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Territory development through Higher Education Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how global shifts in higher education have impacted territorial development and how the Venetian higher education system fits into today's higher education landscape. To understand the current state of affairs, the first part of the thesis employs a comparative analysis of different HEI systems, beginning with the United States, pioneer of the market-driven model, and moving to the European Higher Education Area. The European analysis provides a general overview before examining specific structural variations in countries such as Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, the UK, Spain and the Netherlands.

This cross-continental comparison is essential to introduce the Italian situation and, more specifically, to identify how both the Italian and the Venetian context can be improved. By benchmarking local practices against international standards, this study aims to uncover opportunities for growth.

To investigate the Italian and Venetian contexts in depth, the core of this research consists of two forms of primary data collection with the stakeholders of the Venice university system: a participatory brainstorming workshop with students of the Venetian university pole, who represent the internal side of the system, and semi-structured interviews with external stakeholders, namely a territorial partner from the cultural sector, a trade-union representative, an industry representative and a representative of local government (method in Chapter 4, findings in Chapter 5). The insights of the participants are fundamental to describing the actual state of things and to proposing actionable advice for the future of HEIs in this unique territory.

The Venetian higher education system is described using a system-mapping approach, as explained by Meadows in *Thinking in Systems* (2008), *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (1999) and *Dancing with Systems* (2001). This methodology suggests building a system map for both internal and external actors of the Ca' Foscari university system and expanding them through interviews and workshops to identify leverage points.

Methodology

The analysis first provides a qualitative and then a quantitative description of the two major higher education systems under observation, the United States and Europe. It then moves its focus to the specific situation of each European country, following the same framework used for the two major systems.

To establish a comparative framework for global higher education systems, this research utilizes "The World Guide to Higher Education: A Comparative Survey of Systems, Degrees and Qualifications (1996)" as a foundational baseline.

The guide offers a breakdown of the organization of higher education models, which serves as a comprehensive manual for understanding the traditional academic frameworks before the Bologna Process in 1999, explained in more detail in section 2.2.

Specifically, it provides clear operational definitions of **(a)** institutional governance, **(b)** classification and accreditation of different types of HEIs, **(c)** Funding, **(d)** admission and selectivity, **(e)** degree structure and **(f)** teaching requirements.

After that, a quantitative analysis will provide objective results more easily comparable. Those are provided by national and international institutions and accredited non-profit organisations, such as the OECD, Eurostat, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and UNESCO

Selected metrics for the quantitative analysis are:

(a) Graduate Outcomes and Labor Market: Provides a better overview of Employment Rate & Average Salary, Skill Mismatch and Territorial Retention.

(b) Financial Structure: Investigates Expenditure on HEIs as a % of GDP, Annual Tuition Fees and Student Support, Expenditure per Student and R&D Expenditure. R&D expenditure means amount of private sector funding for university research, measuring University-Industry Collaboration.

(c) Institutional Quality: Investigates International Student Ratio and Faculty-to-Student Ratio.

(d) Demographics, measuring Attainment Rate, the percentage of the population with a degree and Drop-out/Completion Rates.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools

In line with Section 1.3 of the University's guidelines for the final dissertation, this section declares transparently the use of generative artificial intelligence tools in the preparation of this thesis.

The following tools were used. The first is Claude by Anthropic, in the version of Sonnet 5 and Opus 5.5. The second is Gemini by Google.

Claude was used for three purposes. It supported the revision and drafts of sections, helping with structure and proper use of references. It supported the search for primary and secondary sources, in particular the institutional and academic sources. It also supported the creation of charts, diagrams and figures attached in this thesis, based on verified data.

More specifically, Claude was used to support the generation of the charts of Chapters 1 and 2, redrawn from the cited data, and of Figures 3.1, 3.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3.

Gemini was used as a transcription tool to transcribe the audio recordings of the workshop sessions and of the interviews described in Chapter 4. The tool is provided by the University with the institutional account.

Participants names were replaced by the codes S1–S10 and E1–E4 before the analysis.

The correctness, quality and reliability of the material were verified by the author. Every source identified with AI support was checked against the original document. The transcripts were checked against the audio recordings.

All material generated with artificial intelligence tools was carefully verified, revised and reworked by the author, who takes full responsibility for the quality, accuracy and scientific integrity of the work.

Limitations

The use of “The World Guide to Higher Education: A Comparative Survey of Systems, Degrees and Qualifications” is inherently limited by its publication date of 1996. Because it provides a historical snapshot of the late 20th century, it precedes several turning points that defined the contemporary higher education landscape.

Also, quantitative data might not fully reflect the structural problems that each system faces, while still being valuable for the overall analysis.

Related to system mapping, it is a subjective representation (Dentoni et al., 2023) and thus there is little evidence on whether and how it actually influences policy or organizational decisions, according to Dentoni and Roglic (2025). Also, there is limited understanding of when participants get marginalized or underrepresented.

1. UNITED STATES

1.1 The US Higher Education System

The US higher education system was not touched by the Bologna Process, which concerned the harmonisation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Its description here follows the framework of the World Guide to Higher Education published by UNESCO (UNESCO, 1996).

This qualitative section aims at providing the basic understanding of the US higher education system needed to compare it with other higher education systems.

1.1.1 Governance

The US education system is strictly decentralized; the Constitution implicitly grants primary authority over educational matters to the individual states. Consequently, institutions are founded and operated by a vast mix of states, cities, counties, religious denominations, and private groups, creating a landscape characterized by "great variety".

Under US law, all HEIs, both public and private, are considered independent public corporations. They are overseen by a board of trustees, primarily composed of external members representing industry, finance, professions, or alumni. This board holds the authority to select the university president and manage financial and personnel operations.

1.1.2 Institutional Classification and Accreditation

The US does not rely on a central government body for quality control. Instead, it uses a non-governmental accreditation system that establishes norms for teaching methods, faculty qualifications, and facilities. This system consists of six regional accrediting organizations (founded by the universities themselves) and over fifty national or professional accrediting bodies that certify specific departments.

In the US, accredited institutions are primarily categorized by **level**, two-year associate and four-year bachelor's degrees, and **control**, public or private. These institutions fall into six main categories:

- **Technical Institutions:** Offer 1 to 3 year courses leading to associate degrees or certificates, preparing students for specific occupations (e.g., engineering technician, nursing).
- **Community (Public) or Junior (Private) Colleges:** Offer 2 year programs. They either provide occupational licenses or general academic programs designed to prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions.
- **Liberal Arts Colleges:** Focus almost entirely on traditional academic disciplines and award *only* bachelor's degrees. (e.g., history, chemistry, economics)
- **Comprehensive Colleges:** Include state and regional private colleges offering both bachelor's and master's degrees, with an emphasis on pre-professional and vocational curricula. (e.g., business, teacher education)

- **Independent Professional Schools:** Specialized institutes that prepare students at a high level and award bachelor's and sometimes master's degrees. There are very few of these institutions. (e.g., institutes of technology or art schools)
- **Universities:** The highest tier, awarding bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees. They consist of undergraduate colleges alongside graduate schools that provide higher degrees and professional qualifications (e.g., law and medicine).

1.1.3 Funding and Financial Assistance

Private institutions receive limited state support, whereas public institutions are financially backed by state or local authorities.

The federal government plays a small role in directly financing institutions (with the exception of research grants). However, it plays a massive role in student funding. Nearly 80% of students attending public colleges receive some form of direct financial assistance, and about half of these students receive assistance directly from the federal government.

1.1.4 Admissions and Access

Access requires the completion of a 12-year primary and secondary cycle to earn a high-school diploma, or passing the General Educational Development (GED) equivalency exam.

Institutions set their own policies, ranging from open, accepting all high-school graduates, to highly selective, where many apply but few are chosen.

Selective admissions rely on high-school academic performance, standardized entrance exams like the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or ACT (American College Testing Program), teacher recommendations, interviews, and extracurricular achievements.

Selective institutions often adjust criteria to address disadvantages, such as low income, single-parent households, attendance at disadvantaged high schools, and disabilities (UNESCO, 1996).

1.1.5 The Academic Credit System and Degree Structure

The US academic year generally runs from September to May. Academic progress is measured in "credits." A standard four-year bachelor's degree requires around 120 credits (UNESCO, 1996).

One credit roughly equals 1 contact hour or 2 hours of practical work plus 2 hours of personal work per week over a 15-week semester. Candidates are expected to obtain 30 credits a year.

The degree structure of the US provides five kinds of degree title:

- **Associate Degree:** Awarded after two years of study (or 60 to 120 credits / 1,800 to 3,600 contact hours). It can be a final qualification or an intermediate step toward a bachelor's degree.
- **Bachelor's Degree (First Degree):** Takes four years. The first two years are heavily devoted to a broader general education in the chosen field of study. The final two years focus on the area of specialization, and that is called major.

- **Master's Degree (Advanced/Graduate Degree):** Requires a bachelor's degree for entry. It takes 1 or 2 years of full-time study and may require a foreign-language exam, demonstrated expertise, a comprehensive examination, and some sort of publication or project.
- **Doctor's Degree (PhD):** The highest academic degree, requiring mastery within a field and original scholarly research. It typically takes 3 to 5 years of study beyond the master's degree and culminates in a written dissertation and an oral examination.
- **First Professional Degrees:** Degrees signifying readiness for professional practice, such as Medicine (MD), Dentistry (DDS), and Law (JD or LLB). These require at least two years of prior college work plus a bachelor's degree and the professional program itself, totaling at least six academic years.

1.1.6 Teaching Faculty Requirements

To qualify for an entry-level position as a college or university professor, a candidate must have completed almost all requirements for their doctorate. Research output, previous teaching experience and professional accomplishments are heavily considered for appointment and promotion.

1.2 Quantitative Data about the US Higher Education Area

1.2.1 Graduate Outcomes and Labor Market

Before turning to the data, it is necessary to address the phenomenon of grade inflation. This global trend represents a systematic disconnect between academic marks and content mastery, creating a signal extraction problem for the labor market. As grades are compressed toward the top of the scale, the signalling value of a degree erodes to an extent that is difficult to measure.

Median and average GPA of U.S. undergraduates, 1987–2020

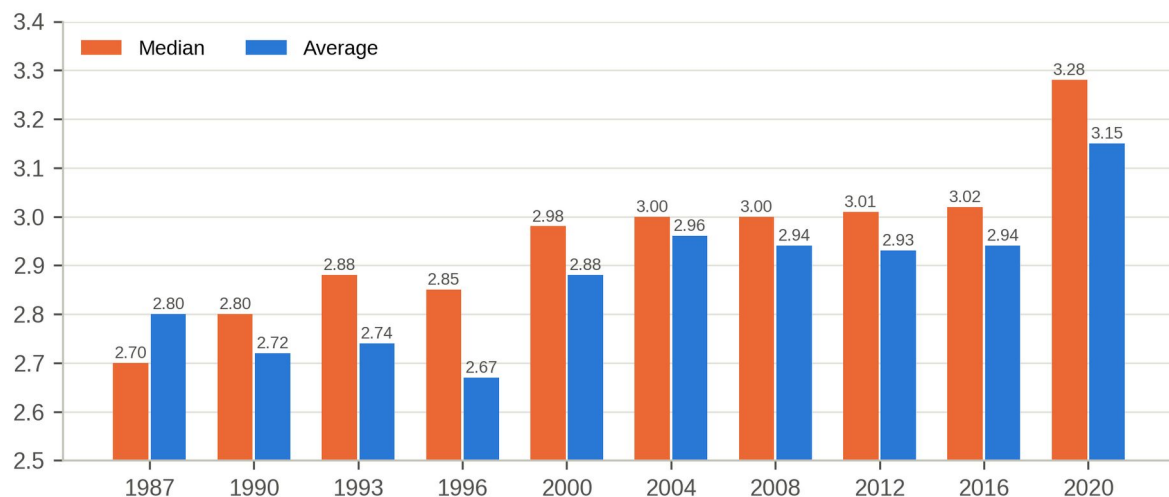


Figure 1.1. Median and average GPA of U.S. undergraduates, 1987–2020.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (NPSAS:UG), 1987–2020.

Average GPA by field of study, 1990 and 2020

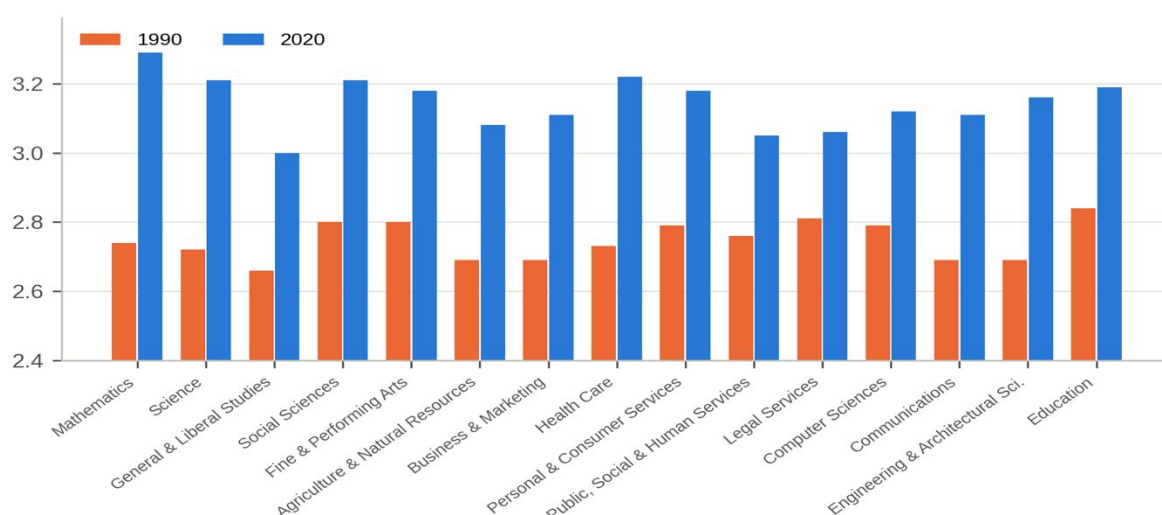


Figure 1.2. Average GPA by field of study, 1990 and 2020.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Undergraduate Students (NPSAS:UG).

Both the average and the median GPA have grown constantly for more than 30 years (Figure 1.1), with some majors more affected than others, as shown in the following chart (Figure 1.2) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

NCES data for 2024 indicate that holders of a bachelor's degree aged 25 and over, without an advanced degree and working full time, earned a median of about \$31,200 a year more than high-school graduates, a premium of roughly 62%. Once taxes are taken into account the gap narrows but remains wide: the same group paid an estimated \$9,000 more in taxes and kept about \$22,200 more in after-tax income (College Board, 2026) (Figure 1.3).

Median earnings and estimated taxes of full-time year-round workers aged 25 and older, by education level, 2024

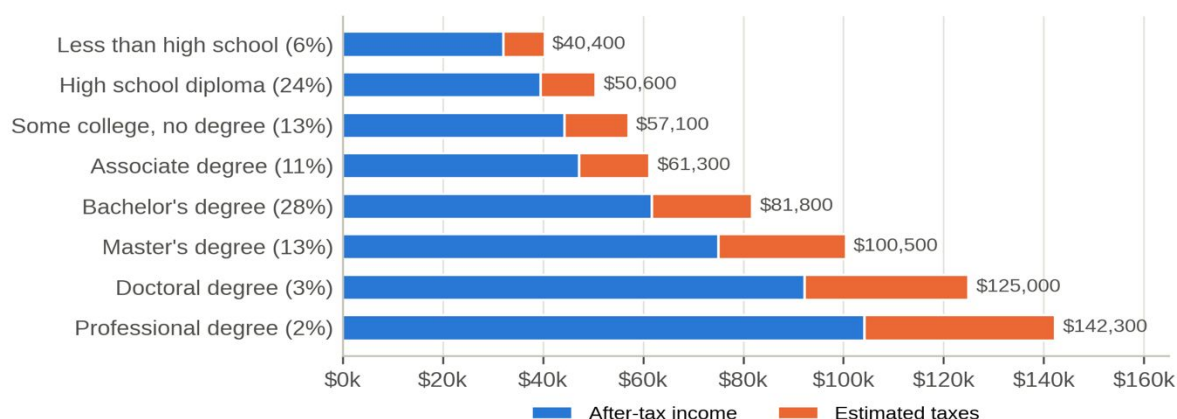


Figure 1.3. Median earnings and estimated taxes of full-time workers aged 25 and older, by education level, 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Education Pays 2026 (based on U.S. Census Bureau, PINC-03, 2024, and Internal Revenue Service, Statistics of Income, 2023 tax year).

According to the same source and to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, since the mid-2000s the unemployment rate of adults aged 25 and over holding at least a bachelor's degree has remained at roughly half the rate recorded for high-school graduates (Figure 1.4) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025).

Unemployment rate, people aged 25+, by education, selected years 2005–2025

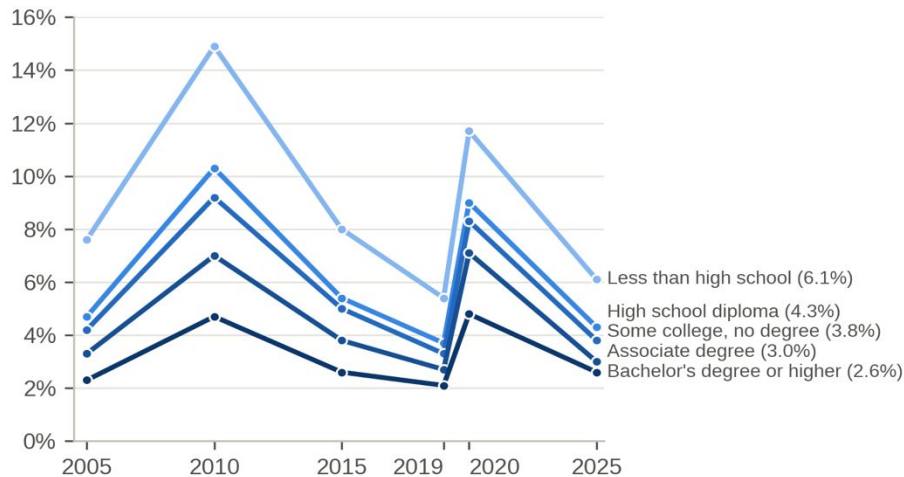


Figure 1.4. Unemployment rate of people aged 25 and older, by education level, selected years 2005–2025.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey annual averages. The 2025 figures are eleven-month averages, because October 2025 data were not collected.

Among 25- to 34-year-olds the gap in 2021 was 3.3% for those with at least a bachelor's degree against 8.3% for high-school graduates (College Board, 2023) (Figure 1.5).

Unemployment rate by age group and education, 2021

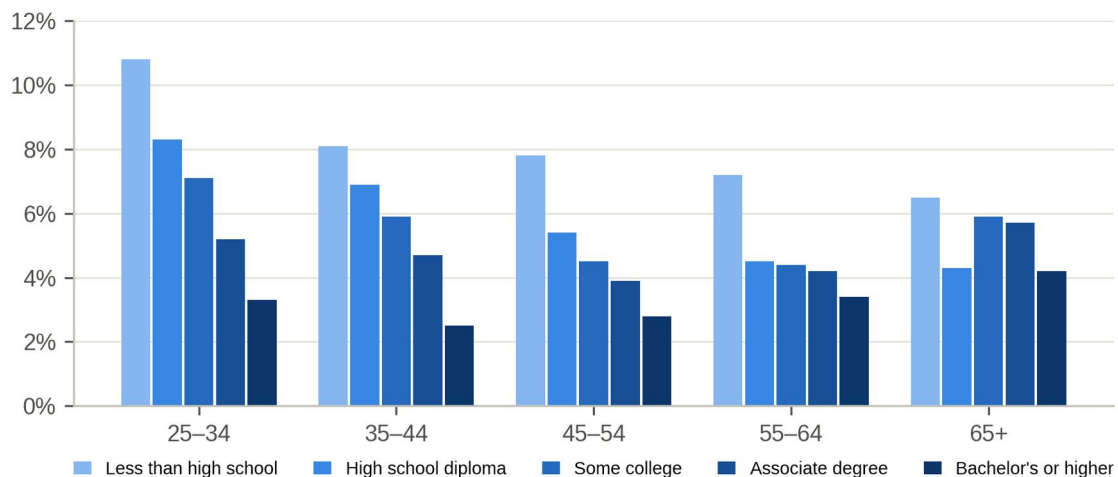


Figure 1.5. Unemployment rate by age group and education level, 2021.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from College Board, Education Pays 2023, Figure 2.13B (based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2022). Values for age groups other than 25–34 were read from the published figure.

The distribution of high earners tells the same story. In 2021, among full-time year-round workers aged 35 to 44, the share earning at least \$100,000 rose from 4% for those without a high-school

diploma and 7% for high-school graduates to 35% for bachelor’s degree holders and 49% for those with an advanced degree; the share earning \$150,000 or more was 14% for the former and 24% for the latter (College Board, 2023) (Figure 1.6).

Earnings distribution of full-time year-round workers aged 35–44, by education, 2021

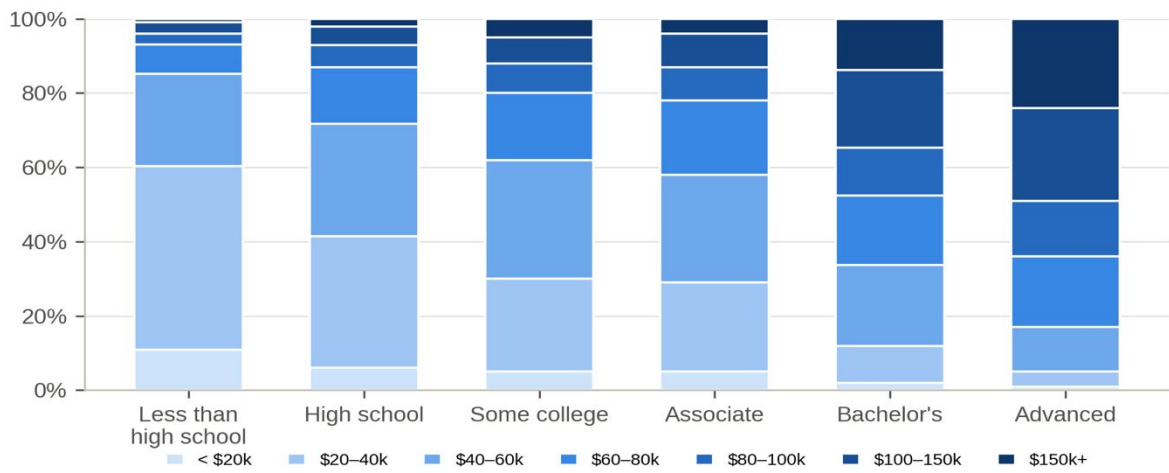


Figure 1.6. Earnings distribution of full-time year-round workers aged 35–44, by education level, 2021.
Source: Author’s elaboration on data from College Board, Education Pays 2023, Figure 2.3 (based on U.S. Census Bureau, PINC-03, 2021).

1.2.2 Financial Structure

Three charts summarise the financial structure of US higher education from the point of view of students and institutions: the evolution of published tuition by sector, the change in state funding per student during recessions and recoveries, and the tuition revenue per student collected by public institutions.

Average published tuition and fees by sector, in 2025 dollars, selected years

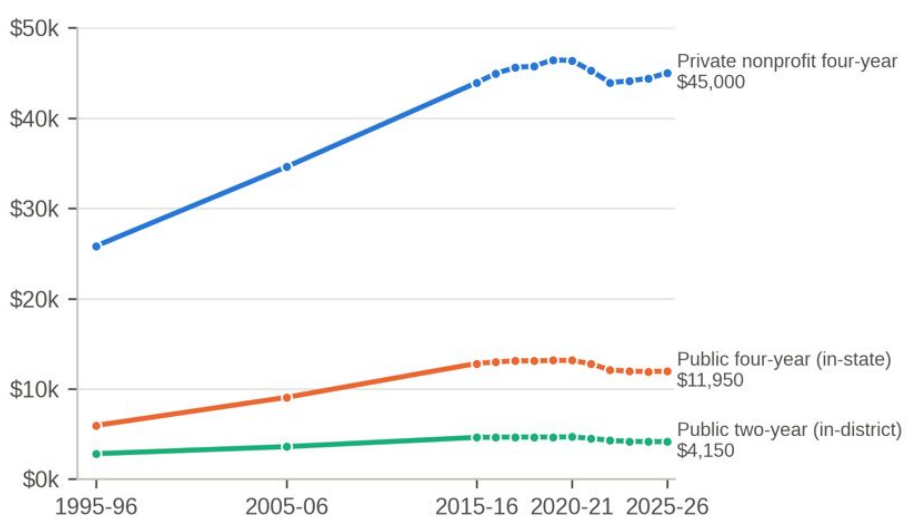


Figure 1.7. Average published tuition and fees by sector, in 2025 dollars, selected years 1995–96 to 2025–26.
Source: Author’s elaboration on data from College Board, Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2025, Table CP-2.

Figure 1.7 shows average published tuition by sector from 1995–96 to 2025–26. The gap between sectors is the first thing to notice as private non-profit four-year institutions charge roughly four times the tuition of public four-year institutions and about ten times that of public two-year colleges.

The second is the change in trend around the mid-2010s. Private tuition rose steadily from about \$26,000 to more than \$45,000 and then flattened while public four-year tuition doubled in real terms from about \$6,000 to a peak of about \$13,150 in 2019–20 and 2020–21 and has slightly declined since.

Public two-year tuition grew from about \$3,000 to \$4,500 and has been stable for a decade. In real terms, therefore, the long expansion of published prices has stopped.

Change in state education appropriations per FTE student at public institutions, recessions and recent recovery (constant 2024 dollars)

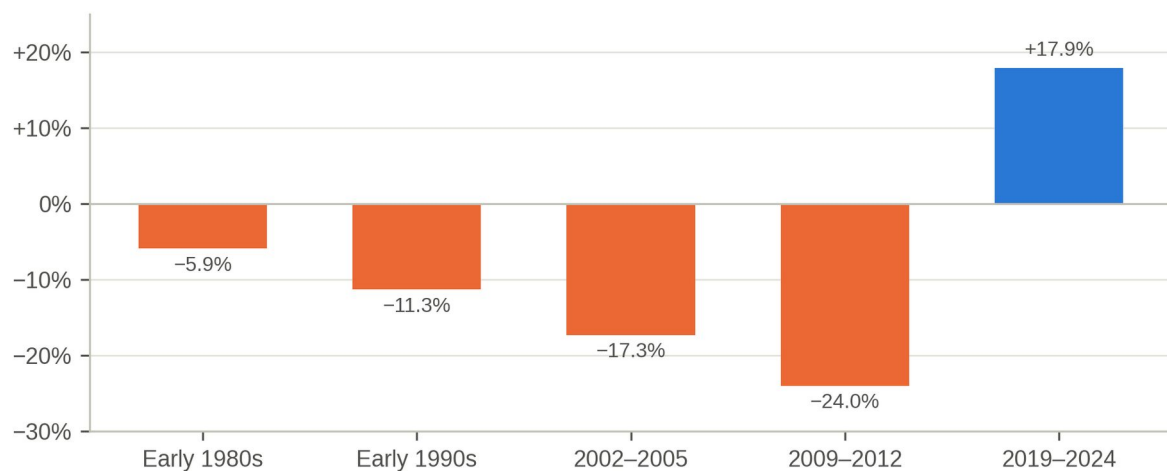


Figure 1.8. Change in state education appropriations per FTE student at public institutions during recessions and in the recent recovery (constant 2024 dollars).

Source: Author's elaboration on data from State Higher Education Finance FY 2024 (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2025).

Figure 1.8 shows how state education appropriations per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, in constant 2024 dollars, changed during each downturn and in the recent recovery. State support follows the business cycle. It fell during every recession before 2020, by about 6% in the early 1980s, 11% in the early 1990s, 17% between 2002 and 2005 and 24% between 2009 and 2012. Appropriations then rose for twelve consecutive years, from 2013 to 2024, and grew by about 18% between 2019 and 2024 alone. In FY2024 they reached \$11,683 per FTE student, just below the FY2000 peak of \$11,902, so public institutions needed more than two decades to recover the ground lost (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2025).

**Net tuition revenue per FTE student at public institutions, selected fiscal years
(constant 2024 dollars)**

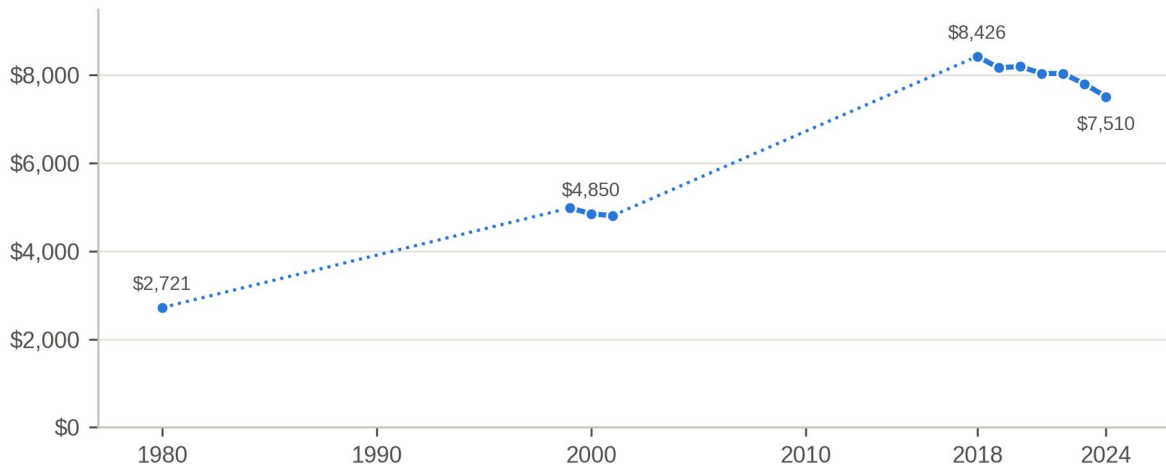


Figure 1.9. Net tuition revenue per FTE student at public institutions, selected fiscal years (constant 2024 dollars).

Source: Author's elaboration on data from State Higher Education Finance FY 2024 (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2025).

Figure 1.9 closes the picture from the institutional side. Net tuition revenue per FTE student at public institutions grew from about \$2,700 in 1980 to about \$4,850 in 2000 and to a peak of about \$8,400 in 2018, before falling to about \$7,500 in FY2024.

When state funding per student was cut, tuition revenue per student rose to compensate, and the flattening of published prices since the 2010s coincides with the return of steady growth in state appropriations (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2025).

1.2.3 Return on Investment and Institutional Quality

Figure 1.10 measures the financial break-even point for the investment made in higher education, displaying the specific age at which the cumulative financial earnings of individuals who hold either an associate or a bachelor's degree finally surpass the cumulative earnings of those whose highest level of education is a high school diploma.

The chart shows how consistently early the financial payoff from college arrives: across all six scenarios, graduates break even before age 40, and in the most favorable conditions, namely a four year degree at net price, as early as 30.

The pattern also suggests that the cost actually paid, rather than the sticker price, is the dominant variable in determining how quickly a degree pays off. Published tuition consistently pushes the break-even age higher by two to four years compared to net price equivalents, underlining how financial aid and scholarships substantially accelerate the return on educational investment (College Board, 2023).

Age at which cumulative earnings of graduates exceed those of high-school graduates

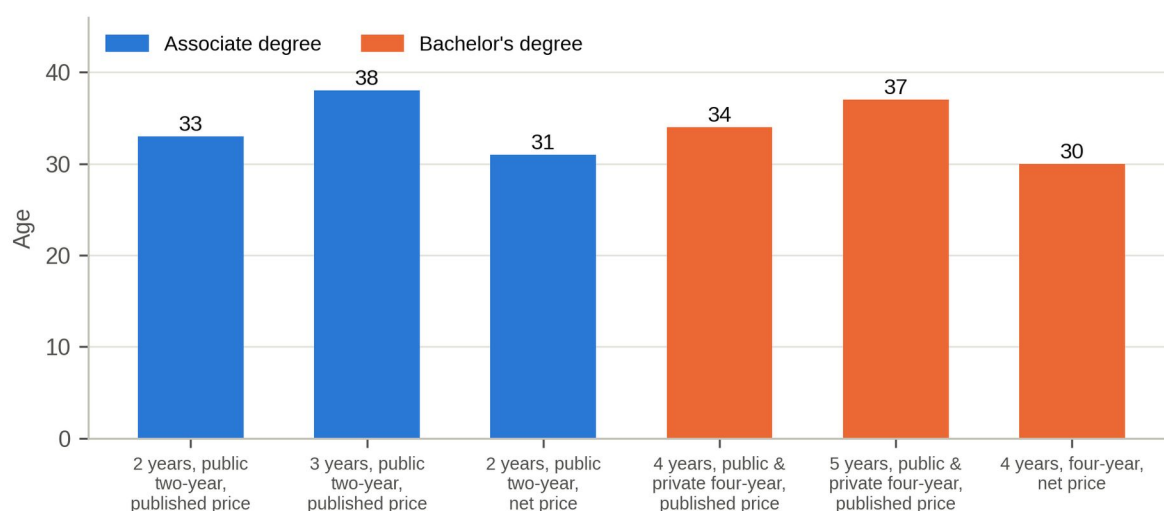


Figure 1.10. Age at which cumulative earnings of associate and bachelor's degree holders exceed those of high-school graduates, by degree and college cost.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from College Board, *Education Pays 2023*, Figure 2.2B, based on U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 2016–2020*, and College Board, *Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022*. The source analysis excludes bachelor's degree recipients who earn advanced degrees. It assumes that students borrow the cost of tuition, fees, books and supplies and repay it over ten years at a 4.99% interest rate, with payments and earnings discounted at 3%.

Figure 1.11 shows the share of all internationally mobile tertiary students enrolled in OECD countries who study in the United States, as tracked by the OECD from 2013 through 2023.

Starting from a peak of 30.90% in 2013, the US share fell almost every year and ended at 18.83% in 2023, a fall of about 12 percentage points over ten years.

The steepest single-period fall occurred between 2018 and 2019, when the share dropped from 23.94% to 20.64%, possibly reflecting early signals of geopolitical friction and a tighter immigration environment.

The overall arc points to a significant contraction of the position of the United States within international student flows. Other OECD host countries absorbed a growing part of internationally mobile students over the period, a trend with implications for the revenue models of US universities and for cross-cultural academic exchange more broadly (OECD, 2025).

Share of the United States in all internationally mobile tertiary students enrolled in OECD countries, 2013–2023

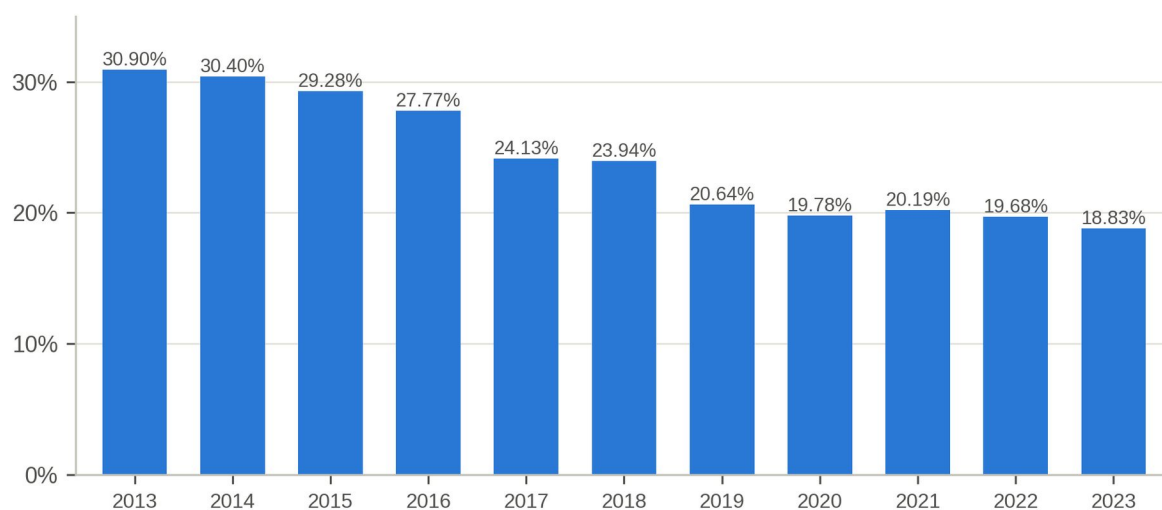


Figure 1.11. Share of the United States in all internationally mobile tertiary students enrolled in OECD countries, 2013–2023.

Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Share of mobile students enrolled at tertiary level by country of destination (Education at a Glance database).

Figure 1.12 provides a quantitative historical perspective on staffing levels in education, illustrating how the balance between the student population and available educators has evolved over the past decade.

The major trend is an uninterrupted decline in the student-to-teacher ratio over the entire observed timeline. From the initial peak, the ratio drops each subsequent year, resulting in an overall decrease of roughly 2.2 students per educator across the eleven-year span (OECD, 2025).

