

# Towards a Canada Post-Secondary Education Act?

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Submitted to

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This thesis is dedicated

to my wife

Sulini

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## ACRONYMS

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ACF	: Advocacy Coalition Framework
AUCC	: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
CanFed	: Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada
CASA	: Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
CAUT	: Canadian Association of University Teachers
CCL	: Canadian Council on Learning
CIHR	: Canadian Institutes of Health Research
CFI	: Canada Foundation for Innovation
CFS	: Canadian Federation of Students
CMEC	: Council of Ministers of Education of Canada
CMSF	: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation
CoF	: Council of the Federation
CRC	: Canada Research Chairs program
CSHT	: Canada Social and Health Transfer
CST	: Canada Social Transfer
EE	: Economic efficiency (Coalition)
EO	: Equal opportunity (Coalition)
EU	: European Union
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
HECQO	: Higher Education Quality Council on Ontario
KIP	: Knowledge Infrastructure Program
OECD	: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
MCEETYA	: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MPHEC	: Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission
NCE	: Networks of Centres of Excellence
NDP	: New Democratic Party

NPM : New Public Management  
NSERC : Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council  
PR : Provincial Responsibility (Coalition)  
PSE : Post-secondary education  
R&D : Research and Development  
SSHRC : Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council  
SUFA : Social Union Framework Agreement  
UBC : University of British Columbia

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## SUMMARY

*The transition from an industrial to a global knowledge-based economy has put universities in the spotlight of public policies as the new drivers of innovation and sustained economic growth. Consequently, societal expectations towards the academic community have changed and so has, under the influence of neo-liberal ideas, the public governance of higher education. This is particularly true in federalist systems, such as Germany, Australia and the European Union, where the roles of each government level in governing the higher education sector had to be renegotiated and clarified. In Canada, however, despite repeated recommendations by policymakers, scholars and international organisations, the respective responsibilities have not yet been clarified and, to date, there are still no mechanisms to coordinate the post-secondary education policies of the federal and provincial governments. This paper inquires into the reasons for this exception. In the academic literature, this has generally been explained in terms of Canada's uniqueness with respect to its federalist system and the decentralized higher education sector. We attempt to go beyond this traditional federalism, state-centered approach, which is predominant in the Canadian higher education literature. Instead, based on interviews and official documents and inspired by the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), we shall be looking at the belief systems of the major actors in the policy process and the degree of coordination among them. Our analysis comes to the conclusion that, on the one hand, proponents of a pan-Canadian approach are divided over their fundamental beliefs regarding the compatibility of inclusiveness and excellence. Some argue that the federal government must legislate common standards to ensure equal opportunities for all Canadians. Others propose a New Governance-inspired approach to create a differentiated and competitive university sector that meets the demands of the global knowledge-based economy more efficiently. On the other hand, even though the provinces differ in their beliefs regarding the equal opportunity versus economic efficiency debate, they share the same strong belief with respect to the role of the federal government. According to this view, post-secondary education is exclusively a provincial responsibility and the role of the federal government is solely to help them 'fix the problems'. Moreover, contrary to the proponents of more intergovernmental collaboration, the provinces have successfully strengthened the coordination among themselves to block further perceived federal intrusions into provincial jurisdiction. We come to the conclusion that the absence of intergovernmental mechanisms to govern post-secondary education is a consequence of the diverging belief systems and the establishment of formal coordination structures among the provinces to block – as they perceive - further federal intrusions. Also, there is less of a sense of urgency to act compared to, say, health care. Finally, remembering the near-separation of Quebec in 1995, there is very little appetite to reopen the constitutional debates. Therefore, based on our analysis, we argue that contrary to suggestions by some higher education scholars, the establishment of intergovernmental coordinating mechanisms appears unlikely in the near future.*

***“We want to be the Smart and Caring Nation;  
a society that innovates, embraces its talent  
and uses the knowledge of each of its citizens  
to improve the human condition for all.***

...

Governor General David Johnston  
Installation Speech, Parliament of Canada  
1 October 2010

## **INTRODUCTION: The Canadian *exceptionalism***

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“Describing Canadian higher education is almost as difficult a task as defining the nation itself”, asserts Glen Jones (2007: p. 627), one of the most prominent scholars in Canadian higher education research. He continues to explain that “the Canadian policy approach to higher education has been – and continues to be – unique, reflecting many of the complex social and economic factors that differentiate this country from its western, developed peers”. Its origins are traced back to the colonial beginnings marked by French missionaries building the first schools and, later, British royalists fleeing from the American Revolution, founding the first higher education institutions in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. A crucial moment for the further development of the Canadian higher education sector was the *British North American Act* of 1867. At a time when the Canadian government’s main task was to defend territorial sovereignty and to promote economic development, education was not considered a national priority. Alas, it was delegated to the provincial authorities, as it remains to this day. Thus, it is commonly asserted that there is no such thing as a Canadian post-secondary education

system<sup>1</sup> (CCL, 2007; Jones, 1997; Fisher et al, 2006; Shanahan and Jones, 2007; Tupper, 2009). Rather, Canada's post-secondary education sector is composed of thirteen different systems. There is no federal ministry of education and no national university, which is unique in the Western world. Canada's *exceptionalism* features another difference with advanced higher education systems. Since the late 1980s, Western governments have initiated major higher education reforms. The best known example, perhaps, is the Bologna reform in Europe. In federalist systems, such as Australia or Germany, higher education reforms came along with a re-negotiation of the respective roles of local and national governments in the new governance structure. Again, Canada differs in two respects. First, Canadian federalism has prevented such "sweeping reforms", note Schuetze and Bruneau (2004). Second, Jones (2007: p. 631) asserts: "The uniqueness of the Canadian constitutional approach to higher education was (...) that the federal government has never been able to negotiate a clear, direct role in this policy arena". This is since World War II, when the Canadian government became involved with universities more closely and, today, channels half of its entire Research and Development (R&D) spending through them.<sup>2</sup> That said, it is not because of a lack of suggestions as to how the roles and responsibilities of the provincial and federal governments could be clarified. In fact, some argue that there are indications that a national post-secondary education strategy will be established in the near future (see Fisher et al., 2006). Yet, proposals for a pan-Canadian or national approach have been made for decades, but they have

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we will use the terms "higher education" and "post-secondary education" interchangeably, while employing the latter mostly with respect to the Canadian context. Furthermore, although we understand that the notion of "post-secondary education" encompasses colleges and university-colleges (for a detailed typology see Statistics Canada, 2009), this research is concerned solely with the university sector. Finally, the terms "university" and "higher education institution" are treated as synonyms. Hence, when referring to *post-secondary education institutions, sector or landscape*, we include both aspects, teaching (education) and research, if not specified otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Canada, Government of, Industry Canada (2010), *Science and Technology Data 2009*, <http://www.science.gc.ca/937918F9-DFCD-42C4-992C-E4948CB883EF/2009-e.pdf> (accessed on 29 June 2011).

never led to serious discussions and negotiations by the concerned governments and stakeholders. Why?

This is - in one word - the question that we will address in this paper. The absence of mechanisms or institutions to coordinate all level of governments, let alone all stakeholders, in the field of post-secondary education has generally been explained *ipso facto* by the exceptionalism of Canadian federalism. Although, without doubt, the particularities of the Canadian federalist system and its history are the overriding issue, this research seeks to go beyond this generic explanation. The underlying premise is that while the large political and institutional environment sets the backdrop, a more in-depth analysis must also take into account the involved individual actors, who interact within the parameters of these broader socio-political and institutional structures. Moreover, their actions are guided not only by interests, but depend on the way they perceive the policy issue and the policy environment. Perceptions, in return, are based on our values and beliefs as to how the world works or *should* work. Therefore, our analysis is inspired by the theoretical approach of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). Developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith, the ACF understands policy stability as a function of stable advocacy coalitions composed by common belief systems and a non-trivial degree of coordination within a specific policy subsystem. With this theoretical lens, we shall inquire into the research question, that is, why, to date, there is no pan-Canadian strategy or institution to coordinate the policies of the federal and provincial governments in post-secondary education?

