

# Americanization of European Management Education in Historical and Comparative Perspective: A Symposium

BEHLÜL ÜSDIKEN  
*Sabanci University, Turkey*

This symposium brings together four contributions that examine the post-World War II development of academic management education in Europe, each focusing on a particular country or region. All four articles are centrally concerned with addressing the *problematique* of Americanization within the context of the form and the content of higher education in management. They do so by taking a historical view that considers the ways in which business education developed in Europe in the first half of the 20th century, proceeding then to an assessment of the processes and outcomes of postwar American influence. The issues that the symposium deals with historically and in relation to the present day is particularly apposite at a time when, as American forms continue moving into other national settings, assertions as to their “correctness” appears to be, if anything, rampant.

Consideration of the pre-World War II period suggests the development of distinct national patterns as well as some shared properties and international modeling effects. The pioneering late-19th-century formations in France and Germany were established as “higher” commercial schools outside the public

university system and were then to serve as models for other countries in Europe. Britain was as an exception in that early initiatives took place within universities or colleges, remaining however only at a limited scale (Tiratsoo, this issue). As Engwall’s contribution shows, the *handelshochschulen* in Germany had a strong influence on Scandinavian countries in form and content, whereas Italy, Spain, and Turkey began by emulating the French schools (Kipping, Üsdiken & Puig, this issue). Unlike the French, Germany embarked on an early process of “scienticization” and “academicization” as the business economics discipline (*betriebswirtschaftslehre*) strengthened its science claims and the commercial schools were converted to or amalgamated into universities from the mid-1910s onward (Kieser, this issue). This had a following in Italy as most commercial schools had been, by mid-1930s integrated into universities. In Nordic countries as well as in France, Turkey, and Spain business education continued to remain outside the purview of the university sector, though there was some late-coming university involvement in the latter two countries. Clearly in form, but largely in content too, Europe remained immune to American influence in the pre-

war period, though there were cases of some impact on the content of academic studies as in Sweden (Engwall) and in Britain (Fauri, 1998) and in the way of meager initiatives for executive education in France and Italy (Kipping et al.).

This began to change, however, after World War II with American involvement in European reconstruction through various forms of technical assistance and as Europe turned toward the United States to learn about management. Although historically there has been considerable diversity within management education in the United States, it nevertheless became dominated in the postwar period by professional business schools attached to universities, the most prominent of which had been founded around the turn of the century (Daniel, 1998). They usually offered, often to students with some work experience, a full-time, generalist, 2-year graduate program leading to a master in business administration (MBA) as well as a range of executive programs. The institutionalization of the graduate business school and its offerings in the United States in the aftermath of World War II and the strengthening claims toward scientifically based content that also extended to reshaping undergraduate business education (Locke, 1989) was accompanied by attempts to transport these models and knowledge to Europe and to other parts of the world. This was to take place not only immediately after the war but also in the 3 decades that followed as this is when the United States served as a "reference society" for most of western and southern Europe (Guillén, 1994).

Wary of the histories of institutional development in each of the countries that are examined, the articles in the symposium recognize, to begin with, that although much of American ideas for management education that were coming in were "new," the postwar European scene was not *tabula rasa*. Together they also show that, despite the strong and active, though not necessarily coherent, early American drive to transfer its managerial and educational models to Europe, corresponding enthusiasm varied across countries, as well as intranationally and over time. Thus, the articles highlight the significance of the recipient context, material and institutional, and the changes therein, in the transfer process and its outcomes. They consider a broad range of factors such as the nature of the ties with and the economic and political dependence on the United States. There is also reference to the more active or passive stance, in some cases variant over time, taken by governments and the

state bureaucracy as well as the role of business interests and the attitudes in industry toward management training. Finally, they point to the interaction with pre-existing institutional frames and in particular to the reactions of public university systems and interorganizational dynamics within the management education field in shaping the pace and the outcomes of accommodating American models.

Altogether these considerations and the evidence presented in the articles point to two major themes. First, and foremost perhaps, they indicate the limits (Zeitlin & Herrigel, 2000) to the wholesale transfer of American models. Not only in the immediate aftermath of the war but even 5 or so decades later the European panorama is characterized more by dominant organizational formations and programs that diverge, variant as they are also across countries, from the archetypal American forms. Notable in particular has been the late-coming involvement of the public university sector and, then, often turning out to be limited to the pre-experience first degree. Indeed, the latter has largely characterized nonuniversity institutions as well, like those in Nordic countries and in France. Nevertheless, the more marked moves toward the prototypical American MBA were also to occur in these kinds of institutions and, as in specific cases in Spain, Italy, and Turkey, within private universities, which have also incorporated the "business school within the university" model. Britain appears to stand out as an exception, as American forms and programs for graduate education seem to have been embraced widely, especially in the last couple of decades, though there too the generic MBA is a rarity. Moreover, only a small proportion of students attend full-time programs, which is itself typically a modified version, not least in duration (Tiratsoo).

The articles also suggest however that there has been a widespread penetration of American approaches to the researching and teaching of management and thus to curricular composition, indicating more broadly that content has tended to flow more readily than educational forms (cf. Amdam, 1996). Nevertheless, this has not necessarily always been complete, due partly, as Kieser (this issue) noted, to curricula being intertwined with organizational forms and programs for management education. Again as Kieser and Kipping et al. suggested, it is also associated with the institutionalized character that curricula gain bearing elements of past traditions and the power relations that surround them. Beyond the various amalgams that have consequently emerged and sus-

tained especially at the first-degree levels, postgraduate curricula including critical and nonmanagerialist approaches on offer in Britain, for example, provide even starker deviations from the spirit and content of the original model.

By assessing the developments in the last decade or so the symposium also addresses the issue of whether there is nowadays a renewed impetus toward greater convergence with American models. Accreditation and public-ranking systems appear to have become more recent bearers of Americanization (Engwall), though again with different degrees of influence across countries (Tiratsoo). Notable also is the European Union's endorsement, with the 1999 Bologna Declaration, of a two-tier system of higher education, distinguishing between bachelor and master's degrees. These supranational institutional developments have been accompanied by national policy reorientations in some countries concerning university governance, again clearly inspired by American models (Kieser). The articles by Tiratsoo, Kieser, and Engwall also point to the politico-economic bases of these institutional alterations as they implicate reductions in public funding of higher education. Based on these developments, Engwall concluded that Americanization of management education will continue in Nordic countries. Kieser, on the other hand, with reference to Germany, argued that historically entrenched norms and practices persist and that only the less-central actors are ardent adopters of the new institutional prescriptions. Thus, despite what currently appears as a resurgence of the enticement for American models, in particular the business school and the MBA,

whether there will be increasing homogenization across Europe toward forms of management education largely akin to the American still remains an open question.

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*BEHLÜL ÜSDIKEN* is currently professor of management and organization at Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey. He has previously taught at Bogaziçi University and Koç University. His research has appeared, in addition to Turkish academic journals, in *Business History*, *Organization Studies*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *British Journal of Management*, *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, and *Operations Research*. He served as a coeditor of *Organization Studies* between 1996 and 2001. His research interests are in organization theory, history of managerial thought and management education. He is currently working on the evolution of management thinking in Turkey and the Turkish managerial elite.