Students per teaching staff in tertiary education, United States, 2013–2023

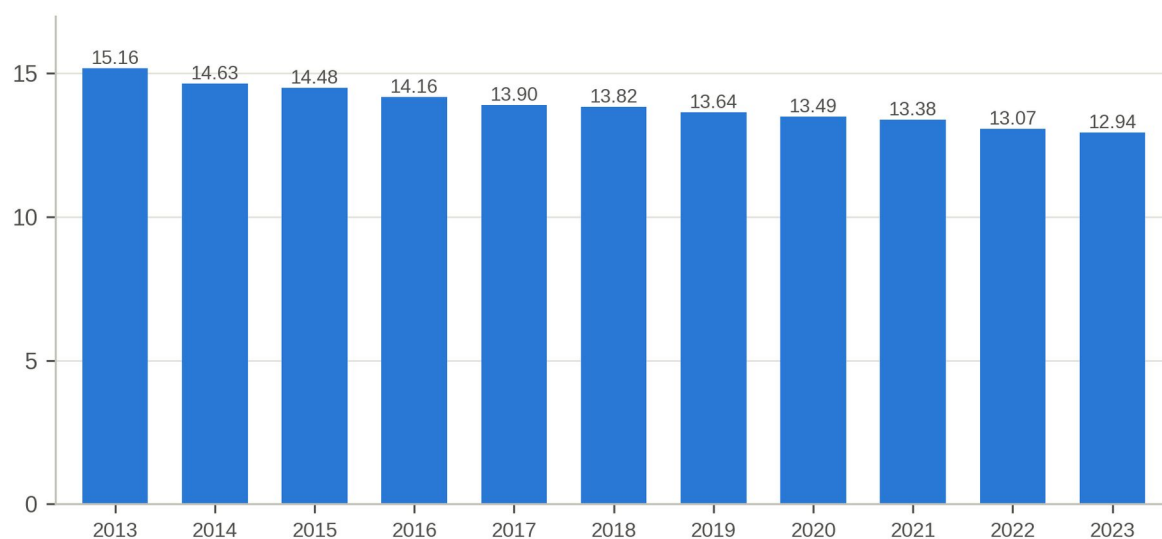


Figure 1.12. Students per teaching staff in tertiary education, United States, 2013–2023.

Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Students per teaching staff indicator.

Figure 1.13 presents expenditure on educational institutions as a share of GDP in the US from 2000 to 2020.

The first phase, from 2000 to 2010, is one of expansion. Starting at a relatively modest 5.8% of GDP in 2000, expenditure climbed steadily through the decade, reaching 6.6% by 2009.

2009 and 2010 correspond to the depths of the global financial crisis, GDP itself contracted sharply during those years, the ratio was simultaneously pushed upward by both increased nominal spending and a shrinking denominator (OECD, 2025).

By 2012 it had retreated to 6.4%, and by 2013 it had settled at 6.1%, a level it then held with remarkable stability for five consecutive years through 2017.

In 2018, expenditure dipped further to 6.0%, lowest point since before the financial crisis and held there through 2019.

Taken as a whole, the chart tells a story of modest long-run improvement punctuated by a crisis spike that flatters the numbers.

Expenditure on educational institutions as a share of GDP, United States, 2000–2020

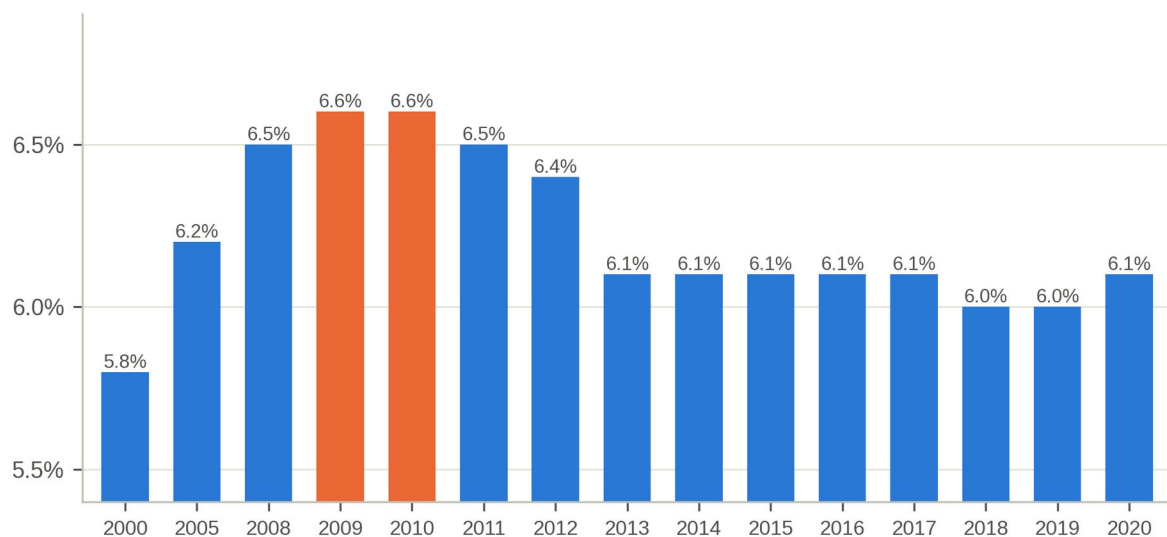


Figure 1.13. Expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, United States, 2000–2020.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance.

1.2.4 Demographic

For the demographic dimension this section draws on the College Board's Education Pays series (College Board, 2023), which documents differences in earnings and employment across levels of education in the United States, together with health-related behaviours, reliance on public assistance, civic participation and the well-being of the next generation, and on the NCES Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Since the late 1980s, the college enrollment rate of recent female high-school graduates has consistently exceeded that of their male peers (Figure 1.14) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

College enrollment rates by gender, United States, 1980–2020

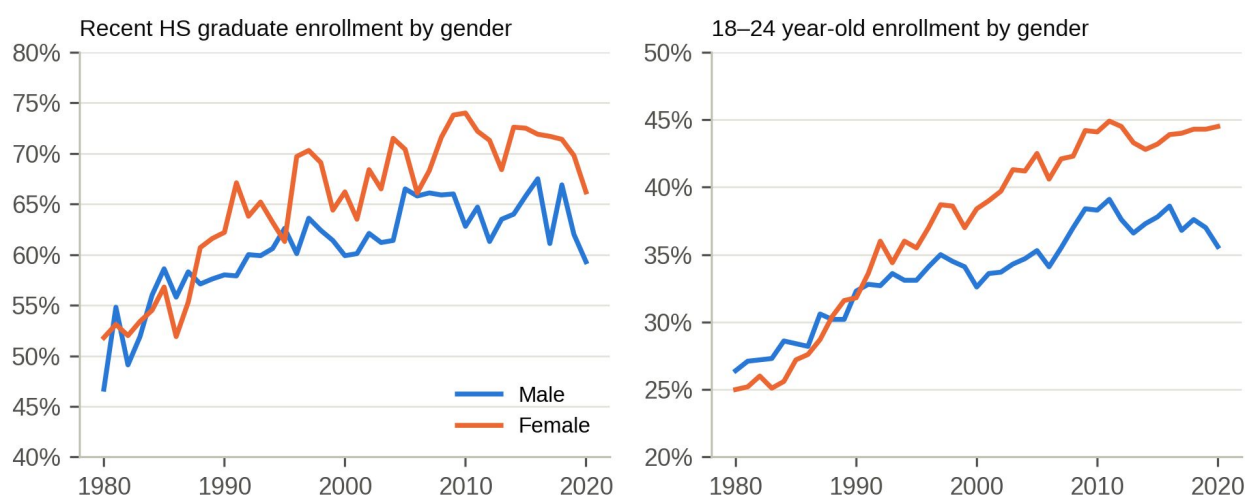


Figure 1.14. College enrollment rates of recent high-school completers (left) and of 18–24 year-olds (right), by gender, United States, 1980–2020.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2021, Tables 302.10 and 302.60.

Figure 1.15 tracks the educational credentials of Americans aged 25 to 34 at selected points between 1940 and 2021, dividing the population into four categories: less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college or associate degree, and bachelor's degree or higher.

In 1940, 64% of young adults lacked a high school diploma; by 2021, that share had collapsed to just 6%. The high school diploma, which barely registered in 1940, became the dominant credential by mid-century and has since stabilized as a baseline floor.

Bachelor's degree attainment rose from 6% in 1940 to 41% in 2021 while the associate degree category expanded through the mid-century decades and has remained relatively stable since the 1990s, hovering around 27–28% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Educational attainment of people aged 25 to 34, selected years 1940–2021

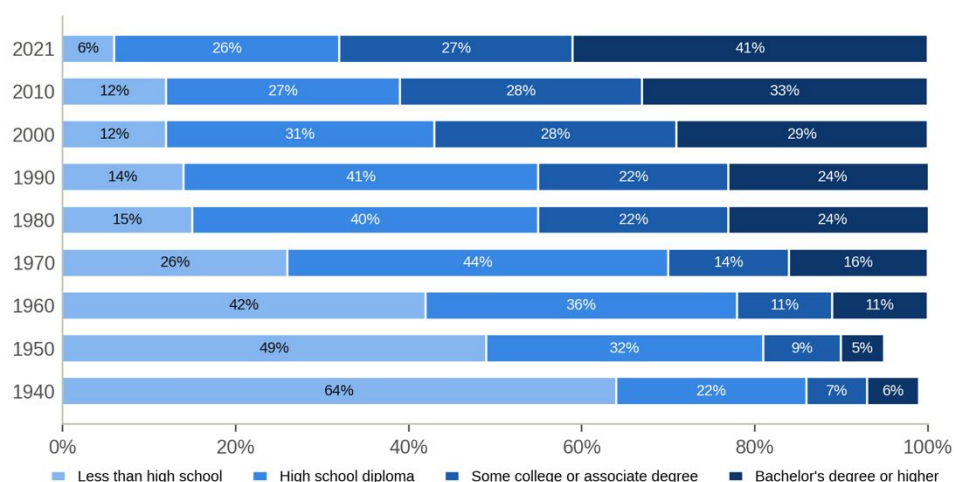


Figure 1.15. Educational attainment of individuals aged 25 to 34, United States, selected years 1940–2021.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment in the United States: 2021, Table A-1.

Figure 1.16 presents a cross-sectional snapshot of educational attainment across four age cohorts in 2021, such as 25 to 34, 35 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65 and older.

The older cohorts show notably higher shares of "high school diploma only", with 29% for 50–64 and 31% for 65 and older (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

The 35–49 group and the 25-34 group lead in bachelor's degree attainment, respectively at 42% and 41%, while the associate degree share remains remarkably stable between 9% and 11% across all groups, suggesting this credential has neither gained nor lost ground generationally.

Educational attainment by age group, United States, 2021

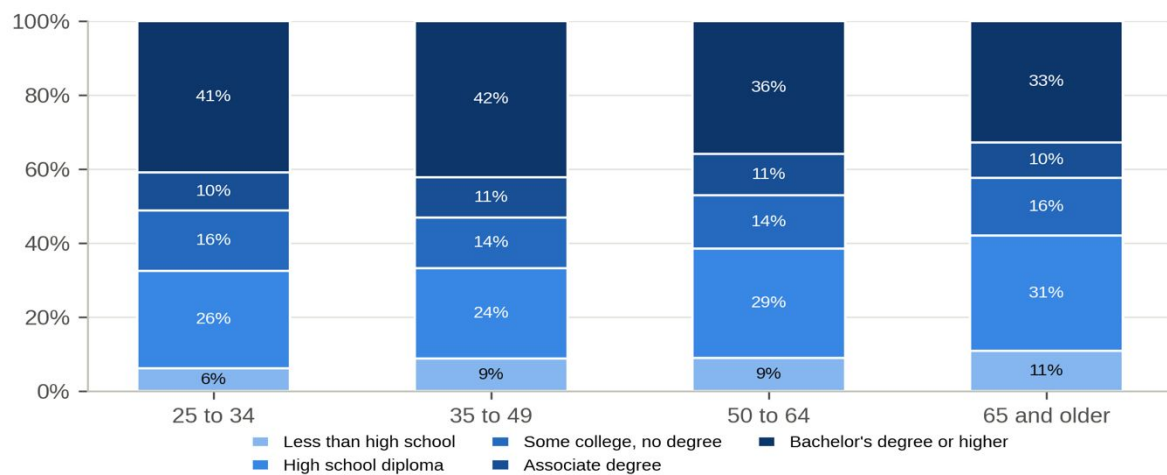


Figure 1.16. Educational attainment by age group, United States, 2021.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from NCES, Digest of Education Statistics 2021, Table 104.30, as reported in College Board, Education Pays 2023, Figure 1.5B.

2. EUROPE

2.1 Before the Bologna Process: Structural Diversity across Countries

Prior to the Bologna Process, the European higher education landscape was highly fragmented. Despite the fact that universities were born in Europe and historically allowed academics to freely circulate across the continent, late 20th-century education had become heavily confined by national regulations, setting the need to harmonize the system.

The country profiles that follow are based on the World Guide to Higher Education, which describes the national systems as they stood before the reform.

2.1.1 Austria

Institutions: Higher education institutions in Austria fall into three categories:

Twelve universities (Universitäten)

Six art schools (Hochschulen für Musik und Kunst)

Polytechnics (Fachhochschulen) which were instituted starting in 1994.

Admission: Access to higher education is primarily based on obtaining the Reifeprüfung (also known as the Maturazeugnis), a secondary-school-leaving certificate awarded after 12 years of education. Alternatively, Austrian nationals over 22 without this certificate can gain access by passing a special examination called the Studienberechtigungsprüfung.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: The main path of university study is divided into two continuous stages leading to a diploma:

First Stage (erster Studienabschnitt): Lasts two to three years and is completed with oral and written examinations known as the Diplomprüfung.

Second Stage (zweiter Studienabschnitt): Lasts two to four years and is completed with a further Diplomprüfung and the submission of a master's thesis (Diplomarbeit).

Successfully completing these two stages awards the student a Diplom qualification. Depending on the field of study, graduates are awarded the academic title of Magister or Diplom-Ingenieur.

Doctorate Studies: The highest degree awarded is the Doktor. Following the Diplom qualification, this requires an additional two to four semesters of specialized study, the submission of a written dissertation, and the passing of a final oral examination called the Rigorosum. Except in the case of medicine, a student must complete the Diplom studies before they can pursue a doctorate. Primary-school teachers are trained separately at teacher-training colleges (Pädagogische Akademien).

2.1.2 France

Institutions: The French system is divided into two main sectors:

University Sector: Comprises seventy-five autonomous, multidisciplinary universities that include teaching units, specialized institutes (like the instituts universitaires de technologie or IUTs), and engineering schools.

Non-University Sector: Features the highly selective grandes écoles, which specialize in fields like engineering, business, and public administration (e.g., École Polytechnique, HEC, ENA).

Admission: Access to higher education is generally based on the baccalauréat, the secondary-school-leaving certificate typically awarded at age 18.

Universities do not practice selective admission; any holder of the baccalauréat (or an equivalent qualification) is granted entry. Non-holders can gain access by passing a special examination called the ESEU.

Grandes écoles are highly selective. Students are admitted based on academic records or, more commonly, by passing a rigorous competitive entrance examination (concours d'entrée). This usually requires completing one to three years of study in special preparatory classes (CPGE).

Structure of Studies and Degrees: The French university system is structured into three successive cycles:

First Cycle: Lasts two years and provides basic multidisciplinary studies. It leads to a diplôme d'études universitaires générales (DEUG) or a more scientifically oriented DEUST. Short-term technical courses lead to a DUT.

Second Cycle: Offers advanced academic and professional training. Students earn a licence after the first year and a maîtrise after the second year.

Third Cycle: Highly specialized training and research. It leads either to a professionally oriented diploma called a DESS (after one year), or a research-preparatory diploma called a DEA (also one year).

Doctorate Studies: The doctorat is awarded after three years of study following the completion of a DEA. Candidates must carry out original research and submit and defend a thesis. Beyond the doctorate, researchers can earn an habilitation à diriger des recherches, which proves their ability to supervise young researchers and entitles them to apply to become university professor.

Funding: The state plays a major role in the French system by financing the universities and most engineering schools. As a result, enrollment and tuition fees in these state institutions are relatively low. For foreign students, study scholarships are available, and they can apply to the Centres Régionaux des Œuvres Universitaires et Scolaires (CROUS) for assistance with financial or social problems.

2.1.3 Germany

Institutions: Higher education institutions in Germany generally fall into three categories:

Universities and equivalent institutions: Includes technical universities, comprehensive universities (Gesamthochschulen), and specialized colleges like teacher-training colleges (Pädagogische Hochschulen).

Colleges of art and music (Kunsthochschulen, Musikhochschulen).

Fachhochschulen: Institutions providing academically based but highly practice-oriented training, particularly in engineering, economics, agriculture, and design.

Admission: Access to higher education is based on completing secondary schooling:

The general higher-education entrance qualification (allgemeine Hochschulreife or Abiturprüfung), typically obtained after 13 years of schooling at a Gymnasium, allows students to study any subject at all institutions.

The entrance qualification for Fachhochschulen (Fachhochschulreife) is typically acquired after 12 years of schooling and grants access to Fachhochschulen.

For highly competitive programs (like medicine or dentistry), nationwide admission restrictions (Numerus clausus) apply, allocating places based on school-leaving grades and wait times.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: Courses of study are generally divided into two stages:

First Stage (Grundstudium): Covers basic studies lasting about four semesters at universities (or two to four at Fachhochschulen) and ends with an intermediate exam (Zwischenprüfung or Vorprüfung).

Second Stage (Hauptstudium): Involves more advanced studies leading to the final degree examination.

Depending on the program, students graduate with one of the following:

Diplom: The main degree for science, engineering, economics, and social sciences. Fachhochschulen award a variation specified as Diplom (FH).

Magister: The primary degree in the humanities and languages, allowing students to combine multiple subject areas.

State Examination (Staatsprüfung): Required for professions regulated by the state, such as doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, and pharmacists. This requires passing a first state exam, followed by a practice-oriented phase, and then a second state exam.

Doctorate Studies: After achieving above-average results in a Diplom, Magister, or first State Examination, students can pursue a doctorate, known as the Promotion. This requires two to four years of independent research, a thesis, and an oral examination. To become a university professor, a scholar must further attain the Habilitation, which involves presenting original research findings in a thesis and a public lecture

Funding: The higher education system is predominantly state-run and funded by the Länder (federal states), with additional support for buildings, equipment, and research from the Federal Government. A notable feature of the system is that there are no study fees at state institutions. This applies to foreign students as well, though they must prove they have adequate resources to cover their own living expenses. Scholarships are available for foreign students, primarily through the German Academic Exchange Service.

2.1.4 Ireland

Institutions: The Irish higher education system encompasses several types of institutions:

Universities: Includes the federal National University of Ireland (which has constituent colleges in Dublin, Cork, and Galway, plus recognized colleges), Dublin University (consisting solely of Trinity College), as well as the University of Limerick and Dublin City University.

Specialized and Technical Colleges: Regional technical colleges and colleges of technology (in locations like Athlone, Cork, and Galway) provide post-secondary education in applied scientific, technological, and business subjects.

Teacher-Training Colleges: Primary-school teachers attend specialized teacher-training colleges, while secondary-school teachers complete a higher diploma in education at a university after their first degree.

Admission: Access to higher education is primarily determined by the school-leaving certificate (ardteistmeireacht), which students take after eight years of primary and five or six years of secondary education. Candidates must achieve passes in specific subjects at required levels depending on their desired course of study. To enter colleges under the National University of Ireland, candidates must also hold a matriculation certificate.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: The higher education path in Ireland generally proceeds through the following stages:

First Stage: Leads to a bachelor's degree, typically lasting three to four years, though specialized fields like veterinary medicine, architecture, and medicine take five to six years. There are two types of bachelor's degrees: the standard pass degree and the more comprehensive honours degree (or moderatorship), which in fields like science involves an extra year of study. Shorter non-degree professional qualifications and diplomas are also available, taking one to three years.

Second Stage: Leads to a master's degree, which involves one to four years of advanced study following a first qualification. This stage requires candidates to attend courses and/or present a research-based thesis.

Doctorate Studies: The third stage of higher education leads to a doctorate (PhD). This qualification is typically acquired after four years of research following a bachelor's degree and requires the presentation of a thesis. Ireland also awards higher doctorates (such as a Doctor of Letters or Doctor of Science) based on advanced research and published original work, awarded after a minimum of five years following the first degree.

Funding: Universities in Ireland are heavily state-funded, with the government providing between 68 and 82 percent of their financing through annual grants-in-aid and capital grants. The remainder of university funding comes from student fees, private donations, and endowments, with each college exercising full control over its own finances. For foreign students, there are no sources of finance available when commencing their studies, though some scholarships are offered once they are already enrolled. Foreign students must prove they can maintain themselves financially during their studies.

2.1.5 Italy

Institutions: The higher education landscape consists of several types of institutions:

University Sector: This includes standard universities, technical universities (such as those in Bari, Milan, and Turin), and university institutes. These can be state-run institutions or independent/assimilated institutions that are private in character. There are also prestigious higher institutes with special regulations, such as the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, which promote studies at the highest cultural and scientific levels.

Non-University Sector: This includes academies of fine arts (accademie di belle arti) and higher institutes for artistic industries (ISIA) focused on graphics and industrial design.

Distance Learning: Open education is provided by consortiums of universities and companies, such as the Consorzio per l'Università a Distanza (CUD) and Consorzio Nettuno.

Admission: Access to university courses is generally based on the maturità (secondary-school-leaving certificate), which is typically acquired after 13 years of total schooling. Students who hold a four-year maturità diploma (such as from teacher-training or arts schools) must complete a one-year supplementary course (corso integrativo) to enroll in standard university degree programs. Generally, the Italian system has no numerus clausus (restricted admission), but exceptions exist for highly competitive fields like medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine, as well as for certain independent universities.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: The system is divided into different cycles and program lengths:

Shorter Courses (First Cycle): Lasting two to three years, these include Scuole Dirette a Fini Speciali (SDAFS) for practical professional preparation, and corsi di diploma universitario (DU) for more academic study. Graduates receive a diploma but are not entitled to the title of dottore.

Main Degree (Laurea): University-level studies generally last four to six years depending on the subject (e.g., humanities is four years, engineering is five, and medicine is six). To earn the laurea, students must pass all prescribed exams and submit an original thesis. Graduates are awarded the academic title of dottore (Dott.).

Professional Practice: The laurea only has academic value; to actually practice a regulated profession, graduates must pass a national state examination (esame di stato)

Specialization: Post-lauream studies include specialization schools (scuole di specializzazione) lasting two to five years, and one-year advanced study courses (corsi di perfezionamento).

Doctorate Studies: The highest academic degree awarded is the research doctorate (dottorato di ricerca). Admission to this program is restricted and determined by competitive examination. It requires a minimum of three years spent carrying out a specific research program in a university department under the direction of professors. Like the laurea, this title has purely academic value

Funding: State universities in Italy are financed by the state. Unlike some of the other European systems we have looked at, Italian students are required to pay tuition fees, though there is a system of student assistance in place that provides scholarships and study vouchers. Foreign students must provide financial guarantees to study in Italy, though those on scholarships or from the European Union are exempt from certain university quotas.

2.1.6 Netherlands

Institutions: The Dutch system is characterized by a sharp "binary" division between academic and professional education.

University Sector (WO - Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs): This is the sector for scientific training and research. It comprises 13 state universities (including technical universities in Delft, Eindhoven, and Twente, and the Agricultural University of Wageningen) and one private university (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam).

Professional Sector (HBO - Hoger Beroepsonderwijs): This sector focuses on higher professional education. The Hogescholen prepare students for specific occupations in fields such as engineering, agriculture, social work, art, and teacher training.

Open University: Provides distance education for adults, allowing flexibility in learning schedules.

Admission: Access is strictly regulated by the type of secondary school diploma obtained after a full primary and secondary cycle.

Access to WO (Research): Requires the VWO (Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs) diploma, earned after 6 years of secondary education (totaling 12–13 years of schooling). Only this diploma grants automatic access to research universities.

Access to HBO (Professional): Requires the HAVO (Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs) diploma, obtained after 5 years of secondary school, or an intermediate vocational education diploma (MBO).

Numerus Fixus: For high-demand courses (such as medicine or veterinary medicine), a "numerus clausus" or national lottery system is applied based on a combination of school grades and a national draw.

Colloquium Doctum: Candidates over the age of 21 without the required credentials can gain access through a specific entrance examination organized by individual institutions.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: Prior to the Bologna reform, programs were structured as continuous long-cycle paths.

Propedeuse: All faculties require a mandatory "propaedeutic" exam at the end of the first year to assess the student's suitability to continue their studies.

HBO Degrees: Courses typically last 4 years. Upon completion, the student receives a professional title such as Baccalaureus (bc.) or Ingenieur (ing.).

University (WO) Degrees: Programs officially last 4 years (5 for engineering and natural sciences, 6 for medicine). Passing the final exam (Doctoraal examen) confers specific academic titles:

(a) Doctorandus (drs.) for humanities, social sciences, and economics

(b) Ingenieur (ir.) for technical and agricultural disciplines

(c) Meester (mr.) specific title for law graduates

Equivalence: These titles are legally considered equivalent to a Master's degree in the modern international system.

Doctorate Studies: The title of Doctor (dr.) is the highest academic degree, accessible only after obtaining a Master's level degree (drs., ir., or mr.). It typically requires 4 years of original research under the supervision of a professor (Promotor) and the public defense of a thesis. In the Netherlands, many doctoral candidates are hired as junior researchers (Assistent in Opleiding - AiO) with a regular employment contract.

Funding: Institutional funding: universities and Hogescholen are funded almost entirely by the State through direct grants. There is a centralized system of financial aid (Studiefinanciering) that includes a basic grant for all students, supplementary grants based on parental income, and low-interest loans. All students pay a uniform annual tuition fee set by the Ministry of Education (UNESCO, 1996).

2.1.7 Switzerland

Institutions: Higher education is primarily provided by:

Cantonal Universities: Eight institutions managed by individual cantons, covering faculties like theology, law, medicine, humanities, and science.

Federal Institutes of Technology: Two federal institutions (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule in Zurich and École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) specializing in architecture, engineering, mathematics, and natural sciences.

Other Institutions: Include practice-oriented higher technical schools, schools for executive staff, training colleges for primary-school teachers, and an increasing number of private universities catering to working professionals. At the time of the text, the creation of specialized Fachhochschulen/hautes écoles spécialisées was also under way.

Admission: Access to higher education is based on the secondary-school-leaving certificate known as the certificat de maturité/Maturitätszeugnis (or baccalauréat in French-speaking Switzerland), which is typically obtained after 13 years of schooling (six years of primary and seven of secondary). There are both cantonal and federal maturité certificates, and not all cantonal certificates guarantee entry to every university faculty. Additional examinations are sometimes required, such as a Latin exam for specific faculties, or supplementary exams for students holding vocational/commercial certificates.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: Because education is a cantonal responsibility, there are numerous differences between institutions regarding the length of studies and the names of qualifications. Generally, studies are divided into three phases:

First Phase: Lasts two to four semesters and focuses on broad foundational studies. This often leads to an intermediate credential such as a demi-licence, Vorprüfung, or propédeutique depending on the university and subject.

Second Phase: Devoted to in-depth specialization. After six to eight semesters, students in arts, law, or science typically earn a licence/Lizentiat, which requires passing examinations and presenting a short thesis (mémoire).

State Diplomas: In fields leading to regulated professions, students earn a state diploma (diplôme d'État/Staats-Diplom). The cantons award these for lawyers, theologians, and secondary teachers, while the federal government awards the Eidgenössisches-Diplom for medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and engineering obtained after 8 to 13 semesters.

Doctorate Studies: The third phase of higher education is dedicated to advanced research and specialization, culminating in a doctorat/Doktorat. Candidates must conduct research for a minimum of eight semesters (or four semesters at the federal institutes of technology following an engineering diploma) and successfully submit a thesis. To qualify to teach in higher education, researchers must complete an additional procedure called the Habilitation, granting them the title of Privatdozent

Funding: The financial structure reflects Switzerland's decentralized nature. The eight cantonal universities are mainly financed by their respective cantons, with some assistance from federal authorities. In contrast, the two federal institutes of technology are financed directly from federal funds. While state universities do not generally have the "very high" student fees associated with the growing number of private universities, foreign students are required to pay examination fees and must independently apply for residence permits, though they are entitled to apply for scholarships and fellowships (UNESCO, 1996).

2.1.8 Spain

Institutions: Higher education is provided by both state and private institutions, including forty state universities and five private universities (such as Deusto and Navarra). The university structure consists of several specialized units:

Facultades universitarias and Escuelas técnicas superiores: Offer both first- and second-cycle courses leading to academic degrees in disciplines like sciences, humanities, law, and engineering.

Escuelas universitarias: Provide only first-cycle professional training courses (e.g., nursing, social work, primary-school teaching).

Institutos universitarios: Dedicated essentially to research, third-cycle (doctorate) studies, and specialized teacher-training.

Distance Learning: Non-formal and distance education is heavily supported by the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).

Admission: The standard pathway to university admission is based on completing the curso de orientación universitaria (COU). To enter the COU, a student must first hold the bachillerato unificado y polivalente (BUP), which is obtained after a three-year course typically completed between ages 14 and 16, or hold a second-level vocational qualification (formación profesional).

To access the main university faculties and higher technical schools, students completing the COU must also pass aptitude tests called pruebas de aptitud. There is also a special entry route for adults over 25 who do not have the bachillerato but can pass university-organized tests.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: University education is structured into three stages (or cycles):

First Stage: Comprises three years of study. If taken at an escuela universitaria or as specific professional training, it leads to the qualification of diplomado, arquitecto técnico, or ingeniero técnico.

Second Stage: Students who complete the first stage can enter this specialization cycle, which normally lasts two years (or three in medicine). Successful completion awards the title of licenciado (or licenciatura), arquitecto, or ingeniero. Earning a licenciatura typically represents five years of total university study (six for medicine) and entitles the holder to enter professional practice.

Doctorate Studies: The third stage is open only to those who hold the title of licenciado, arquitecto, or ingeniero. It leads to the highest degree awarded, the doctorado. Earning a doctorate requires at least two years of further study and research beyond the second stage, culminating in the preparation and defense of a thesis. Holding a doctor title is a prerequisite for teaching in university faculties and higher-technical schools.

Funding: Universities in Spain are granted financial autonomy, which allows them to adopt their own budgets, manage their resources, and set the amount of student fees. Foreign students are required to provide financial guarantees to study in Spain, but they have access to various grants, scholarships, loans, and fellowships (though on-campus employment is not offered to them) (UNESCO, 1996).

2.1.9 United Kingdom

Institutions: Higher education is provided by four main types of institutions: universities; the Open University and Open College; colleges and institutes of higher education; and art and music colleges.

As a result of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, the "binary line" was abolished, allowing polytechnics to obtain university status and award their own degrees. The structure includes:

Universities: Autonomous institutions organized into faculties, which may be further subdivided into departments, multidisciplinary institutes, or schools. This includes private institutions like the University of Buckingham.

Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education: Often formed from the amalgamation of teacher-training and other colleges, offering advanced technical and vocational qualifications. Their degrees are validated by the Open University or a nearby university.

Distance and Non-formal Learning: Heavily supported by the Open University, which offers part-time study via correspondence, broadcasts and summer schools. The University of London's external system also allows external students to study for certain degrees.

Admission: Access to higher education normally requires a minimum of thirteen years of primary and secondary schooling. The standard pathway relies on passing subjects in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and the general certificate of education (GCE) advanced (A) level. To enter most university courses, candidates must typically secure a minimum of five passes with at least two at A-level or four passes with at least three at A-level. Scotland uses its own leaving certificates. Applications for undergraduate courses are largely centralized through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Exceptions exist for Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham Universities, which organize their own competitive entrance examinations, and institutions often factor in school reports and interviews due to high competition.

Structure of Studies and Degrees: University education is generally structured into consecutive stages:

First Stage (Undergraduate): Usually spans three or four years and leads to a first degree, typically the bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BSc, BEng). In Scottish universities, the first degree in arts is designated a master rather than a bachelor. Degrees are classified as either an honours degree, highly specialized, or an ordinary degree.

Second Stage (Postgraduate): Students who complete their first degree can enter this stage to deepen their knowledge and specialize. It generally leads to a master's degree (such as an MA, MSc, or MBA) after one or two years of study, or to a postgraduate 'conversion' course in subjects like computer science.

Doctorate Studies: The third stage is dedicated to pure research. After two years of additional study and a thesis, candidates can earn a master of philosophy (MPhil). A doctorate of philosophy (DPhil or PhD) requires at least three years of study and research, culminating in a thesis. A higher doctorate (e.g., DLitt, DSc) may be awarded to senior scholars based on a body of distinguished published work.

Funding: Universities operate with autonomy but are primarily funded through Higher Education Funding Councils established for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Overseas (foreign) students must provide evidence that they have sufficient funds for fees and maintenance to study in the UK, though grants, scholarships, and advisory services are available to them.

2.2 After the Bologna Process: Structural Harmonization across Countries

The first major step toward unification was the Sorbonne Declaration, signed in Paris in May 1998 by the higher education ministers of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom (Sorbonne

Declaration, 1998). This declaration stressed the removal of barriers to develop a unified framework for teaching and learning that would significantly enhance student and teacher mobility.

The birth of the Bologna Process came on top of the momentum started by the Sorbonne Declaration; ministers from 29 European countries gathered in 1999 to sign the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Declaration, 1999). This marked the official launch of an intergovernmental initiative to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which aimed to consolidate European citizenship, drive human growth, and vastly increase the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

To achieve this, the signatories committed to several core objectives to be reached within the first decade of the third millennium:

A Common Degree Architecture: The replacement of disparate national systems with a framework essentially based on two main cycles: an undergraduate cycle lasting a minimum of three years, and a graduate cycle leading to a master's or doctoral degree. This has since evolved into the universally recognized three-cycle degree framework, with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies, with short-cycle programs later recognized as a stand-alone qualification level.

Easily Readable and Comparable Degrees: The implementation of tools like the Diploma Supplement to make European degrees easily understandable across borders and to promote the employability of citizens.

A Standardized Credit System: The widespread adoption of a credit system, specifically the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), to allow students to validate acquired credits across different universities and contexts, including lifelong learning.

Quality Assurance: The promotion of European cooperation to develop comparable criteria and methodologies for quality assurance, which today is aligned with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA et al., 2015).

Enhanced Mobility: A commitment to overcoming administrative and structural obstacles to the free movement of students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff.

To understand how these broad objectives materialized, it is essential to examine their specific impact on the highly fragmented national frameworks previously described. While preserving institutional autonomy, the Bologna Process radically transformed the EHEA across the five key structural categories:

(a) **Institutions:** The Bologna Process successfully integrated diverse national higher education models into the interconnected European Higher Education Area (EHEA) while preserving institutional autonomy.

Currently, institutional operations across all member systems are strictly guided by shared Quality Assurance (QA) policies. Transnational trust is maintained through internal and external evaluations, with external reviews increasingly conducted by independent agencies registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR).

Furthermore, the EHEA formally defined and anchored fundamental values such as academic freedom, academic integrity, institutional autonomy, student and staff participation in governance, and public responsibility.

These values aim to protect institutions from external interference and ensure they can freely adapt to societal demands. At the pedagogical level, institutional policies have heavily shifted toward Student-Centred Learning (SCL), empowering individual learners through innovative, more active, teaching methods and the direct involvement of students in curriculum design.

(b) **Admission:** Admissions frameworks across all participating systems were revolutionized to prioritize international mobility, inclusivity, and fairness. The legal cornerstone of this shift is the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (Council of Europe and UNESCO, 1997), which guarantees applicants the right to a fair assessment and shifts the paradigm from demanding exact equivalence to evaluating comparable learning outcomes.

The major objective of this framework is achieving system-level automatic recognition of degrees for academic purposes across the entire continent. To foster an inclusive EHEA, admission policies now strongly champion the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which validates non-formal and informal learning to provide alternative access routes for diverse and non-traditional learners.

Access to graduate studies (the second cycle) universally requires the successful completion of a first-cycle degree. Special tools, like the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR), have also been endorsed by all member states to facilitate fair admission of displaced persons.

(c) **Structure of Study and Degrees:** The architecture of academic degrees was systematically harmonized across all member systems through the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). This framework established a universally recognized three-cycle structure based on learning outcomes:

Undergraduate: bachelor's, typically requiring between 180 and 240 ECTS

Graduate: master's, requiring between 60 and 120 ECTS

Doctoral studies: no specific ECTS range is required

Recognizing the need for diverse labor market pathways, short-cycle programs, typically 90–120 ECTS were subsequently integrated into the framework as an additional qualification level.

To standardize student workloads mathematically, member systems universally adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). To ensure maximum academic transparency, graduates are automatically issued a Diploma Supplement. More recently, this structural flexibility has expanded to embrace micro-credentials, meaning smaller, quality-assured units of learning designed to support continuous upskilling and flexible lifelong learning pathways.

(d) **Doctorate Studies:** Doctoral studies were structurally standardized as the official third cycle of the QF-EHEA across all participating systems. Access to this advanced research tier uniformly mandates the successful completion of a relevant second-cycle (master's) degree.

Unlike the first and second cycles, Bologna policies do not assign a specific ECTS credit range to the doctoral cycle. Instead, a profound strategic emphasis is placed on forging structural synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA). Consequently, doctoral education evolved from models of purely independent, self-contained research into innovative, interdisciplinary programs aligned with the Salzburg Recommendations (European University Association, 2005), serving as the foundational guidelines for reforming and structuring doctoral education within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The original Salzburg principles are the following:

Original Research as the Core: The advancement of knowledge through original research is the core component of doctoral training, which must also meet the needs of a wider employment market.