To respond to this question, we have structured this paper as follows: To begin with, the literature review will in a first step take a broad look at the economic, social, political and ideological forces that have had a significant impact on higher education policies in Western

countries, in particular with respect to the role of the state in this policy field. In the second part of the literature review, we will narrow our focus on Canada and present more specifically the recent developments and trends in this country's rapidly changing post-secondary education landscape in the context of the relatively rigid federalist system. Of particular interest will be the evolution of the federal government's role in the university sector. Chapter three and four will explain the theoretical and methodological approach. Based on interviews with representatives from associations, provincial departments, universities and experts, as well as official policy documents and reports, the analysis in chapter five will focus on the belief systems of the advocacy coalitions, the coordination between them as well as their resources and strategies. The subsequent discussion (chapter 6) will put the various pieces together and, in light of the ACF model, will, first, provide a response to our research question and, second, discuss the current indicators for potential major policy change in the near future. Third, we shall also look into the implications of our research in terms of policy options and a future research agenda. Finally, the concluding remarks will summarize the main findings and put it in the context of the current academic literature on Canada's post-secondary education landscape by asking, whether our research reinforces the image of the Canadian *exceptionalism*.

Unlike in natural sciences, the "why" question in social sciences leaves typically much space for interpretation and assumption. Asking why a certain policy is not in place may in the perspective of some people imply that there *should* be such a policy. It is clearly not the premise of this research that there *should* be a Canadian strategy in post-secondary education, or the contrary. Our goal is to foster a more in-depth understanding of the policy arena with respect to the coordination of federal-and provincial policies towards universities. Our

findings will demonstrate that the transition to a global knowledge economy has divided proponents of a pan-Canadian approach, while the provinces have successfully strengthened the coordination among themselves. The status quo is furthermore enhanced by the absence of complete data and a forum for dialogue among major stakeholders. Finally, our analysis of the current indicators for potential major policy change do not support assertions by some Canadian higher education scholars, that Canada is heading towards a national higher education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY AND THE STATE**

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Universities have never been completely isolated from the societal and economic context of their times, despite being referred to as “Ivory Towers”. Their emergence in 19<sup>th</sup> century was closely related to the rising of the nation-state, as was their contribution to the development of the welfare state in the 1960s (Kwiek, 2001). Hence, the state-university relationship has always been an important one, indicative of broader societal values and beliefs pertaining to the role of knowledge and education. An overview of the literature on Canadian higher education points to three major forces that, more recently, have considerably re-shaped the state-university connection, that is the mantra of the *knowledge-based economy* and *knowledge society* (see, for example, Metcalfe, 2009; Skolnik, 2005, Wolfe, 2002, 1998), *globalization* (Clark et al, 2010; Metcalfe, 2010; Skolnik, 2005; Schuetze and Braun, 2004), and *neo-liberalism* (Fisher et al., 2006; Jones, 2007). This chapter will, first, describe these meta-narratives that dominate the higher education discourse in Canada and elsewhere.

Second, we shall discuss how these forces have impacted the interaction and interdependence between society, state and universities. In this respect, of particular interest for our research is how other federalist states have altered their intergovernmental governance structure in higher education to adapt to changing environment. Hence, the purpose of the following two sub-chapters, 1.1 and 1.2, is to present the reader the main global developments that have driven higher education policy makers in most Western countries, including Canada. As we shall see in the analysis of chapter 5, these forces have contributed considerable to shape the belief systems in Canada's university landscape.

## **1. 1. Forces shaping higher education**

### **1.1.1. The 'knowledge-based economy' and the 'knowledge society': The emergence of two conflicting discourses**

The terms 'knowledge-based economy' and 'knowledge society' are widely used, but less often explained (Beerkens, 2008). Both notions provide a 'policy meta-narrative' (Ozaga, 2007) for politicians and policymakers to justify wide-reaching reforms. Building on the endogenous growth theory<sup>3</sup> and the human capital theory<sup>4</sup>, the concept of knowledge-based economy was adopted in the mid-1990s and subsequently fiercely promoted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In its first main report on "The

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<sup>3</sup> The endogenous growth theory was developed by Paul Romer and the Chicaco School of Economics. In classical economic theory, economic growth was explained solely in terms of labor and capital. In contrast, the endogenous growth theory includes knowledge, more precisely science and technology, as a determinant for economic growth. Whereas in the classical model economic growth was limited to the amount of labor and capital available, the endogenous model predicts that sustained and unlimited economic expansion is possible given that knowledge is abundant (see Peters, 2003; Romer, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Concepts such as National Systems of Innovation, Information Society and new Economy have previously been used to describe basically the same thing, that is, knowledge and Information and Communication Technology matters for economic growth and prosperity (Godin, 2009).

knowledge-based economy”, the OECD (1996) asserts in its introduction that “knowledge is now recognized as the driver of productivity and economic growth, leading to a new focus on the role of information, technology and learning in economic performance” (p.3). As such, knowledge-based economies are defined as “economies which are directly based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge and information” (p. 7). In its core, this assertion was nothing new (Godin, 2009), but the concept of knowledge-based economy came to be used as an umbrella term for policymakers to propose new economic and science policies (Godin, 2009; Peters, 2001), in a world in which “knowledge and skills now stand alone as the only source of comparative advantage” in the international marketplace (Thurow, 1996 In: Peters, 2001: p. 1).

The concept of ‘knowledge society’ can be traced back to the writings of Peter Drucker (1969), Robert Lane (1966) and Daniel Bell (1973). Accordingly, the increasing education level of the people was going to result in the abolishment of class domination (Drucker, 1969), reduce ideology and make political decision-makers freer (Lane, 1966). Thus, the new relation of science to technology is understood as a driver for social change (see Bell, 1973). De Weert (1999) remarks with respect to Bell’s conception of knowledge, it reflects optimism that common sense or experience-based knowledge will eventually be replaced by scientific, rational reasoning. As well, the writings by the visionary authors anticipate that the knowledge society will empower the individual through education, by promoting social mobility.

The current debate on the knowledge society refutes in several ways the optimism of the early authors. The sociologist Nico Stehr asserts that the potential of academic knowledge to solve societal problems in a rational and efficient way, thereby de-politicizing the policymaking

process, proved to be wrong. Science is seen no longer as a symbol for “secular progress and civilizational advance” (2003: p. 647). Furthermore, some argue that more knowledge and education does not necessarily result in a classless society (Brine 2006; Peters 2001). Knowledge has become *the* central commodity defining social inclusion and exclusion, societal status and material disadvantage. Thereby, education has moved to the center of social policies. Traditional income transfer is incrementally being replaced by policies focusing on education as a means to promote social equality (Banting, 2006). Therefore, to ensure social cohesion in the knowledge society, better communication of knowledge to the public (Ozga, 2007) and “the reinvention of education as a *welfare right* and the recognition of *knowledge rights* as a basis for social inclusion and informed citizenship” (Peters, 2001) are necessary.

In conclusion, the discourse on the knowledge-based economy has emerged from the simple observation that knowledge matters for economic growth. Meanwhile, it has turned into a rather fuzzy concept providing the political impetus for new economic policies that focus on promoting research and development, in an attempt to defend a country’s competitive advantage in a global economy. In contrast, the notion of ‘knowledge society’ was born in the confidence that more knowledge will make society more equal. The current discourse emphasizes the other side of the coin, that is, those who don’t know, don’t have and are at the periphery of our society. What the discourses do have in common, is that they have been framed, shaped and driven by two forces that have marked any policy debate since the 1990s: globalization and neo-liberalism.

### 1.1.2. Globalization

Depending on whether one is a ‘sceptic’ or a ‘globalist’, the understanding of what ‘globalization’ means and entails, differs considerably (Beerkens, 2003; Held and McGrew, 2000). For our purposes, we refer to Held and McGrew’s (2000: p. 4) definition as “the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows of social interaction”, which “refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world’s major regions and continents”. Globalization as a determining force in shaping contemporary higher education manifests itself in many various ways. Subsequently, we describe three such manifestations, which have one underlying theme in common: competition. Whether it is between individuals, institutions or countries, competition emerges as a key driver in a global environment.

