



Polish policy-making for higher education financing in the years 2010-2023: the case study of the University of Zielona Góra

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SUMMARY

The work outlines the issue of financing higher education in Poland and discusses the role and significance of higher education in the policy of the Polish state, emphasising its key function in social, economic, and cultural development. Higher education is presented as a main factor determining the future of the state, directly influencing the shaping and strengthening of its potential in various areas of social life.

The thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the financing of the higher education sector, focusing on key changes in the state's financial policy regarding universities and the mechanisms of budget allocation, financial support programs, and strategies for optimising the use of available resources in the context of the sustainable development of academic institutions. In order to carry out this research, with a view to eliciting answers to the above key issues, a brief historical evolution of higher education in Poland is presented, with particular attention given to legal acts regulating its functioning, including the "Law on Higher Education and Science". Key changes introduced to this legal act and their impact on the quality of education, research organisation, and funding of innovation are analysed. Special attention is paid to the challenges related to the adaptation of universities to changing economic and legal conditions, emphasising the need to ensure adequate financial and infrastructural support. The legal foundations of the functioning of universities in Poland are outlined, analysing their structure, division, and role in the education system and the national economy. Universities, both public and private, are key institutions influencing the development of knowledge, innovation, and competencies essential in the modern economy. It is emphasised that their role extends beyond traditional teaching and research functions. Universities serve as centres of knowledge and innovation and actively participate in the development of local and regional communities. They engage in projects supporting knowledge transfer and improving the quality of life in the regions where they operate.

The dissertation outlines the mechanisms of financing universities, analysing the methods of budget allocation and their effective management. Particular attention is given to the challenges associated with the declining number of students and its impact on the financing of academic institutions. The financial policy towards the higher education sector in Poland has undergone numerous changes aimed at adapting the education system to evolving challenges and socio-economic realities. Therefore, the research presented in this work is confined to the period 2010–2023 as its chronological framework. The beginning of this period is associated with the introduction of significant reforms in Polish higher education, aimed at improving the quality of education, increasing the independence of universities, and strengthening the relationship between the education system and the needs of the labor market. This reform introduced new financing rules and modified the method of budget allocation for universities. Therefore, strategies for acquiring funds, such as

research grants, collaboration with the private sector, and attracting international students, are also discussed.

The selection of the lower time frame was influenced, among other factors, by the economic crisis of 2008–2010, which global consequences impacted state budgets, including the financing of the education sector. The period following the crisis was characterised by the restructuring of public finances and the search for new ways to finance higher education. An important factor was also the Europe 2020 strategy, which goals, as part of European Union policy, emphasised education, scientific research, and innovation as the foundations of sustainable economic development. This strategy had a significant impact on the financial policy towards higher education, promoting investments in human capital development and innovation. A pivotal moment in the discussed period was the introduction of the Law on Higher Education and Science (the so-called Act 2.0) in 2018. This reform changed the funding model for universities, introducing new quality criteria and modifying the structure of resource allocation.

Chapter IV presents a case study of the University of Zielona Góra, analysing the financial management of this institution. The history and structure of the University are presented, and an analysis of revenues and costs in various areas of activity is conducted. Strategies for financial optimisation, cost-saving measures, and their impact on the quality of education and scientific research are discussed in detail.

The University of Zielona Góra serves as an example of the practical application of the state's financial policy towards higher education. The analysis of its financing allows for an assessment of the effectiveness of public policies regarding budget allocation, scholarship systems, and research grants. The integration of various fields of knowledge, following the model of Western universities, makes this institution unique and interesting from the perspective of research on the financing and management of higher education. The case study of the University of Zielona Góra enables a better understanding of the impact of interdisciplinary and a wide range of study programs on the development of the university and the entire region.

In most Polish cities, specialised institutions such as technical universities, medical universities, or economic universities operate. The University of Zielona Góra stands out among them by combining various fields of science and education within one institution, following the model of Western universities. Therefore, the choice of the University of Zielona Góra for analysis was not accidental. It is an institution in the Polish higher education system, making it a particularly interesting case of research. Thanks to its broad range of study programs, it integrates the features of a technical university, a medical university, and an economic university. This kind of interdisciplinary is rare in Poland, where higher education institutions typically specialise in specific areas. The choice of this university has also allowed for a comprehensive view of the education system and research activities, aligning with modern academic trends.

The conclusions and recommendations resulting from the analysis are presented in Chapter V. The focus is on the legal and financial aspects shaping the condition of universities and on proposals for improvements in the state's policy towards higher education. Modifications to the algorithm for budget allocation and new models for assessing the financial efficiency of universities are proposed, which could improve the management of public funds.

In summary, the document provides a comprehensive analysis of higher education in Poland, with particular emphasis on financial, legal, and organisational aspects. The proposed reforms and recommendations could make a significant contribution to the development of the academic sector and its adaptation to contemporary challenges.