Institutional Responsibility: Universities must embed doctoral programs within their institutional strategies and offer appropriate professional career development.

Importance of Diversity: The rich diversity of doctoral programs across Europe is a strength that must be underpinned by quality and sound practice.

Candidates as Early-Stage Researchers: Doctoral candidates should be recognized as professionals making key contributions to new knowledge, with commensurate rights.

Crucial Role of Supervision and Assessment: Arrangements should be based on a transparent contractual framework outlining shared responsibilities between the candidate, supervisor, and institution.

Achieving Critical Mass: Programs should aim for critical mass through innovative practices and varying forms of collaboration at international, national, and regional levels.

Appropriate Duration: Doctoral programs should generally last three to four years full-time.

Promotion of Innovative Structures: Programs should meet the challenges of interdisciplinary training and transferable skills development.

Increasing Mobility: Programs should offer geographical, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral mobility within an integrated framework.

Ensuring Appropriate Funding: High-quality programs and successful completion require appropriate and sustainable funding

Modern Bologna policies increasingly classify individuals conducting these projects not merely as students, but as early-stage researchers and young professionals, championing attractive working conditions and clear career paths within the academic community.

(e) **Funding:** The Bologna Process fundamentally reoriented European funding policies by introducing a profound emphasis on the social dimension of higher education. EHEA policies established that the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education must reflect the diversity of the broader population across all member states. To achieve this, member states have to implement into their systems sustainable public funding strategies to ensure equity, inclusion, and diversity.

This includes providing targeted grants, scholarships, counseling, and guidance to vulnerable and underrepresented students. Furthermore, to support international mobility, ministers agreed that students could use their home country's grants and loans to study anywhere within the EHEA

2.3 Quantitative Data about the EHEA

This section examines quantitative data within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The investigation is categorized into four primary dimensions:

- (a) **Graduate Outcomes and Labor Market:** Including employment rates, average salaries, skill mismatch, and territorial retention.
- (b) **Financial Structure:** Assessing expenditure on HEIs as a percentage of GDP, tuition fees, student support, and R&D investment (including private sector contributions to university research).

- (c) **Institutional Quality:** Measuring international student ratios, selectivity, acceptance rates, and faculty-to-student ratios.
- (d) **Demographics:** Tracking attainment rates, degree completion, and dropout rates across the population.

By comparing these metrics across the EHEA, this section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape, highlight cross-country disparities, and identify longitudinal trends

2.3.1 Graduates' Outcomes and Labour Market

Employment rates

The overarching trend is upward, but with three distinct phases (Figures 2.1–2.3). Through the 1990s and early 2000s, rates were relatively flat or even declining in some countries. The 2008–2013 financial crisis caused a visible but uneven dip, during which some countries bounced back quickly, others took a decade.

Employment rate of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 1989–2000

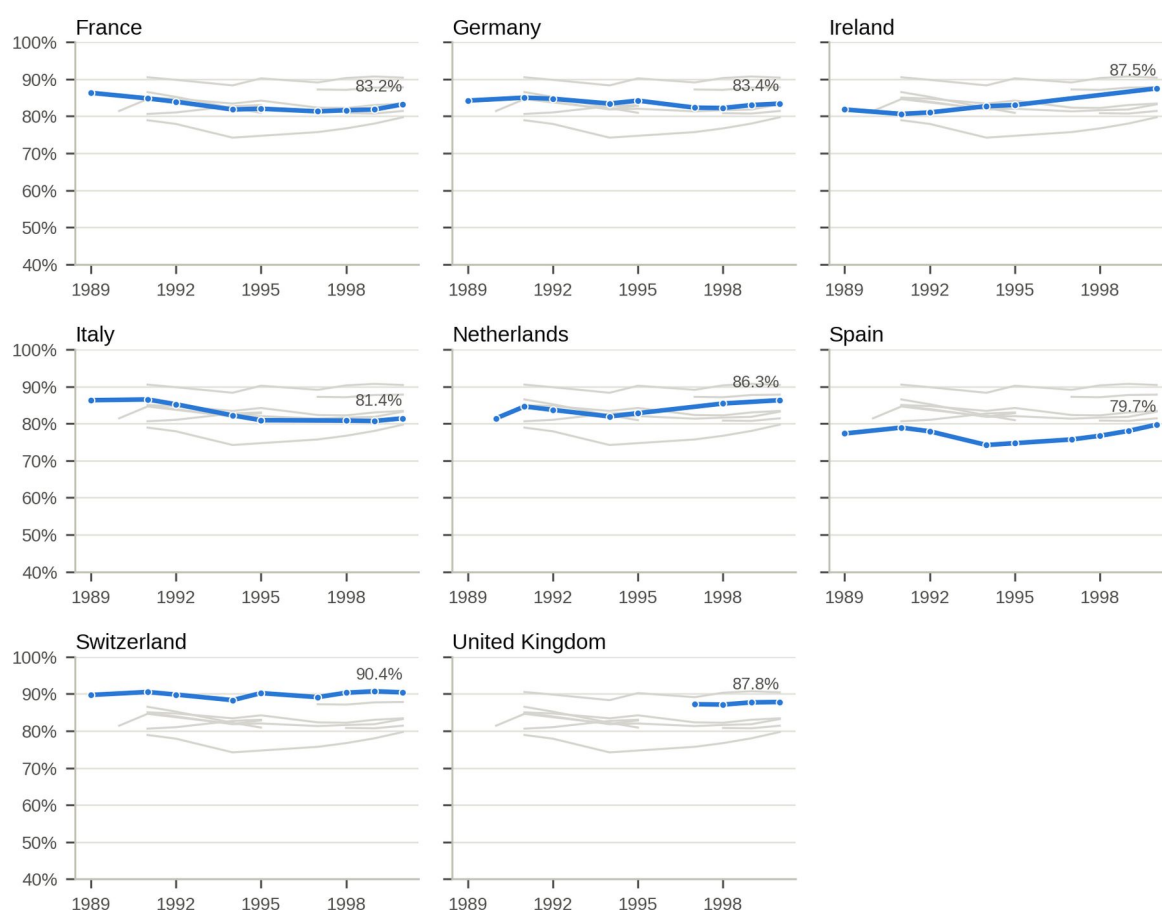


Figure 2.1. Employment rates of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 1989–2000. Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Employment rate of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 2000–2011

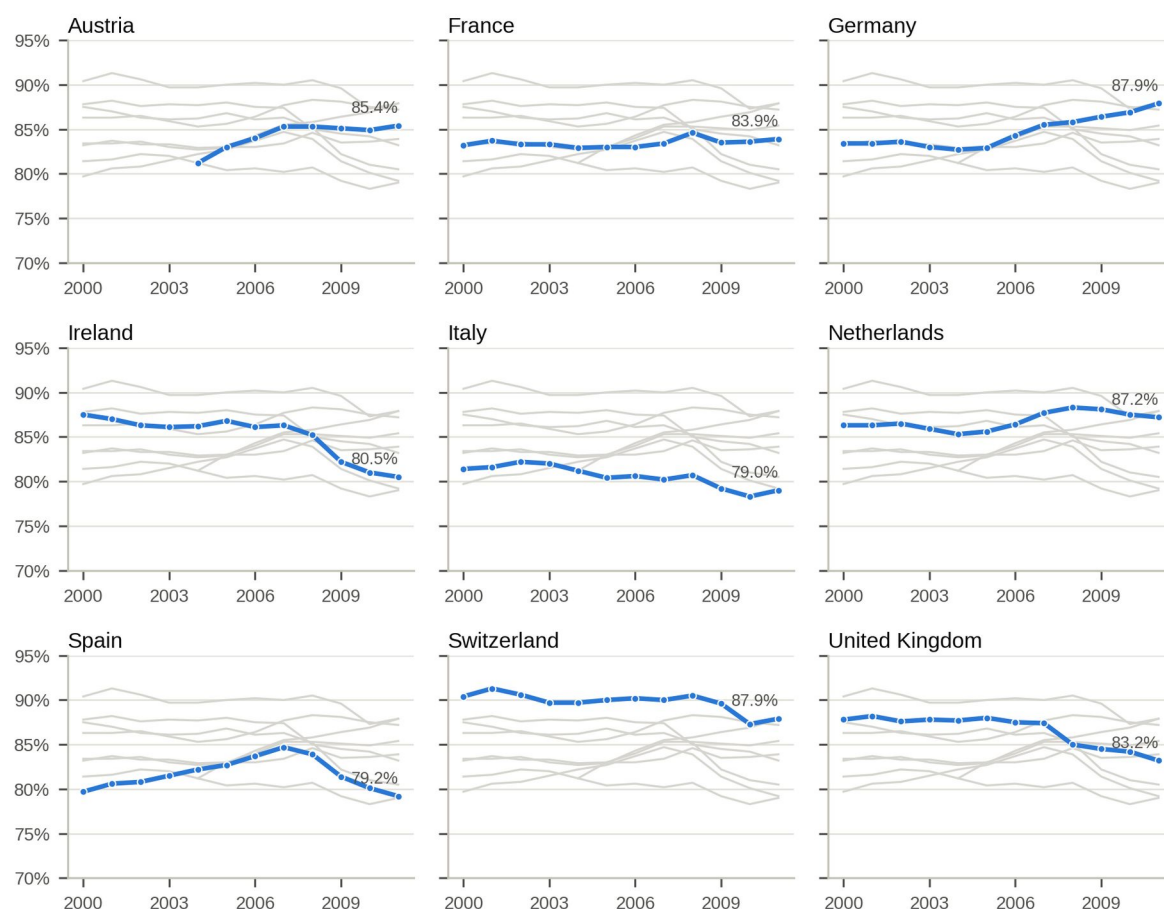


Figure 2.2. Employment rates of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 2000–2011.
Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Employment rate of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 2011–2024

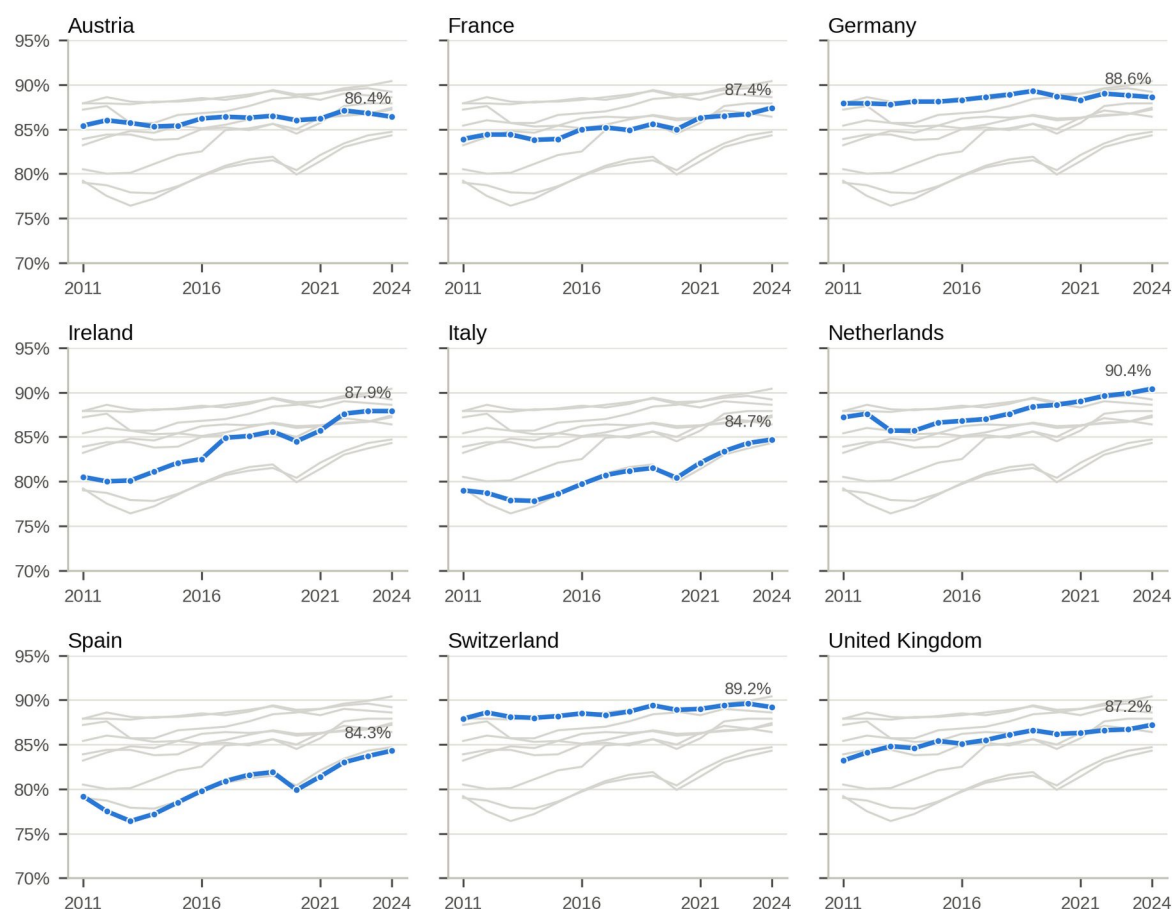


Figure 2.3. Employment rates of adults with tertiary education (25–64), selected European countries, 2011–2024.
Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

The Netherlands stands out on every metric. It started from the lowest base in 1990 at 81.4%, achieved the greatest absolute gain reaching the highest 2024 value at 90.4%, crossed the 90% barrier as the only country in the group. It is also one of only two countries with Germany where the 2008 financial crisis caused essentially no damage to tertiary-educated employment. The combination of starting low and finishing highest makes it the most structurally transformed labour market in the dataset for this education group.

Italy started exceptionally well in 1989 with 86.3% of employment rate, among the highest at the time but then deteriorated almost continuously for 25 years, bottoming out at 77.8% in 2014. This is a loss of nearly 9 percentage points from the peak. Even the recent recovery in 2024 of 84.7% still leaves it below where it was in 1989, making it the only country to end lower than it started (OECD, 2025).

Earnings of graduate individuals

Across most countries, the tertiary wage premium has been narrowing over time. This is a global pattern driven by the rapid expansion of university-educated workers, consequently as supply grows, the scarcity premium erodes (Figure 2.4) (OECD, 2025).

Earnings of tertiary-educated workers relative to upper secondary (upper secondary = 100), 2005–2014

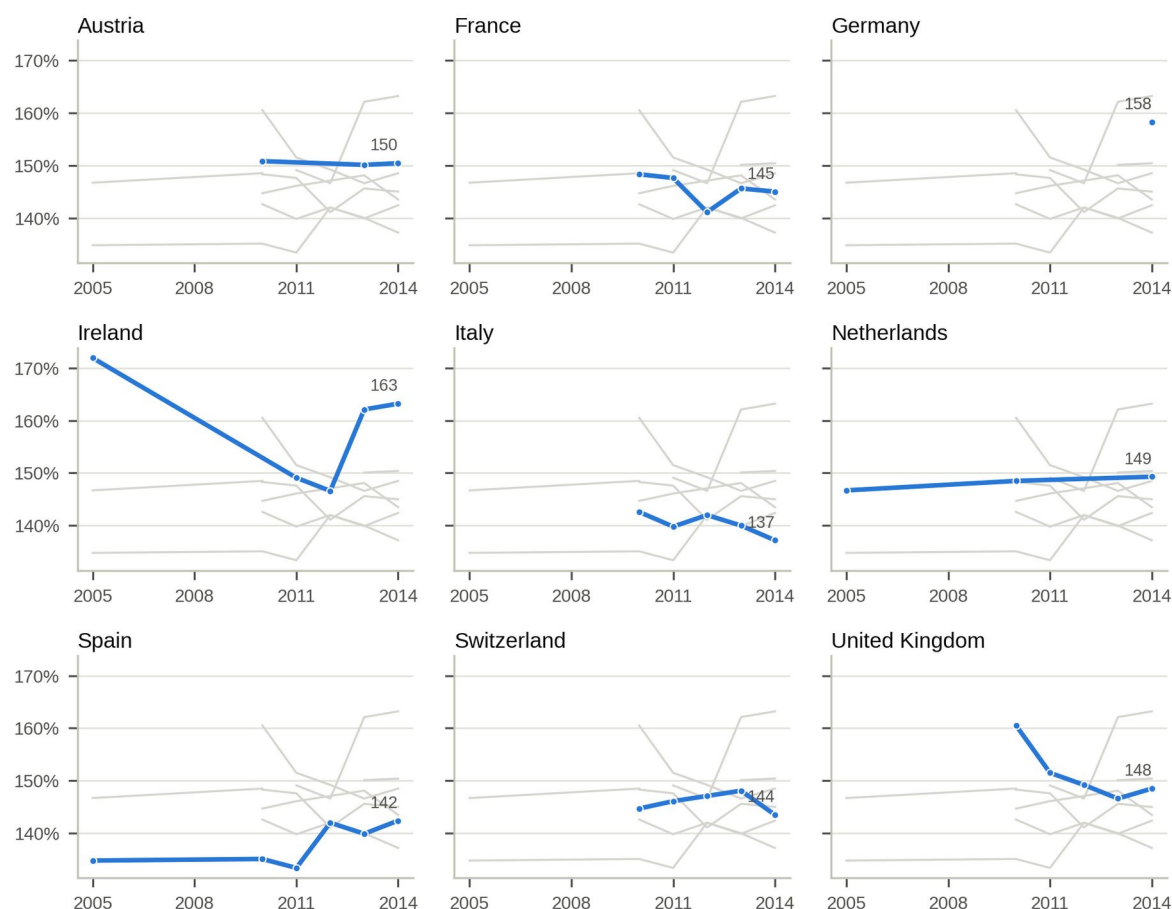


Figure 2.4. Earnings of workers with tertiary education relative to upper secondary, age 25–64, full-time.

Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

The group average in 2023 sits around 146%, down from levels of 150–160% in the early 2010s for most countries. However the trend is not uniform as France and Spain move sharply against it (Figure 2.5) (OECD, 2025).

The 2020–2021 pandemic period produced anomalous spikes of volatility in several countries, mechanically inflating the relative earnings of the tertiary group. These spikes mostly reversed by 2022–2023.

Earnings of tertiary-educated workers relative to upper secondary (upper secondary = 100), 2015–2023

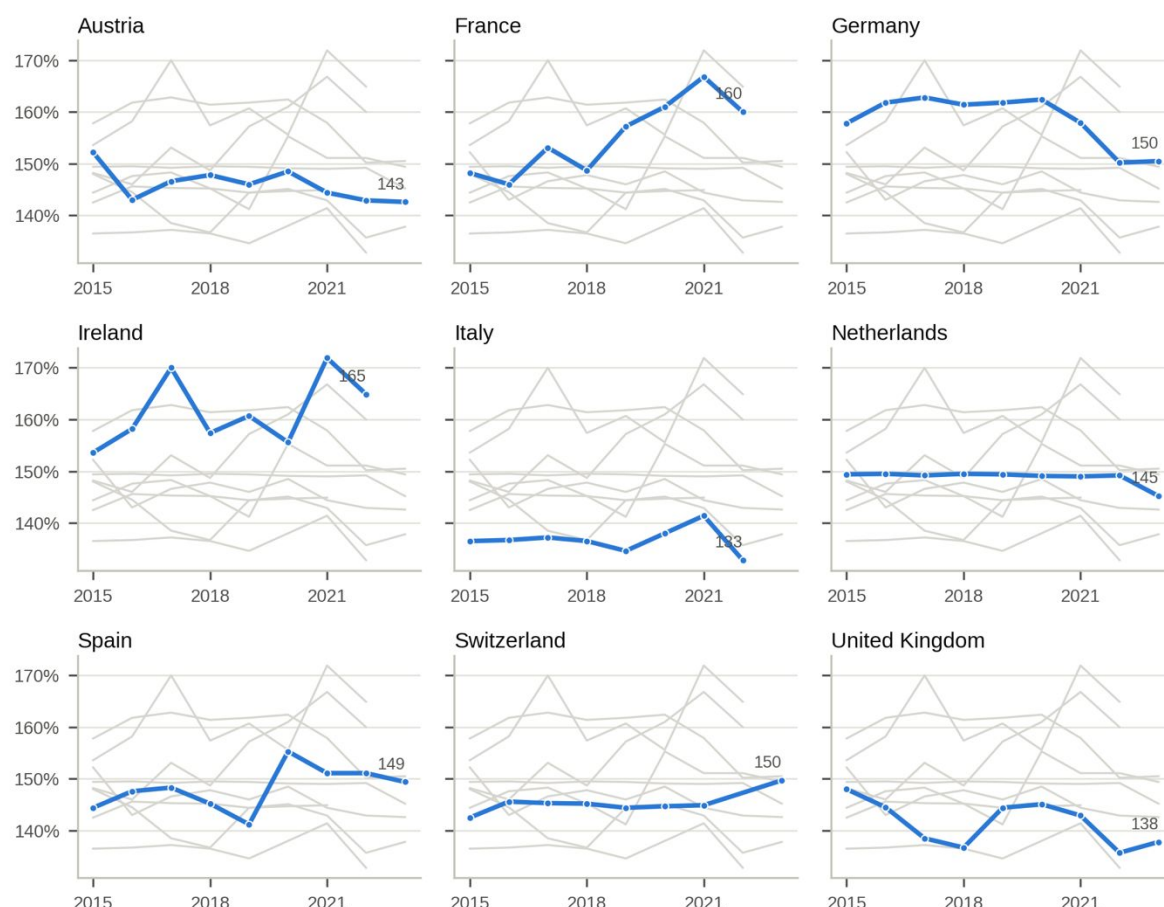


Figure 2.5. Earnings of workers with tertiary education relative to upper secondary (25–64, full-time), 2015–2023.
Source: Author’s elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Ireland entered the data in 2005 at an extraordinary 171.9%, meaning that tertiary graduates earned 72% more than high-school graduates and remains the highest in the most recent year at 164.8% in 2022. Even at its lowest point at 146.6% in 2012 it stayed above most countries' peaks. Its 2016–2023 average of 162.7% is unmatched in the group, reflecting a consistently high return on tertiary education (OECD, 2025).

Italy’s premium started at 142.6% in 2010 and has fallen almost every year since, hitting a low of 132.8% in 2022. A tertiary degree in Italy gives only a 33% earnings advantage over a high-school diploma, and that advantage is shrinking. This reflects an over-supply of graduates in a labour market with limited demand for high-skill roles.

The United Kingdom started at 160.5% in 2010, second only to Ireland and has fallen nearly every year since, reaching 137.8% in 2023. That is a loss of 22.7 percentage points in 13 years, the largest decline of any country. The UK has gone from near the top of the ranking to second-from-bottom. Figures 2.6 and 2.7 compare the mean net income of the two groups in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025).

Mean equivalised net income, tertiary education (18–64), 2024

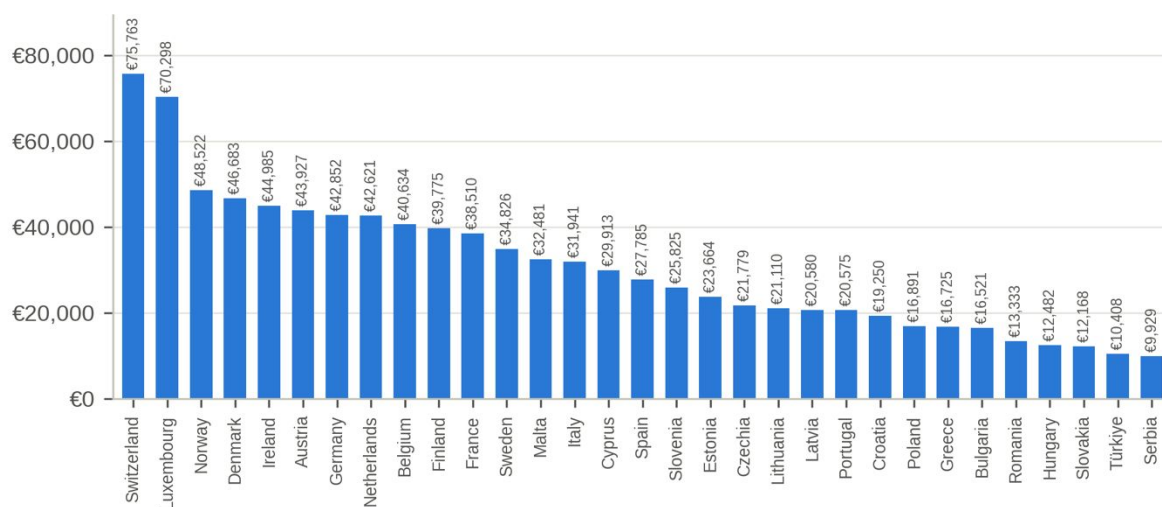


Figure 2.6. Mean equivalised net income by educational attainment, tertiary education (18–64), 2024, euro.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), EU-SILC.

Mean equivalised net income, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (18–64), 2024

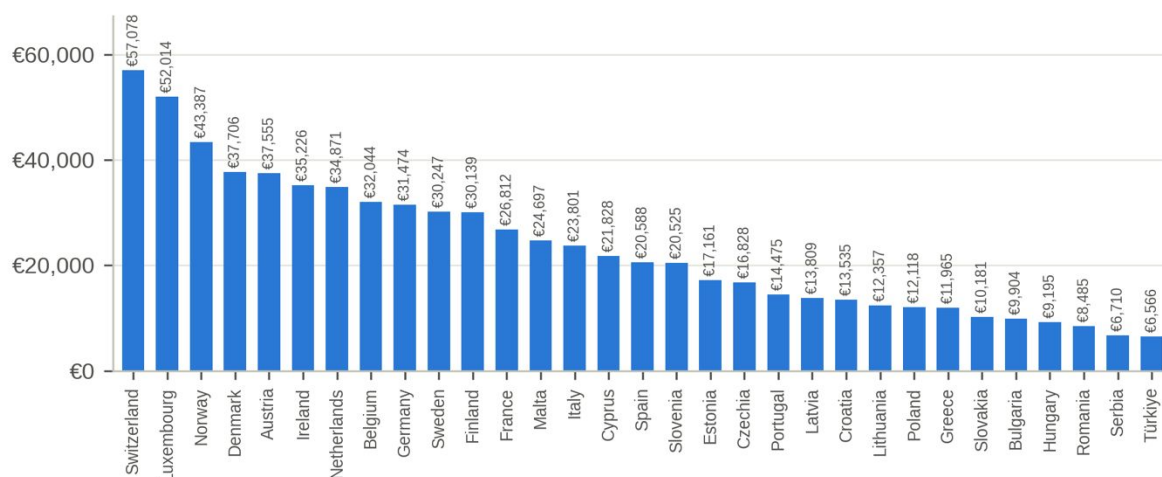


Figure 2.7. Mean equivalised net income by educational attainment, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (18–64), 2024, euro.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), EU-SILC.

Unemployment

Higher education consistently acts as a shield against unemployment, but still varies wildly depending on the regional model. On average the unemployment rate for upper-secondary graduates stands at roughly 6.25%, while for tertiary graduates it drops to 4.01% (Figures 2.8 and 2.9), revealing an employment premium for higher-skilled workers.

In the DACH region (Germany, Switzerland) and in the Nordics the unemployment gap between high school graduates and university graduates is almost non-existent, often dropping below half a percentage point.

Conversely, in Southern Europe and the Baltics, lacking a university degree exposes workers to significantly higher risks, highlighting labour markets where high-quality middle-skill jobs are much scarcer (Eurostat, 2025).

Unemployment rate, tertiary education (20–64), 2024

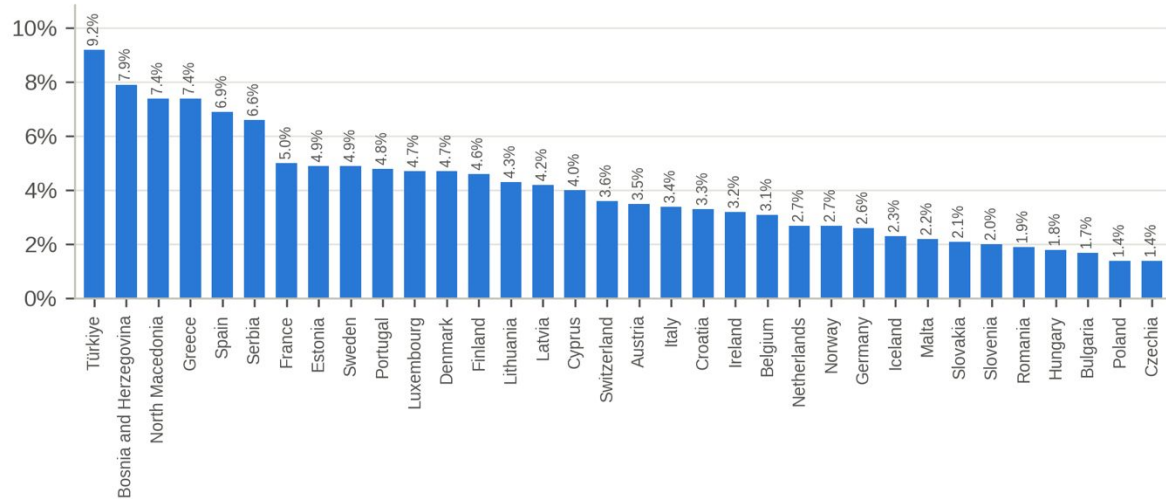


Figure 2.8. Unemployment rates by educational attainment, tertiary education (20–64), 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), Labour Force Survey.

Unemployment rate, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (20–64), 2024

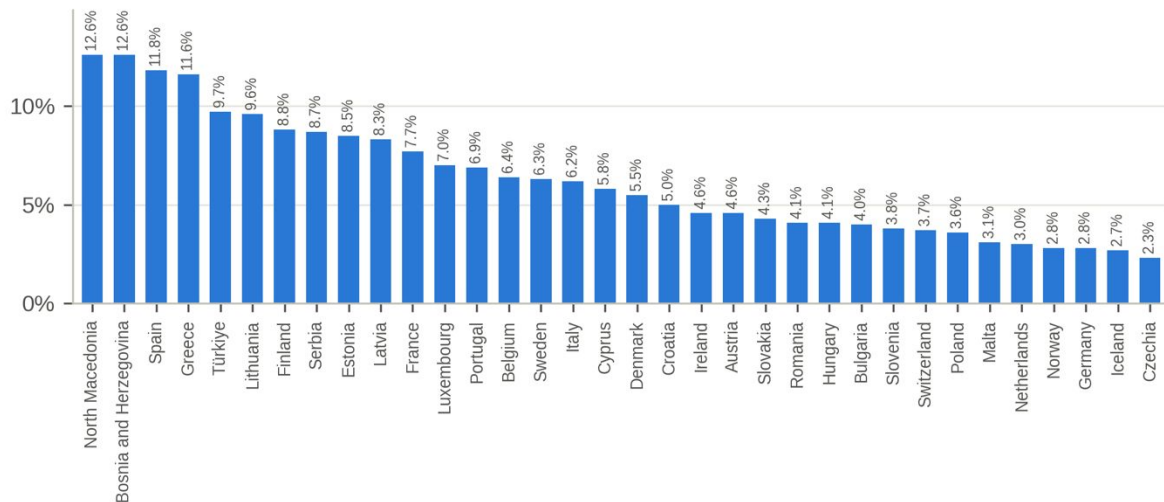


Figure 2.9. Unemployment rates by educational attainment, upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary (20–64)..

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), Labour Force Survey.

2.3.2 Funding and Expenditure on Education

Government expenditure on tertiary educational institutions

Government expenditure on tertiary institutions per FTE student, national currency, current prices

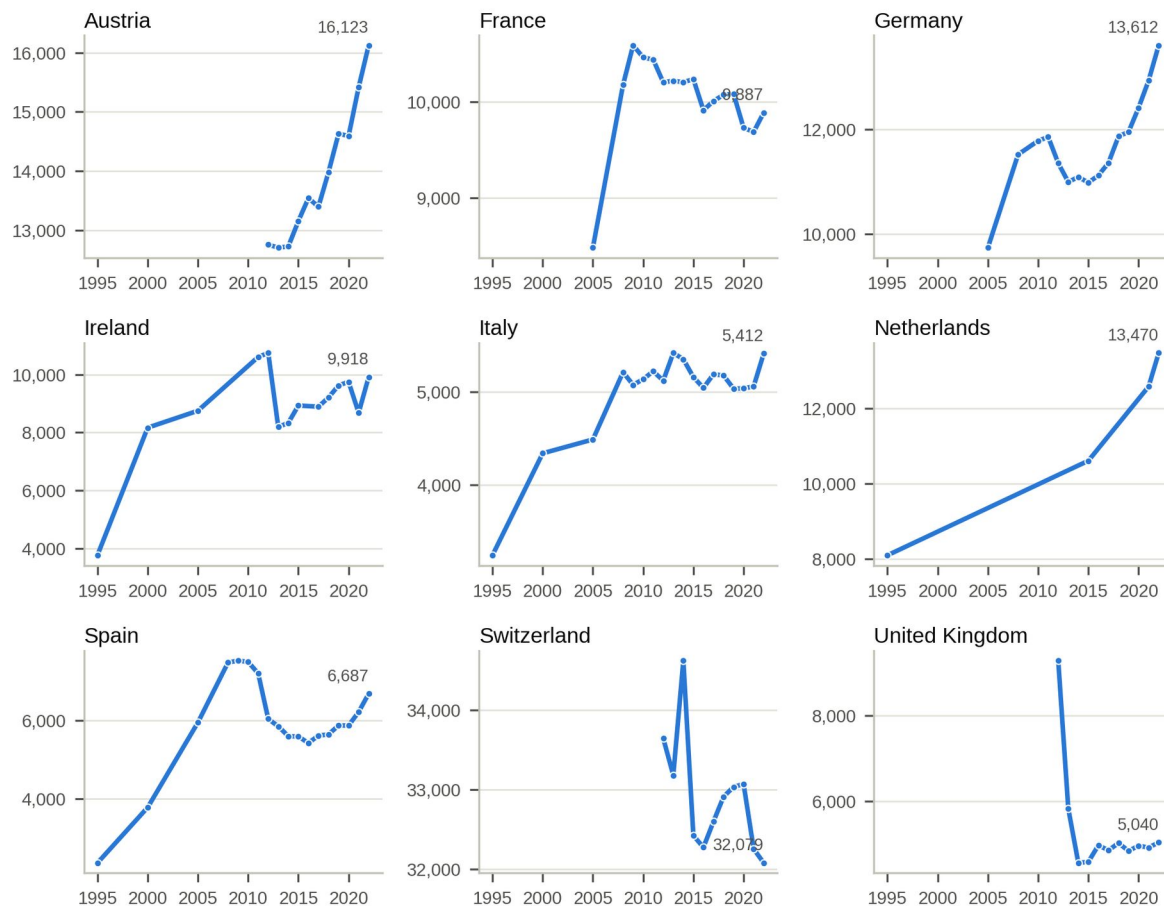


Figure 2.10. Government expenditure on tertiary educational institutions per full-time equivalent student, national currency, current prices, selected years 1995–2022.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Indexing the values of Figure 2.10 to 2015 (2015 = 100), Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, the investing group, reach 119–127 by 2022, meaning they increased per-student spending by 20–27% in nominal terms over seven years. Germany in particular went from 100 in 2015 to 124 in 2022, a steady and unbroken climb (OECD, 2025).

France, Italy, Switzerland, UK, the retreating or stagnant group hovered near or below their 2015 levels throughout, with France falling as low as 95 in 2021 before a partial recovery to 97 in 2022.

Switzerland is essentially flat for a decade, 98.9 in 2022 vs 100 in 2015. Italy oscillates narrowly between 98 and 105, never breaking meaningfully upward.

A second structural feature visible in longer-series countries is the pre-crisis expansion and post-crisis austerity cycle. Spain is the most vivid example: it grew from an index of 42 in 1995 to a peak of 135 in 2009, then collapsed to 100 by 2015 as austerity cut deeply. Ireland shows a similar shape — rapid expansion through the 2000s, a sharp contraction post-2012, then gradual recovery.