First, globalization expresses itself in a much higher mobility of students, researchers and skilled labour. The international mobility of doctoral students provides for an indicator illustrating mobility in the higher education and research sector. Between 1998 and 2006, the share of international doctoral students has increased in almost all member states, most notably in New Zealand, from 7.9% to 22.2%, and Canada, from 18.4% to 38.3% (OECD, 2009). According to Docquier and Marjoux (2004), the global brain drain resulting from higher mobility has affected primarily developing countries, while, in the 1990s, brain drain among developed countries has, in fact, decreased. In the meantime, the discourse has shifted from “brain drain” to “brain circulation” or “brain train”, taking into account the fact that many students and professors are not bound to a country and will go back to their home or a third country (Wildavsky, 2010).

Second, on an institutional level, the international mobility of students, researchers and other highly-skilled staff results in competition between universities seeking to attract the best talents. This phenomenon is best reflected in the growing popularity of national and international rankings of universities. These lists not only respond to a need for simplified, transparent and comparable information for students, but also constitute an informal performance indicator for governments and private funders (Michael, 2005). The best known global rankings are the *Academic Ranking of World Universities* by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (in short: Shanghai Ranking), established in 2003, and the *World University Rankings* by the Times Higher Education (THE), founded in 2004. Despite the continuing controversies, Marinson and Van de Wende (2007) conclude that they cannot be ignored and ought to be considered as a “potent device for framing higher education” (p. 326). This is confirmed, for example, by a case study of four Canadian universities by Burnett and Huisman (2010), illustrating the organizational, cultural and strategic impacts on the university as an institution.

Third, the competition between institutions has further been enhanced by the worldwide emergence of private providers of higher education. This may be regarded as a direct consequence of the liberalization of services, spurred by the World Trade Organization and the General Agreements on Trade in Services, GATS (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Morin, 2008). The rise of the free trade paradigm has contributed significantly to the commodification of educational-services, putting in question the public nature of education. Its ideological and theoretical origins are to be found in neo-liberalism.

### 1.1.3. Neo-liberalism

After World War II, economic and social policies in Western countries followed the view of the British economist Maynard Keynes, who asserted that anti-cyclical government intervention is necessary for an efficient and equitable economic system (Klees, 2008). Starting in the early 1980s, Keynesian policies were abandoned because of rising inflation and low economic growth, and substituted by so-called neo-liberal policies. Both being rooted in classical economic liberalism, Keynesians and neo-liberalists share fundamental premises, such as the view of individuals as economically self-interested subjects and of the market as best way to allocate resources, a commitment to free trade and *laissez-faire* with regards to market regulation (Olssen and Peters, 2005). A major point of dispute, though, is the role of the state in the economy and in the society at large. The neo-liberals emphasizes the *laissez-faire* approach and advocate for market-mechanisms as the overarching principle for economic and social organization. The role of the state is to be reduced to supporting the principle and the mechanism of the market. As Doherty (2006: p. 59) puts it, “the state under new capitalism is engineered as regulator, decontaminator, caretaker, insurer, actuary, keeper and curator of the market’s infrastructure”. At the same time, Olssen and Peter (2005) argue that neo-liberalism has surmounted the negative view of the state, implicit in the classical liberalism writings, which fought against feudalism and the theoretically unlimited state power of the royal families. Rather, “neo-liberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state’s role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation” (p. 315). Furthermore, according to the authors, while classical liberalism sees the individuals as “having an autonomous human nature”, that “can practice freedom”, the neoliberal state wants to model “enterprising and

competitive entrepreneurs” (p. 315). Hence, the policies’ focus is no longer the citizenry as whole, but the individual as a self-responsible economic actor (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004).

In the field of education, neo-liberalism has shaken the very foundations upon which state intervention was deemed legitimate to secure societal progress. From a traditionalist, neo-classical perspective, education is considered *intrinsically* a public good (Marginson, 2007). Education in itself is characterized as non-rivalrous (can be consumed by an unlimited number of people) and non-excludable (its benefits cannot be solely limited to an individual consumer). Furthermore, public goods typically have *spill-over effect* (or *externalities*). They refer to the benefit of a good which cannot fully be internalized by the consumer. For instance, literacy skills not only benefit the individual, but also the company whose billboard the literate consumer is able to read. Because of these features, markets often don’t produce enough of these goods. Hence, traditionally it has been argued that the state must intervene to ‘fill the gap’ (Klees, 2008). This view has increasingly come under attack. Marginson (2007) asserts that the conventional public/private perception in higher education has become especially problematic in a globalized world. She points to the World Trade Organization (WTO) as the principal global forum in higher education, which contributes to blurring the public/private divide and perceives education as a freely tradable commodity. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), negotiated by the WTO member countries, is focusing on the liberalization of educational services in four areas, that is: *cross-border supply* (distance education), *consumption abroad* (international student mobility), *commercial presence* (establishment of a campus abroad) and *presence of natural persons* (for instance, a professor travelling abroad to provide a service) (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Verger, 2008).

The liberalization of educational services is further enhanced by bilateral free trade or regional economic integration agreements (Morin, 2008). The liberalization does not affect all countries to the same degree though. In fact, most countries have been reluctant to commit themselves to liberalize educational services (Verger, 2008). Especially less-developed and developing nations who deem that such an irreversible step would bear more risk than advantages.

In sum, the changes to the higher education landscape incurred by the forces of the overriding knowledge economy/society discourse, globalization and neo-liberalism have been incremental. Universities and higher education systems have responded to them in various ways. Although one may identify certain trends, there is no such thing as a standardized university model or higher education system (Beerkens, 2008). Standardized policies promoted by international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are being locally reinvented and adapted to the traditions and values inherent in each higher education system. Nonetheless, on the backdrop of those meta-forces, a common element in most higher education reforms of the past two decades is the redefinition of the role of the university in society and in relation to the state, which has developed an elaborate set of policy instruments to steer higher education institutions.

## **1.2. University, society and the rise of the ‘evaluative state’**

To describe the changing relationships between state, society and university, Guy Neave’s ‘evaluative state’ provides for a pertinent guiding concept to showcase the historical origins

and the features of the state's changing role in higher education governance. The concept of the evaluative state was first presented in Neave (1988), and subsequently discussed and developed particularly by European scholars in the following two decades (Bleiklie, 1998; Neave 1998; Dill, 2007; Jongbloed, 2007; Kehm, 2007). The rise of the evaluative state is closely related to higher education's responsibility to society (Jongbloed, 2007) and to the societal expectations pertaining to the role of the university in a specific socio-cultural setting. Thus, we shall first discuss societies' expectations towards universities and academic knowledge production, which differ depending on the socio-cultural context. The second section will explain the rise of the evaluative state and its derivative, the New Public Management. Finally, we are particularly interested in how this has affected intergovernmental relations in federalist systems, where education is within the jurisdiction of the member states.

#### 1.2.1. Societal expectations towards universities and scientific knowledge production

Societal expectations towards universities are not the same everywhere. Depending on socio-cultural values and traditions, people have diverging views on what role universities should play. Bleiklie's (1998, 2005) 'knowledge regimes' serve as a useful concept to establish a basic taxonomy. Knowledge regimes are defined as a set of rules, cultural and social norms which frame the context in which the role of knowledge in society is negotiated between actors such as bureaucrats, politicians, students, professors, researchers, and business leaders. Three ideal-type knowledge regimes can be identified, that is the *idealist*, *functionalist* and *rational* knowledge regime. The latter refers to higher education systems in which public

authorities plan, direct and control research and higher education to maximize the benefits for the society and the economy. Versions of this ideal-type regime may be found in South-East Asian countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan, which have developed a state-centered model of higher education governance (St. George, 2006). Yet, for our purposes, it is the former two regimes that are of particular interest, as they are established in most Western countries.

