a performance indicator in the VQR.

Figure 2 shows a detail from an ANVUR report on the VQR process, focused on an overview of the “third mission” section of the VQR. More precisely, Figure II shows graphs comparing institutions on two indicators: research ‘income’ (top) and ‘patents’ (bottom), demonstrating these forms of privatisation are inherent in the policy. Moreover, the extract from the report illustrates how these performance measures set up a comparison across sectors.

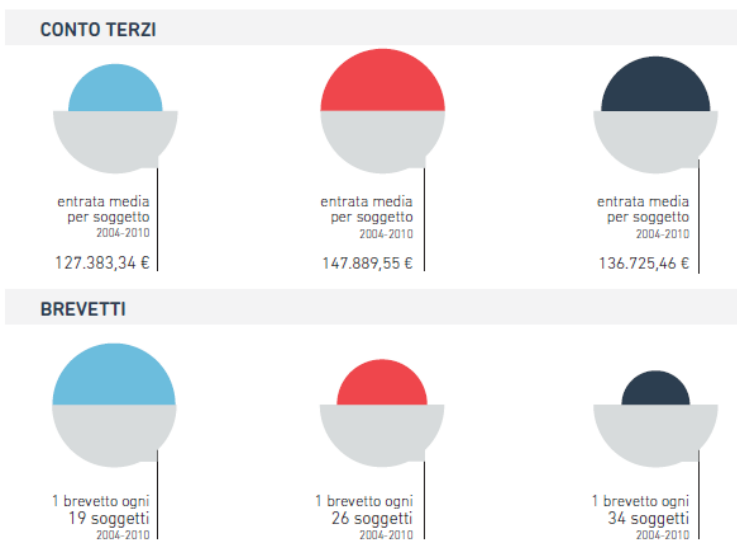
In fact, as Ball (2012) and others have noted, the implied standardisation and comparison across public and private sector leads to a conceptual equivalency that recognises no specific role for public institutions. Instead, this comparison

establishes competition among institutions, regardless of sector, and in turn, potentially paves the way to further privatisation. For example, in cases where private institutions outperform public institutions on a measure, the implied choice would be to reward or fund the private institution, and considerations of funding research for the public good would not enter the conversation.

## LA TERZA MISSIONE

La "terza missione" è l'insieme delle attività con cui università e enti di ricerca interagiscono con la società. Riguarda la valorizzazione della conoscenza e può essere di tipo economico e socio-culturale. Nel primo ambito rientrano la gestione della proprietà intellettuale, la creazione di imprese, la ricerca conto terzi e i rapporti ricerca-industria, e la gestione di strutture di intermediazione e di supporto, su scala territoriale. Nel secondo, rientrano i beni culturali e la gestione di poli museali, gli scavi archeologici e la divulgazione scientifica.

### LEGENDA



**Figure 3. Extract from ANVUR Report on the VQR (2015)**

In the case of Italy, therefore, policy discourse is informed by the influence of neoliberal frames imposed by the EU and by the national government in the wake of university restructuring and budget cuts (c.f. Table 3). Policy documents related to the VQR show neoliberal concepts emphasizing international mobility and standards as well as performativity. In addition, however, resistance from researchers who in some cases boycotted the process, and eventual acknowledgement from Brussels that a strong move toward marketization of universities would not address pressing problems facing the

Italian university system illustrate the ways in which neoliberal concepts were challenged in this debate.

### **Discussion and Implications**

From these analyses, we see that policy makers and others who contributed to the policy discourse surrounding PBF in the four case jurisdictions employed concepts related to neoliberal economics, in that they:

- aimed to incentivise institutions to change their priorities;
- introduced competition to create pseudo-markets for HEIs;
- emphasised efficiency, performativity, and various avenues for privatisation (i.e. rewarding private sources of funding and basing quality impacts on the economy);
- created new markets within HEIs for private sector products and services (i.e. consultancy and services to help institutions navigate new accountability requirements);
- involved the private sector in creating, mediating, and implementing policy (i.e. Gates, Lumina, CCA, OECD);
- naturalised marketisation (i.e. by assuming its desirability, conflating it with the public good, or portraying it as inevitable).

Through these case studies, we observed not only how policymakers used neoliberal concepts, as described by Mudge (2008) and others, in forming PBF policies. We also saw how this use played out differently in four distinct contexts. Both US examples, but especially Washington, showed the centrality of policy intermediating organisations (Slaughter and Cantwell, 2012). The Tennessee case highlighted how complex, participatory processes had developed over time, so that the use of neoliberal concepts was selectively taken up within institutions, as well as by external policy makers. Somewhat similarly, the UK policy debates demonstrated Feller's (2009) point, showing

that privatisation (i.e. consulting, increased reliance on tuition and emphasis on impact) was advocated and implemented both via external pressures and from within institutions as well. In Italy, this kind of buy-in unfolded differently, as some participants challenged neoliberal solutions. At the same time, however, the policy discourse surrounding the VQR also illustrated how performativity can reinforce the legitimation of public funding going to private entities (Ball, 2012).

Our findings raise questions regarding the underlying purposes and effectiveness of PBF policies and highlight the importance of incorporating responsiveness to the diverse missions and local contexts of institutions. Institutions will be more or less constrained in their ability to respond to performance-based funding, according to the specific level of autonomy they have within the broader system.