Private sector expenditure on educational institutions

Private-sector expenditure on tertiary institutions per FTE student, national currency, current prices

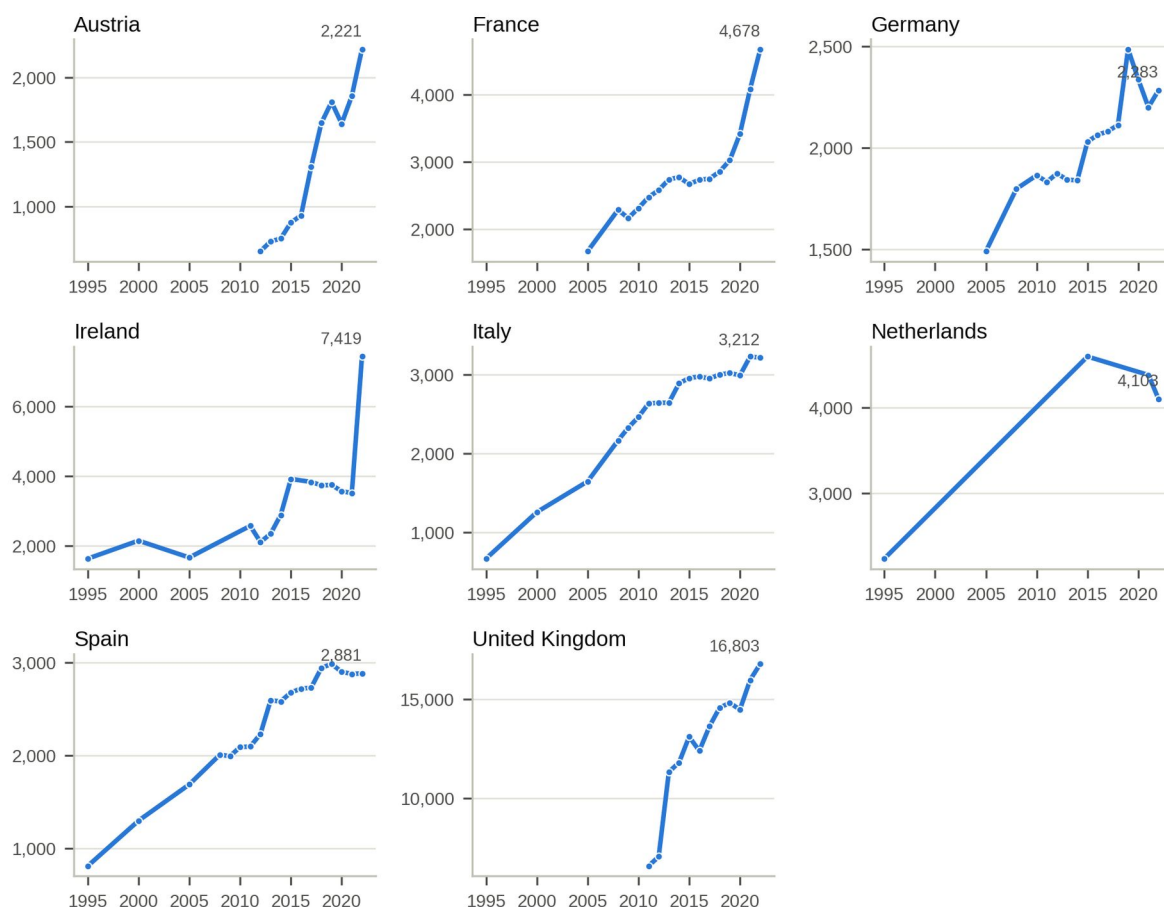


Figure 2.11. Private-sector expenditure on tertiary educational institutions per full-time equivalent student, national currency, current prices, selected years 1995–2022.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Between 2012 and 2022, private expenditure, which largely consists of household spending like tuition fees and related educational costs, grew universally (Figure 2.11). This reflects a structural shift globally where the financial burden of higher education is gradually moving away from state budgets and onto private entities and students.

From a student and household perspective, aiming at the minimum financial burden, Germany and Austria are the best countries. Their tertiary education systems are heavily subsidized by the public sector. In 2022, Germany's private expenditure per student was only 2,283 EUR, and Austria's was 2,221 EUR, the lowest among the Eurozone countries analyzed (OECD, 2025).

From a private investment and university revenue perspective, aiming at the highest funding the United Kingdom is the strongest performer. Private capital flows massively into their universities, growing from roughly £7,024 per student in 2012 to £16,803 in 2022

Italy and Spain sit in an uncomfortable middle ground. Their private expenditure grew very weakly over the 10-year span, only 21.5% for Italy and 29.3% for Spain. When accounting for cumulative inflation over a decade, this means real-term private investment has essentially stagnated or shrunk. If

public funding in these countries is not making up the difference, it signals that their university systems are facing severe funding squeezes.

Total expenditure on R&D tertiary educational institutions

R&D expenditure in tertiary institutions per FTE student, national currency, current prices

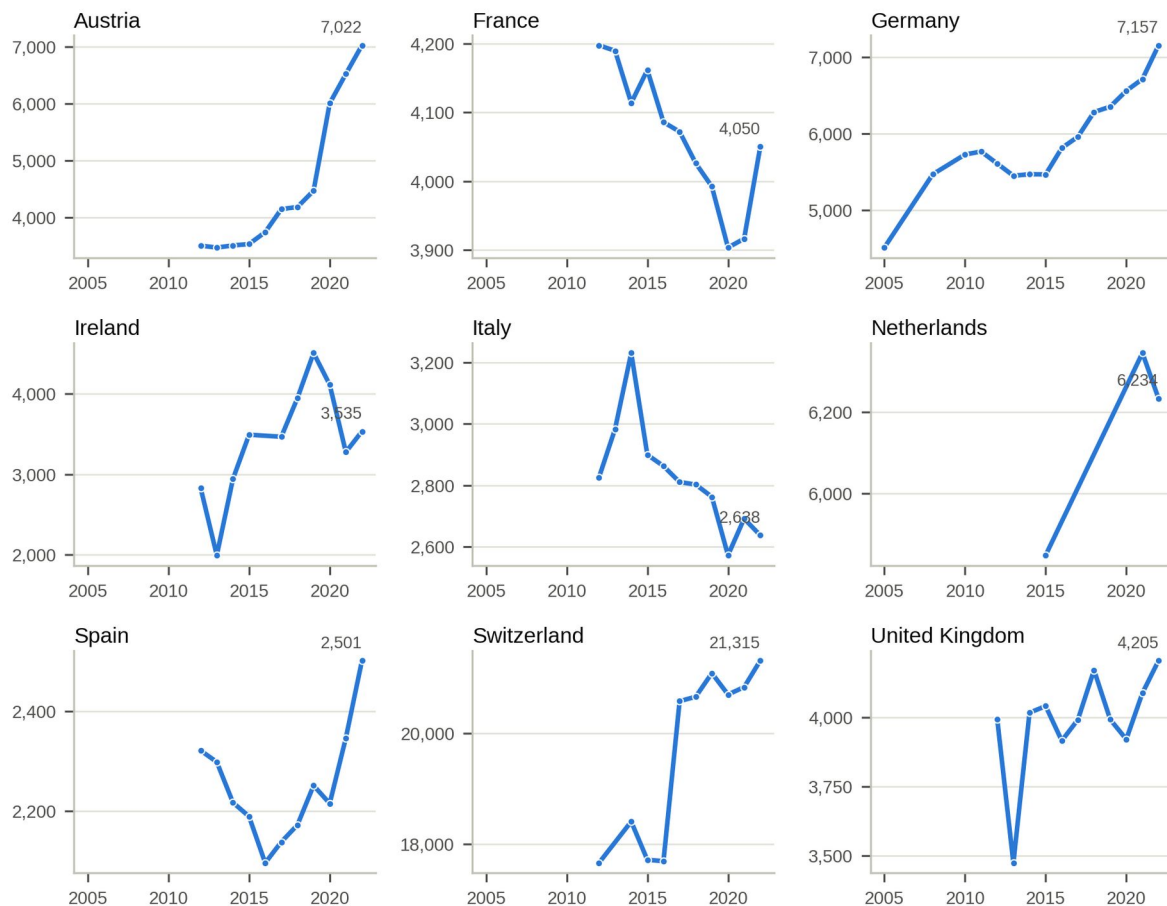


Figure 2.12. Expenditure on R&D in tertiary educational institutions per full-time equivalent student, national currency, current prices, selected years 2005–2022.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Unlike private student expenditure which grew almost in every country, R&D investment per student shows drastically different trajectories across Europe (Figure 2.12).

Countries like Austria and Germany are consistently scaling up their R&D investments per student, while many major Western European economies are experiencing severe stagnation or even absolute decline. This indicates a growing gap in research capacity and funding density between different European higher education systems.

In absolute terms, R&D expenditure per student in Switzerland stood at 21,315 CHF in 2022. This is roughly triple the amount spent by countries like Germany and Austria, and heavily underscores the financial firepower of Swiss research institutions.

Over the 2012–2022 decade, Austria doubled its R&D expenditure per student, growing by exactly 100.5%, from 3,501 EUR to 7,022 EUR.

Germany also performed well, showing steady and solid growth up 27.5% over the same period, reaching 7,157 EUR in 2022 (OECD, 2025).

2.3.3 Institutional Quality

Share of international students in tertiary education

Data reveals a highly uneven landscape of student mobility across Europe, with the average share of international students standing at roughly 12.2% (Figure 2.13) (Eurostat, 2025).

Several small-to-medium-sized nations, particularly those with highly specialized economies and widespread use of English in academia, attract disproportionately large shares of foreign students.

Conversely, many of the continent's most populous nations with massive domestic student bodies, like Italy and Spain, show surprisingly low rates of internationalization, hovering around 4% to 5%.

Share of tertiary education students from abroad, 2024

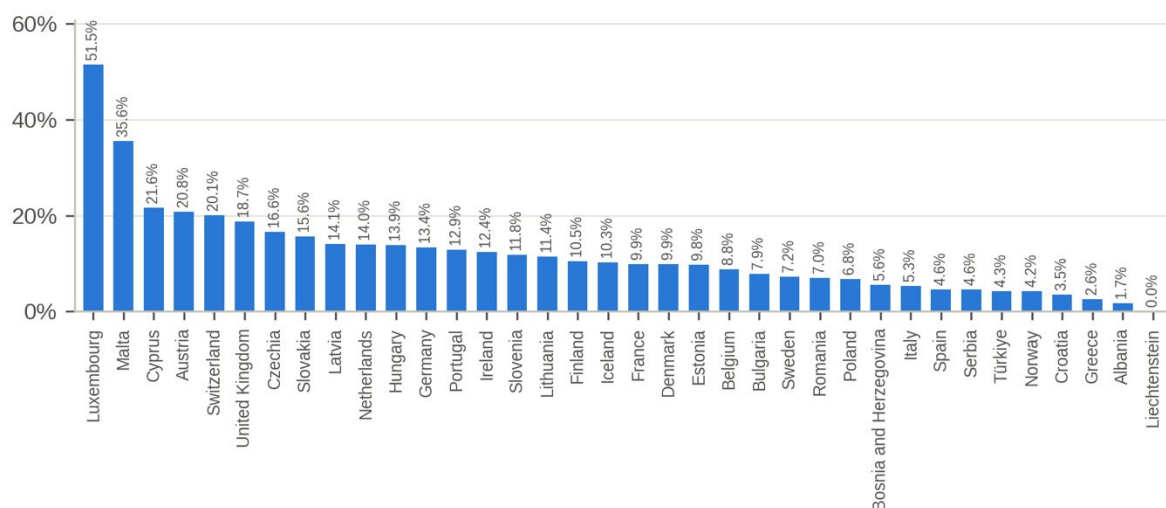


Figure 2.13. Share of tertiary education students from abroad, 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), UOE data collection.

Students per teacher ratio

A lower number of students per teacher allows more academic support, and the countries with the lowest ratios perform best on this indicator (Figure 2.14) (OECD, 2025).

Students per teaching staff in tertiary education, 2023

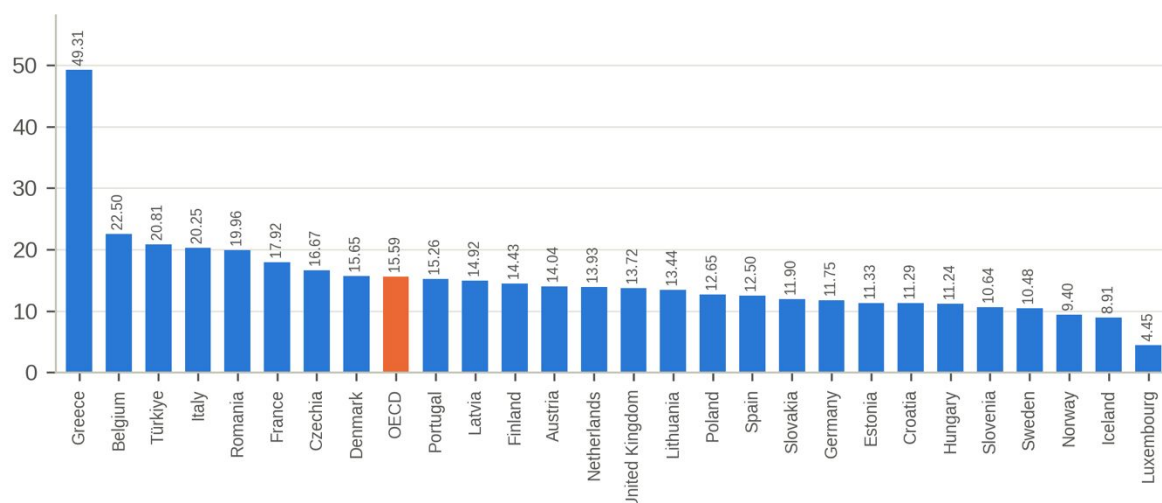


Figure 2.14. Number of students per teacher in tertiary education, 2023.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Students per teaching staff indicator.

Luxembourg leads the group with an exceptionally low ratio of roughly 4.5 students per teacher. This suggests a highly personalized academic environment, likely driven by its smaller, specialized university system and significant financial resources

Belgium, Italy and France systems tend toward very large student-to-faculty ratios with, respectively, 22.50, 20.25 and 17.92, highlighting a lack in providing individualized academic mentorship.

The Nordic countries also demonstrate strong commitments to faculty staffing, with Iceland, 8.9, and Norway, 9.4, both securing positions well below the OECD average.

GDP expenditure on education

A prominent trend emerging from the dataset is the pronounced geographical and historical divide in educational funding across the European landscape (Figure 2.15).

Education expenditure as a share of GDP, European countries, 2024

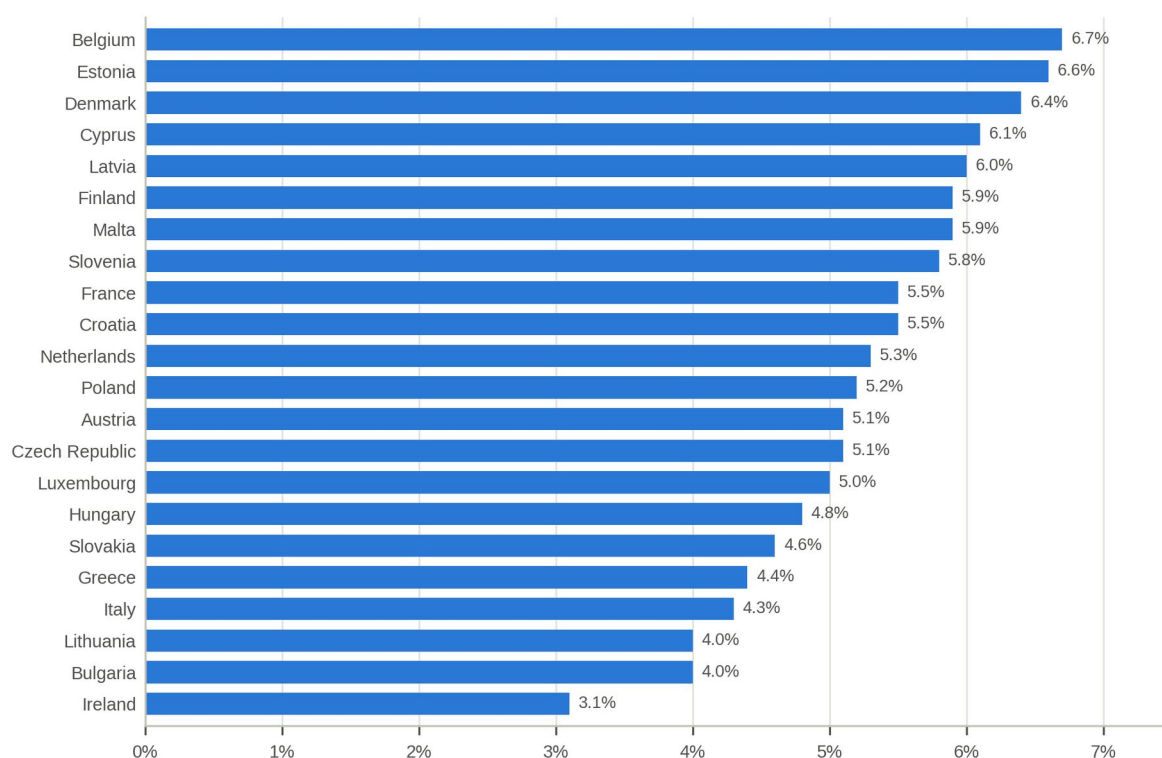


Figure 2.15. Education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, European countries, 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Geo Factbook (2024), based on United Nations, CIA World Factbook and World Bank Open Data.

The Northern and Scandinavian countries consistently cluster at the higher end of the spectrum, maintaining funding levels generally at or above six percent of their GDP. This reflects their long-standing socio-economic models that prioritize heavily subsidized education.

Southern and several Eastern European nations tend to dedicate less than five percent of their economic output to education, falling in the lower part of the distribution.

The lower end of the spectrum presents several concerning anomalies, particularly among nations that either possess advanced economies or have pressing needs for human capital development.

Ireland and Italy sit at the bottom of the chart dedicating, respectively, only 3.1% and 4.3% of their GDP to education.

Estonia stands out at the top of the list with 6.6%, a remarkable result that shows the country's commitment to the education of its citizens (Geo Factbook, 2024).

2.3.4 Demographic

Tertiary education attainment

The macro-trend is a universal and significant increase in the highly educated workforce. Every country saw a substantial jump in the percentage of adults holding a tertiary degree between 2014 and 2024 (Figures 2.16–2.18). This reflects a broad European structural shift toward knowledge-based economies, where higher education is becoming increasingly necessary and accessible for the general population (OECD, 2025).

Share of adults (25–64) with tertiary education, selected European countries, 1989–2000

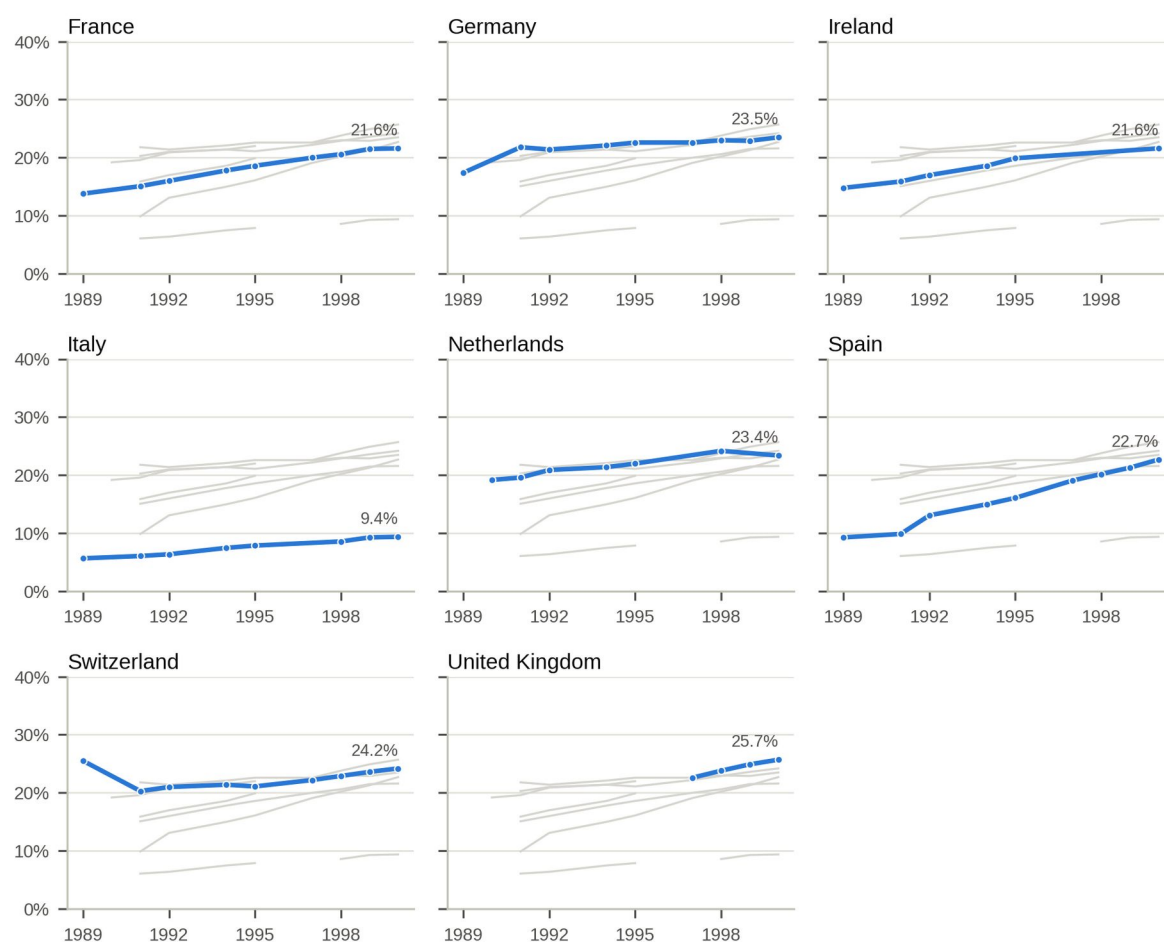


Figure 2.16. Tertiary educational attainment of adults (25–64), selected European countries, 1989–2000.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Share of adults (25–64) with tertiary education, selected European countries, 2000–2011

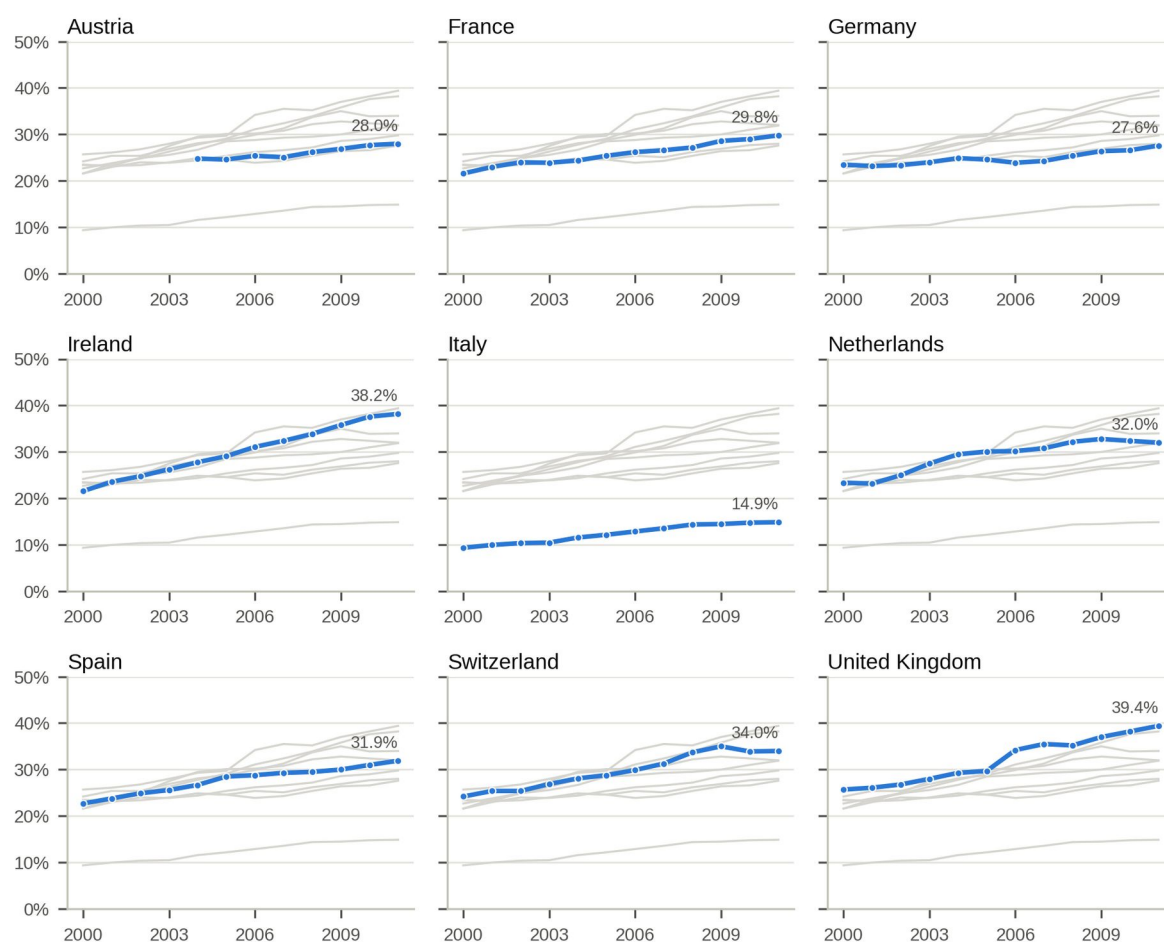


Figure 2.17. Tertiary educational attainment of adults (25–64), selected European countries, 2000–2011.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Share of adults (25–64) with tertiary education, selected European countries, 2011–2024

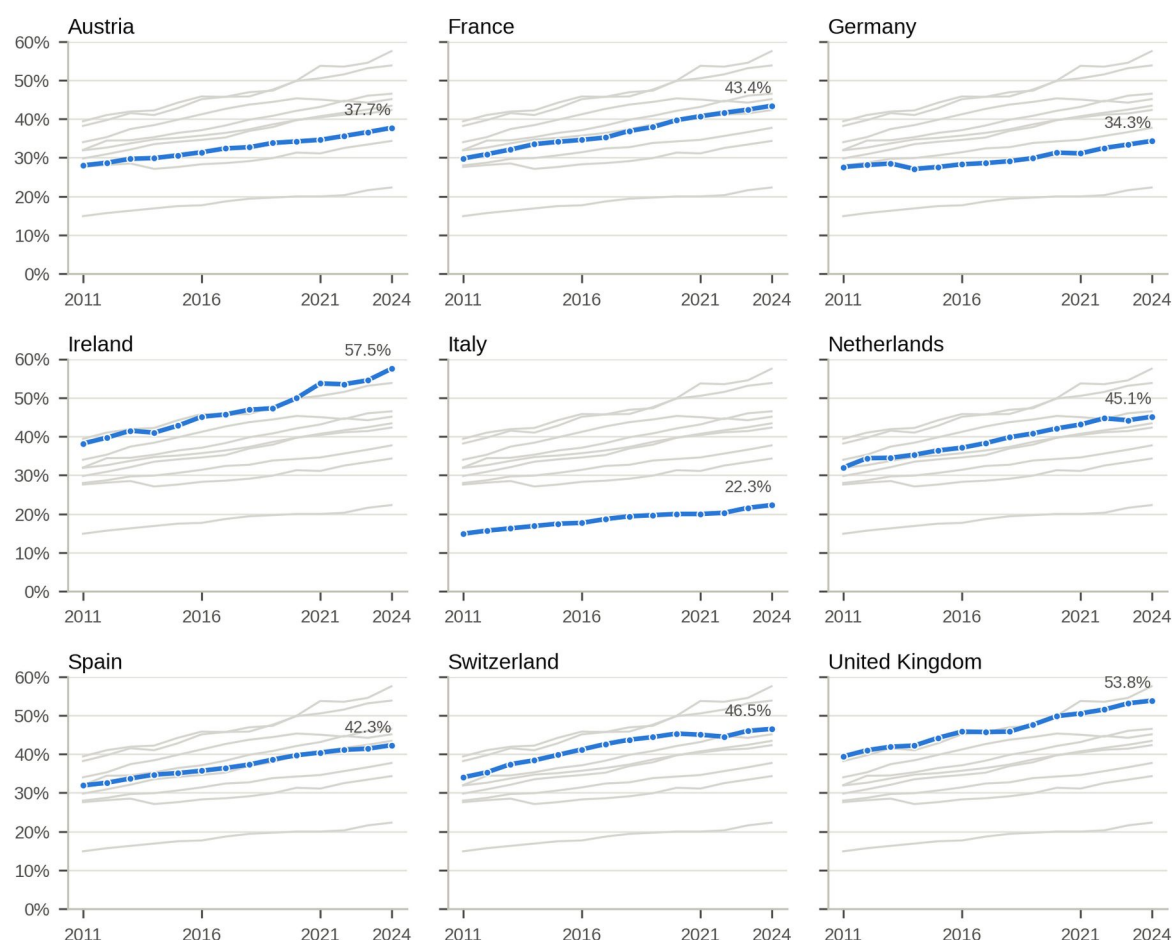


Figure 2.18. Tertiary educational attainment of adults (25–64), selected European countries, 2011–2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from OECD (2025), Education at a Glance database (OECD Data Explorer).

Ireland is the absolute leader with 57.5% of its adult population aged 25–64 holding a tertiary degree in 2024. The United Kingdom is the runner-up, with a highly educated workforce standing at 53.8% in 2024 (OECD, 2025).

Once again Italy is at the bottom of the standings. While it showed decent relative growth over the decade at +31.9%, its absolute numbers are staggeringly low compared to its peers. In 2024, only 22.3% of Italian adults have a tertiary education. This puts Italy dead last in this dataset by a massive margin. The next lowest country is Germany, recording over ten percentage points higher at 34.3%.

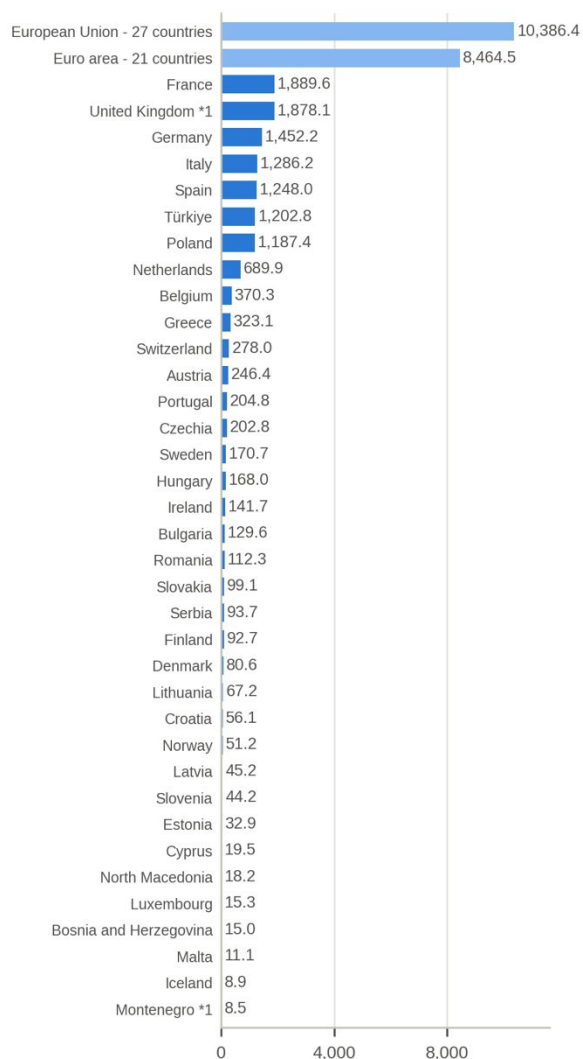
Self employment by graduate individuals

The charts (Figures 2.19 and 2.20) show that in France, Germany, Spain, UK tertiary-educated entrepreneurs and freelancers outnumber those with only a secondary education.

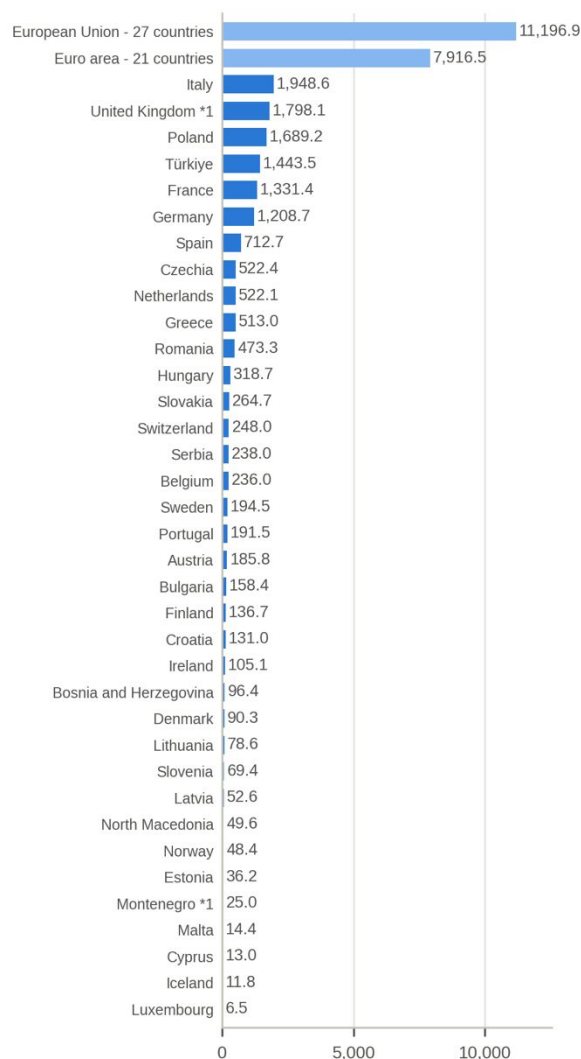
In Eastern and Southern Europe, such as Poland, Italy, and the Balkans, the traditional model of self-employment heavily persists.

In these regions, self-employed individuals with secondary education vastly outnumber those with university degrees, reflecting a landscape dominated by traditional, non-technical industries (Eurostat, 2025).

Self-employed people with tertiary education, 2024 (thousands)



Self-employed people with at most secondary education, 2024 (thousands)



Figures 2.19 and 2.20. Self-employment by individuals with tertiary education (left) and with only secondary education (right), thousands, 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), dataset lfsa_esgaed.

Early leavers from education

This metric, commonly understood as the school dropout rate, serves as a crucial socio-economic indicator. It highlights the segment of the youth population that is entering the workforce with minimal formal qualifications.

Across the surveyed European nations, the average rate of early school leavers sits around 8.3% (Figure 2.21) and the complex geographic landscape is split along North–South and East–West lines (Eurostat, 2025).

Some wealthy and highly developed nations, where nearly universal educational retention might be expected, act the opposite way. Spain remains a significant negative surprise with an early school leaving rate of 13.0%, reflecting challenges with youth disconnecting from formal schooling to enter the low-skilled labor market. Even more striking is Germany, which records a poor rate of 12.9%.

Early leavers from education and training (18–24), 2024

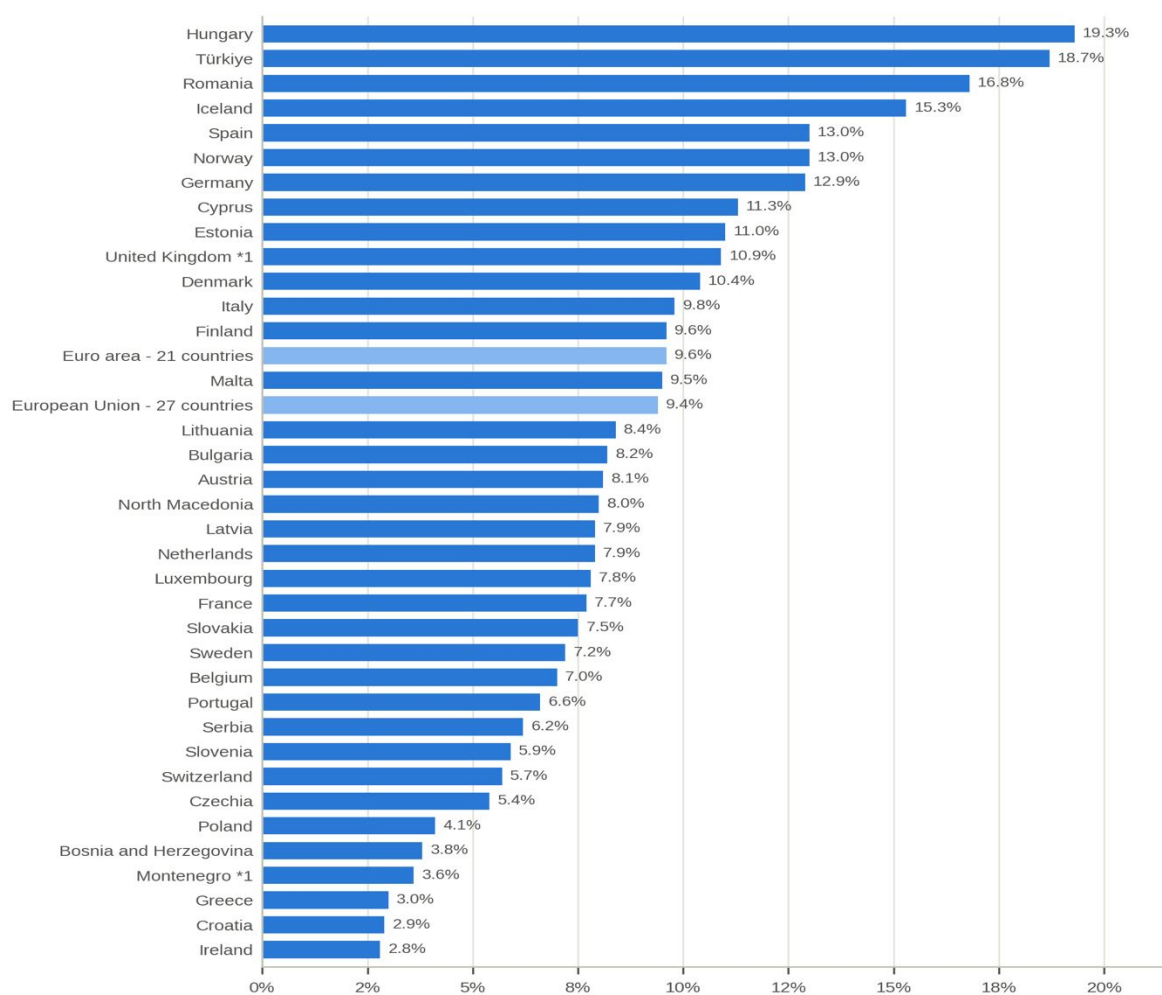


Figure 2.21. Early leavers from education and training, aged 18–24, 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration on data from Eurostat (2025), dataset edat_lfse_14.