The *idealist regime* refers to a higher education governance model which seeks to uphold the Humboldtian ideal according to which institutional autonomy must be guaranteed, and teaching and research are closely linked. In this tradition, the state protects the university from interference from outside, thereby allowing for the search for knowledge for its intrinsic value. This regime is also referred to as the public-managerialist regime, characterized “by university-state alliances, political-administrative and a semi-competitive logic based on incentive policies, where part of the public support depends on teaching and/or researching” (Bleiklie, 2005: p. 52). This ideal-type regime is mostly present in European countries, albeit in different constellations.

In contrast, the *functionalist regime*, predominantly present in the US-higher education system, features the university as an organization that reflects and responds to the specific cultural needs of society. It shares common characteristics with the idealist regime, such as linking teaching to research. But there is a tendency to search knowledge less for its own sake than for utilitarian purposes. In the literature, this functionalist regime can also be linked to, what Leslie and Slaughter (1997) call *academic capitalism*. The theory of academic capitalism suggests that university autonomy, if it ever existed, becomes less possible in the context of a knowledge-based, *new economy*. In the academic capitalism knowledge regime, knowledge is

to a large extent privatized. Eventually, privatization of knowledge also benefits the public, as it spurs economic growth. Academia thus becomes a fully integrated part of a network of knowledge circuits involving public, non-profit and private actors.

Akin to the private/public divide, which is not clear cut and rather manifests two poles of a spectrum, both knowledge regimes “coexist, intersect, and overlap” (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004) and must be seen as “different layers of expectations that gradually have been piled upon one another” (Bleiklie, 1998: p. 310). Yet, in both regimes, universities have been facing an incremental change in the way knowledge is produced, although the idealist regime has been affected to a greater extent. The transformation in knowledge production can be referred to as a change from *mode 1* to *mode 2* of knowledge production (Gibbons et al., 1994). Mode 1 describes the ‘traditional’ way of producing knowledge, which is characterized by a disciplinary approach, problems defined by academic and curiosity-driven interests, hierarchical organizational structures and quality control solely based on peer-reviews. In contrast, the mode 2 of knowledge production features a context marked by: transdisciplinarity, problems defined according to their practicability and applicability, organizational diversity with mainly horizontal structures, quality control that goes beyond peer-review and includes a broader set of criteria (such as cost effectiveness) and, finally, a stronger focus on social accountability.

The mode 1 / mode 2 model has also been the subject of some criticism. Hessels and Van Lente’s (2008) literature view point to some weaknesses, such as the high degree of generalization and the lack of empirical evidence in particular with respect to the transdisciplinarity and the modes of quality control. What has been less contested is the dominating context of application and the stronger focus on social accountability. Thus, we

can summarize this consensus in Bleiklie's (2005) words, who describes the complex transformation of knowledge production from a setting where "(...) science traditionally has been regarded as an inner-directed, intellectually self-propelled enterprise that has 'spoken' to society" (p. 47) to a time where science "(...) finds itself integrated into society, embedded in a context that increasingly 'speaks back' to it" (p. 47). With changing expectations from society and, thus, the taxpayer, comes a shift in the way the state regulates the higher education sector, which has claimed institutional and academic autonomy to be the *sine qua non* for any university.

#### 1.2.2. The rise of the evaluative state and the New Public Management instruments

For Neave (1988), the higher education reforms in Europe in the 1980s depicted 'the rise of the evaluative state', which was the driving force for institutional and system development in higher education at that time. In his view, evaluation as a policy instrument is not a novelty in higher education. Previously, the state's higher education governance featured the usual formal, administrative verification and occasional special commissions. The latter served to provide in-depth reviews of the national higher education policy sometimes leading to major reforms through new legislation which, nevertheless, respected academic and institutional autonomy. The evaluative state emerged in the 1980s as a short-term solution to the financial crisis in the context of neo-liberal ideas. However, it soon turned out to become a long-term, strategic instrument for the state to 'steer from a distance' through a wide array of monitoring instruments. The evaluative state can also be closely linked to a larger public sector reform in the 1980s best known as New Public Management (NPM). The NPM promotes a governance structure that relies on quasi market-mechanisms and is based on the constant monitoring of performance measures. The goal- and output oriented approach is based on the premise that

institutions are more likely to meet their targets if the allocation of resources is not pre-determined, but depends on whether specific quantifiable goals have been reached. These goals stress “efficiency, value for money and performance rather than democracy or legitimacy”, state Ferlie et al. (2008: p. 335). In the higher education sector, the authors assert, the NPM has been at least partially adopted in countries such as the UK, Germany or the Netherlands. The following trends have been observed:

- Market based reforms stimulating the competition for students and research funding between higher education institutions
- Introduction of higher student fees to empower students as consumers
- Development of audit and checking systems for the measurement and monitoring of performance in both research and teaching
- Concentration of funds in the highest performing higher education institutions
- Development of strong rectorats and non executive members drawn from business

NPM instruments attribute a new role to the state that diminishes its capacity for central control in return for stronger strategic control (Crespo, 2001, Neave, 1998); or put differently, instead of rowing, the state steers from a distance. As a consequence, independent quality evaluation agencies are founded and legal frameworks rather than specific laws are enacted. Closely linked to the NPM approach are the altering funding mechanisms, which shall ensure that the strategic goals of the state correspond with those of the universities. Sörlin (2007) illustrates that the trust-based funding regime, which pre-allocated block grants with few strings attached, is being substituted by a performance-based funding system, which is more project-based and requires comprehensive accountability schemes. Moreover, the performance-based funding regime enhances the competition among researchers and

institutions, which results in the vertical differentiation of national systems causing frictions, especially in countries with an egalitarian culture.

In conclusion, for over two decades, new ways of governing the higher education sector have emerged in most industrialized countries. The degree to which the reforms brought about change in the governance structure depended on the specific local context or the *knowledge regime*. At times, the claimed changes were more rhetoric than substantial (Beerrens, 2008). However, undoubtedly, societal expectations towards how the university functions and what knowledge it produces have altered. Not surprisingly, many academics see this development towards more exterior accountability and applied-research as an immediate threat to the very foundations of the academic enterprise (see for example Altbach, 2001). Hence, in many respects, the state-university relationship had to be, and still is, in the process of being redefined and renegotiated. Taking these reflections about the effects of the global knowledge economy and the neo-liberal public sector reforms on the university-state relationship a step further, we may also ask how this has affected the reorganization of the state itself in managing these changes in the higher education sector. Of particular interest for our research topic are federalist states, where the responsibility for education resides with the local governments.

### 1.2.3. A comparative perspective: Governing higher education in federalist systems

There is relatively little literature that compares federalist systems in the field of higher education. Exceptions are Swenden (2001) and Brown et al. (1992). The comparative perspective is limited insofar as each federalist system has its own features and historical

background. Yet, the following comparison with the EU, Germany and Australia<sup>5</sup> will provide us with an informative overview of how policymakers from different government levels have clarified their respective roles in governing the higher education sector.

- *The European Higher Education Area (EHEA): A new mode of governance*

In 1999, twenty-nine European ministers launched the so-called Bologna process that led in 2010 to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which is based, amongst others, on comparable degrees, a common three-tier degree structure and a regulated qualification assurance system. Regardless of the controversial question of whether the Bologna Process was as successful as it claims to be, it is “unanimously recognized as the most powerful force for changing higher education public policy in Europe over the last 50 years” (Ravinet, 2008: p. 354). Twelve years after its launch, the Bologna Process engages 46 countries, including countries that are not members of the European Union, such as Russia and Turkey. What are the policy instruments that explain this success and who are the actors involved?