If performance-based funding policies rely too simplistically on neoliberal frames, they may fail to account for differences across the institutions affected. This kind of approach may give rise to unintended consequences, such as increasing retention or graduation rates simply by making admissions criteria more selective or by diminishing academic expectations placed upon students (Arum and Roksa, 2011; Tandberget al., 2014; Letizia, 2015). Moreover, some institutions may be forced to bear an unfair and punitive burden, whereby resources are progressively more constrained through PBF, creating a downward spiral. Some policy analyses have noted that institutions with the greatest institutional wealth, high levels of private funding for research and other diverse resources, on the other hand, are less likely to feel the consequences of receiving or losing public funding tied to outcomes (Dougherty and Reddy, 2011; Tandberg and Hillman, 2014). This study thus, highlights the ways in which policies that appear neutral in applying measures across

institutions may actually place a greater burden upon institutions that have fewer resources and that serve the broadest population of students.

More centrally, however, this study explored how neoliberal concepts were used by participants in the discourse surrounding four different PBF policies. We found that neoliberal concepts were used most often in connection with statements of the purpose of the policies. In those contexts, the effectiveness of the policies to achieve their goals were assumed (i.e. not made provisionally, in light of the lack of firm evidence from studies conducted so far (Hillman, et al., 2015). Neoliberal concepts were less prevalent or more diluted in descriptions of implementation. When more attention to the variation in institutional context was apparent, references to equity and the public good were more prevalent. Nevertheless, regardless of such contexts, concepts related to equity, service, and the public good were scarce, arguably crowded out by the market logic.

The benefit of highlighting these uses is to show “cracks in the wall”; places where the use of neoliberal concepts is less prevalent or more open to question within the discourse, as well as where they are widely used or deeply assumed. The next steps following from these conclusions are: to examine the additional ways neoliberalism is shaping our policy debates; to explore the extent to which this prevents us from dedicating resources to equity, education for the public good, and accountability to communities (not markets); and finally, to identify opportunities to introduce equity and extension aims, as well as accountability to communities, into policy and practice (Santos, 2006).

Illuminating the role of neoliberal economics in PBF debates is useful because it provides an empirical basis for linking those debates to broader theoretical discussions about neoliberalism (Santos, 2006; Mudge, 2008), allowing us to make use of observations, strategies, and cautions, in navigating debates on

current and emerging PBF policies. While the link with neoliberal economics may seem intuitive in the context of some policy environments, in the US it is not a common or assumed part of the policy debate.

Grounded in social theory, this study illuminates the role performance-based funding policies play internationally in moving higher education institutions closer to markets. Moreover, it provides an empirical view of the mechanisms and networks built into policy debates on performance-based funding. Finally, it contributes to a theoretically and empirically grounded view on the discursive uses of neoliberalism in education policy.

In the wake of recent global economic crises, it is clear that discussions of neoliberal policy in education are as timely as ever. This research contributes actionable insights for institutions and scholars, shedding light on the features of current and emerging neoliberal discourse that often prevent us, as subjects in the public sphere, from participating actively, and navigating its pitfalls knowledgeably.

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## Appendix

**Table 1. Document Data Set by Case and Type**

	Tennessee	Washington	UK	Italy	Total
Primary Policy Documents	2	1	17	7	27
Advocacy Documents	12	2	7	9	30
Evaluation Studies	3	7	3	7	20
News and Outreach	9	19	9	7	44
<b>Totals</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>121</b>

*Note: In addition to extensive activity in the mainstream news media the UK REF was discussed extensively on social media. Twitter entries that included the #REF2014 tag were digested and included as a single long document. Very brief news stories collected via LexisNexis were similarly compiled into a single long document.*

**Table 2. Code List**

Low-inference (literal) thematic codes
Curriculum
Data Systems
Economic context
Education policy context
Educational equity or opportunity
Evaluation studies of PBF policies
Funding model
Participatory processes
Performance measures (definitions, etc.)
Public good
References to accountability movements
References to differences in institutional missions or contexts
References to open access institutions
References to research-universities
Remedial developmental courses
Stated purpose of PBF
Transfer- Articulation
Codes derived from critique of neoliberalism sources
Institutional autonomy
Interdisciplinarity and Partnerships
International comparison
New external agencies
Performativity
Privatization
References to efficiency
References to markets
Later-stage codes
Inevitability
New public management

Table 3. Case Contexts

	<b>Tennessee: CCTA (2010)</b>	<b>Washington: SAI (2012)</b>	<b>United Kingdom: REF (2014)</b>	<b>Italy: VQR (2010)</b>
<b>Economic context</b>	Greater than average statewide unemployment during recession; stronger than average recovery. <sup>1</sup>	Significant post-2008 job losses in construction, manufacturing, and financial services. <sup>1</sup>	Continued but slowing growth since 2016 Brexit vote. <sup>2</sup>	Reduction in consumer spending; growing unemployment during the global economic crisis. <sup>3</sup>
<b>HE Policy context</b>	Stongly centralized governance structure, centered on Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC).	High involvement of policy intermediating organizations (Gates, Lumina foundations)	EU focus on efficiency and accountability; "competitive system" involving 163 institutions. <sup>4</sup>	EU focus on efficiency and accountability; Restructuring of university funding system and substantial budget cuts. <sup>4</sup>
<b>PBF history</b>	Longest history in the US, dating from 1979. Current version awards 100% funding via PBF.	Community college funding. Implemented via a participatory process.	Previous versions : Research Assessment Exercises (RAE), dating back to 1986.	Previous version: <i>Valutazione Triennale della Ricerca</i> , VTR, dating back to 2001. Current version awards 7% block research funding via PBF. <sup>5</sup>

1. (U.S. Senate Joint Economic Committee, 2016) 2. (Bowler, 2017) 3. (Di Quirico, 2010) 4. (Geuna and Piolatto, 2015) 5. (MIUR, 2015)

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