3. SYSTEMIC READING OF THE CA' FOSCARI CASE

3.1 From Comparison to System

The preceding chapters compared higher-education systems, moving from the United States to the European Higher Education Area and its national variants, Italy among them. That comparison establishes what the institutions are, how they are funded, and how they are governed.

To address the question of how Ca' Foscari can be strengthened, the analysis must move from a static account of structure to a dynamic account of behaviour.

This chapter displays what happens when applying systems thinking to the case of Ca' Foscari and its territory. According to Meadows (2008), the behaviour of a complex system is determined by the feedback relationships that connect its actors. The two maps presented here are designed to show how the feedback relations between the actors actually take place.

The chapter proceeds in four steps. It first introduces the Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) as the method of synthesis. It then presents two complementary maps: one of Ca' Foscari's internal structure, one of its external ecosystem. This corresponds directly to the distinction between internal and external stakeholders adopted in the interview design. It analyses the feedback loops that each map reveals. Finally, it prepares the use of Meadows' notion of leverage points, which Section 5.3 applies to the findings as the analytical bridge to the strategic initiatives of Chapter 7.

3.2 The Causal Loop Diagram as a Synthesis Tool

In a CLD, variables are represented as nodes and causal influences as arrows between them. What distinguishes a CLD from a simple flow chart is its treatment of circularity, since chains of causation that close back on themselves form feedback loops.

Two kinds of loop are distinguished:

- a. A reinforcing loop (labelled R) is self-amplifying: a change in one direction propagates around the loop and returns as a further change in the same direction, so that the behaviour compounds.
- b. A balancing loop (labelled B) is self-correcting: it counteracts deviation from a goal or limit and tends to return the system toward equilibrium (Meadows, 2008; Sterman, 2000).

The polarity of a loop is determined by the signs of its links. For the purposes of this chapter, each loop is simply labelled R or B and numbered, with its full causal chain explained in an accompanying legend. Labels restart in each map: the loops marked B1 and R1 in the external map are distinct from those marked B1 and R1 in the internal map, and the text always specifies the map to which a loop belongs

3.2.1 Building the Maps

Systems mapping is a recognised method for organising complex, qualitative knowledge into an analytical whole. Several uses of such maps are distinguished. The most basic is systems mapping as a tool, in which a researcher draws on prior analysis to construct a map that makes sense of a complex problem and clarifies where it might be addressed.

The two maps in this chapter are grounded in a documentary analysis of (a) the Italian regulatory framework governing higher education, (b) Ca' Foscari's own Statute and (c) its organisational regulations and public reporting, summarised in the next section.

The internal map covers the professorate, administrative staff, and students; the external map covers territorial partners, industry, and public institutions.

3.3 The Documentary Basis of the Maps

Three bodies of documents were consulted to identify the actors and the links represented in the two maps. The first is the national regulatory framework. Law 240/2010 defines the governing bodies that every Italian state university must have: the Rector, the Academic Senate, the Board of Directors, which must include members external to the university, the Board of Auditors, the Evaluation Unit and the General Director. It establishes departments as the basic units of teaching and research and, within them, the joint teacher–student committees (*Commissioni paritetiche docenti-studenti*) charged with monitoring the teaching offer and the quality of teaching. These are the six layers of the internal map. The same framework establishes the channels through which the State relates to universities in the external map: the Ministry (MUR) allocates the ordinary financing fund (FFO), a growing share of which is distributed as a performance-based quota (*quota premiale*) on the basis of the research and third-mission assessments carried out by the national agency ANVUR, while CRUI represents the Rectors collectively. The right to study is a regional competence and in Veneto is administered by ESU Venezia, the regional body that pays scholarships and manages student residences (*Legge regionale del Veneto n. 8/1998*).

The second body of documents is Ca' Foscari's own Statute and General Regulations (*Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2011; 2012*), which translate the national template into the configuration shown in the internal map: the Pro-Rectors and delegates through whom the Rector exercises delegated authority, including the Pro-Rector for the right to study who is the formal point of reference for student representatives; the composition of the Board of Directors described in Chapter 5; the departments with their Councils, Heads and Joint Committees; and the technical-administrative structure headed by the General Director and organised into offices for teaching, research, human resources and finance.

The third body is the set of documents through which the university describes its external relationships: the strategic plan (*Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2021*), the third-mission reporting required by ANVUR, and the agreements and memberships the university makes public, with the Veneto Region, the City of Venice and the Port Authority, with research institutions such as CNR, with the EUTOPIA European alliance and the Erasmus+, ERC and Horizon Europe programmes, and with the cultural institutions of the city, among them the Biennale, the Teatro Stabile del Veneto and Teatro La Fenice. From these sources the nodes of the two maps were drawn. The direction of each link was inferred from the formal competence that the documents assign to each actor, and the loops were then tested against the workshop and interview material presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.4 The Internal System Map

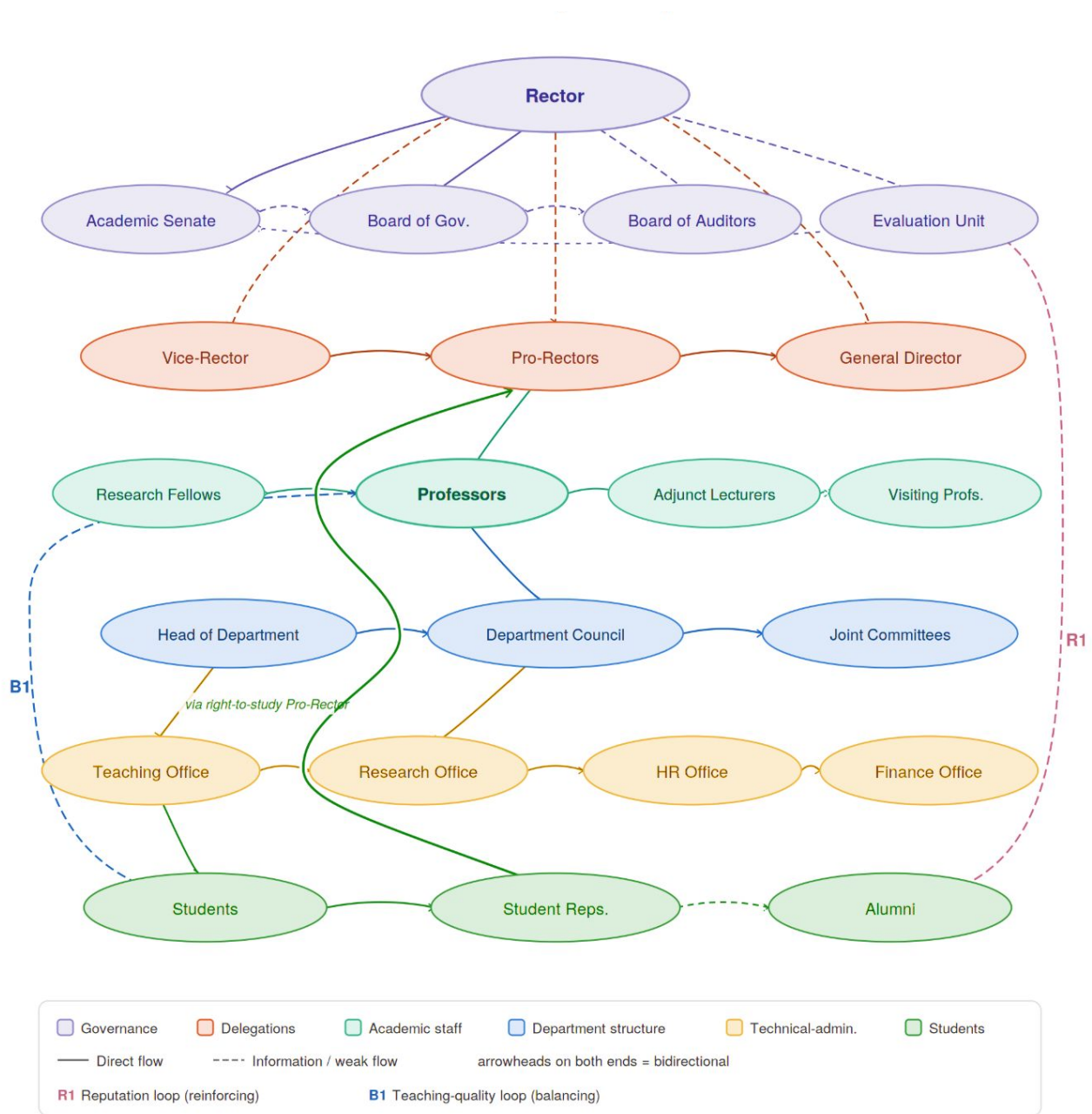


Figure 3.1. The internal system map of Ca' Foscari. Loops: R1 reputation (reinforcing), B1 teaching quality (balancing). Source: Author's elaboration on Law 240/2010 and on the Statute and General Regulations of Ca' Foscari (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2011; 2012).

The internal map (Figure 3.1) renders Ca' Foscari's structure as six functional layers:

- Governance
- Delegated authority
- Academic staff
- Departmental structure
- Technical-administrative offices

(f) Students.

Vertical arrows trace the flow of authority and resources downward and the flow of reporting and feedback upward. Horizontal arrows, several of them bidirectional, capture the lateral relationships within each layer that an organisational chart typically omits.

The reciprocal link between the Pro-Rectors and the General Director represents the negotiation through which political priorities are translated into administrative action.

Similarly, the link between Professors and Adjunct Lecturers encodes a specific asymmetry as the professor defines the syllabus and validates the examinations, while the adjunct delivers a module within that frame that bears directly on teaching quality.

The student representatives reach the central governance not through the administrative offices but through the Pro-Rector responsible for the right to study, who is their formal point of reference.

Two feedback loops are highlighted on the map. The first, *R1*, is a reinforcing reputation loop, addressing the quality of teaching and research shapes the employability of graduates, which feeds the data on which the institution's reputation rests, which in turn affects its capacity to attract strong students and staff, closing the loop by influencing quality.

The second, *B1*, is a balancing teaching-quality loop addressing dissatisfaction expressed by students through course evaluations, registered by the Joint Committees, relayed to the Department Council, and corrected through changes to the teaching offer. This loop self-corrects only if the link from the Joint Committees to the Department Council actually carries the signal.

3.5 The External System Map

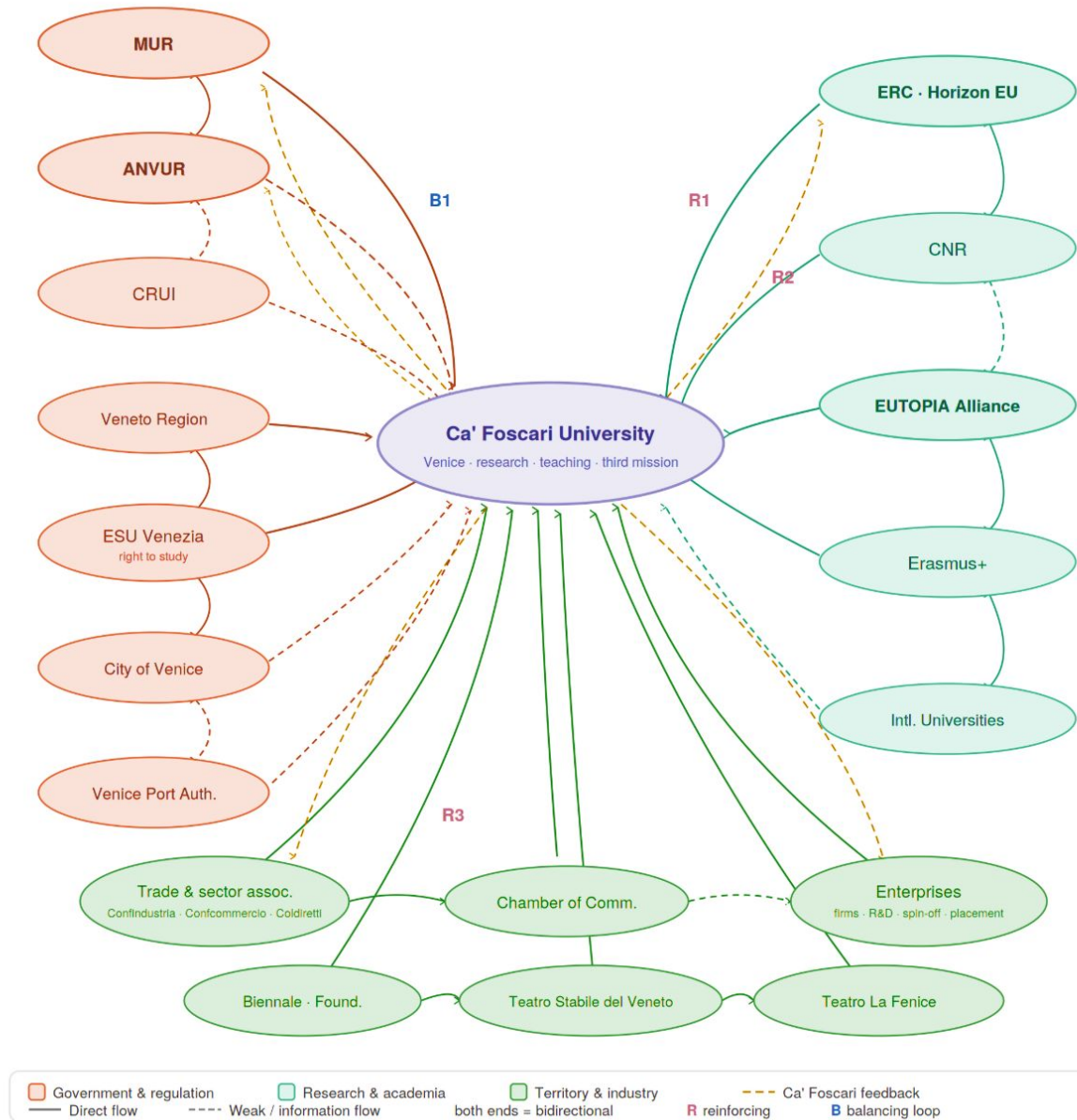


Figure 3.2. The external system map of Ca' Foscari. Loops: B1 premium funding (balancing), R1 international ranking, R2 competitive grants, R3 third mission (reinforcing).

Source: Author's elaboration on Law 240/2010, Regional Law of Veneto n. 8/1998 and the Strategic Plan 2021–2026 of Ca' Foscari (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2021).

The external map (Figure 3.2) places Ca' Foscari at the centre of an ecosystem organised in three zones:

- (a) Government and regulation
- (b) Research and academia
- (c) Territory and industry

The map distinguishes the flows the university receives, such as funding, rules, grants, partnerships, from the flows it returns to the system, such as graduates, research, spin-offs, consultancy, and cultural production.

The reciprocal link between the Veneto Region and the City of Venice is not a single channel but three concrete points of contact made by (1) student housing, where the Region funds the regional right-to-study body (ESU Venezia) while the City physically hosts the residences, (2) mobility, where regional and municipal transport planning must be reconciled and (3) the port, whose decarbonisation plan the Region co-finances and the City must accommodate within the urban fabric. The university participates in all three. The economic actors of the territory, in turn, are distinguished on the map between the representative bodies, trade and sector associations such as Confindustria, Confcommercio, and Coldiretti, and the enterprises themselves, with which the university maintains direct relationships of research, spin-off creation, and graduate placement.

Four loops are highlighted. *B1* is a balancing premium-funding loop addressing improvements in research quality raise the institution's evaluation score and thus its share of the Ministry's performance-based funding, but because that fund is a fixed pool divided among all Italian universities, gains by one institution prompt compensating effort by others, so the system tends toward a competitive equilibrium rather than unbounded advantage for any single actor.

R1, *R2*, and *R3* are reinforcing loops that operate on different axes and mutually amplify one another. *R1* links international ranking to the attraction of talent and resources; *R2* links competitive grants (ERC, Horizon Europe) to research output, reputation, and the next grant; *R3*, the third-mission loop, links research quality to patents and spin-offs, whose revenues and reputational returns fund further research and attract more substantial enterprise partners.

The third mission deserves particular emphasis because it is the channel through which the university's research returns most directly to its territory, and because it is increasingly weighted in national evaluation.

At Ca' Foscari the third mission works through three distinct channels, and separating them shows where the reinforcing loop *R3* can be strengthened:

Technology transfer: Spin-offs, patents, and contract research managed by the Research Office

Public and cultural engagement: Collaborations with Venetian cultural institutions such as the Biennale, the Teatro Stabile del Veneto, and Teatro La Fenice, together with citizen-science projects in the lagoon

Continuing education: Executive and lifelong-learning programmes, often co-designed with industry.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

4.1 Objectives of the Empirical Research

The first three chapters of this thesis moved from a comparison of higher education systems to a systemic reading of Ca' Foscari and its territory, expressed in two causal loop diagrams. The two maps show how the feedback relations between the actors take place on paper. This chapter tests them against the experience of the people involved in the system, through a workshop with students and interviews with external stakeholders.

Its general objective was to investigate the perceptions of a set of actors who are relevant to the Venetian metropolitan system, on both sides of the boundary between the university and the city. On the first side the students who study in Venice and try to live there, and on the other the institutional, economic and cultural actors who deal with the university from the outside. The research concentrated on the factors that participants perceive as obstacles to a closer integration between the university and the city, focusing on how young university students in Venice can have an active role in the city.

Three questions guided the work. The first asks which obstacles and which drivers of integration are perceived by students and by territorial actors. The second asks what, in the participants' experience, separates a student who passes through Venice from one who takes root there, and which conditions would make the second outcome more likely. The third asks how the perceived factors relate to one another, so that the analysis can move from a list of problems to a diagnosis of the system and to possible solutions. The first two questions are answered in section 5.1, the third in section 5.2.

4.2 Participants

Data were collected on two occasions of exchange. The first was a participatory brainstorming workshop with students of the Venetian university pole, held in two sessions on 15 June 2026 and 17 July 2026, each lasting approximately two hours. The second consisted of four individual semi structured interviews with external stakeholders of the university system, conducted between July and September 2026. In total, fourteen people took part, ten students and four external actors.

Consistently with the University's guidelines on personal data in final dissertations, no participant is identified by name. Students are referred to with the codes S1 to S10 and external stakeholders with the codes E1 to E4. The codes are used throughout the findings so that the reader can always see who said what and can follow each participant across themes. Table 4.1 describes the sample through nationality, institution and study or professional background.

Table 4.1. Participants in the workshop (S1-S10) and in the interviews (E1-E4).

Code	Occasion	Nationality	Institution	Study or professional background
S1	Workshop	Italy	Ca' Foscari	Marketing and communication
S2	Workshop (author, facilitator and participant)	Italy	Ca' Foscari	International Management

Code	Occasion	Nationality	Institution	Study or professional background
S3	Workshop	Montenegro	Ca' Foscari	Global Accounting and Finance
S4	Workshop	Serbia	Ca' Foscari	Global Accounting and Finance
S5	Workshop	Romania	Ca' Foscari	Comparative international relations
S6	Workshop	Kazakhstan	Ca' Foscari	Global Accounting and Finance
S7	Workshop	Italy	Università Iuav di Venezia	Product design
S8	Workshop	Italy	Università Iuav di Venezia	Fashion design
S9	Workshop	Italy	Accademia di Belle Arti	Painting
S10	Workshop	Georgia	Ca' Foscari	Business administration
E1	Interview	Italy	Ca' Foscari and a Venetian opera foundation	Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage
E2	Interview	Italy	Confederal trade union (Venice area)	Youth and public-sector employment and policies for the territory
E3	Interview	Italy	Business / industry representation	Veneto business ecosystems and representative of chamber of commerce system
E4	Interview	Italy	Local government (Venice area)	University, youth and urban-regeneration policies

Source: Author's elaboration on the workshop and interview records.

The student group was deliberately heterogeneous. Seven participants were enrolled at Ca' Foscari, two at the Università Iuav di Venezia and one at the Accademia di Belle Arti. The Conservatorio, the fourth institution of the pole, was not represented, an absence that, as will be seen, is itself part of the findings. Programmes ranged across business administration, global accounting and finance, marketing and communication, comparative international relations, product design, painting and fashion design. Both Italian and international students took part, with nationalities including Italian, Montenegrin, Serbian, Romanian, Kazakh and Georgian. All participants were in the age range typical of bachelor's and master's students.

The four external stakeholders were chosen to occupy four distinct positions on the external map of Chapter 3. E1 is a professional working in the performing arts sector for a major Venetian theatre that collaborates with the university on initiatives for young audiences. E1 commutes to Venice from the mainland every day, which gave the interview a first hand perspective on the condition of the commuter. E2 is a representative of a regional trade union, with responsibility for youth and public sector employment, and speaks from the point of view of the labour market and of organised labour. E3 is a representative of the business community of the Veneto, a graduate of Ca' Foscari with a long career, whose knowledge of both the Venice and the Padua areas allowed a comparison between the two.

E4 is a representative of local government in the Venice area, with responsibility for policies concerning the university, young people and urban regeneration, including the investment programmes under way on the mainland. E4 therefore speaks from the position of the public administration that the other participants repeatedly identified as the holder of the levers they themselves lack and was in a position both to confirm and to answer several of the criticisms raised by the students and by E1. The interview was conducted after the others, which made it possible to put to E4 a number of points that had already emerged, and the value of that exchange is reported in Chapter 5.

4.3 The Interview and Workshop Methodology

The two occasions used the same guide but in different formats. In the workshop, participants worked in pairs loosely grouped by discipline, and each pair first articulated its own experience along the three relationships that structure the guide, listed below.

1. Student and the university
2. Student and the city and mainland
3. University and the city

Then, each group responded to the other pairs, so that shared patterns and points of divergence emerged in the exchange rather than being inferred afterwards. The facilitator introduced each theme, kept the discussion on it, and asked followup questions when a participant raised something the guide had not anticipated.

The interviews with E1, E2, E3 and E4 were individual conversations of approximately fortyfive minutes each, following the same themes adapted to the interviewee's role.

Workshop sessions and interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed with the support of an artificial intelligence transcription tool, declared in the Introduction. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study and of the use that would be made of their contributions. All conversations were held in Italian. The quotations presented in Chapter 5 are the author's translations, and the original wording of every coded citation is reported in Appendix A.

4.4 The Coding Process

The transcripts were analysed following the procedure for inductive qualitative research proposed by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013), often referred to as the Gioia methodology. Its purpose is to combine the richness of qualitative material with a demonstrable chain of evidence, so that a reader can trace every interpretation back to the words of the participants. The procedure has three steps, which were applied in sequence.

The first step was the segmentation of the material into units of meaning. Each transcript was read several times and every passage carrying a distinct, substantive claim about the relationship between students, the university and the city was isolated as a citation and given an identifier. This produced forty-nine citations, eighteen from the workshop and thirty-one from the interviews. The full list is reported in Table A.1 and constitutes the raw data of everything that follows.

The second step was first-order coding. Each citation was labelled with a code that uses the participants' own words and expressions whenever possible.

The third step was second-order coding. The first-order codes were compared with one another across all fourteen participants, looking for similarities and differences, and aggregated into broader concepts that name what a group of related codes is collectively about. Twentyone second-order themes emerged. The themes were then grouped into four aggregate dimensions, which correspond to the four domains in which participants located the obstacles and drivers of integration. Table 4.2 presents the resulting data structure.

Table 4.2. Data structure, from first-order codes to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013).

Aggregate dimension	Second-order theme	Illustrative first-order codes (informant-centric)	Sources
Living in the city	Housing and the rental market	competing with tourists for the same housing short-term rentals vs. student residence forced commuting, island unaffordable public housing by ISEE only services and housing not increased cost of living makes people give up island jobs	S3, S4, S9, S10, E1, E2
	Mobility and transport	inefficient transport despite many lines Venice-Padua slower than Mestre-Padua high-speed rail at Tessera and fast water transport as a lever	E2, E3
	Depopulation and touristification	from 130,000 to barely 50,000 residents a heavily touristified city about 20,000 students domiciled in the city every day without the university the centre would be emptied	E3, E4
	Tourism vs. the real economy	few investments in the real economy (long paybacks, thin margins) too much investment in tourism the university as a bulwark against a hit-and-run tourism economy	E2, E4
	Urban services and quality of life	a question of residence and a question of services hard to count many supermarkets in Venice	E3
Working and staying	Work and professional opportunities	remote work, university oriented to leaving mainland economy absorbs graduates limited opportunities Venetian firms less open than Padua's talent drain, not a training-quality problem	S1, S2, S7, S8, E3
	Salaries and the value structure of the local economy	Italian salaries well below London or Milan an economy built on containing costs, not on added value	E4
	Bureaucracy and residence permits	study-to-work permit conversion as an obstacle course a deadline on a document cancels a job	S5

Aggregate dimension	Second-order theme	Illustrative first-order codes (informant-centric)	Sources
	Rootedness and permanence in the territory	a three-year flow, not a stable population turning into a real resident	S1
	Roles and responsibilities (university, politics, economy)	the university attracts, politics and the economy stabilise “the blanket is short” why should the public administration house students who leave	E2, E3
The university as an institution	Governance and evaluation of the university	rewarded for research and reputation, not teaching logistics opportunistic, image-driven relations with external bodies Rector as professor without political posture resident students not counted public pay scales cannot attract international professors	S6, S10, E1, E4
	Teaching model and competition from online universities	frontal lectures and repetitive slides lecturers not incentivised to innovate online universities risk emptying the classrooms	E4
	Services and student experience	career service perceived as ineffective informal integration, no structured path public/private gap in services spaces as a place to live access to events through the right to study a single access point to libraries and study rooms Venice as a campus city	S5, S9, S10, E4
	Data and student policies	a “data hole”, students absent from studies and policies	S6
	Bureaucracy and institutional collaboration	useless bureaucracy no fixed point of contact on the university side institutions must talk to each other and share where to invest a dedicated figure for territorial relations in the new governance	E1, E4
	Disparity among the institutions of the pole	the four institutions are not equal the municipality talks to Ca' Foscari and IUAV	S9
Civic and cultural life	City life and student involvement	commuters excluded from city life confined to San Giobbe the right-to-study body and city associations for a 360-degree experience beyond the university as an exam factory	E1, E4
	Collaborations with the territory (culture, firms, institutions)	unbalanced university-theatre U35 partnership the university asks only for a discount	E1
	Student representation and associationism	the union as “that thing losers need” new relationship through Futura mancano le istituzioni di mezzo tra giovani e	E2, E4

Aggregate dimension	Second-order theme	Illustrative first-order codes (informant-centric)	Sources
		politica	
	Attractiveness and branding of the territory	everyone comes to Venice Venice as a laboratory, "Milanised" coolness and a sense of community the network is worth as much as the qualification the Venice asset, palaces as a competitive advantage	E3, E4
	Demographic sustainability and generational turnover	urgency, a generational turnover will hit all universities	E1

Source: Author's elaboration on the coded citations of Table A.1, following Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013).

Two remarks on the trustworthiness of the analysis are in order. Coding was carried out by a single researcher, the author, and the risk of reading the material through the categories of the system maps of Chapter 3 was real. To limit it, the first-order codes were written before any attempt to relate the citations to the maps, and the second-order themes were derived from the codes rather than from the loops. The relationship between the themes and the maps is discussed only in sections 5.2 and 5.3, after the findings have been presented in their own terms. Second, the number of participants is small, and the findings are indicative of patterns and relationships rather than representative of the populations from which the participants come.

5. FINDINGS

This chapter presents what emerged from the workshop and the interviews, organised by second-order theme within the four aggregate dimensions of Table 4.2. Each theme is introduced by a general description of what participants said, then illustrated with the verbatim citations from which the description was drawn, so that the reader can see who said what, how it was said, and where the participants agreed and where they did not. The final section draws the themes together, traces the relationships among them, and proposes a diagnosis of the problem and a set of possible solutions grounded in the data.

5.1 Results by Theme

5.1.1 Living in the City

Housing and the rental market. Housing was the most frequently coded theme across both kinds of participants, with six of them contributing to it, and the only theme on which students and external stakeholders converged without qualification. For the students, the core of the problem is not a shortage of rooms but a competition they cannot win. Two students who worked as a pair framed it in terms of the incentives of the owner rather than of any ill will towards students.

S3 “Students compete with tourists for the same housing stock. As long as a flat earns more from a tourist, the student is structurally the second choice.”

S4 “The city rents to a tourist for three nights the room it would give a student for a year, because it pays more. Houses should be taken off the short-term market.”

S9 “I live in Mestre because the island is not affordable, an hour and a half each way with my materials on my back, like many other students at the Accademia.”

S9, the one participant enrolled at the Accademia di Belle Arti, whose campus is on the island, thus described the consequence of losing that competition. S9 added that this condition is common among Accademia students, which turns an individual inconvenience into a structural feature of the school. A different lever was raised by S10, who is active in student representation and knows the municipal instruments. Public housing exists, but it is allocated on income alone.

S10 “Public housing is allocated only based on ISEE, used more as a social buffer than as a lever to keep talent. The dialogue between university and municipality, and between university and region, should be more active.”

The external stakeholders confirmed the picture from the supply side and widened it beyond students. E1, from the cultural sector, judged the growth of services and housing insufficient relative to what the city had been led to expect from the university, and drew a conclusion that no student had drawn.

E1 “Services have not increased enough compared with expectations. More housing for students. Maybe fewer students, but more involved, more active in city life.”

The trade-union representative moved the problem from students to workers. The cost of living on the island, and housing above all, is what makes people give up jobs that exist.

E2 “In the public administration there have been 40,000 unfilled job offers. Many give up working on the island because of the cost of living, housing above all.”

Mobility and transport. Mobility was raised only by two of the four external stakeholders and in the same terms, a city full of transport lines that is nonetheless slow. E2 described the inefficiency of the network even for the shortest and most frequent journey.

E2 “Even though it is full of public transport lines connecting Venice to the hinterland, transport remains highly inefficient, even for those coming from nearby Mestre.”

E3 turned the same observation into a decision rule that explains where people choose to live, and then into an opportunity.

E3 “If it now takes me an hour and a half to go from Venice to Padua, and half an hour from Mestre to Padua, I go to Mestre. [...] The fact that high-speed rail may one day reach Tessera is, for me, a huge opportunity.”

In the interview E3 went further, imagining a system of fast public water transport, not only taxis, connecting points of the lagoon such as Murano and Tessera in about ten minutes. Mobility, in this account, is not a comfort issue but the variable that decides whether living on the island is compatible with working anywhere else, and it is one of the few levers on which the interviewee saw a concrete project already on the horizon.

Depopulation and touristification. E3 provided the longest historical perspective of the study, having studied at Ca' Foscari decades earlier, and set the student question inside the demographic transformation of the city.

E3 “When I started at Ca' Foscari, 130,000 people lived in Venice. Now I think we barely reach 50,000. It is a city that has become heavily touristified, and so the student issue is experienced differently.”

The point is that in a city that has lost more than half its residents and reorganised itself around visitors, the presence of students is not read as a resource to be rooted but as another transient population to be accommodated. This is the external, historical counterpart of what the students described as being the second choice.

E4, who was interviewed last and from inside the public administration, read the same demographic facts in the opposite direction. On this point the two readings diverge more sharply than anywhere else in the study.

E4 “The university is fundamental for the historic centre, above all against depopulation. Ca' Foscari and the IUAV bring in about 20,000 students domiciled in the city every day. Without them, Venice would be emptied.”

The two accounts are not incompatible, because they count different things. E3 counts residents and sees a city that has lost more than half of them. E4 counts daily presence and sees the university as the institution that still supplies it.

Tourism versus the real economy. E2 gave the economic reading of the same transformation, hedging it as an impression rather than a documented claim.

E2 “Few investments in the real economy, because of long timeframes and lower margins. Perhaps too much investment in tourism, which on its own does not allow the real economy of a territory to develop.”

The interviewee could not point to a specific example, and the citation is reported with that caveat. Its value lies in the connection it draws. The same profit differential that makes a tourist preferable to a student in a flat makes tourism preferable to manufacturing or services in an investment decision, and both work against the young graduate who needs a job and a room to stay.

E4 completed the same argument from the other end, assigning the university the role of counterweight within that economy.

E4 “The university was born historically for the needs of commerce. Today it trains thousands of graduates for the private sector and acts as a bridge for research. It is a bulwark for a city economy that would otherwise be dominated only by hit-and-run tourism.”

Where E2 described what the territory invests in, E4 described what the university produces, and together they define what is at stake. If tourism crowds out the real economy, the university is one of the few remaining producers of the competences on which a non-tourist economy would have to rest. As the preceding themes have shown, however, producing those competences is not the same thing as keeping them, and the bulwark holds only for as long as the graduates it forms have somewhere to go.

Urban services and quality of life. Alongside housing, E3 raised the more ordinary question of what the island offers to someone who must live there every day.

E3 “One issue [...] is residence [...] there is also an issue of services [...] honestly, I struggle to count many supermarkets in Venice.”

As shops for tourists replace everyday services, living on the island becomes harder, and this adds to high rents in pushing students like S9 to live on the mainland and commute.

5.1.2 Working and Staying

Work and professional opportunities. Two students from the management and economics track opened the discussion by distinguishing the island from the mainland.

S2 “The mainland does have an economy. In certain fields it hires and keeps its graduates. Whoever lives on the island goes to the mainland to work anyway.”

S1 “For professions that have no market in Venice, you can live in the city and work for a market elsewhere. The university, however, teaches you to leave, not to work remotely from here.”

Repopulating the island requires mainland integration due to an unsustainable local job market. Students such as S2 see the mainland as the place where graduates find work, which further weakens local talent retention.

S7 “For IUAV students the opportunities on the island and on the mainland are limited. Students often move to the main centre of interest, which is Milan, or abroad.”

S8 “Even though their skills could be useful to the territory, students feel undervalued both economically and in terms of reputation, which is typical of the architecture world.”

S7 acknowledged that local opportunities are increasing, but the territory is not perceived as a centre of gravity comparable to Milan. S8 added the reputational dimension, a sense that the competences formed at IUAV are neither paid nor recognised locally. From the business side, E3 confirmed the weakness of the Venetian labour market by comparison with Padua, attributing it to the structure and attitude of local firms.

E3 “The Venetian territory has fewer opportunities for the development of large firms compared with what the Padua territory can have. In the Venice area there is a bit more reluctance than what I perceived in Padua.”

In the interview E3 observed that there are objectively fewer firms in Venice willing to host students for internships or projects, while the Padua area is more fertile and welcoming. E3 was equally clear, however, that the problem is not the quality of what the university produces.

E3 “It is not true that Italian universities do not train well. We create beautiful professional profiles. But then where do these professionals go, if we have no opportunities to keep them here?”

Both a first-year business student and a senior business representative end up saying that the territory forms competences that it does not absorb, and that graduates sometimes move to nearby regions for better conditions.

Salaries and the value structure of the local economy. E3 established that graduates leave because there is nowhere for them to go. E4 named the mechanism that decides where they go instead and did so in terms no other participant used.

E4 “The main problem is Italian salaries, clearly lower than in metropolitan areas such as London or Milan, which pushes graduates to emigrate. The Veneto has built an economic system based on containing costs rather than on added value.”

The second half of the citation moves the argument from the individual firm to the regional model. Because the regional economy competes on cost rather than on added value, E3 found firms reluctant to engage with the university and E2 counted forty thousand unfilled public-sector posts.

Bureaucracy and residence permits. For non-EU students, one constraint sits upstream of every other and was described with unusual precision by S5, who spoke for the pair of international students.

S5 “For non-EU students, converting the study permit into a work permit at graduation is an obstacle course that does not reward merit. You can do everything right and still not get the job because of a deadline on a document.”

The pair recounted a real case in which this had happened to someone they knew. Whatever the city or the university do to retain graduates, for this group the flow is cancelled before it starts, by a rule set at national level that no local actor controls.

Rootedness and permanence in the territory. The theme that gives this thesis its recurring question was formulated by S1 in a single sentence that the workshop returned to several times.

S1 “Ca’ Foscari students are a three-year flow, not a stable population, unless someone turns into a real resident.”

Bringing students to the city does not repopulate it if they leave at graduation. It only produces a continuous turnover of people aged 18 to 25.

Roles and responsibilities among university, politics and the economy. Both E2 and E3 addressed, unprompted, the question of whose job retention is. E3 offered a division of labour.

E3 “The university’s job is to attract, whereas the economy and politics have the job of stabilising. Otherwise it is a cat chasing its own tail.”

In the interview E3 added that the university alone cannot solve the residence problem and that, if jobs and services are missing, the result is a hit-and-run effect in which students stay only for the duration of their studies. The municipality and firms must create productive settlements in or near the city rather than delegating everything to the attractiveness of the university. E2 posed the same question as an unresolved dilemma, using an idiom that was kept as a first-order code.

E2 “It is hard for the burden of student housing to fall on the university, because ‘the blanket is short’ [la coperta è corta]. But at the same time, why should the public administration provide housing services to students if they then go elsewhere to live and work anyway?”

It is clear how the university cannot afford to house students and the public administration does not see why it should house people who leave, while people leave partly because there is no housing. Neither interviewee claimed to know how to break the circle, but both located it precisely.

5.1.3 The University as an Institution

Governance and evaluation of the university. The most pointed critique of the institution came from a student and was echoed, from the outside, by a cultural partner. S6 identified a misalignment between what the university is measured on and what would keep students in Venice.