According to Ravinet (2008), a crucial element of the Bologna Process is its very light, flexible and non-binding structure that is appealing to many countries. The continuity has been ensured by the so-called Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), which organizes biennial summits of the Education ministers, and a small secretariat in the host country of the next

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<sup>5</sup> The decision to take the European Union, Germany and Australia as a basis of comparison is based on the following reasons. Similar to Canada, the EU does not have a central Ministry for Higher Education. Germany is an interesting case since the relationship between the two levels of government in higher education was, until recently, characterized by great tensions. Finally, Australia’s higher education culture aligns closest to the Canadian model, which, compared to Europe, gives universities large autonomy.

meeting.<sup>6</sup> The Bologna follow-up instruments refers to the concepts of ‘New Governance’ and the ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (MOC), that are characterized by non-coercive processes and collective deliberation (Bruno, Jacquot and Mandin, 2006). This policy approach is translated into policy instruments such as the exchange of best practices, peer review and benchmarking.

With regards to the involved actors, there is no European Higher Education Ministry and the Bologna Process is not controlled by the EU. In fact, the European Commission (EC) was at first deliberately excluded from the first ministerial meetings (Pongy, 2008; Croche, 2008). Nonetheless, the EC exerts considerable influence on the process by shaping the discourse on higher education policy (Keeling, 2006). It promoted concepts such as efficiency and competition, and by presenting the Bologna reform as part of a broader economic agenda, that is, the Lisbon Agenda, the Commission enhanced the perception of higher education as a motor for innovation and economic development. Furthermore, the Bologna Process provided non-governmental actors such as the European University Association (EUA) and the European Student Union (ESU) with a platform and a visibility they did not previously possess (Beerrens, 2008b).

As several authors point out, the Bologna process is a vehicle to advance the domestic agendas of the European Education ministers (Kupfer, 2008; Ravinet, 2008; Schriewer, 2009). Before 1999, many governments recognized the necessity to overhaul the higher education system, but encountered strong political opposition despite major problems. For example, France was struggling with underfinanced, overcrowded mass universities (Schriewer, 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> Note that during the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve in 2009, the responsible ministers decided that, for the future, the country with the rotating EU presidency would also be co-chairing the process, together with a non-EU country. See <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=8> (accessed 27 July 2011).

By pointing to the ‘inevitability’ of the Bologna Process, governments could break interior resistance against higher education reforms in their country and blame the intergovernmental process if things went the wrong way. However, as the next chapter illustrates, the Bologna reform also contributed to clarifying the competencies between the two levels of governments in higher education policymaking.

- *Germany: From cooperative to competitive federalism*

Up until 2006, German higher education policy was characterized by intergovernmental cooperation and joint-decision making processes (Toens, 2009). Even though the Länder (German provinces) had cultural autonomy which included administration, legislation, and planning of higher education, the Bund (German federal government) had the competency to legislate framework bills, which, for example, guaranteed accessibility by prohibiting tuition fees. Furthermore, cooperative federalism established jointly financed planned programs in key policy areas, such as higher education. Hence, the relationship between the Bund and the Länder was marked by interdependency (Swenden, 2001). However, as a result of the rapidly increasing demand for higher education in the beginning of the 1990s, which led to a highly controversial debate along the provincial-federal divide about constitutional competencies in higher education, the 1998 amendments to the Federal Framework Law for Higher Education (Hochschulrahmengesetz) introduced policies to encourage more competition, differentiation and deregulation (Hüfner, 2003). Nonetheless, as Toens (2009) demonstrates, it was the interplay of the Bologna process and the overhaul of the German federal system that had the biggest impact and changed the Länder-Bund relationship with regards to higher education policy.

The soft governance policy instruments of the Bologna process presented a welcome opportunity for the Bund to overcome the deadlocked joint-decision making processes and to push the convergence of the Länders higher education legislations. The Bologna reform occurred in parallel to the German federalism reform, where the struggle over competencies in education was fierce. However, the Bologna reform eased the conflict insofar as the Bund agreed to completely renounce the legislation of higher education policies if the Länder would be committed to the Bologna reform. Thus, Bologna became a substitute for the Federal Framework Law for Higher Education, which was abolished on 1 October 2008. On the same token, the vagueness of the Bologna action lines provided the Länder with large freedoms in implementing the Bologna policies, so that each Land (province) created its own version of Bologna (Toens, 2009; Schriewer, 2009). Nonetheless, the Bund and the Länder continue to collaborate through cooperation agreements such as the Higher Education Pact and the Excellence Initiative. The latter, in particular, has received much attention. In 2005, both levels of governments agreed to invest additional 2 billion Euros over five years, which were channelled based on a competition to selected universities with the purpose to strengthen their international visibility and competitiveness. The program has been renewed until 2017.<sup>7</sup> As we see in the next chapter, this development in Germany contrasts with the reforms in Australia.

- *Australia*

As in Canada and Germany, constitutional authority for higher education policy in Australia resides with the member states. From the mid-1970s to 1987, Australia's higher education sector was coordinated by an intermediary agency, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC), which set up a framework for regular consultation and cooperation

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.exzellenz-initiative.de/> (accessed on 3 August 2011).

including the states, the central government and the universities which have historically benefited from great autonomy (Swenden, 2001; Gamage, 1993). However, under the Hawke-Keating government (1990 – 1991), a fundamental shift with respect to intergovernmental relations in higher education occurred. This shift must be seen in the context of the economic crisis (Marshall, 1990), wider macro- and micro-economic reforms (Harman, 2005) as well as the ‘new federalism’ reform, which was to improve the cooperation and consultation between both level of governments, thereby ensuring higher efficiency in the policy-making process (Jones, 2008). With a ‘carrot and stick policy’ (Gamage, 1993: p. 92), the institutions and, in particular, the member states had to be convinced of the benefits of a more centralized governance of education policy, which aimed to, among others, merge universities and abolish the binary system<sup>8</sup>. As Harman (2005) concludes, Hawkes’ objectives were largely achieved. In terms of intergovernmental reforms, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) was founded in 1993 bringing together the responsible ministers from the national and the state governments at annual meetings to facilitate the policy-making process within a commonly agreed framework. However, this platform was also a means for the national government to impose its priorities. In 1997, for example, the Conservative government of John Howard succeeded in convincing the states to sign an agreement setting out national goals in higher education; a process which became subsequently “an exercise in cooperation and compromise” (Jones, 2008). Furthermore, in 2004, the national education minister once more pushed for greater national consistency in higher education by making the Commonwealth funding conditional on a 10 point plan. Given the regional states’ dependence on the funding, especially the smaller ones,

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<sup>8</sup> A binary post-secondary system consists of two types of institutions: the university which focuses on academic teaching and research on the one hand, and post-secondary institutions with a vocational mission, such as colleges on the other hand.

they agreed reluctantly. Moreover, the funding agreement for the period 2005 – 2008 was controversial since the Commonwealth government made the funding dependable on the state's commitment to gather data which was used for the establishment of national performance measures. Prior to 2005, although the MCEETYA created a Performance Measurement Taskforce a few years earlier, it was not properly implemented by the member states, who then developed their own measurement system. Thus, the MCEETYA, from which emerged the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment in 2009 with the same functions and objectives, allowed for the development of a national approach to higher education. Albeit, one that reflects largely the national government's priorities. This process of centralization was encountered with resistance and reluctance by the states, yet, as Jones (2008: p. 170) concludes since membership remains voluntary, "members ostensibly see advantages to a joint approach to shared problems".

In summary, over the last two decades, the repositioning of higher education in federalist-organized knowledge societies has impacted and redefined the relationship between different levels of government. Whereas in Germany the Länder strengthened their position vis-à-vis the Bund, in Australia the central government had early on imposed itself on the states. In contrast, the Bologna process was established by European education ministers, at first, to bypass the Commission of the European Union. Guided by a new mode of governance, the Bologna reform sought to provide an impetus for national higher education systems in order to be better prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, in all three countries, political elites proved the willingness to address the issue of clarifying their respective roles in higher education by reforming and innovating the intergovernmental cooperation or division of tasks. As we shall see in the following chapter, the same can not be said of Canada.

## 2. NEW CANADIAN UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE, OLD FEDERALIST ISSUES

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The literature on post-secondary education in Canada accounts for a noteworthy specificity. Over a decade ago, Skolnik (1997) asserted that as a consequence of the decentralized system, literature with a truly national perspective is hard to find. This explains why most of the literature on Canadian higher education is organized either by jurisdictions or themes. Skolnik (1997) points also to a few exceptions, one of them being David Cameron's *More than an academic question*. Published in 1991, it provides, perhaps, the most thorough account of the development of post-secondary education in the context of Canadian federalism. Cameron's later works<sup>9</sup> illustrate in several respects that many of the intergovernmental issues that have arisen since the 1960s and 1970s have remained the same and, in fact, have been exacerbated since the mid-1990s, especially under the Liberal governments. Another exception is the current research conducted by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), whose yearly reports aim at providing a national picture on the Canadian education sector.

Hence, Canadian federalism and post-secondary education are closely connected. In some ways, post-secondary education has been the battlefield for many intergovernmental fights over the last half century. This same battlefield, however, has undergone major changes in light of the above discussed developments. Thus, in light of the above, this chapter will, first, illustrate the recent developments and trends in Canadian post-secondary education. Subsequently, in the second part, we shall narrow our focus on the role of the federal government in the context of Canadian federalism and the changing university landscape.

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<sup>9</sup> See Cameron and Simeon (2002), and Cameron (2005).

## **2.1. Recent developments and trends in Canadian post-secondary education**

### 2.1.1 From an elite to an almost universal-system

“The dominant story in Ontario higher education over the past half-century, as in many other jurisdictions, has been the transition from an elite system to a mass system and then from a mass system to a near-universal system”, writes Clark et al. (2009)<sup>10</sup>. Between 1955 and 1971, the universities faced a growth in the enrolment more than fourfold as a result of the baby boom. After the rather slow growth rates of the 1990s, the growth picked up again in the beginning of the new millennium, with an increase of over a third since 2000 (see AUCC, 2008a). This growth is due, again, to the baby boomer generation, whose children have begun to enrol in post-secondary education institutions. Hence, demographics have been a major driving force in the expansion of the post-secondary education system, which, to date, is facing the challenge of absorbing this demand. More recently, the long-held view that Canada is a worldwide leader in terms of participation rates (Jones, 1997) has been questioned because of the increased awareness of the difficulty to compare different higher education systems (AUCC, 2008a). Nevertheless, policymakers in Canada and many other OECD countries continue to seek higher participation rates. The rationale is that not only is higher education seen as a key pillar of the knowledge economy, but also as an important factor promoting active citizenship and creating a more inclusive society (Corak et al., 2005). It is with this backdrop that accessibility is understood in Canada as an economic as well as social right. The rise in tuition fees in the late 1990s and early 2000s has caused concerns that people from poorer family background could not afford to attend university. Earlier literature

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<sup>10</sup> This statement is based on the definition of a higher education mass system having surpassed a participation rate of 15%, while in an universal system the threshold is at 50%.

on this topic is ‘mixed’ (Christofides et al., 2009) and ‘contradictory’ (Mueller, 2008), as some studies found a negative correlation between participation rates, and some did not. Recent research seems to add to the growing evidence that the rise in tuition fees has had little effect on an individual’s decision as to whether to attend university or not (Christofides et al., 2009; Finnie and Usher, 2008; Corak et al., 2005). Based on new data of the Youth in Transition Survey, Finnie et Usher (2008) summarize the findings of several studies that point to the conclusion that rather than the actual price of higher education, it is cultural and environmental factors, such as parental education, high school grades, test scores and schooling aspirations, as well as parental income that are the key determinants. Thus, as the authors notice, despite efforts to off-set tuition costs through various means such as scholarships, inequalities have remained the same, which, according to some experts, suggests that the government programs have helped subsidize middle- and upper-income instead of the low-income students. Therefore, there is growing consensus that policies should focus more on ‘soft barriers’ in order to minimize these inequities. That said, as policymakers must continue to accommodate the growing demand for post-secondary education, they face the challenge of increasing the capacity of the higher education system. As the next chapter illustrates, a consequence of quest for more capacity is the trend towards a more differentiated and diverse post-secondary education system.

#### 2.2.1. The blurring of the dual system

The international trend towards greater diversity of higher education institutions has been observed at latest since Lynn Meek’s comparative research *The Mocker and Mocked* (see, in particular, Goedegebuure et al., 1996). This development was spurred by the introduction of

quasi-market mechanisms which sought to shape the higher education sector so it could absorb the higher demand for tertiary education. In countries such as Australia and the U.S., the traditional binary system of higher education was practically abolished by the mid-1990s. Canada, however, was pictured once again as an exception, since its binary system remained largely intact. As well, it featured a relatively homogenous university sector, in contrast to its diversified non-degree sector, which includes community colleges and trade schools. Today, however, the clear distinction between the traditional university with a comprehensive undergraduate and graduate education, combining research and teaching, and the technical or community college, which offers certificates or diplomas and is solely devoted to teaching, has become increasingly blurred. This rings equally true in Canada (Baker and Miosi, 2010; Marshall, 2008; Shanahan and Jones, 2007). For example, some provincial governments have allowed several non-degree granting colleges to offer specific degree programs. Three colleges received university status. Four provinces changed legislation permitting private, for-profit universities. Next to demographics, there are several other forces explaining the growth of alternatives to universities (Marshall, 2008): professional associations increasingly require an undergraduate degree for licensing; despite increased capacities, universities remain elitist and artificially limit access; and, finally, with the stronger emphasis on research, universities – especially larger ones - tend to neglect the teaching mission. Although the growth in new degrees has responded to the demand of policymakers and consumers for more post-secondary education alternatives, it has also raised concerns. One of the major concerns is quality assurance (Baker and Miosi, 2010). In Canada, the quality assurance of degree programs in publicly funded universities rests with the institutions themselves. Although the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) has issued guidelines for the provincial

governments with respect to standards and quality assurance, there is no national quality assurance agency or system. By default, the Association of Universities and Colleges (AUCC) has assumed the role of an accrediting agency by requiring the universities that desire membership meet a set of criteria. As for private institutions, a third-party quality assessment is necessary to be granted permission to offer credentials. Another consequence of the greater diversity of higher education institutions is the growing confusion among students and parents about the value of the degree (Baker, 2010; CCL, 2010; Marshall, 2008). While traditionally Canadian universities considered each other as equals in terms of quality, the recognition of undergraduate degrees, particularly from non-university institutions, has become more difficult. Thus, the Canadian Council on Learning concludes: "Canadian degrees are no longer consistently recognized" (CCL, 2010: p. 27). Finally, the blurring of the boundaries between different categories of higher education institutions has resulted in questioning the Humboldtian university model, which is based on a strong connection between the research and teaching mission. The so-called Teaching&Research-Nexus has become increasingly a subject of debate and research, fuelled by the important investments of the federal government in university research since 1997 (Halliwell, 2008). Programs such as the Canada Research Chairs, "are seen by some as unduly privileging research over teaching" (Halliwell, 2008: p. 12). The design of federal initiatives, such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation, has further privileged larger research universities over smaller universities. The side-effect was a stronger stratification among Canadian universities resulting in some policymakers suggesting the official designation of institutions solely dedicated to undergraduate teaching, and others to graduate teaching and research. Those calling for better system-design and greater differentiation argue that only a comprehensive vision can respond best to the

achievements of societal goals and enhance competitiveness, accountability and sustainability (Clark et al., 2010). Lastly, the demand for a more efficiently governed post-secondary education system must be understood in the context of the shifting perception of the university as a central pillar of national and regional economic development.

### 2.2.2. From the Ivory Tower to a central pillar of the Innovation Nation

The percentage of the R&D performed in Canadian universities is among the highest worldwide, indicating the central role higher education institutions play in the national innovation system (STIC, 2009). It is, however, rather ‘by default’ that Canadian universities have “largely come to be seen by policy-makers as a surrogate for innovation” (Dufour, 2010: p.61). Whereas in most OECD-countries the private sector is the driving force behind R&D investments, Canadian business performance has been historically very weak. A report by the Council for Canadian Academies (2009) points to two characteristics of Canada’s economy which provide an explanation for the lack of focus on innovation in Canadian business strategies. First, the strong resource sector has put Canadian businesses in an up-stream position in the American value chain, meaning that they have primarily focused on providing the raw commodities instead of developing innovative products. Second, the relatively small and geographically fragmented market features fewer competitors and thus less pressure for Canadian businesses to differentiate themselves by innovating.