S6 “The university is measured on what does not keep students here. It is rewarded and evaluated on research and international reputation, not on teaching logistics.”

S6’s pair added that nobody appears accountable for timetables, rooms or tutoring, and course evaluations are collected without visible consequence. S10 raised a further governance point, concerning the figure who represents the university towards the city.

S10 “The Rector is also a professor and does not always have the right posture for institutional relations. Out-of-town students living in Venice are not counted as residents.”

In the workshop S10 explained the composition of the Board of Directors and observed that a large share of the university’s external-facing capacity rests on the four external members appointed by the Rector, so that the diplomatic skill of one person shapes the quality of the dialogue with the Region and the City. E1, who deals with the university as a partner, described its posture in harsher terms. The citation is reported as the perception of one interviewee, not as an established fact.

E1 “An opportunistic relationship on the university’s part with bodies and institutions, often done for image or to obtain certifications, while not really caring about the territory. No relational rapport.”

Whatever its accuracy, the perception matters, because a partner who reads the university’s engagement as instrumental will invest accordingly.

E4 added a constraint on the same institution, seen from the side of what it is permitted to do rather than of what it is rewarded for.

E4 “The university suffers the bureaucratic limits of the public sector. Unlike private institutions, it cannot offer salaries outside the pay scale in order to attract prominent international professors.”

The observation extends S6’s argument of an institution measured on research and international reputation. E4 pointed out that the same institution cannot compete for the academic staff on whom research and international reputation depend. The competition for professors runs on the same wage differential that the previous theme identified for graduates, so the constraint that pushes students towards metropolitan cities operates on the university’s own recruitment as well.

Teaching model and competition from online universities. The second half of E4’s account of the institution concerned what happens in the classroom, and it is the most direct criticism of teaching in the whole material.

E4 “Teaching is too tied to the frontal lecture and to repetitive slides. Lecturers have to be given a reason to innovate, otherwise the online universities, which are already growing fast, risk emptying the classrooms.”

S6 said that the institution is not rewarded for teaching. E4 said that lecturers are therefore not given a reason to change how they teach. The consequence is that the advantage of in-person teaching over remote learning is narrowing. If a lecture can be reconstructed from slides obtained elsewhere, the reason to be in the room has to come from something the room provides better, something worth the commute.

Services and student experience. Four citations from three students concern what the university offers beyond teaching. The first is a request rather than a complaint.

S5 “Better a career service that actually tells you where the opportunities are and builds connections to them.”

The word “actually” carries a judgement on the existing service, which is perceived as generic. What students want is a map of where the jobs are, including the honest admission that many are not in Venice. S10 broadened the comparison to what a university is in students’ lives.

S10 “Italian universities have a daily, teaching and core-business dimension different from universities abroad. Where public services are scarce, private universities fill the gap with more services, quality and a decisive network factor.”

S10 “The right to study should also include access to events and initiatives that would otherwise be out of reach. University spaces should become a place to live, not only to study.”

S10 gave a concrete example of how the right-to-study office can broker access to events at controlled prices, as in the case of an initiative at the city’s opera house for students, with the university acting as intermediary. The same office is currently perceived as a channel for scholarships and little else. The Accademia student described the opposite situation, in which integration happens but without any institutional support.

S9 “Some students manage to get into the city’s art scene, even in the long run, but there is no structured path. It is all left to individual initiative.”

Long-term residence in the city's cultural life is achievable, but happens only despite the institution, not through it.

What the students described as a gap, E4 described as a programme already under way.

E4 "The library and study-room system should be unified across the university, the municipality and the private foundations, with a single point of access for students. The aim is to turn Venice into a real campus city, offering not only classrooms but sport, cultural events and integration with the city."

The convergence with S10 is close. A student asked for university spaces that can be lived in and not only studied in. A public administrator, interviewed separately and without knowledge of that request, proposed exactly this under the name of the campus city. E4 cited investments already completed in study spaces as evidence that the direction is not hypothetical, and the proposal is notable for what it does not require, since it asks the three owners of existing facilities to share access rather than asking any of them to build. What separates the two accounts is therefore not the objective but the visibility of it. No student described such a programme, which suggests that an intention formed on their behalf has not yet reached the constituency it concerns, and that is itself consistent with the data gap S6 identified.

Data and student policies. One citation, from S6, names a gap that the rest of the material repeatedly illustrates.

S6 "There is a data hole. Students are not considered in the studies and policies meant to improve the situation."

Students, in this view, are not treated as a population worth knowing, how many there are, where they live, how many stay. The point returns in S10's remark that resident students are not counted as residents.

Bureaucracy and institutional collaboration. E1 described the practical side of collaborating with the university from outside.

E1 "Useless bureaucracy. Collaborating with other bodies and institutions is very complex. No fixed point of reference has been identified to communicate with on the Ca' Foscari side."

The interviewee's advice was to return to what E1 called organisational essentialism, fewer steps and one stable interlocutor. The absence of a fixed contact person means that every initiative starts from scratch, which raises the cost of partnership for the external actor and, over time, lowers its willingness to engage.

E4 located the same difficulty one level higher, in the absence of a shared view of what the two institutions are trying to achieve.

E4 "The main challenge is for the institutions, the municipality and the university, to talk to each other more and to share a common vision of where to invest."

Because the fourth interview took place after the others, it was possible to put E1's complaint to E4 directly. The answer both confirmed it and reported a remedy.

E4 “A structured contact for external relations has historically been missing, but the university’s new governance provides for a figure dedicated to relations with the territory.”

E1 described the cost of having no stable interlocutor. E4, speaking from the public side, agreed that the figure had never existed and reported that it is being created. This confirmation establishes that the difficulty E1 experienced was structural rather than a failure of individual goodwill.

Disparity among the institutions of the pole. S9 introduced a theme that the design students confirmed from their own side and that has consequences for the city’s cultural life.

S9 “The four institutions of the pole are not equal. When the municipality talks to the universities, it talks to Ca’ Foscari and IUAV, while the Accademia and the Conservatorio remain under-considered.”

Students at the Accademia perceive this acutely, S9 said, and the fact that no Conservatorio student took part in the workshop is consistent with it. The asymmetry is striking because the Accademia and the Conservatorio are the institutions most naturally connected to the city’s artistic and musical production, and yet they are the ones least present at the table where the city and the universities talk.

5.1.4 Civic and Cultural Life

City life and student involvement. E1, a commuter, described the low participation of commuting students in the cultural activities on offer as partly the university’s responsibility.

E1 “Commuters are not involved in the activities on offer. If a commuter arrives but has to stay only at San Giobbe, he does not experience the rest of the city.”

E1 offered personal experience as counterevidence that a commuter can take part in everything the theatre proposes, so the barrier is motivation and organisation rather than distance. A student whose university day is confined to one satellite campus never encounters the city that the third mission is supposed to connect him to.

E4 approached the same problem from the side of what the city could offer rather than of who fails to take part.

E4 “It is important to work with the regional right-to-study body and with the city’s associations, sporting and cultural, so that students can have a 360-degree experience in Venice, from sailing courses to evenings at the theatre, going beyond the idea of the university as an exam factory.”

The word *esamificio*, exam factory, is E4’s own and was kept as a first-order code because no paraphrase carries the same judgement. It names from the inside the condition E1 described from the outside. A student whose relationship with the institution is exhausted by examinations has no reason to remain in the city after the last lecture of the day, and the commuter’s ten-minute dash for the train is the behaviour that condition produces. E4’s remedy is a modest one. It does not require the university to build or to fund anything, only to act as an intermediary towards organisations that already exist, which is the same mechanism S10 described for the right-to-study office and the same one E1 was asking for in the case of the theatre.

Collaborations with the territory. The same interviewee provided the study’s only detailed account of a specific partnership between the university and a cultural institution through an accessible-pricing

initiative for audiences under thirty-five, whose aim was to make attending the theatre an ordinary social activity for future generations.

E1 “U35 case [theatre name omitted], accessible prices to grow the fan base in the long term. The university only asks for a discount for its students, and the theatre gets nothing in return.”

E1 judged the initiative sustainable in cost terms but conditional on both parties sharing a purpose. The objectives, in E1’s words, must be aligned. In the case described they were not, because the university’s contribution to the negotiation was limited to asking for a price, while the theatre bore the cost and received no visible return. This is the clearest illustration in the material of what the previous theme called an opportunistic relationship, and it shows how a partnership that should reinforce both sides can fail to reinforce either.

Student representation and associationism. E2 described the relationship between organised labour and students as historically absent, in language that was kept verbatim as a first-order code because of its bluntness.

E2 “The union is not considered a primary actor able to affect the territory. It is seen as ‘that thing losers need’ [quella cosa di cui gli sfigati hanno bisogno].”

E2 “Young people’s interest is low. This year, with the change in the student association in charge (Futura), a relationship was established that led to greater involvement.”

The second citation records a change, and its cause is a student list that engaged the union, the municipality and the university through institutional channels rather than in opposition to them. S10 made the same point from the student side, noting that the list had obtained results because it had adopted an institutional posture towards the city and the university, and that students who want a relationship with the city must treat it with respect. The lesson, drawn independently by a union official and a student representative, is that influence flows through institutional channels and that the students best able to shape their environment are those who engage it as partners.

E4 named the same absence in general terms, from the side of the institutions rather than of the students.

E4 “The intermediate institutions that connect young people with politics are completely missing. And by politics I do not mean only national politics, but also its most local form, such as university politics at Ca’ Foscari. They are the instrument through which young people can make their ideas heard and influence their own paths.”

E4 locates the deficit in the supply of bodies rather than in the willingness of students, which E2 had already suggested from the union side. It also places university politics on the same footing as national politics, so that the internal representation of Ca’ Foscari, the Joint Committees and the student lists, becomes the first of the intermediate institutions rather than a separate administrative body.

Attractiveness and branding of the territory. E3 closed the interview with the most expansive framing in the material.

E3 “Venice has an issue, everyone comes to Venice. Venice could really be a laboratory. It could be very ‘Milanised’ from these points of view.”

The interviewee's point is that the city's exceptional capacity to attract, the same capacity that produces overtourism, could be redirected into a deliberate policy of attractiveness for young residents, on the model of what Milan has done, if the territory chose to pursue it. E3 also judged that Ca' Foscari's current policies to develop new student settlements go in the right direction, and that the missing piece is not the university's effort but the city's.

E4 gave the same intuition a sharper and less flattering formulation, and located what Venice lacks in the experience rather than in the infrastructure.

E4 "The big universities are good at creating an ecosystem in which the student wants to stay, build a network, go to the alumni dinners. In Venice and in the Veneto this is missing. There is little storytelling and students live the university at a distance. The culture has to change, because the network of contacts is worth as much as the qualification itself."

E4 "The Venice asset should be exploited better. The city's palaces can host meetings, dinners and events of the highest level that an online or peripheral university could never offer, and that is what justifies the value of living and studying in person."

E4 treats Venice as the one competitive advantage the university holds against both the online alternative and the peripheral campus, on the condition that it is deliberately used.

Demographic sustainability and generational turnover. Finally, E1 introduced a time constraint that no other participant mentioned but that conditions all the others.

E1 "We need to move as soon as possible, in view of the generational turnover that will come in not many years and will hit all universities, state and private alike."

Combined with E3's figure of a resident population that has fallen from 130,000 to about 50,000, the window in which the system can still convert students into residents is, in the perception of these stakeholders, narrow and closing.

5.2 Relations among Themes, Diagnosis and Possible Solutions

5.2.1 How the Themes Relate to One Another

The twenty-one themes were presented separately for clarity, but the participants did not experience them separately. Reading the citations across themes, a small number of relationships recur, and they can be traced with the same logic of causal links used in the system maps of Chapter 3. Figure 5.1 draws them. The paragraphs that follow explain each link with reference to the citations that support it.

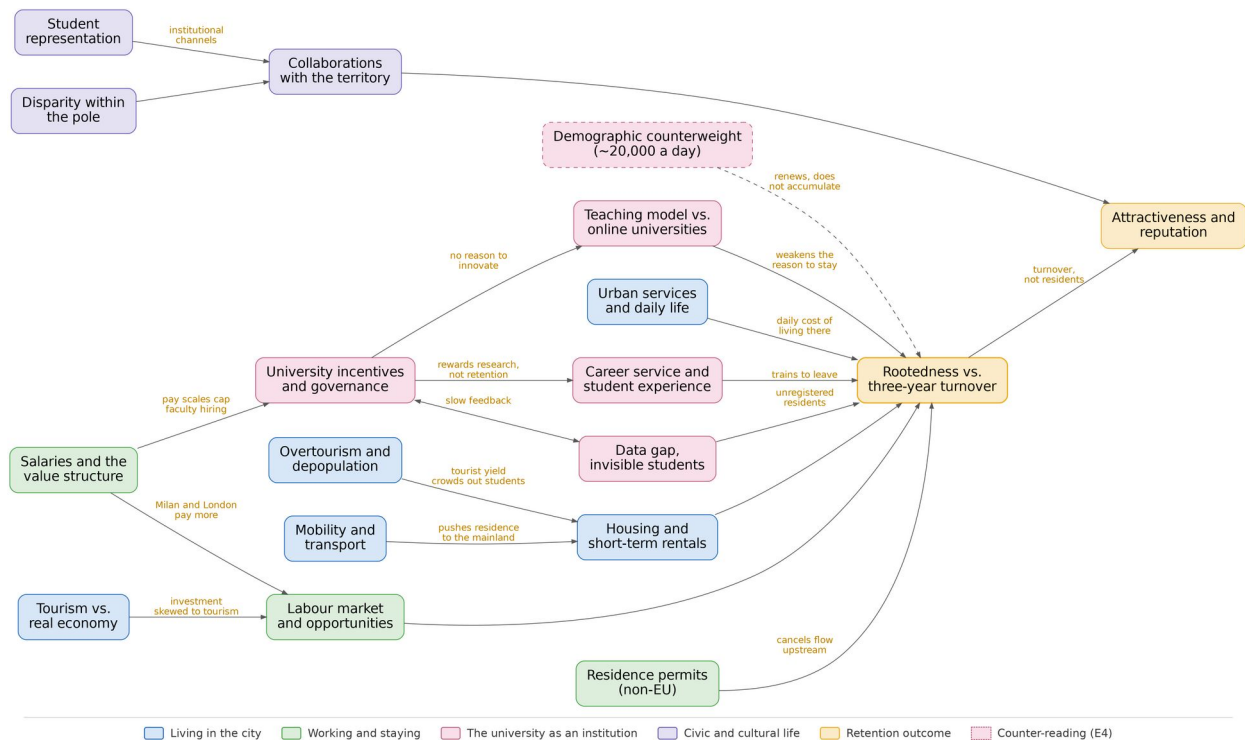


Figure 5.1. Relationships among the second-order themes as they emerge from the citations. Arrows read as “contributes to.” Labels summarise the mechanism named by the participants. The dashed link marks the counter-reading discussed at the end of this section.

Source: Author’s elaboration on the coded citations of the workshop and interviews (Table A.1).

The first chain links tourism, housing and residence. Depopulation and touristification (E3) have reorganised the city around visitors, and in the housing market this reorganisation has a precise mechanism. The same room earns more from a tourist than from a student, so the student is structurally the second choice (S3, S4), and those with the least to spend are pushed off the island altogether (S9). The resulting cost of living discourages workers as well as students from settling there (E2). The same yield logic reappears in investment decisions, where tourism crowds out the real economy (E2), so that the island offers few jobs (S2, S7, E3) and even those who manage to live there tend to work on the mainland. Housing and work, taken together, decide whether a student becomes a resident or remains part of what S1 called a three-year flow, and that conversion is the outcome the whole study is concerned with.

The second chain passes through the university. The institution is evaluated on research and international reputation rather than on teaching logistics or on where its graduates end up (S6). A career service that stays generic (S5) and a formation oriented to leaving rather than to working from Venice in a distributed way (S1) are consequences of that evaluation regime, and they feed the same flow from the other side. A further link concerns information. Students are absent from the data and policies that concern them (S6), and out-of-town students who live in Venice are not counted as residents (S10). The university and the city therefore discover their retention problem only years later, once a cohort has already left. Feedback between governance and data is slow in both directions.

The third chain concerns civic and cultural life. The unequal weight of the four institutions of the pole (S9) keeps the Accademia and the Conservatorio away from the table where the city and the universities meet, and it does so precisely on the cultural production to which those two institutions are closest. The collaborations that do exist can be unbalanced (E1, the theatre partnership) or costly in

bureaucratic terms (E1), and students engage the city effectively only through institutional channels (E2, S10). These links determine how much of the university's presence the city reads as a contribution rather than a burden, which is to say the city's reputation as a place where a young person can stay.

A fourth chain, which the last interview added, runs underneath the first two. Salaries in the Veneto sit well below those of the metropolitan labour markets competing for the same graduates (E4), which is why the move to Milan that S7 described has a destination and not only an origin. The chain closes on the university itself, because public pay scales prevent it from competing for international faculty (E4), and faculty are the input to the research reputation on which the institution is evaluated. A wage differential that begins as a private reason to leave therefore ends as an institutional constraint on the quality of what is left behind.

Two further links lie outside these chains but condition all of them. Mobility (E2, E3) pushes residence towards the mainland whatever the housing policy, and residence permits (S5) cancel, for non-EU graduates, the flow that every other lever is trying to retain. Both are governed by actors that neither the university nor the municipality controls, the transport system and the State, and for this reason they appear at the edges of Figure 5.1.

5.2.2 Findings

The Venetian university system attracts but does not retain, as it produces a flow of well-educated students who then leave. The obstacles that participants stated are the joint effect of three sets of incentives that do not align.

The market rewards the tourist over the resident

The university is rewarded for research and reputation, outputs that are indifferent to where its graduates settle

The public administration, which alone holds the levers of housing regulation, registration and mobility, sees no reason to invest in people it expects to leave

Each actor behaves rationally given its incentives, and the outcome is the circle that E3 described as a cat chasing its own tail and that E2, from the inside, described as a blanket that is too short.

The last interview adds a fourth misalignment beneath the three. The regional economy is built on containing costs rather than on adding value (E4), so it does not bid for the graduates the university forms, and the salaries it offers cannot match the metropolitan markets that do. This is what makes the other three misalignments so difficult to correct locally. A housing rule, a career service or a simpler registration procedure changes the cost of staying. None of them changes what staying pays.

Students' complaints concerned services and orientation rather than teaching content. Moreover, all interviewees presuppose a desire to stay that the system fails to accommodate.

The balancing teaching quality loop does not close because no one owns teaching logistics. The reinforcing reputation loop runs on a measure of employability that has no geography. The external map, for its part, needs two nodes it did not have, the short-term rental market and the residence-

permit regime, together with a disaggregation of the university node into the four institutions of the pole. These are the points at which participants, without knowing the maps, located the obstacles. Section 5.3 develops these revisions and classifies them as leverage points.

5.2.3 Possible Solutions

The solutions proposed here are limited to those that participants themselves suggested or that follow directly from the relationships traced above, and none requires resources that the data do not indicate are available. They are grouped by the actor who holds the relevant lever, since the diagnosis shows that no single actor can act alone.

For the municipality and the Region. The first and most direct lever is the regulation of the short-term rental market, which S3 and S4 identified as the only remedy that does not depend on the goodwill of owners, and which E2's account of unfilled public-sector jobs shows would benefit workers as much as students.

The second is a revision of the criteria for public housing. S10 observed that allocation by income alone selects for need but not for the likelihood of rooting. Pairing the ISEE criterion with criteria that reward stable employment and a declared intention to remain would allow the subsidy to turn presence into residence rather than reproduce turnover.

The third is a simpler residency registration for out-of-town students. This would give them access to the services the city reserves for residents, including the dedicated medical service that S10 cited as a model, and it would make them count in the very data on which the city's decline is measured.

The fourth concerns mobility. E3's high-speed link at Tessera and a fast public water-transport network belong to a longer horizon, but the reorganisation of existing lines that E2 asked for does not.

For the university. Three changes lie entirely within the institution's authority. The first is to give teaching logistics an owner and to make course evaluations consequential, so that the loop S6 described as measured on the wrong things closes on something students can see. The second is to reorient the career service in the direction S5 asked for, with an honest map of where opportunities are, including the mainland, remote work for markets elsewhere and the professions that do have a market in Venice, together with concrete connections to them. The third is to treat the right to study as S10 described it, as a portfolio that includes access to the city's cultural life at controlled prices and university spaces that can be lived in, not only studied in.

Three further proposals came from the last interview and lie in the same space. The first is to unify access to study spaces across the university, the municipality and the private foundations, so that the investments already made in libraries and reading rooms can be reached through a single door (E4). This costs nothing to build and answers directly what S10 asked for. The second is to give the new figure for relations with the territory that E4 announced the authority to commit the institution, so that it resolves the difficulty E1 described rather than adding a further step to it. The third is to treat teaching as something lecturers can be given a reason to change (E4), since an in-person offer that reproduces what a screen already provides will not hold students in the room, still less in the city.

Towards external partners, E1's request is inexpensive and precise. It amounts to one stable contact person, fewer procedural steps and partnerships in which the university brings something to the table

beyond a request for a discount, so that initiatives like the theatre's pricing scheme serve the objectives of both parties.

For the university pole as a whole. The asymmetry that S9 described can be corrected by the City simply by widening the table. Including the Accademia and the Conservatorio in the dialogue on the city's cultural production would connect the two institutions most relevant to it and would give their students the structured path into the city's artistic life that S9 said does not exist. The four institutions could also present themselves jointly on the issues they share, housing, registration and mobility, on which their students are in the same position.

For students. The one solution the data attribute to students themselves concerns the mode of engagement. The precedent of a student list that obtained results by taking an institutional stance towards the municipality and the university (E2, S10) indicates that influence flows through institutional channels. Representation, including the relationship with organised labour that E2 saw beginning, is the way in which students become actors in the city rather than its temporary users.

For the university and the city together. E4's campus-city proposal is the one solution that requires the two to act as a single actor, with sport, cultural events and study spaces brokered through the regional right-to-study body and the city's associations, using buildings and organisations that already exist. Its most specific form is what E4 called the Venice asset, the use of the city's palaces for occasions that no online or peripheral institution can match. This is also the only proposal that addresses the sense of belonging which E4 and S10 independently identified as decisive, and which no housing rule and no career service can produce.

Beyond local control. Finally, the residence-permit constraint described by S5 cannot be removed locally. The university can reduce friction at the margin, through its International Office, by anticipating the deadlines at which a graduate's permit and job offer must coincide. The territory can make the case, through the Region, for a conversion procedure that rewards merit. The constraint is included here because a set of solutions that omitted it would overstate what Venice can achieve on its own for the international students it has chosen to attract.

The common thread of these proposals is that they act on rules, information and the structure of who talks to whom, rather than on budgets. It is also consistent with the urgency that E1 and E3 attached to the problem. The generational turnover ahead will not wait for the system to learn about its retention problem through the slow feedback that currently connects the university, the city and the students who pass between them.

5.3 From Findings to Leverage Points: Revising the System Maps

This section traces each finding back to the causal-loop diagrams from Chapter 3 and asks what the diagrams need to change to account for it. The exercise serves two purposes. Analytically, it separates findings that simply confirm a relationship already in the model from those that qualify or extend it. Practically, it points to where an intervention would matter most, which is the question the strategic initiatives of Chapter 7 have to answer.

For the second purpose, the analysis uses Meadows' idea of leverage points, which are the places in a system where a small change produces a large change in behaviour. Meadows ranks these from least

to most effective. Parameters such as budgets and prices are at the bottom, followed by the size of buffers, the structure of stocks and flows, and the length of delays. Above them come the strength of balancing loops, the gain of reinforcing loops and the structure of information flows. The rules of the system, the power to change its structure and its goals are at the top. According to Meadows, intuition tends to push interventions toward the bottom of the list, where they are visible and easy, while the behaviour of the system is decided at the top. Six revisions follow from the findings, two concerning the internal map, three the external map, and one that cuts across both. They are presented in turn and summarised in Table 5.1.

5.3.1 Revisions to the Internal Map

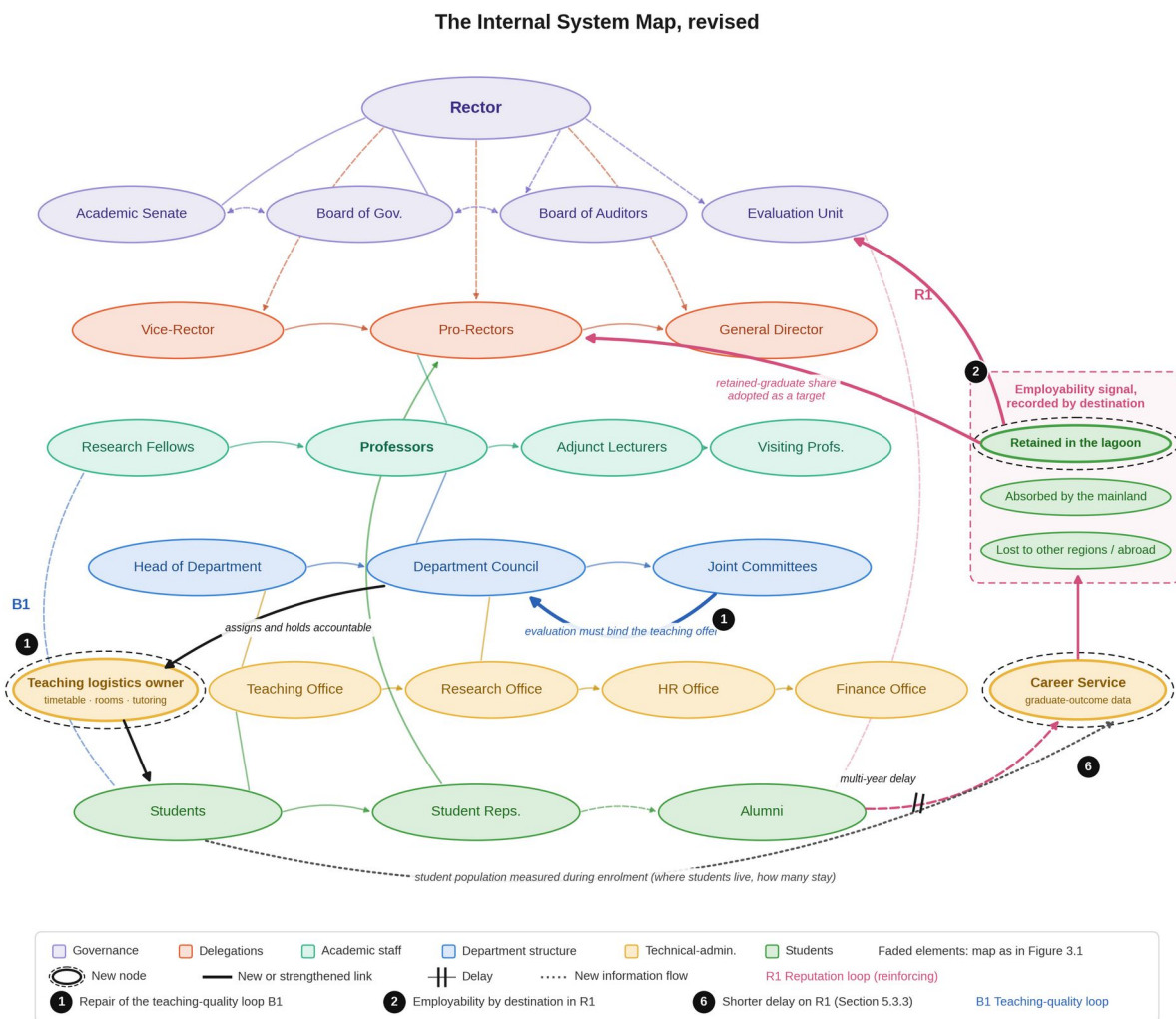


Figure 5.2. The internal system map revised according to Section 5.3, showing revisions 1 and 2 (Section 5.3.1) and the delay on the reputation loop R1 (revision 6, Section 5.3.3).

Source: Author's elaboration on Figure 3.1 and on the workshop findings.

The first revision concerns the balancing teaching-quality loop B1 of the internal map (Figure 5.2). Chapter 3 identified the link from the Joint Committees to the Department Council as the point where the loop either closes or fails, and the workshop confirmed from the student side that it does not close. Course evaluations are collected, but nothing visibly changes afterwards, and no office is clearly responsible for timetabling, rooms or tutoring. No new node is needed for this, since the problem lies

in the strength of a link that already exists. The revision therefore treats the link between the Joint Committees and the Department Council as binding, so that a negative evaluation has a consequence for the teaching offer. Since the workshop linked the missing accountability to a missing function, the revision also adds an owner of teaching logistics to the technical and administrative layer of the map. This role is missing today because, as one participant put it, the institution is rewarded for research while nobody checks whether the timetable works. In Meadows' terms this is an intervention on the strength of a balancing loop and on the information flow that feeds it. It is a lever of middle depth, and it lies fully within the university's own authority.

The second revision concerns the reinforcing reputation loop R1 of the internal map. The central finding of the workshop, that the university forms students to leave, is compatible with R1, but it shows that R1 is measured on an aggregate that hides the variable this thesis is interested in. Graduate employability, the signal that feeds reputation, is recorded today without any geographical information. A graduate who works in Milan and one who works in Marghera count the same, and both count the same as a graduate who stayed on the island. The revision divides the employability signal into at least three parts, namely graduates retained in the lagoon, graduates absorbed by the mainland and graduates who move to other regions or abroad. The structure of the loop stays the same, but the loop can now be used to steer retention, which is impossible as long as its gain does not respond to it. The Rectorate and the Pro-Rectors are involved, since they decide what the institution measures itself against, together with the Career Service, which produces the data. This is an intervention on information flows. If the share of retained graduates were then adopted as a target, it would become an intervention on the goals of the system, one of the highest leverage points.

5.3.2 Revisions to the External Map

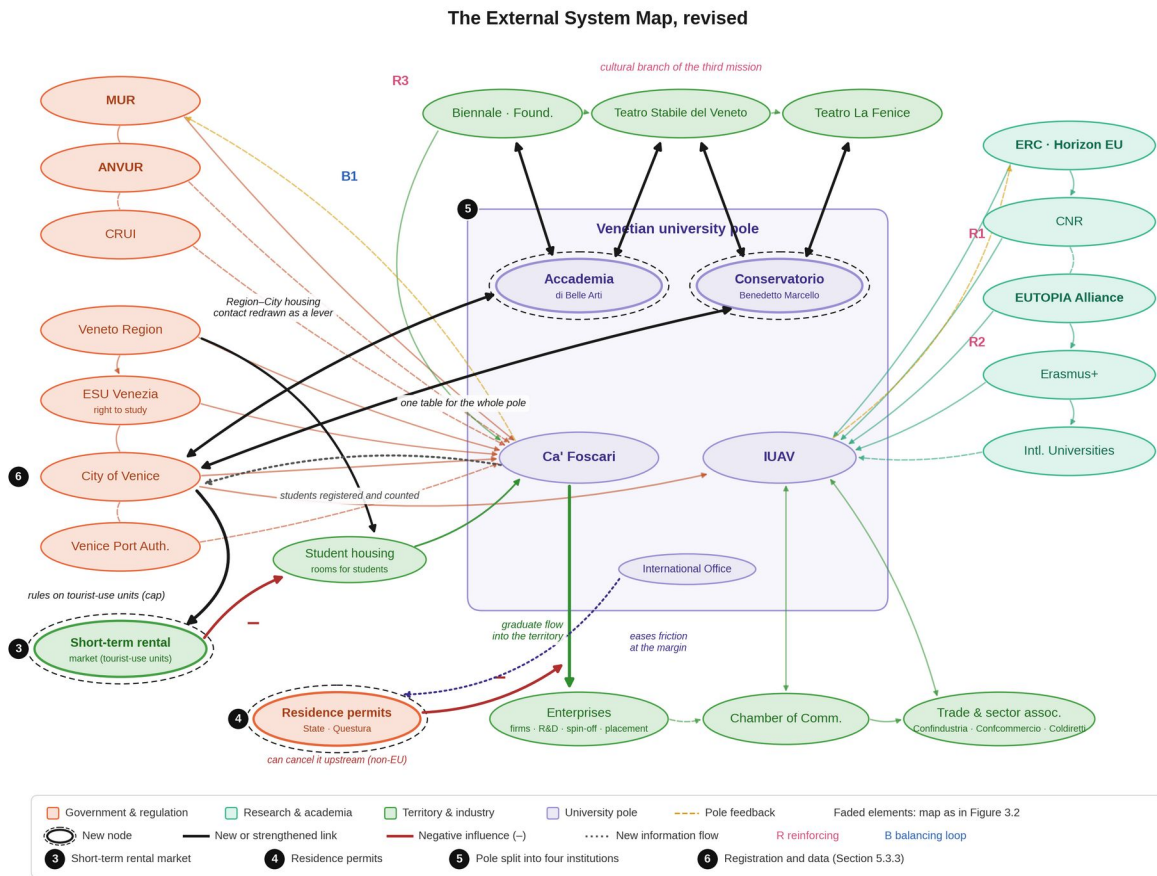


Figure 5.3. The external system map revised according to Section 5.3, showing revisions 3 to 5 (Section 5.3.2) and the registration of students (revision 6, Section 5.3.3).

Source: Author's elaboration on Figure 3.2 and on the workshop findings.

Two findings require the external map (Figure 5.3) to gain nodes it does not currently have, and a third requires it to split a node it currently treats as one.

The first new node is the short-term rental market. Chapter 3 described student housing as a point of contact between the Veneto Region, which funds ESU Venezia, and the City of Venice. The workshop showed that this view is incomplete, because students compete with tourists for the same units and lose, since a room earns more in three tourist nights than in a student year. The revision adds the tourist rental market as a node in the territory and industry zone and turns the housing contact between Region and City into a possible lever. Students asked for rules that take units out of the short-term market, without relying on the goodwill of owners. This is an intervention on the rules of the system, high in Meadows' ranking. It costs little to the public budget but goes against tourist rent, so it is mainly a political decision. The City of Venice holds the lever, while ESU Venezia and the universities would benefit from it.

The second new node is residence permits. Non-EU graduates can lose a job offer because of a document deadline, so part of the graduate flow is lost before any local actor can retain it. The revision adds a residence-permits node in the government and regulation zone and links it to the graduate flow. This is the only revision whose lever lies outside local control, since the rule is set by the State and

applied by the Questura, and the university's International Office can only reduce friction at the margin. The node is still needed, because without it the map would overstate what local actors can achieve.

The third revision splits the university node. Chapter 3 treated the university as a single actor in the third-mission loop R3, but the workshop showed that the four institutions of the pole do not have the same weight in the dialogue with the city. The municipality engages mainly Ca' Foscari and IUAV, while the Accademia di Belle Arti and the Conservatorio receive less attention, even though cultural engagement with the Biennale, the theatres and the musical life of the lagoon depends mostly on them. The revision divides the university node into the four institutions and links the Accademia and the Conservatorio to cultural production. This is an intervention on the structure of the system, and the City could carry it out by widening the table at which it meets the pole.

5.3.3 The Delay in the Reputation Loop

The final revision concerns both maps and deals with time. In the internal map, the reinforcing loop R1 runs from quality to employability, reputation and attraction, and every step is slow. A cohort needs three years to graduate, employment data arrive a year later and reputation changes over several ranking cycles. According to Meadows, a system cannot steer a loop with such a long delay, because the conditions have already changed when the signal returns. Two workshop findings concern this delay. Students feel absent from the studies and policies that concern them, and those who live in Venice without registering as residents do not appear in the population count, so the city looks emptier than it is.

The revision shortens the delay by measuring the student population directly, meaning how many students there are, where they live and how many stay after graduation. The reputation loop would then receive a signal years earlier than graduate surveys allow. Easier residency registration helps in the same way, because registered students appear in the municipal data. The actors involved are the university's data and planning office and the registry office of the City of Venice. In Meadows' ranking, delays sit above parameters and below rules and goals. This revision is also a precondition for the second internal revision, since retained graduates cannot be measured without knowing where students live during their studies.

5.3.4 Reading the Revisions as Leverage Points

Table 5.1. Revisions to the internal and external system maps derived from the student workshop, classified by leverage point (Meadows, 1999; 2008).

Workshop finding (section)	Map element affected	Proposed revision	Actors implicated	Leverage point (Meadows)
Course evaluations collected but not acted upon; no owner of teaching logistics (5.1.3)	Internal map, loop B1	Strengthen the Joint Committees → Department Council link so that the evaluation signal binds the teaching offer; add an explicit owner of teaching logistics (timetables, rooms, tutoring)	Joint Committees; Department Council; a teaching-logistics office	Strength of a balancing loop; information flows
“The university	Internal map, loop R1	Split the employability	Rectorate / Pro-	Information

forms students to leave” (5.1.2)		signal by geography: graduates retained in the lagoon vs. absorbed by the mainland vs. lost to other regions	Rectors; Career Service	flows; system goals
Students compete with tourists for the same housing units (5.1.1)	External map, Region–City housing contact point	Add the node “short-term rental market / tourism”; convert the Region–City contact point from administrative reconciliation into an active regulatory lever	City of Venice; ESU Venezia; the universities	Rules of the system
Study-to-work permit conversion fails on deadlines, not merit (5.1.2)	External map, government/regulation zone	Add the node “residence permits”, linked to the graduate flow returned to the territory, which for non-EU graduates is cancelled upstream	State / Questura; International Office	Rules of the system (outside local control)
The four institutions of the pole are not equals; Accademia and Conservatorio excluded from the city's dialogue (5.1.3)	External map, loop R3	Disaggregate the “university” node into the four institutions; connect Accademia and Conservatorio to the cultural-production cycle (Biennale, public engagement)	Accademia; Conservatorio; City of Venice	Structure of the system
Students absent from data and policy; resident students not counted as residents (4.4.1, 4.4.2)	Internal and external maps, loop R1 (delay)	Measure the student population itself (how many, where they live, how many stay), not only graduates; ease residency registration	University data / planning office; City of Venice	Length of delays; information flows

Source: Author’s elaboration on the revisions discussed in Sections 5.3.1–5.3.3.

Table 5.1 shows that none of the revisions changes a parameter. Participants asked for a rule on rentals, an owner for teaching logistics, a new measure of success, a wider table for the pole and better data, and none of them asked for more money, scholarships or lower fees. The levers are held by different actors. The university controls the repair of loop B1 and the employability metric, the City controls the rental rule and the widening of the pole, the data revision is shared between the two, and residence permits depend on the State. The revisions are also linked. The new employability metric needs better data first, the housing lever works only if permits do not cancel the graduates it retains, and widening the pole brings the Accademia and the Conservatorio into loop R3.

Chapter 6 looks at how other university cities have used similar levers, and Chapter 7 turns the six revisions into strategic initiatives.

6. INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARK

The following chapter presents ten cases from different national contexts, selected to examine how a given retention mechanism performs once it is actually implemented. Each case is read with that objective in mind, and each concludes with an explicit comparison to Venice, distinguishing the elements that could reasonably be transferred from those that could not.

6.1 Purpose and Method

The selection of cases follows directly from the findings of Chapter 5, which identified nine recurring problems, drawn both from the students' perspective and from the interviews with external stakeholders. Read together, these problems explain why the student flow does not settle into permanent residence in the city, and they can be organised into four families.

The first group concerns the pressure that tourism exerts on the housing stock and on the local economy. Students compete directly with the short-term rental market for available units, in a city whose resident population continues to shrink as its economy grows more dependent on tourism.

The second group concerns the passage from study to employment. Students experience the university as an institution that prepares them to leave rather than to remain, non-EU graduates face structural obstacles in transitioning into local employment, and the university itself is evaluated on criteria that are disconnected from whether its graduates actually stay.

The third group concerns the relationship between presence and residence. A significant share of students live in Venice without registering as residents, remaining invisible to the city's own data, while the island lacks an autonomous local economy capable of sustaining residence beyond the university itself.

The fourth group concerns governance. The relationship between the university and the territory is widely perceived as discontinuous and dependent on individual initiative rather than on institutional structure, and the four institutions that make up the university pole do not hold an equal standing in their dialogue with the city.

The chapter is organised around these rather than by geography, so that each cluster of cases can be read against the corresponding findings of Chapter 5. Housing pressure is discussed in Section 6.2, the retention of graduates in Section 6.3, the conversion of presence into residence in Section 6.4, and the governance of the university–territory relationship in Section 6.5.

Ten initiatives were selected according to following criteria:

- (a) Each case had to address at least one of the nine problems.
- (b) The sample had to cover different institutional contexts, so Europe, North America, South America and Africa are represented by at least two cases each and Asia by one. This variety helps separate what depends on context from what is transferable.
- (c) Each case had to be documented by at least one institutional source, such as a public authority, a development or financial institution or a university.

Each case is described with the same framework:

- (a) The initiative and how it addressed the problem

- (b) Its promoters and the actors involved
- (c) The resources it employed
- (d) Expected versus achieved results
- (e) A comparison with Venice identifying similarities, differences, transferable elements and critical issues

A section closing each group of cases then reads the cases together and draws the lesson they share. Table 6.1 lists the cases, the country and the Venetian problem each one addresses.

Table 6.1. Benchmark cases and Venetian problems addressed.

Section	Case	Country	Problem addressed
6.2.1	Barcelona – tourist-flat phase-out <i>Barcelona, Catalonia</i>	Spain	Housing vs short-term rentals
6.2.2	SHIP – Student Housing Infrastructure Programme <i>National programme, 26 universities and 50 TVET colleges</i>	South Africa	Student housing supply
6.3.1	Study & Work <i>Ten regional networks across several Länder</i>	Germany	Retention of international graduates
6.3.2	Study and Stay / Atlantic Immigration Pilot <i>Nova Scotia and the Atlantic provinces</i>	Canada	Retention; non-EU transition
6.3.3	Wuhan graduate retention plan <i>Wuhan, Hubei</i>	China	Graduate retention; registration
6.4.1	Aktion Heimvorteil <i>Heidelberg, Baden-Württemberg</i>	Germany	Students not registered as residents
6.4.2	Tulsa Remote <i>Tulsa, Oklahoma</i>	USA	Living in the city, working elsewhere
6.5.1	CUEE – Comité Universidad Empresa Estado <i>Medellín, Antioquia</i>	Colombia	University–territory governance
6.6.1	Porto Digital <i>Recife, Pernambuco (Bairro do Recife)</i>	Brazil	Historic centre without an economy
6.6.2	CMU-Africa <i>Kigali</i>	Rwanda	University as territorial anchor

Source: Author's elaboration on the cases presented in Sections 6.2–6.6.

A final point of method concerns the quality of the evidence as the cases are not equally well documented. Some rest on independent academic evaluations, others on data reported by the promoters themselves or on official statistics reconstructed by researchers. The comparison with Venice takes this into account, and Section 6.7 returns to it.

6.2 Housing Pressure and the Short-Term Rental Market

Housing was the most frequently recorded finding of the whole empirical research.

A housing policy for students can act on this problem in two ways. It can reduce the competing use, so that existing dwellings return to residents, or it can add supply dedicated to students.

The two cases in this section illustrate one lever each. Barcelona shows what regulation of the competing use can do, and South Africa shows what it takes to build new student housing at scale.

6.2.1 Barcelona: Phasing Out Tourist-Use Flats

The initiative: Barcelona regulates tourist accommodation through a special urban plan, the PEUAT, whose declared aims are to reduce tourist pressure and to protect the well-being of residents. Catalan Decree Law 3/2023 applies to municipalities in areas of high residential market pressure, including Barcelona. It requires them to state in their urban plans how many tourist flats they want and where (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2023).

Barcelona has chosen to allow none (Barcelona Metròpolis, 2026). The City Council will not renew the roughly 10,000 tourist-flat licences that expire in 2028, with the explicit goal of returning these units to the long-term rental market (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.-a, n.d.-b and 2024).

Promoters and actors: The measure was announced by Mayor Jaume Collboni. It rests on a division of competences between two levels of government. The regional government set the legal framework, and the municipality decides how many tourist flats to allow within it (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2024). This division matters for the comparison with Venice, because it shows that the decisive choice was local even though the enabling rule was regional.

Resources: The policy is regulatory rather than financial, so its main cost lies in enforcement. According to the City Council, illegal holiday lets have declined significantly thanks to inspection activity, with about three hundred complaints lodged every month (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2024).

Expected and achieved results: The final outcome cannot yet be assessed, since the licences expire in 2028. The rationale of the measure, however, is supported by independent evidence. Using detailed data on rents and prices, Garcia-López et al. (2020) estimate that Airbnb activity raised rents by 1.9% and transaction prices by 4.6% in the average neighbourhood of Barcelona.

The effects were considerably larger in the neighbourhoods where listings are most concentrated. The problem the policy addresses is therefore well measured, even if the effect of the policy itself is not yet observable.

Comparison with Venice: The two cities share a historic core under intense tourist demand. They differ in their economic base. Barcelona has a large and diversified non-tourist economy, whereas the Venetian island has no economy of its own.

For Barcelona the measure was politically easier, because tourism weighs less on the city's income. In Venice the same measure would meet stronger resistance, since much of the island's income depends on tourism. At the same time it is more needed there, because in a large city many other activities compete with tourism for space, while on the island tourism has almost no competitors.

A 2022 national provision establishes Venice as the only Italian municipality with a specific legal basis for this lever. The municipality is allowed to set maximum limits, differentiated by area, on the use of residential units for short-term rentals (D.L. 50/2022, art. 37-bis).

The regulation adopted by the municipal executive on 24 October 2024 does not cap the number of units (Comune di Venezia, 2024). It allows owners who register within a set window and accept a code of conduct to let beyond 120 days, on an experimental basis until 31 December 2026. As of August 2025 the regulation had still not completed its approval process, and a further postponement was expected (Galfrè, 2025).

The transferable element is therefore not the legal power, which Venice already has, but the choice to use it as a ceiling, combined with systematic inspections. The critical issue is political. The measure conflicts directly with tourist rent, which is the conflict the workshop identified when it proposed adding a short-term rental market node to the external map.

6.2.2 South Africa: The Student Housing Infrastructure Programme (SHIP)

The initiative. SHIP was designed to deliver about 300,000 student beds over ten years at South Africa's 26 public universities and 50 public technical and vocational colleges. The beds are split roughly two-thirds to universities, 200,000 beds, and one-third to colleges, 100,000 beds (DBSA, 2021). The programme responds to documented conditions. Many students live in unsafe housing, in decaying urban areas or far from campus, and these conditions undermine their academic performance (DBSA, n.d.-a).

Promoters and actors. The Department of Higher Education and Training prioritised the programme and entrusted the Development Bank of Southern Africa with hosting the SHIP Management Office for its first five years (DHET, 2019). Individual institutions act as project owners. The design separates the owner of each residence from the body that plans, finances and procures, which is the feature most relevant to Venice.

Resources. Funding combines departmental resources, grants from the national Budget Facility for Infrastructure, DBSA loans, grants from the Infrastructure Investment Programme for South Africa, private developers and financial institutions, such as the Parliamentary Monitoring Group.

In the second cluster of projects, funding comes mainly from the Budget Facility for Infrastructure (about 57%), private debt (20%) and grants from the Department of Higher Education and Training (13%). The debt is repaid with the housing allowances that students receive from the national aid scheme NSFAS, which make up about 80% of the revenue base (DBSA, 2021).

Expected and achieved results. The programme was meant to raise annual delivery from about 4,000 to about 30,000 beds, with an estimated need of R80 billion for 150 projects (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, n.d.). The first phase contracted 19,561 beds. Six facilities at five institutions, with 9,407 beds, are now ready, while a second phase of twelve projects and about 24,400 beds went through feasibility studies between 2021 and 2022 (DBSA, 2021, and n.d.-b).

Parliamentary records explain the gap between target and delivery. Missing title deeds, rezoning and land claims on rural campuses, limited planning and procurement capacity inside institutions, uncoordinated sequencing of funding and investors deterred by burdensome procurement all slowed

delivery. Committee members also raised corruption in procurement processes (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, n.d.).

Comparison with Venice. The case shows that student housing is often slowed by the limited capacity to carry out projects, even when funds are available.

Venice lacks a single office that plans and procures projects for all institutions. It also lacks a scheme of loans for new residences repaid through the regional right-to-study funds managed by ESU, which participants saw as the main form of student support in Chapter 5.

The main difficulty is the historic building stock. Specific rules and water transport raise costs and slow down works, which lengthens the payback period and makes execution capacity even more important in Venice than in South Africa.

6.3 Retaining Graduates and International Students

The second family of problems concerns the passage from study to work. Students described a university that prepares them to leave (S1), a career service perceived as generic (S5) and, for non-EU students, a permit regime that can cancel a job offer over a deadline (S5). Stakeholders added that Venice offers fewer opportunities than Padua (E3) and lower salaries than metropolitan markets (E4).

Retention, therefore, is not a single decision taken at graduation. It is the outcome of a transition that begins during the years of study. The three cases in this section approach that transition in different ways. Germany built regional networks between universities and employers. Nova Scotia offered structured support to small cohorts of international students. Wuhan relied on administrative and financial incentives on a very large scale.

6.3.1 Germany: The “Study & Work” Regional Networks

The initiative. Between 2015 and 2017 the initiative funded ten regional networks. Each network brought together universities, through their career services and international offices, with labour-market actors such as companies, chambers of commerce and employment agencies, and with municipal bodies and other partners.

The aim was to accompany international students from their studies into local employment. The networks were spread across several Länder, from Brandenburg, Saxony, Thuringia and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria (Stifterverband, n.d.). Results and good practices were collected in a final documentation published by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy together with the Stifterverband (BMWi and Stifterverband, 2017).

Promoters and actors. The programme was launched by the Federal Government Commissioner for the new Länder together with the Stifterverband (Stifterverband, n.d.). It was accompanied by a longitudinal study of the research unit of the Expert Council of German Foundations on Integration and Migration, which surveyed international students at 50 German universities (SVR-Forschungsbereich, 2017). The combination of a policy programme and an independent evaluation is unusual in this benchmark and makes the German case one of the best documented.

Resources. Each project received up to €120,000 over two years, and the networks were coordinated by VDI/VDE Innovation + Technik (Stifterverband, n.d.). The legal framework was an important complementary resource. German law grants non-EU graduates an 18-month residence permit to look for work, during which any employment is allowed (Aufenthaltsgesetz, 2004, § 20, formerly § 16(5), and SVR-Forschungsbereich, 2017).

Expected and achieved results. The SVR study surveyed students in the final phase of their studies and again eighteen months later, with 419 respondents in the longitudinal sample. Seven in ten intended to stay in Germany and most did. Only 37.9%, however, held employment sufficient to support themselves, while 31.3% were still looking for work. Work experience in Germany related to the field of study emerged as the decisive factor for entering the labour market. Regular volunteering increased the likelihood that students who initially intended to leave would change their mind (SVR-Forschungsbereich, 2017). A later qualitative comparison of two programme-funded networks found that lack of resources and internal differences among partners hindered their consolidation, while problem pressure and a long-term orientation of the collaboration favoured it (Köppen, 2024).

Comparison with Venice. The case addresses two findings of Chapter 5. The first is the request for a career service that states honestly where opportunities are and builds connections to them. The second is the obstacle non-EU graduates face in converting their permit. It also confirms the view of E3 that attracting students is the university's task, while stabilising them depends on the economy and on local policy. A regional transition network linking the universities, business associations, the Municipality, the Region, ESU and the immigration offices is transferable at moderate cost. It should extend to the mainland, where participants located most local employment.

Two critical issues emerge. The first is durability. Temporary funding tends to dissolve such networks once projects end, as the German follow-up study shows. The second is that the permit lever lies at national level. Italy does provide a post-study permit. Since 2018 non-EU graduates of Italian universities and AFAM institutions can obtain a permit of nine to twelve months to look for work or start a business. They must declare their availability to the public employment services, meet income requirements and hold health insurance (D.Lgs. 286/1998, art. 39-bis.1). Compared with the German eighteen-month permit the Italian one is shorter and conditional on proof of resources. The difficulties reported in Chapter 5 therefore concern its length, its conditions and its administrative handling rather than its absence.

6.3.2 Canada: Nova Scotia's "Study and Stay" and the Atlantic Immigration Program

The initiative. Study and Stay is an attraction and retention programme for international students in Nova Scotia's universities and community colleges. It was launched as a pilot in 2016 and is delivered by EduNova (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016, and ACOA, 2018). Participants receive structured pre-employment support throughout their studies, including webinars, events, mentors and career strategists, together with an introduction to the provincial labour market (EduNova, n.d.).

Promoters and actors. EduNova is the provincial co-operative of education providers. In 2018 the Atlantic provincial governments, with the support of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and the federal immigration department, agreed to extend the model to the whole region (ACOA, 2018). In parallel, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot, launched in 2017, offered employer-driven pathways to permanent residence with mandatory settlement plans (IRCC, 2020). The Canadian case therefore

combines an educational programme with an immigration instrument, and the two must be kept distinct when judging its results.

Resources. The province invested CAD 549,500 in the pilot to cover recruitment, events and support for students (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016). The programme also relies on federal support for its Atlantic extension and on the in-kind involvement of institutions, mentors and employers (ACOA, 2018).

Expected and achieved results. The programme was designed to mentor about fifty students a year and to convince at least 80% of them to stay. According to EduNova the target was exceeded in the first year, and 93% of a later cohort was retained (Luck, 2020). EduNova's chief executive later reported that 86% of participants in the first six years were still in the province and working in their field one year after graduation, against a provincial conversion rate to permanent residence of about 11% (Magnet, 2023). These figures are self-reported and refer to self-selected participants who had declared their wish to stay. The immigration component rests on stronger evidence. The federal evaluation found that the Atlantic Immigration Pilot retained migrants better than other economic programmes in the region (IRCC, 2020), a result confirmed by Statistics Canada (2022).

Comparison with Venice. The Atlantic provinces share with Venice the problem of losing graduates to larger centres. The most transferable element is the small-cohort format, with dedicated support from the first year of study. The International Office and ESU could pilot it at low cost for non-EU students, the group for whom S5 described the transition as an obstacle course. The immigration component is not transferable, because Italian regions have no competence over permits. The case also carries a methodological warning. Any Venetian pilot should be evaluated with a comparison group, so as to avoid the self-selection bias that limits the Canadian evidence.

6.3.3 Wuhan: The Plan to Retain One Million Graduates

The initiative. Wuhan has one of China's largest student populations, yet most of its graduates used to leave the city after completing their studies (Wu, 2018). In February 2017 the city's Communist Party secretary, Chen Yixin, launched a programme to keep one million university graduates in Wuhan within five years (Yin, 2018; Wu, 2018). In October 2017 the municipal government allowed bachelor's graduates under 40 to obtain local household registration, the hukou, by presenting their degree certificate. Master's and doctoral graduates faced no age limit. Graduates could also buy or rent subsidised housing at 20% below market price (China News Service, 2017).

Promoters and actors. The plan was a municipal initiative within a wider competition among China's second-tier cities. From 2017 these cities launched talent-oriented policies to attract graduates, typically combining easier access to local registration with housing subsidies (Cui et al., 2022). The same orientation is still visible in the city's current talent programme, built around seed funding, campus recruitment and alumni events (Wuhan Municipal People's Government, 2026).

Resources. The instruments were administrative, through registration, and financial, through discounted housing. Both were introduced by the municipal government (China News Service, 2017).

Expected and achieved results. In 2017, the first graduation season under the new policy, about 301,000 graduates took up work in Wuhan, twice the 2016 figure. About 142,000 graduates obtained local registration, six times as many as in 2016 (Yin, 2018). A study of 2018 graduates of China's leading universities, however, found that only 25% of local graduates remained in Wuhan, well below

the more than 40% observed in Hefei and Zhengzhou, while 27% moved to Guangzhou and Shenzhen (Cui et al., 2022). No independent public evaluation of the plan was found, so these figures rest on municipal data reported by the press rather than on an official assessment.

Comparison with Venice. Scale and governance make the instruments incomparable, but the case is instructive in two respects. First, it links residence registration to concrete benefits. This is relevant to the Venetian problem of students who live in the city without being counted as residents. Second, it shows the limits of incentives that are not matched by employment opportunities. Registration and discounted housing brought graduates in, but the labour markets of larger cities still drew them away. For Venice the transferable idea is subsidised housing conditional on rooting. It answers the criticism raised in the workshop that public housing allocated solely on income selects for need rather than for the likelihood of settling (Chapter 5).

6.4 Becoming Residents: Registration and Remote Work

The third family of problems concerns the difference between living in a city and belonging to it. Chapter 5 showed two versions of this gap. Out-of-town students who live in Venice are often not registered as residents, so they cannot access resident services and do not appear in the population data (S10, S6). Graduates whose profession has no market in Venice could remain only by working remotely for a market located elsewhere (S1). The two cases in this section address these two versions. Heidelberg tried to turn students into registered residents. Tulsa tried to turn remote workers into members of the local community.

6.4.1 Heidelberg: Incentives for Students to Register as Residents

The initiative. In autumn 2006 the City of Heidelberg launched the campaign Aktion Heimvorteil. Students who registered their main residence in the city received a bonus card entitling them to discounts. The campaign ended in the summer semester of 2009 (Universität Heidelberg, 2010).

Promoters and actors. The campaign was approved unanimously by the city council in May 2006 and supported by the university, the other local higher education institutions and the Studentenwerk. Local shops, cultural institutions and restaurants offered more than seventy discounts to card holders, and the thousandth card had been issued by late November 2006 (Stadt Heidelberg, 2006a, and 2006b). The logic of the campaign derives from German local finance. Through municipal fiscal equalisation the city receives funds only for residents registered with their main residence (Stadt Heidelberg, 2006a).

Resources. According to the municipality, the campaign cost about €250,000 over three years (Universität Heidelberg, 2010).

Expected and achieved results. The city issued 6,937 cards, but only 576 students changed their registration to main residence as a result. Even so, the municipality estimated additional fiscal-equalisation revenue of at least €600,000, more than twice the cost. The city then replaced the card with a one-off welcome gift, a free semester public transport ticket for students registering their main residence (Universität Heidelberg, 2010). Other university cities use a fiscal deterrent instead. In Gießen the introduction of a second-home tax led many students to register their main residence in the city, to the city's financial benefit (RPR1/dpa, 2026).

Comparison with Venice. The problem is identical to one recorded in Chapter 5. The size of that gap has been measured. A study by the City of Venice reconstructed the population of insular Venice from the water-consumption data of the municipal utility Veritas rather than from the civil register. Its premise was that the inhabitants of a city cannot be counted from the registry or the electoral roll alone. It estimated between 102,064 and 109,354 equivalent inhabitants, against 53,076 people registered in the historic centre and 27,759 in the estuary islands (ANSA, 2019). Close to a quarter of the people who actually live on the islands therefore appear in no register, and students are a large share of that invisible population. A welcome package linked to registration is a low-cost measure the Municipality could adopt, and it would act on a documented gap rather than on a presumed one.

Some issues need to be addressed before any implementation. The conversion rate in Heidelberg was low, at about 8% of card holders, which suggests that discounts alone do not change an administrative habit. The link between registered population and municipal transfers works differently in Italy and should be assessed before assuming a comparable financial return. Changing residence may also affect a student's family situation for ISEE purposes, a point to clarify with ESU before any campaign.

6.4.2 Tulsa: Attracting Remote Workers

The initiative. Launched in 2018, Tulsa Remote offers USD 10,000 to remote workers who relocate to Tulsa, Oklahoma, for at least one year (Choudhury et al., 2022). The incentive is combined with a bundle of services, such as co-working and community activities, designed to increase participants' engagement and embeddedness in the city (Teodorovicz et al., 2025).

Promoters and actors. The programme was launched with significant private funding from a philanthropic organisation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, rather than by a public authority (W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 2026).

Resources. Including the incentive, administration and community benefits, the programme spends roughly USD 15,000 per participant (SSTI, 2025).

Expected and achieved results. By 2023 the programme had received over 20,000 applications and relocated nearly 2,000 people, 75% of whom stayed at least two years (Teodorovicz et al., 2023). Peer-reviewed research found that it increased participants' community engagement, real income and entrepreneurship. Community engagement was the main driver of their willingness to stay (Teodorovicz et al., 2025). An economic assessment by the Upjohn Institute estimated that 58 to 70% of participants would not have moved without the incentive. It also found that benefits for existing residents grow with retention and with an adequate expansion of housing supply (Bartik, 2025). The evidence is robust, although the main studies were carried out in partnership with the programme.

Comparison with Venice. Workshop participants argued that for occupations without a local market, living in Venice while working for a market located elsewhere may be the only route to stable residence (Chapter 5). Venice already has a comparable initiative. Venywhere was promoted by Ca' Foscari and the Fondazione di Venezia and presented in February 2022, with sixteen Cisco employees as its first pilot group (Fondazione di Venezia, 2022, and Ca' Foscari Alumni, n.d.).

The main difference is the cost of living. Tulsa is inexpensive and Venice is not, so a monetary incentive weighs far less where rent remains the barrier. Remote workers would also compete with students for the same housing stock. The Tulsa assessment itself notes that the programme's benefits depend on housing supply keeping pace with new arrivals (Bartik, 2025), a condition Venice does not

currently meet. The transferable lessons therefore concern design rather than money. The first is to select participants for their willingness to engage locally, since engagement proved to be what keeps people. The second is to address a version of the programme to the university's own alumni. That version would respond to the perception that the university trains students to leave, by offering them a structured way to stay while working elsewhere.

6.5 Governance of the University–Territory Relationship

The fourth family of problems concerns governance. Chapter 5 recorded a relationship between the university and its territory that depends on individuals rather than on institutions. E1 described the absence of a fixed contact person on the university side and a partnership style perceived as opportunistic. S10 noted that the quality of the dialogue with the Region and the City varies with the diplomatic skill of each Rector. S9 observed that the four institutions of the pole do not have equal standing, since the municipality speaks mainly with Ca' Foscari and IUAV. E4 confirmed that a structured contact for external relations had historically been missing. The question for the benchmark is how a territory can make the relationship between its universities and its other actors permanent. Medellín offers one of the most durable answers.

6.5.1 Medellín: The University–Business–State Committee (CUEE)

The initiative. The Comité Universidad Empresa Estado was created in 2003 within the technology management programme of the University of Antioquia. Its purpose was to strengthen the university's relations with the social and productive sectors of the region. It is a permanent forum where universities, companies, business associations and government agree joint agendas. Today it works through four tables on human talent, financing, platforms and innovative entrepreneurship (Universidad de Antioquia, n.d.).

Promoters and actors. Besides the university, the committee owes its existence to two Antioquian business leaders, Manuel Santiago Mejía and Luis Carlos Uribe. Their credibility across economic, political and academic circles allowed them to act as brokers between worlds that had little habit of talking to each other. Their contribution was not financial but persuasive. They convinced the university to open its research capacity to regional companies. At the same time they convinced firms that a public university could be a working partner rather than a distant institution.

The committee was set up inside the technology management programme of the University of Antioquia, which gave it an administrative home without creating a new body. The university's Superior Council backed it from the outset (Universidad de Antioquia, n.d.). Around that nucleus the membership widened to the other universities of the department, to business associations, to individual firms and to the regional and municipal administrations. One table now brings together actors who elsewhere meet only bilaterally and case by case (CUEE Antioquia, 2022).

Resources. The committee relies almost entirely on non-cash contributions of goods, services or expertise. It has no organisational chart or board, and members take part voluntarily and on a continuous basis (CUEE Antioquia, 2022).

Expected and achieved results. The committee has produced concrete results, particularly in university–business relations. It functions as a knowledge network with high levels of trust among actors, and the model has been replicated in other Colombian regions with national government

support (Morales-Gualdrón and Giraldo Gómez, 2015). Its technical secretary identifies financing as a key open challenge (Universidad EAFIT, 2023).

Comparison with Venice. A permanent table with regular plenary sessions and a stable technical secretariat would make the relationship less dependent on individuals, at low cost. The Venetian version would need one feature that Medellín did not. It should include all four institutions of the pole, since the workshop showed that the Accademia and the Conservatorio are under-represented in the dialogue with the Municipality.

The critical issue is trust. The committee rests on relationships built over twenty years and on business figures with unusual personal authority. E3 described the Venetian business fabric as less inclined to collaborate with the university than, for example, that of Padua. A table can be created by decision, but the trust that makes it work cannot. For this reason the transferable element is the institutional form, a permanent table with a secretariat, rather than the expectation of Medellín's results in a short time.

The Medellín case also clarifies what kind of intervention a governance table is. It does not add resources to the system as it only changes who meets whom and how does that happen. It acts on the structure of information flows and, where it gives a voice to actors previously excluded, on the structure of the system itself. This is exactly the kind of lever that Section 5.3 found participants asking for when they requested a wider table for the pole. The new figure for relations with the territory announced by E4 can be read as a first step in this direction. The case suggests that such a figure becomes effective only if it serves a permanent collective table rather than a single institution.

6.6 Knowledge Districts and Historic Centres

The fifth family of problems concerns the productive base of the historic city. Students observed that the island has no economy of its own, so that even those who live there work on the mainland (S2). E3 suggested that the Municipality and firms should create productive settlements in or near the city rather than relying on the attractiveness of the university alone. The two cases in this section show what happens when a university becomes the anchor of a territorial development project. Recife used its historic centre as the seat of a technology district. Kigali built a new innovation district around an international university.

6.6.1 Recife: Porto Digital

The initiative. Porto Digital originated at the Centre for Informatics of the Federal University of Pernambuco. Its aim was to attract companies and create jobs so as to retain the university's own graduates. At first the idea was to locate it on campus, but in 2000 it was established in the Bairro do Recife, the historic island where the largest port in the Americas stood in the seventeenth century (Simas et al., 2020).

Promoters and actors. The proposal received strong support from the State Governor, who linked it to the revitalisation plan for the historic district. The park is managed by a social organisation under public contract (Simas et al., 2020).

Resources. A key resource was the historic building stock. Disused buildings were converted into company premises, and the Port Authority building, owned by the Brazilian Navy, was to house research laboratories (Revista Pesquisa FAPESP, 2001).

Expected and achieved results. On the economic side the results are substantial. According to the municipality, the district now hosts 415 technology companies and more than 18,000 workers (Prefeitura do Recife, 2024). On the residential side the objective has not been achieved. The area has remained monofunctional and active only during office hours, and the municipality and the park's management are now trying to encourage housing (Santos, 2023).

Census data point the same way. Between 2010 and 2022 Recife lost about 3% of its population, falling to 1,488,920 inhabitants. The municipality attributes the decline to a saturated urban area and to residents moving to nearby municipalities (IBGE, 2023, and Prefeitura do Recife, n.d.-a). Critical scholarship also describes gentrification, with rising property values and the departure of part of the low-income population (Simas et al., 2020).

The municipality responded with Recentro, a regeneration programme for the central area launched in November 2021 by mayor João Campos, covering the historic neighbourhoods of Bairro do Recife, Santo Antônio and São José. The programme rests on four axes, spanning cross-departmental governance, fiscal incentives, innovation delivered through Porto Digital and the attraction of new investment. Its core instrument is tax relief conditional on renovation and residential use. Owners who restore a building can obtain a reduction of up to 100% on the property tax IPTU, while the service tax ISS on restoration works falls from 5% to 2%.

The property transfer tax ITBI can be waived entirely for a first purchase or for a buyer who will live in the property, with benefits extending up to ten years for social housing. In December 2023 the city amended the founding law to broaden these incentives and extend the perimeter to the neighbouring district of Boa Vista (Prefeitura do Recife, n.d.-b; 2021; 2023).

Comparison with Venice. This is the case closest to the Venetian condition. It combines a historic island without an economy of its own, a university that trains talent destined to leave and an attempt to bring qualified work back to the centre. The transferable element is the use of historic public buildings as the seat of a knowledge district originating from the universities.

Bringing jobs back does not bring residents back. Without a simultaneous housing policy the risk is a district full during the day and empty in the evening, which would not address the problem this thesis is concerned with. Rising property values could even worsen students' access to housing. The later Recentro programme is instructive for Venice on two counts. It treats the return of residents as a fiscal question rather than an urban-design one. It also concentrates the incentive on the conversion of existing historic buildings, which is exactly the constraint a lagoon city faces.

6.6.2 Kigali: Carnegie Mellon University Africa

The initiative. CMU-Africa was established in 2011 as a partnership between the Government of Rwanda and Carnegie Mellon University. Its first cohort of 24 students was housed on two floors of a government telecommunications building (Knox, 2022). In November 2019 it moved to a new campus and became the anchor institution of Kigali Innovation City, a district designed to foster digital innovation and entrepreneurship (Carnegie Mellon University, 2019c). Construction of the wider district began only in September 2024 (Rwanda Development Board, 2024).

Promoters and actors. The Rwandan government initiated and financed the partnership, and the Mastercard Foundation later joined as a major funder (Mastercard Foundation, 2022). The district itself is financed by the Rwandan government together with Africa50 and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, which alone lent USD 20 million for basic infrastructure (MINECOFIN, 2021, and Rwanda Development Board, 2024).

Resources. Until 2022 the college was funded largely by the Rwandan government through a ten-year agreement worth USD 95 million (Knox, 2022). In 2019 it moved to a new facility designed for about 300 students, with space for a start-up incubator (Carnegie Mellon University, 2019b). In 2022 the Mastercard Foundation announced a further USD 275.7 million investment, including a USD 175 million endowment to fund CMU-Africa (Mastercard Foundation, 2022).

Expected and achieved results. By spring 2022 the programme enrolled over 230 students from 21 African countries (Mastercard Foundation, 2022). In June 2019 the university reported that 75% of its 145 alumni worked in Africa (Carnegie Mellon University, 2019a). The partnership has been criticised because of its ties to the Rwandan government, which has been accused of human-rights abuses (Knox, 2022). The results are reported by the promoters, and the district that should give them a territorial meaning is still under construction.

Comparison with Venice. The relevant element is the use of the university as an anchor for a territorial development project, supported by public buildings and a multi-year agreement. In Venice a comparable approach would link multi-year public support to explicit targets, such as the share of graduates working in the metropolitan area. Such a target would also correct the employability indicator that feeds loop R1, by distinguishing graduates who stay from those who leave (Chapter 5). The differences are evident. CMU-Africa aims to retain talent on a continent and Venice in a city, and neither the scale of resources nor the political context is comparable. The case is therefore useful for the logic of the agreement, which ties public money to retention targets, rather than for its size.

6.7 Cross-Case Discussion

This section discusses the conditions under which the mechanisms that worked can be transferred and the quality of the evidence across the cases and then links the benchmark to Chapter 7.

6.7.1 Conditions of Transferability

A mechanism that worked elsewhere can be transferred only if Venice has the conditions it depends on. Three conditions recur in the comparisons.

The first is legal competence. Venice already holds the power to cap short-term rentals, which makes the Barcelona lever directly available but it does not hold competence over residence permits, which makes the Canadian immigration component unavailable.

The second difference is fiscal architecture. Heidelberg's campaign paid for itself because German municipalities receive general grants calculated against their registered population, so that each additional resident mechanically raises the transfer the city receives from the Land. Italian comuni are financed differently. The main equalization transfer, Fondo di solidarietà comunale, is allocated according to standardized spending needs (fabbisogni standard) computed across many variables so

an increase in registered residents does not produce a comparable, predictable rise in municipal revenue.

The third is the economic base and the time horizon. Medellín's committee rests on trust built over twenty years, and Recife's district on a diversified metropolitan economy. Neither can be reproduced by decision in a short time.

Table 6.2 summarises, for each case, the element judged transferable to Venice and the main constraint it would face.

Table 6.2. Transferability of the benchmark cases to Venice.

Case	Transferable element	Main constraint in Venice
Barcelona <i>Barcelona, Catalonia (Spain)</i>	Cap on tourist-use units with systematic inspections	Legal power exists (D.L. 50/2022) but current regulation is not restrictive; conflict with tourist rent
SHIP <i>National programme (South Africa)</i>	Single management office; loans repaid from student housing support	Heritage constraints and construction costs
Study & Work <i>Ten regional networks (Germany)</i>	Regional transition network including the mainland	Temporary funding; shorter and conditional Italian post-study permit
Study and Stay <i>Nova Scotia / Atlantic Canada</i>	Small-cohort support for non-EU students from year one	No regional competence on immigration; self-selection
Wuhan <i>Wuhan, Hubei (China)</i>	Registration linked to benefits; housing conditional on rooting	Incentives without jobs do not retain
Heidelberg <i>Heidelberg, Baden-Württemberg (Germany)</i>	Welcome package linked to registration	Low conversion; different municipal finance; ISEE effects
Tulsa Remote <i>Tulsa, Oklahoma (USA)</i>	Selection for local engagement; alumni version	High cost of living; competition for housing
CUEE <i>Medellín, Antioquia (Colombia)</i>	Permanent table with stable secretariat, four institutions	Trust built over time; less collaborative business fabric
Porto Digital <i>Recife, Pernambuco (Brazil)</i>	Knowledge district in historic public buildings	Monofunctional use; gentrification risk
CMU-Africa <i>Kigali (Rwanda)</i>	Multi-year agreement with retention targets	Scale and context not comparable

Source: Author's elaboration on the comparisons with Venice in Sections 6.2–6.6.

The elements that transfer most easily change rules, information flows or relationships and need small budgets, as with the cap on tourist-use units, the permanent table, the transition network and the registration package. Elements that depend on large budgets or national competences, such as the Wuhan subsidies, the Canadian immigration pathway or CMU-Africa, are the hardest to transfer.

6.7.2 The Quality of the Evidence

The third point is methodological and concerns the evidence itself. Robust evidence exists on the problem addressed in Barcelona and on outcomes in Germany, in Tulsa and in the Canadian immigration component, although the Tulsa studies were carried out in partnership with the programme. Results for Study and Stay, Heidelberg, Wuhan and CMU-Africa are largely reported by their promoters, by the press or reconstructed from secondary data.

6.7.3 From Benchmark to Strategy

Chapter 7 uses these results to build two strategic initiatives.

The first concerns intermediate bodies, the permanent places and procedures through which students and the institutions of the city can meet. It draws mainly on Medellín, on the German networks and on the Heidelberg experience of registration.

The second concerns student housing and draws on Barcelona, South Africa and Wuhan. The elements of Table 6.2 are then prioritised through an impact and feasibility matrix.

7. STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

The previous chapters moved from a comparison of higher education systems to a systemic reading of Ca' Foscari, from the record of students' voices and stakeholders to its findings, and from that to the experience of other cities to similar issues.

The chapter is organised in two parts.

Sections 7.1 and 7.2 present the two strategic initiatives, the first on intermediate bodies and the second on student housing. Each follows the same structure. It first restates the problem, then presents four actions, then discusses the evidence and the limits, and finally positions the actions in an impact and feasibility matrix.