Since the first explicit and comprehensive Science and Technology strategy in 1987, universities have played a central role in the federal government’s policies to stimulate economic development through innovation (Godin et al., 2002; Godin and Gingras, 2000). To ‘pull academics out of their *Ivory Towers*’ and to integrate them into the national system of

innovation, the federal government launched in 1989 one of its most successful S&T policy instruments: the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program. The idea behind the NCE was that instead of investing into ‘bricks and mortar’ to support science, the federal government would create virtual networks among university laboratories to create synergies through collaboration (Atkinson-Grosjean, 2002). More importantly, the networks were required to include industry partners and conduct research with a potential for commercialization. The ultimate goal of the NCE, however, went beyond creating industry-university partnerships, as Atkinson-Grosjean (2002: p. 81) asserts: “The ideological goals of the NCE program have never been hidden. A stated purpose is ‘to change the research culture itself’. Inevitably, the transformation of the Ivory Tower into a key pillar of the national innovation system has met the resistance from academics. Holdsworth (2002), for example, deplores the tension between politics and science, built up by the federal Science and Technology (S&T) strategies, which devaluate the notion of critical inquiry and the pursuit of truth. More recently, the discourse of the national innovation system has shifted to fostering regional and local clusters of innovation, thereby creating a rationale for provincial support of university research (Cameron, 1997; Wolfe, 1998, 2002). Wolfe (2010) asserts that “the contribution of universities to local cluster development should not be viewed simply as a source of scientific ideas for generating new technology to transfer to private firms”. Rather, they also “play a more fundamental role as providers and attractors of talent to the local and regional economy and as a source of civic leadership for the local community” (p. 273). Yet, in spite of their central role as national and local innovation engines, public core funding for universities have been soaring.

### 2.2.3. Changing funding patterns for universities

“Few countries have experienced such a large shift in their basic financing arrangements of post-secondary education over so short a period of time”, state Finnie and Usher (2008: p 159), by which they refer to the level of public funding, the shift in the funding pattern as well as the change of public funding mechanisms. Comparing the funding levels per student between Canada and the United States, the AUCC (2008a) notes that while in the early 1980s Canadian universities had \$2,000 more funding per student than their U.S. counterparts, the funding gap has inversely increased to \$8,000 per student to the detriment of Canadian students<sup>11</sup>. Whereas funding per student in the United States has grown over the last thirty years, funding per student in Canada has dropped from \$25,000 in 1980 to just less than \$21,000 in 2006<sup>12</sup>, notwithstanding recent increases of government funding. Between 1997 and 2002, total expenditures for Canadian universities have actually doubled. The lower per-capita funding reflects thus the consequence of the rapid enrolment growth and the inflationary pressure (AUCC, 2008; Snowdon, 2005; Clark et al., 2010). As well, there has been a shift in the financing pattern towards a relative decline of the share of public funding and a considerably higher income from private sources (Metcalf, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2003). Between the late 1980s and the beginning of the new century, private revenues of Canadian universities have risen by 167%. The biggest share was accounted for by a dramatic increase of tuition fees in the mid-1990s, following the tuition fee deregulation (Fisher et al., 2006). In recent years, the trend towards student fees covering a greater proportion of university’s operating budget has been moderate (Statistics Canada, 2007). Nevertheless, by

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<sup>11</sup> These monetary figures are in constant 2006-07 Canadian Dollars.

<sup>12</sup> According to the statistics provided on the website of the AUCC, these figures have remained the same in 2008/09. See [http://www.aucc.ca/policy/quick-facts\\_e.html](http://www.aucc.ca/policy/quick-facts_e.html) (accessed on February 4th, 2011).

the end of the 1990s, students paid more than double than in the beginning of the decade. The same decade also saw rising revenues from other private sources, such as investment revenues, donations and contracts. For example, between 1991 and 1996, the income from patents and royalties grew fourfold, albeit starting from a very modest level. This increase in private revenues has resulted in a relative reduction of the public share in the financing of the university operating budget, from 84% in 1978 to 58% in 2008 (CAUT, 2010)<sup>13</sup>. However, the apparent decrease of public support for the universities' operational budget does not signify the retreat of the state from higher education financing, but rather a shift in funding mechanisms (Metcalf, 2010). Although most provincial funding systems still rely on how many students the university has enrolled (see Clark et al., 2010), the trends goes towards performance-based funding (Schuetze and Bruneau, 2004). Moreover, as we shall see in greater detail in the following chapter, the federal government has channelled its money away from supporting universities' operational budget in favour of students, through scholarships and grants, and researchers by increasing support for direct research costs through the three research granting councils, or the creation of new organizations such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) or the Canada Research Chair (CRC) program. Not surprisingly, this important development in funding mechanisms has had major effects on the academic enterprise. For example, as a consequence of the heightened research activity in universities due to greater federal funding, indirect costs have increased (Cameron 2004; Tupper, 2009; Snowdon, 2005). Indirect costs include, for example, heating and administrative costs incurred through new research projects, and are covered by the universities' operating budget. Consequently, operating budgets, which had already been

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<sup>13</sup> There are considerable differences among the provinces, though. For example, the share of public funding in Nova Scotia is 45.9%, while in Newfoundland and Québec, it amounts to 72.2% and 70.1% respectively.

soaring from lower public funding, have further been strained.<sup>14</sup> Another concern pertains to matching funding schemes introduced in federal initiatives such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) (Cameron, 2004; Lopreite and Murphy, 2009). Universities in smaller provinces or rural areas are somewhat disadvantaged since they have more difficulties in matching the federal funding. Unlike larger provinces, such as Ontario, where the government matches CFI funds automatically, smaller provinces sometimes do not have the fiscal capacity to provide such considerable funds. Beyond the financial aspects, the federal initiatives have also altered the social relations and dynamics within the university (see Grant and Drakich, 2010; Polster, 2007). Polster (2007), for example, asserts that the Canada Research Chair Program promotes unhealthy competition between universities and researchers, whose performance is measured based on income grants rather than academic excellence. On an institutional level, with the growing importance of research grants so too grows the need to comply with the accountability requirements of federal and provincial governments (Gauthier, 2004). This makes universities more strategic in planning and in aligning themselves with the government's priorities, which at times do not necessarily account for the differences in the missions of various higher education institutions. Thus, as Lang (2005) remarks, funding formulas can have a powerful steering effect, reflecting the New Public Management approach to 'steer from a distance' and to use quasi-market instruments.

On this note, referring to Young (2002) and Metcalfe (2010), a strong argument can be made that *academic capitalism* has also arrived in Canada and has greatly impacted the university landscape. In this respect, the changing funding pattern, including rising tuition fees,

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<sup>14</sup> The federal government has addressed this issue at least partly by the Indirect Cost Program, see chapter 2.2.3.

illustrates the policymakers' goal to increase the efficiency<sup>15</sup> of the higher education system, based on the neo-liberal premise that "prices indicate 'which of the available technical methods is most economical in the given circumstances.'" (Young, 2002). Thereby, an increasingly destabilized environment for universities is created to make them more sensitive and responsive to the priorities of their funders (Metcalf, 2010). Yet, in a higher education system, in which the two levels of government remain the major university funders, the cooperation and collaboration between them becomes of particular interest in light of their increased powers to steer universities 'from a distance'. As was alluded to in this chapter, the federal government has come to play a major role in this changing post-secondary education landscape; however, the history and the structure of the Canadian federalist system remains the same and sets the background against which federal and provincial governments define their respective responsibilities and roles.