Section 7.3 reads the eight actions together.

Each action is assessed on two dimensions.

Impact: refers to the expected effect on the conversion of the student flow into a resident population. It considers the depth of the leverage point the action touches in Meadows' hierarchy, the number of misalignments of Section 5.2.2 it addresses and the size of the population it reaches.

Feasibility: refers to the ease of implementation. It considers who holds the lever, whether the action requires an agreement with actors outside the university, how much it costs and how long it takes to produce effects. An action that the university can adopt alone, at low cost and in a short time, is highly feasible. An action that requires a political decision by the City or a change in national rules is not.

The assessment is qualitative. It rests on the empirical material of Chapter 5 and on the evidence of Chapter 6, not on a quantitative model. The positions in the matrices are therefore ordinal. They show which action is expected to have more impact or to be more feasible than another, not by how much. The matrices divide the actions into four groups.

Quick wins: high impact and high feasibility

Structural moves: high impact and low feasibility and require negotiation with actors outside the university

Incremental gains: lower impact and high feasibility

Low-priority actions: low impact and low feasibility, none of the actions proposed here falls into that group

7.1 Intermediate Bodies

7.1.1 The Problem

Among the obstacles named in Chapter 5, E4 observed that between young people and politics there is almost no intermediate body carrying what students think into the places where decisions are taken. The observation holds at every scale, from national representation to the internal politics of Ca'

Foscari. Inside the university the absence takes the form of a representation that exists on paper but has very limited impact and appeal.

Three further observations from the interviews support this reading.

E2: Relationship between unions and students as historically absent, with the union perceived as that thing losers need

S6: Students are missing from the studies and policies meant to improve their situation

S10: Students who move to Venice for academic reasons are not counted as residents

These observations describe a large part of the actual population of Venice that is absent from the electoral roll of the city it lives in and is not organised in any body that speaks for it.

Section 5.3 showed that the reputation loop R1 runs on data that ignore where graduates settle, and that the teaching-quality loop B1 does not close because student evaluations do not bind anyone. Both are failures of intermediation. A signal is produced but does not reach the actor who could act on it.

The absence of intermediation also sustains the circle described in Section 5.2.2. Students, then, expect to leave because nothing in the city is organised around their permanence. Each expectation confirms how intermediation could be the missing link in that circle because it is the only way in which the interests of students can become visible to those who decide on housing, transport and services.

E2, as proof of that, reported that youth interest in the union was low until a change in the student association in charge, the list Futura, established a relationship that led to greater involvement. S10 described the same episode from the student side, noting that the list obtained results because it adopted an institutional posture towards the city and the university. This shows that what was missing was not willingness on either side but a body through which the two could meet.

7.1.2 The Four Actions

The initiative builds intermediation at the four points where the interviews previously located its absence.

- (a) Inside the university
- (b) Between the pole and the city
- (c) Towards the organised interests
- (d) In the register of actual residents

None of the four actions requires huge amounts of budget since each works on rules and on aligning the interests of the actors involved. Each is described below with its content, the actor who holds the lever and the finding it responds to.

- (a) **Inside the university:** S6 reported that course evaluations are collected without visible consequence and that no one appears accountable for timetables, rooms or tutoring. This is the experiential form of the balancing loop B1 that Chapter 3 found does not close.

The action is to require the Department Council to answer every opinion of the Joint Committees in a documented form within a fixed term. The duty of the Council should not be to

take note of the opinion. It should be to state what was done with it and why. This condition is what turns a signal into a feedback.

The same rule should name an owner of teaching logistics, the function whose absence Section 5.3.1 identified. The lever lies entirely within the university, through a change of internal regulation. The action acts on the strength of a balancing loop and on the information flow that feeds it.

- (b) **Between the pole and the city:** S9 reported that the four institutions are not equal in the dialogue with the municipality. E1 reported that no fixed point of reference exists on the Ca' Foscari side, and E4 that a structured contact for external relations had historically been missing.

A permanent table modelled on the Medellín committee could answer all three observations. It would include a technical secretariat and one representative each for the four institutions of the pole, the City, the Region and ESU. Unlike in Medellín, students should sit as full members, so that the table gives them the voice they lack today.

The table is also the natural venue for E4's campus-city proposal and for the negotiation of the housing measures of Section 7.2. The new university figure for relations with the territory, announced by E4, would act as the university's permanent delegate to it. The action changes the structure of the system by connecting actors who today meet only bilaterally, which is the disaggregation of the university node proposed in Section 5.3.2.

- (c) **Intermediate body:** E2 reported that the union is not perceived by students as an actor able to affect the territory. The remedy is not to ask students to join it, which is neither the university's business nor a plausible request. It is to make the encounter part of the curriculum. Unions, employers' associations and the Chamber of Commerce can be accredited as host organisations for curricular internships on the same footing as firms. An annual meeting between these organisations and the student representatives of the four institutions would give a standing form to the exchange E2 described as having happened once. Credibility requires plurality, so all recognised organisations should be invited on the same terms.

The action also connects to the lesson of the German networks in Chapter 6, where contact with local labour-market actors during the years of study proved decisive for later employment.

- (d) **In the register of actual residents.** Simpler residency registration was already proposed in Section 5.2.3 for its effects on services and on data. Its political effect is larger than either. Electoral rolls are drawn from the register of residents, so a student who lives in Venice without registering cannot vote in the municipal elections that decide on housing, on transport and on the short-term rental market. The invisibility S6 described in the data and the absence of intermediation E4 described in politics therefore have the same administrative root. The action combines a simpler procedure at the City with a welcome package of the kind tested in Heidelberg, and with an agreement with ESU that registration will not penalise students in

the calculation of their right-to-study benefits. It acts on the delay in the reputation loop identified in Section 5.3.3, because a registered student is a counted one.

7.1.3 Evidence and Limits

The initiative does not address the fourth misalignment of Section 5.2.2, since it gives graduates no better career path. It is therefore an enabling condition that needs the housing and wage levers alongside it.

The effect of Futura on the relationship with the union is reported by two participants from opposite sides, which makes it credible as an episode, even if it proves little in general. The benchmark adds support, since Medellín shows that a permanent table can last and Heidelberg that registration can be encouraged, although with modest results.

The main risk is that the new bodies become a formality, as happened with the Joint Committees, whose evaluations have no visible consequence. Each action should therefore have an indicator of actual use, such as the share of Joint Committee opinions answered on time, the decisions taken at the table between the pole and the city, the internships hosted by organised interests and the number of students registered as residents.

7.1.4 Position in the Impact and Feasibility Matrix

The action inside the university is the most feasible of the four as it only needs a change of internal regulation and no agreement with any external actor. It improves the relationship between students and their institution and restores a feedback loop, without touching the conditions that decide residence. For these reasons it sits among the quick wins, close to the feasibility end of the matrix.

The channel towards the organised interests, the intermediate body, is also feasible, thanks to the internship infrastructure that already exists. Its impact is slower, since it works through the annual flow of students rather than through a single decision, and it sits just above the threshold that separates quick wins from incremental gains.

The table between the pole and the city has high impact because it is the only action that seats the four institutions, the City Municipality, the Region and ESU together with student representatives.

Its feasibility depends on actors the university does not control, above all the City Municipality.

Registration carries the highest potential impact of the four, since it converts a presence into an electorate and conditions the durability of the other actions but it is also the least feasible. No institution can carry it out by deliberation, because the criterion of residence is national and the act itself is performed by each student individually. Realistically, it depends on an agreement with the Region and ESU on how registered students are treated, more than on a faster procedure at the City.

Figure 7.1 plots the four actions:

Impact and feasibility of the actions on intermediate bodies

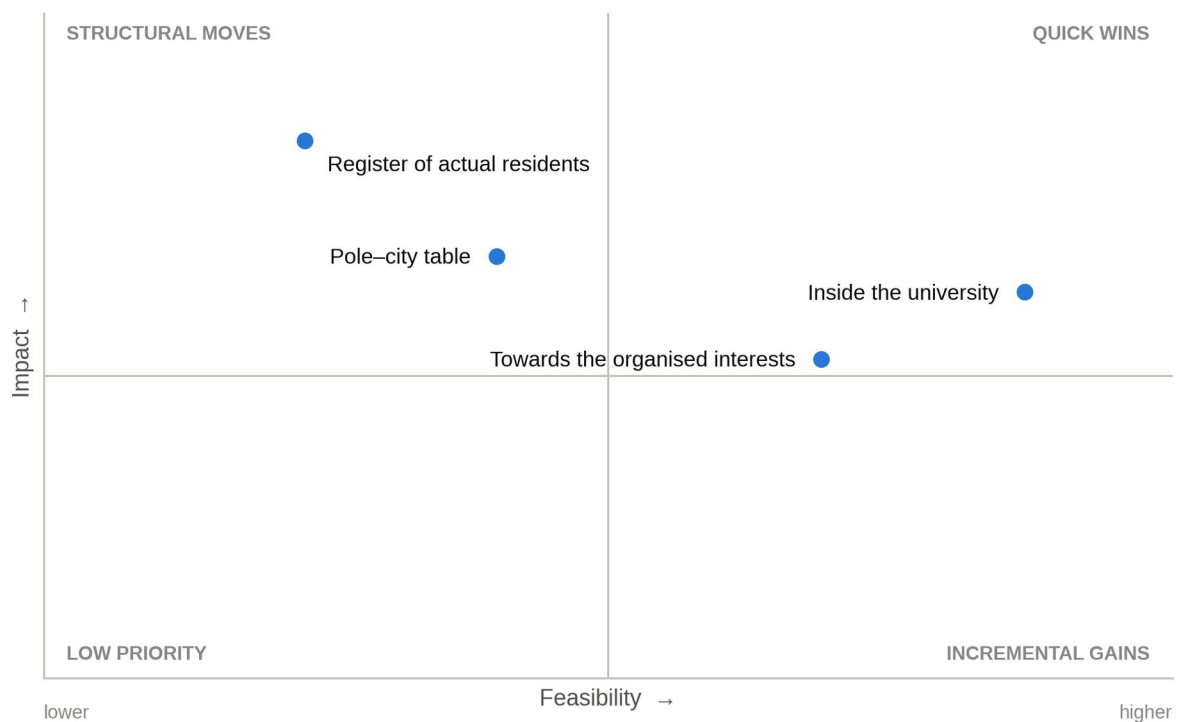


Figure 7.1. Impact and feasibility matrix of the actions on intermediate bodies.

Source: Author's elaboration on the assessment in Section 7.1.4.

7.2 Student Housing

7.2.1 The Problem

Housing was the most frequent finding of the workshop and the only theme raised by every group. Since a room earns more from a tourist than from a student, students are the landlords' second choice (S3, S4), and those with the least money are pushed off the island. S9, an Accademia student who studies at the Zattere, lives in Mestre and commutes an hour and a half each way with materials.

E2 linked the cost of housing to public-sector posts that remain unfilled, so the problem also concerns workers. E1 judged that housing and services have not kept pace with the growth of the university. E2 also asked who should pay, since the university has limited resources and the public administration has little reason to house people who will leave. S10 observed that public housing allocated on the ISEE indicator alone selects for need and may increase turnover.

The problem therefore has three parts. The market makes students the least profitable tenants, nobody is willing to finance new housing, and public housing criteria ignore who wants to settle. In the terms of Section 5.3, the first is the missing short-term rental node of the external map, and the other two are rules of the system that do not support retention.

7.2.2 The Four Actions

The four actions work on the three constraints identified in Chapter 6, which are the competing use, the execution capacity and the allocation rule.

- (a) A cap on tourist-use units

- (b) A single delivery office for student housing
- (c) Beds financed against the right-to-study stream
- (d) Allocation that rewards rooting

Only the second and the third involve a monetary budget, and neither asks the university to fund residence from its own budget.

A cap on tourist-use units: Barcelona will not renew the roughly 10,000 tourist-flat licences that expire in 2028 and combines this rule with systematic inspection.

Venice is the only Italian municipality that can do the same, since a 2022 national provision allows it to set limits by area on short-term rentals.

The action works on the rules of the system, the highest lever identified in this thesis.

A single delivery office for student housing: The South African SHIP programme shows that the binding constraint on student housing is execution rather than funding. Its remedy was a single management office concentrating the planning and procurement capacity that individual institutions lack. Even so, the first phase has brought into use 9,407 of the 19,561 beds it contracted.

Venice adds heritage constraints and a unique logistics system based on water transport. The action is one office serving the four institutions of the pole together with ESU. The office would hold the pipeline of projects, the permits and the procurement, so that each project does not restart from the same point. The lever belongs to the institutions of the pole and to ESU, which can establish the office by agreement among themselves.

Beds financed against the right-to-study stream: SHIP services the debt on new residences from the accommodation component of the support students already receive.

Applied to Venice, this means financing beds against the right to study funds channelled through ESU rather than against the university's own budget. The action answers the objection of E2. The student support that already exists becomes the repayment stream, and the university contributes buildings and coordination rather than capital.

The lever to this belongs to the Region and to ESU, which would have to agree to pledge part of the accommodation component to the repayment of new residences.

Allocation that rewards rooting: S10's objection to allocation by income alone follows the same logic as the Wuhan scheme, by tying subsidised housing to registration and to settlement.

The action is to pair the ISEE criterion with criteria that reward stable local employment and a declared willingness to remain, opening eligibility to recent graduates and young workers rather than to students alone. Public housing would finally be more efficient in converting a transient presence into a resident.

The lever belongs to the City, which sets the criteria for public housing. The action links this initiative to the previous one since registration as a resident would become a natural condition of eligibility.

7.2.3 Evidence and Limits

A student who can afford a room in Venice but finds no suitable work will still leave, so the housing initiative, like the previous one, is necessary but not sufficient alone.

The Tulsa assessment adds that attracting new residents without new supply makes competition for housing worse, and the same would happen in Venice with more students and no more homes.

E1 pointed to a smaller and more engaged student population, so the tie between students and the city matters as much as the number of beds.

The problem the cap addresses is the best documented of the benchmark (Garcia-López et al., 2020), although the cap itself cannot be assessed before 2028. The SHIP lesson rests on parliamentary and programme documents, and the Wuhan evidence on press reports of municipal data. Useful indicators are tourist-use units by area, student beds delivered each year, the share of beds financed through right to study funds and the share of public housing beneficiaries still resident after several years.

7.2.4 Position in the Impact and Feasibility Matrix

The cap on tourist-use units carries the highest impact of the four (Figure 7.2), since it acts on the mechanism that every other measure works around, but it has the lowest feasibility, since the City has recently used the same power in the opposite direction and the measure runs against tourist rent. It is the clearest example of a structural move.

The single delivery office is the most feasible, because the four institutions and ESU can establish it without any external agreement. Its impact is moderate. It accelerates delivery rather than creating supply by itself, which places it among the quick wins but close to the threshold. Financing against the right to study stream carries a high impact, because it unlocks beds without asking the university for capital. Its feasibility is middling, since it needs the Region and ESU to agree to pledge the accommodation component, and it sits on the structural side of the matrix. Allocation that rewards rooting is comparably feasible, being a municipal criterion. Its impact is bounded by the size of the public-housing stock, which places it among the incremental gains rather than among the quick wins.

Impact and feasibility of the actions on student housing

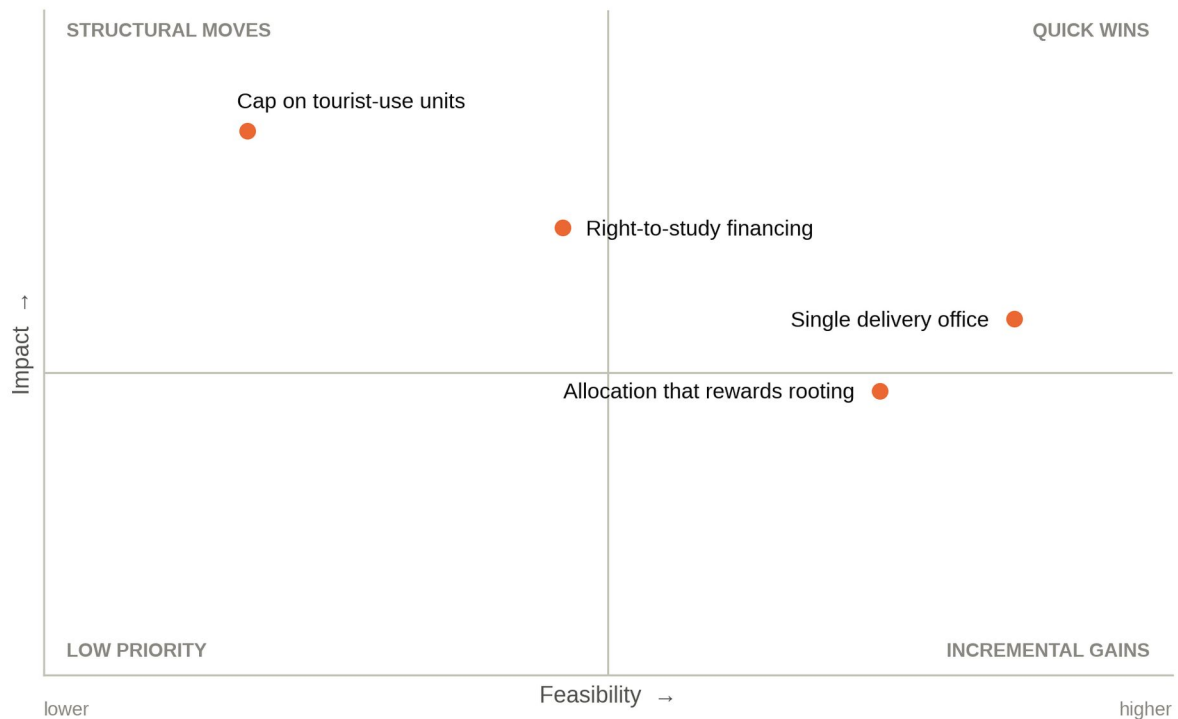


Figure 7.2. Impact and feasibility matrix of the actions on student housing.

Source: Author's elaboration on the assessment in Section 7.2.4.

7.3 Final Overview

7.3.1 Interpretation of Proposed Initiatives

Figure 7.3 places the eight actions of the two initiatives in a single matrix. The quick wins are three actions that the university and the other institutions of the pole can start without waiting for other actors. These are the accountability rule inside the university, the channel towards the organised interests and the single delivery office for student housing.

The structural moves are four actions that require the City, the Region or ESU. These are the pole-city table, registration, the cap on tourist-use units and the financing of beds against the right-to-study stream.

Integrated impact and feasibility matrix of the eight actions

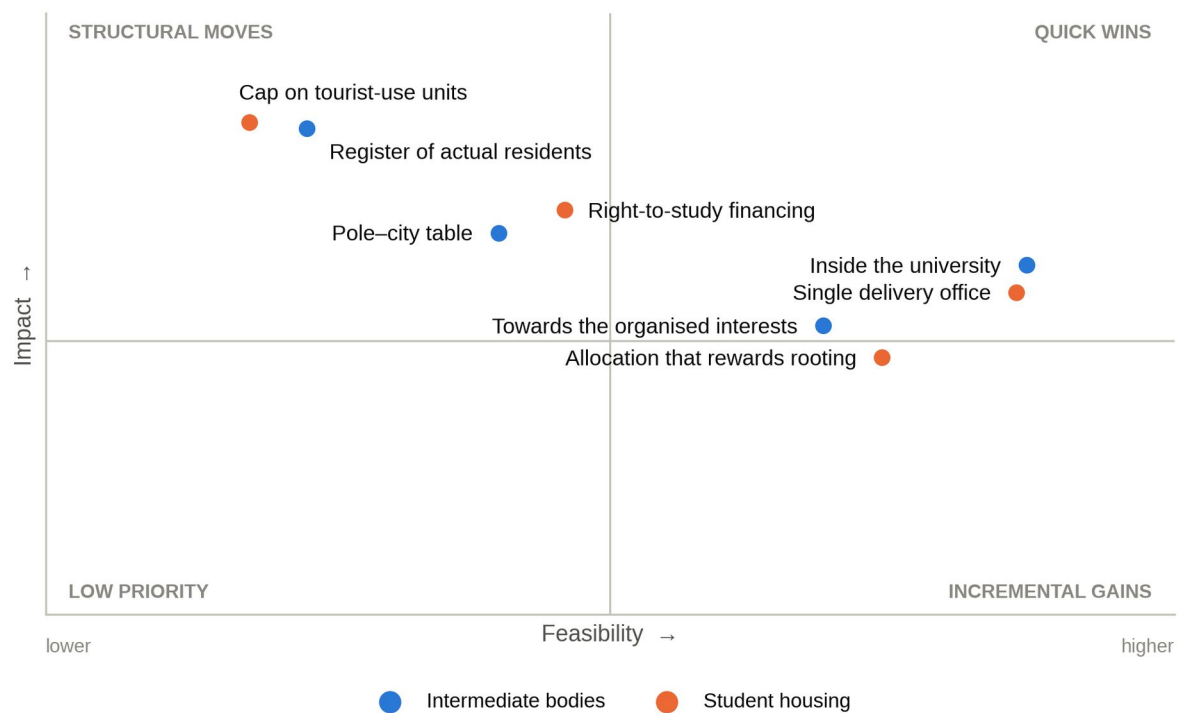


Figure 7.3. Integrated impact and feasibility matrix of the eight actions. Blue marks the actions on intermediate bodies and orange the actions on student housing.

Source: Author's elaboration on the assessments in Sections 7.1.4 and 7.2.4.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis studied how changes in higher education affect the territories that host universities, with a focus on Venice. It compared higher education systems, mapped Ca' Foscari and its territory as a system of feedback loops and then listened to students and stakeholders and looked at cities abroad with similar problems.

8.1 Main Findings

The comparison showed two responses to the same pressures. In the United States the cost of higher education has moved from public budgets to families, as state funding falls in every recession and tuition rises. Europe harmonised its systems through the Bologna Process, but national systems remain unequal. Italy performs poorly on almost every indicator, with the lowest share of tertiary-educated adults, a shrinking graduate wage premium and few international students.

The systemic reading produced two causal maps. The internal map showed a reputation loop and a teaching-quality loop, and the external map placed the university among regulators, research partners and territorial actors.

Fourteen participants, ten students and four stakeholders, produced forty-nine coded citations grouped into twenty-one themes. Their answers point to one diagnosis. Venice attracts students but does not keep them, because the housing market prefers tourists, the university is evaluated on research and reputation, which ignore where graduates settle, and the public administration sees little reason to invest in people who will leave. Under these three problems lies a regional economy based on low costs, which cannot offer metropolitan salaries.

Comparing these findings with the maps produced six revisions, which concern feedback loops, information flows, rules and the actors at the table, while none concerns budgets. In Meadows' terms, participants placed the problem high in the hierarchy of leverage points.

8.2 From Findings to Strategy

The benchmark of ten cases showed that housing policy works best when regulation and new supply are combined, that retention is prepared during the years of study, and that lasting initiatives create a permanent place where actors meet.

The thesis therefore proposed two initiatives, one creating intermediate bodies that give students a voice and one on student housing. The quick wins depend on the university and the pole, while the actions with the highest impact, such as the cap on tourist rentals, the permanent table and easier registration, depend on the City, the Region and ESU. A strategy addressed only to the university would therefore use only part of the available levers.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

The results have clear limits. Participants were few and self-selected, and the Conservatorio was not represented. Several benchmark results come from promoters instead of independent evaluations. The proposed actions should therefore be tested through pilots with indicators and, where possible, comparison groups.

Future research could survey students across all four institutions, measure where graduates settle between the lagoon, the mainland and other regions, and follow one of the proposed actions over time to test whether it produces the expected effects.

8.4 Contribution

The thesis links the international debate on higher education to a local case, showing how trends such as touristification, wage gaps and institutional evaluation take shape in one city. It also uses system mapping to connect qualitative evidence with policy design, showing where an intervention would matter and who holds the lever.

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APPENDIX A. CODING TABLE

Table A.1 reports the forty-nine citations on which the analysis of Chapter 5 is based, in the original Italian, with the first-order code and the second-order theme assigned to each. Speaker codes are those of Table 4.1.

Table A.1. Full coding of the workshop and interview material.

ID	Speaker	Verbatim citation (original Italian)	First-order code	Second-order theme
1.1	S1	Gli studenti Ca' Foscari sono un flusso di tre anni, non una popolazione stabile, a meno che qualcuno non si trasformi in residente vero.	Three-year turnover, failed residency	Rootedness and permanence in the territory
1.2	S1	Per i mestieri che a Venezia non hanno mercato si può vivere in città e lavorare per un mercato che sta altrove. L'università però insegna a partire, non a lavorare da qui in modo distribuito.	Remote work, university oriented to leaving	Work and professional opportunities
2	S2	La terraferma un'economia ce l'ha. In certi campi assume e trattiene i suoi laureati. Chi vive in isola va comunque in terraferma per lavorare.	Mainland economy, graduates absorbed elsewhere	Work and professional opportunities
3	S3	Gli studenti competono con i turisti per lo stesso patrimonio abitativo. Finché un alloggio rende di più al turista, lo studente è strutturalmente la seconda scelta.	Competition between tourism and students for housing	Housing and the rental market
4	S4	La città affitta a un turista per tre notti la stanza che darebbe a uno studente per un anno, perché rende di più. Bisognerebbe togliere case al mercato breve.	Short-term rentals vs. student residence	Housing and the rental market
5.1	S5	Meglio un servizio carriera che dica realmente dove si trovano le opportunità e crei collegamenti con esse.	Career service perceived as ineffective	Services and student experience
5.2	S5	Per gli studenti extra-UE convertire il permesso di studio in permesso di lavoro alla laurea è un percorso a ostacoli che non premia il merito. Si può fare tutto giusto e non ottenere comunque un lavoro per una scadenza sul documento.	Residence-permit bureaucracy, non-EU students	Bureaucracy and residence permits
6.1	S6	L'università è misurata su ciò che non trattiene gli studenti. È premiata e valutata sulla ricerca e sulla reputazione internazionale, non sulla logistica didattica.	Incentives on research/reputation, not on teaching	Governance and evaluation of the university
6.2	S6	C'è un buco dei dati. Gli studenti non sono presi in considerazione negli studi e nelle politiche volte a migliorare la situazione.	Lack of data on the student population	Data and student policies
7	S7	Per gli studenti IUAV le opportunità in isola e in terraferma sono limitate. Spesso gli studenti si spostano verso il centro di maggiore interesse, cioè Milano, oppure all'estero.	Limited opportunities, flight to Milan/abroad	Work and professional opportunities

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8	S8	Anche se le loro capacità potrebbero essere utili al territorio, gli studenti si sentono sottovalutati sia dal punto di vista economico sia da quello reputazionale, un tratto tipico del mondo dell'architettura.	Economic and reputational undervaluation	Work and professional opportunities
9.1	S9	Vivo a Mestre perché l'isola non se la può permettere, un'ora e mezza a tratta con i materiali addosso, come molti altri studenti dell'accademia.	Forced commuting, housing costs on the island	Housing and the rental market
9.2	S9	Qualche studente riesce a inserirsi nel contesto artistico della città anche nel lungo termine, ma non esiste un percorso strutturato. È tutto lasciato all'iniziativa dei singoli.	Informal integration, no structured path	Services and student experience
9.3	S9	Le quattro istituzioni del polo non sono pari. Quando la municipalità parla con le università, parla con Ca' Foscari e IUAV, mentre l'Accademia e il Conservatorio restano sottoconsiderati.	Unequal weight among the institutions of the pole	Disparity among the institutions of the pole
10.1	S10	Le università italiane hanno una dimensione quotidiana, didattica e di core business diversa da quella estera. Dove i servizi pubblici scarseggiano, le università private colmano il vuoto con più servizi, qualità e un fattore network decisivo.	Public/private service gap between universities	Services and student experience
10.2	S10	Il diritto allo studio dovrebbe includere anche l'accesso a eventi e iniziative altrimenti fuori portata. Gli spazi universitari dovrebbero diventare un luogo di vita, non solo di studio.	Events, spaces lived in as places of life	Services and student experience
10.3	S10	Le case popolari sono assegnate solo su base ISEE, usate più come ammortizzatore sociale che come leva per trattenere talenti. Il dialogo università-comune e università-regione dovrebbe essere più attivo.	Public housing (ISEE), university-municipality/region dialogue	Housing and the rental market
10.4	S10	Il Rettore ricopre anche il ruolo di professore e non sempre ha la postura adatta alle relazioni istituzionali. Gli studenti fuorisede che vivono a Venezia non vengono conteggiati come residenti.	University governance, residency status	Governance and evaluation of the university
11.1	E1	Burocrazia inutile. Collaborazione con altri enti/istituzioni molto complessa. Mancata individuazione di una figura fissa di riferimento con cui comunicare dal lato dell'università Ca' Foscari.	Bureaucracy, lack of a fixed contact person	Bureaucracy and institutional collaboration
11.2	E1	Rapporto opportunistico da parte dell'università con enti/istituzioni, spesso fatto per immagine o per ottenere certificazioni, fregandosi in realtà del territorio. Nessun rapporto relazionale.	Opportunistic university-territory relationship	Governance and evaluation of the university
11.3	E1	Mancato coinvolgimento dei pendolari nelle	Commuters	City life and

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		attività proposte [...] Se un pendolare arriva ma deve stare solo a San Giobbe non vive tutto il resto della città.	excluded from city life	student involvement
11.4	E1	Caso [teatro] U35, prezzi accessibili per aumentare la fanbase nel lungo termine [...] l'università chiede solo uno sconto per gli studenti, il teatro non ha nessun ritorno.	Unbalanced university-theatre agreement	Collaborations with the territory (culture, firms, institutions)
11.5	E1	Servizi non aumentati sufficientemente rispetto alle aspettative, più housing per studenti. Magari meno studenti ma più coinvolti, più attivi nella vita città.	Insufficient services and housing	Housing and the rental market
11.6	E1	Bisogna muoversi ASAP in vista del ricambio generazionale che avverrà tra non molti anni e che colpirà tutte le università (sia statali che pubbliche).	Urgency of the generational turnover	Demographic sustainability and generational turnover
12.1	E2	Sindacato non considerato un soggetto primario e in grado di impattare il territorio, visto come 'quella cosa di cui gli sfigati hanno bisogno'.	Low regard for the union among young people	Student representation and associationism
12.2	E2	L'interesse da parte dei giovani è basso [...] quest'anno con il cambio di associazione studentesca in carica (FUTURA) si è stabilito un rapporto che ha portato a un maggiore coinvolgimento.	Union-student associations relationship	Student representation and associationism
12.3	E2	Nella Pubblica Amministrazione ci sono state 40mila offerte di lavoro non soddisfatte. Tanti rinunciano a lavorare in isola causa costo della vita, il tema abitativo su tutti.	Cost of living, giving up work on the island	Housing and the rental market
12.4	E2	Pochi investimenti in economia reale in quanto tempi lunghi e margini più bassi [...] forse troppi investimenti sul turismo che da soli non permettono lo sviluppo dell'economia reale di un territorio.	Imbalance between tourism and real-economy investment	Tourism vs. the real economy
12.5	E2	Nonostante sia pieno di linee di mezzi pubblici che colleghino Venezia all'entroterra il trasporto rimane altamente inefficiente, anche per chi viene dalla più vicina Mestre.	Inefficiency of public transport	Mobility and transport
12.6	E2	Difficile che l'onere della residenzialità degli studenti ricada sull'università perché 'la coperta è corta' [...] ma allo stesso tempo perché dovrebbe la PA provvedere a servizi alloggio agli studenti se poi comunque vanno altrove a vivere/lavorare.	Burden of student housing, university or public administration?	Roles and responsibilities (university, politics, economy)
13.1	E3	Quando ho iniziato a fare io Ca' Foscari, a Venezia abitavano 130.000 persone, adesso credo che a malapena arriviamo a 50.000 [...] è una città che si è fortemente turisticizzata [...] e quindi il tema degli studenti è vissuto in un modo diverso.	Depopulation and touristification of Venice	Depopulation and touristification of Venice

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13.2	E3	Il territorio veneziano [...] ha meno opportunità di sviluppo di grandi imprese [...] rispetto a quello che può avere il territorio padovano [...] nel Veneziano c'è un po' più di ritrosia rispetto a quello che io ho percepito su Padova.	Lower openness of Venetian firms towards the university	Work and professional opportunities
13.3	E3	Un tema [...] è quello della residenzialità [...] c'è anche un tema di servizi [...] io onestamente faccio fatica a contare tanti supermercati a Venezia.	Shortage of basic urban services	Urban services and quality of life
13.4	E3	Se io adesso per andare da Venezia a Padova ci metto un'ora e mezza e invece da Mestre a Padova ci metto mezz'ora, vado a Mestre [...] il fatto che l'alta velocità un domani possa arrivare a Tessera per me è una grandissima opportunità.	Mobility as a relaunch lever (high-speed rail, water transport)	Mobility and transport
13.5	E3	L'università ha il compito di attrarre [...] e invece l'economia e la politica hanno il compito di stabilizzare [...] altrimenti è un gatto che si morde la coda.	Division of tasks among university, politics and the economy	Roles and responsibilities (university, politics, economy)
13.6	E3	Le università italiane non è vero che non formano bene [...] Noi creiamo professionalità bellissime [...] però poi queste professionalità dove vanno se non abbiamo le opportunità per trattenerle qui?	Talent drain, not a training-quality problem	Work and professional opportunities
13.7	E3	Venezia ha un tema [...] che a Venezia vengono tutti [...] Venezia potrebbe essere veramente un laboratorio [...] potrebbe essere molto 'milanizzata' da questi punti di vista.	Venice as a laboratory of attractiveness	Attractiveness and branding of the territory
14.1	E4	L'università è fondamentale per il centro storico, soprattutto contro lo spopolamento. Ca' Foscari e IUAV portano ogni giorno circa 20.000 studenti domiciliati in città. Senza di loro Venezia sarebbe svuotata.	20.000 studenti come contrappeso demografico	Depopulation and touristification of Venice
14.2	E4	L'ateneo è nato storicamente per i bisogni del commercio. Oggi forma migliaia di laureati per il settore privato e fa da ponte per la ricerca. È un baluardo per un'economia cittadina che altrimenti sarebbe dominata solo dal turismo mordi e fuggi.	Ateneo come baluardo contro un'economia di solo turismo	Tourism vs. the real economy
14.3	E4	La sfida principale è parlarsi di più tra istituzioni, Comune e Università, e condividere una visione comune su dove investire.	Parlarsi di più tra istituzioni, visione comune sugli investimenti	Bureaucracy and institutional collaboration
14.4	E4	Il sistema delle biblioteche e delle aule studio andrebbe unificato tra università, comune e fondazioni private, creando un accesso unico per gli studenti. L'obiettivo è trasformare Venezia in una vera e propria città campus.	Accesso unico a biblioteche e aule studio, città campus	Services and student experience
14.5	E4	È mancata storicamente una figura strutturata	Nessun referente	Bureaucracy and

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		per le relazioni esterne, ma la nuova governance di ateneo prevede una figura dedicata ai rapporti col territorio.	strutturato, figura dedicata nella nuova governance	institutional collaboration
14.6	E4	Bisogna collaborare con l'ESU e con le associazioni cittadine, sportive e culturali, per far vivere agli studenti un'esperienza a 360 gradi, dai corsi di vela alle serate a teatro, superando il concetto di università come esameificio.	ESU e associazioni cittadine, oltre l'esameificio	City life and student involvement
14.7	E4	Le grandi università sono brave a creare un ecosistema in cui lo studente vuole rimanere, fare network, partecipare alle cene degli alumni. A Venezia e in Veneto questo manca. C'è poco storytelling e i ragazzi vivono l'università in modo distaccato. Il network di contatti vale quanto il titolo di studio.	Coolness e senso di comunità, il network vale quanto il titolo	Attractiveness and branding of the territory
14.8	E4	Il problema principale sono i salari italiani, nettamente inferiori rispetto a metropoli come Londra o Milano, il che spinge i laureati a emigrare. Il Veneto ha costruito un sistema economico basato sul contenimento dei costi piuttosto che sul valore aggiunto.	Salari bassi ed economia costruita sul contenimento dei costi	Salaries and the value structure of the local economy
14.9	E4	L'università sconta i limiti burocratici del pubblico. Non può offrire stipendi fuori tabella per attrarre professori internazionali di spicco, a differenza delle private.	Tabelle stipendiali pubbliche e attrazione dei docenti	Governance and evaluation of the university
14.10	E4	La didattica è troppo legata alla lezione frontale e alle slide ripetitive. I docenti vanno incentivati a innovare, altrimenti le università online rischiano di svuotare le aule.	Lezione frontale e slide, rischio università online	Teaching model and competition from online universities
14.11	E4	Bisogna sfruttare meglio l'asset Venezia, usando i palazzi della città per creare occasioni di incontro ed eventi di altissimo livello che un'università online o periferica non potrà mai offrire.	L'asset Venezia, i palazzi come vantaggio competitivo	Attractiveness and branding of the territory
14.12	E4	Mancano completamente le istituzioni di mezzo che collegano i giovani con la politica. E per politica non intendo solo quella nazionale, ma anche quella più locale, come la politica universitaria di Ca' Foscari. Sono lo strumento con cui i giovani possono far sentire le proprie idee e influenzare direttamente i propri percorsi. [verbatim da confermare sulla trascrizione]	Mancano le istituzioni di mezzo tra giovani e politica, dalla nazionale a quella universitaria	Student representation and associationism

Source: Author's elaboration on the transcripts of the workshop and interviews.