## **2.2. The role of the federal government in post-secondary education in the context of Canadian federalism**

After the overview of the broader global and ideological context, as well as the major changes and challenges facing Canadian universities, we shall now focus our attention to the historical context and development of federal-provincial relations in post-secondary education. First, a brief description of the constitutional division of power and the federal power will be given. The second sub-chapter summarizes how Ottawa has become involved with universities,

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<sup>15</sup> The notion of 'increasing the efficiency of the higher education system' is widely used in the policy discourse and in the scientific literature, but very rarely it is defined. Generally, the concept of 'efficiency' refers to the ratio between input and output. In the context of higher education, input is mostly understood in terms of financial resources. The measurement of the output is more controversial as the definition of the proper indicators continues to be subject of debate. Currently, however, output is commonly measured i.e. as the number of "graduates and time to exam, the number of scientific publications, as well as the ability to acquire external research funds" (Sörlin, 2007: In Meek et al., 2009, p: 128).

followed by a more detailed view on developments since 1997 the year the federal government began running budget surpluses. Finally, we will present in a chronological order the various policy proposals advanced by various stakeholders in an attempt to improve federal-provincial cooperation in post-secondary education.

### 2.2.1. Shared responsibilities: The power of the Constitution vs. the power of money

The constitutional foundation of today's federalist system rests to a large extent on the division of powers as formulated in the *Constitution Act* of 1867, which provides, in articles 91 to 95, an enumeration of competencies and responsibilities attributed to or shared by the provincial and federal governments<sup>16</sup>. Among the activities over which the federal parliament has jurisdiction to legislate include trade, national defence, foreign affairs, currency and interprovincial- and national communication; thus disposing of the constitutional tools to advance the nation-building process. The provincial parliaments may enact laws in the fields of social welfare, health, property and civil rights (Art. 92) as well as in education (Art. 93). In matters of agriculture, immigration (Art. 95) and natural-resources (Art. 92 a.), parliaments of both government orders can legislate. For areas of legislation that are not exclusively assigned to the provinces, the so-called "Peace, Order and good Governance" clause introduced in Article 91 allows the federal government to take action in a national emergency and on issues of national concern that were not yet taken into consideration by the Fathers of Confederation (Simeon and Papillon, 2006; Pelletier, 2005).

With the growing complexity and interdependence of policy issues, the courts have (first the Privy Council and, after 1949 the Supreme Court of Canada), over the years redefined the

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<sup>16</sup> For a full list of the division of competencies, see Pelletier (2005: p. 56-57).

division of powers without changing the constitutional architecture (Simeon and Papillon, 2006). For example, the federal spending power, which has emerged as one of the probably most powerful and, thus, most controversial instruments of the federal government to exercise influence in areas of provincial jurisdiction, finds no explicit mention in the Constitution. Yet, the Supreme Court had declared that “the federal spending power is wider than the field of federal legislative power” (Telford, 2003). Former Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau defined it as “the power of parliament to make payments to people or institutions or governments for purposes on which it (parliament) does not necessarily have the power” (Telford, 2003: p. 25). Nonetheless, some legal scholars peg the constitutionality of the federal spending power on rather shaky grounds (See Telford, 2003).

#### 2.2.2. From nation building to innovation nation: Justifying the federal intrusion<sup>17</sup>

The first drastic increase in student attendance after WWII, Canada’s first crisis in higher education (see Bissel, 1956) created the rationale for a sustained federal government’s intervention in higher education matters. Based on the recommendations of the Massey Commission<sup>18</sup>, the federal government provided direct support to the universities, because they were considered to be contributing to “national strength and unity” (Massey, p.132). Instead, this resulted in divisions with Québec, whose universities had to refuse the federal grants on the basis that the provincial government regarded them as an unacceptable intrusion into provincial jurisdiction. Thus, in 1959, the federal government eventually agreed to channel the money for post-secondary education indirectly through the government of Quebec. Nonetheless, various Commission reports continued to support a stronger leadership

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<sup>17</sup> This chapter draws in particular on Cameron (1991), Fisher et al. (2006) Tupper (2006) and Sheffield (1987), as well as on individual chapters of the respective Commission reports.

<sup>18</sup> The full name is the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences.

role for Ottawa in post-secondary education affairs. A point in case is the Bladen Commission, which inquired into university finances. Albeit recognizing the provincial jurisdiction over education, the Commission suggested the creation of a federal ministry for higher education. Whereas the AUCC, that commissioned the report, endorsed the proposals wholeheartedly, the provinces created shortly thereafter the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) to stop the mounting federal intrusion. Hence, in 1969, the federal government stepped back by announcing that in lieu of supporting universities with direct grants, it would transfer additional tax points and cash transfers to the provinces covering up to 50% of the universities' operating costs. Hence, by the end of the 1960s, the provinces reasserted their responsibilities in higher education vis-à-vis the federal government, but failed to assume leadership. A review by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the early 1970s noted the absence of national objectives as well as the lack of coordination and political leadership. To this end, the organization suggested that CMEC be reorganized as a national forum for post-secondary education; a suggestion, that remained ignored by the interprovincial body. In the meantime, the cost sharing program proved to be very costly for the federal government (Fisher et al., 2006). Without hopes that a federal-provincial forum would be created any time soon, the cost-sharing program was substituted with the Established Programs Financing (EPF), which were unconditional block grants paid through cash transfers and tax points.<sup>19</sup> No strings were attached to the transfers and, thus, the provinces could not be held accountable as to how they spent the money. In view of the decreasing provincial investments in higher education, the federal government paid an increasing share for universities' budgets, but had little say. This resulted in a series of initiatives in the mid-1980s to address the mounting frustration on both sides. The Senate

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of the EPF formula, see Fischer et al. (2006: p. 39-40).

Standing Committee on Finance began a study in 1985 on the federal funding of post-secondary education. In the same year, the Canadian Higher Education Research Network (CHERN) was created by the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education (CSSHE), established at the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Administration with core funding from the Department of Secretary of State<sup>20</sup>. Its mission was to "develop in higher education a national perspective, provide a forum and the capacity to coordinate the adjustment which the higher education enterprise will have to go through for the next while" (Paquet, 1988). In the light of the "excessive provincialization" and the "rigidity and protected nature of the higher education institution" (Paquet, 1988: p. 2), its director, Gilles Paquet, proposed a national strategy, in which the federal government "had some responsibility for acting as quarterback" (p. 5). In short, the vague contours of the strategy included a focus on producing more research and data about Canada's higher education sector, a more strategic approach to funding and a forum for deliberation. In the same year, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) presented its "Post-Secondary Education Financing Act" (CAUT, 1985). Making reference to the previously enacted *Canada Health Act*<sup>21</sup>, the CAUT asserted that the transfers for post-secondary education needed also to be legislated to avoid further reductions in investments by the provinces. Amongst others, the proposed Act envisioned a parliamentary declaration of common objectives, a financing scheme that include incentives for provinces to maintain their relative funding and the creation of a Post-Secondary Education Advisory Council to conduct research, collect data and inform policy-makers. Furthermore, in 1987, a National Forum on Post-Secondary Education was held in

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<sup>20</sup> The Secretary of State was amongst others in charge of coordinating education-related matters.

<sup>21</sup> The reference concerned the changes made to the EPF, which consisted of earmarking the respective shares for health and post-secondary education. This was necessary since the contributions for health were tied conditions, in contrast to the transfer for post-secondary education.

Saskatoon, co-sponsored by CMEC (Cameron, 1991). There was consensus that discussions on research, student financial aid, international education, and research on post-secondary education should be continued. Yet, the impetus given by the national forum did not result in a sustained process. Finally, a study of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance, published in 1987, concluded that the EPF should be abolished. Instead, the provinces should receive larger direct transfers and the federal government should channel its money directly to students, researchers and institutions (see Fisher et al., 2006). Soon thereafter, however, post-secondary education largely vanished from the national political agenda amid, first, a constitutional crisis, followed by a fiscal crisis in the early and mid-1990s.

### 2.2.3. The 'New Paradigm' - Federal support for universities since 1997

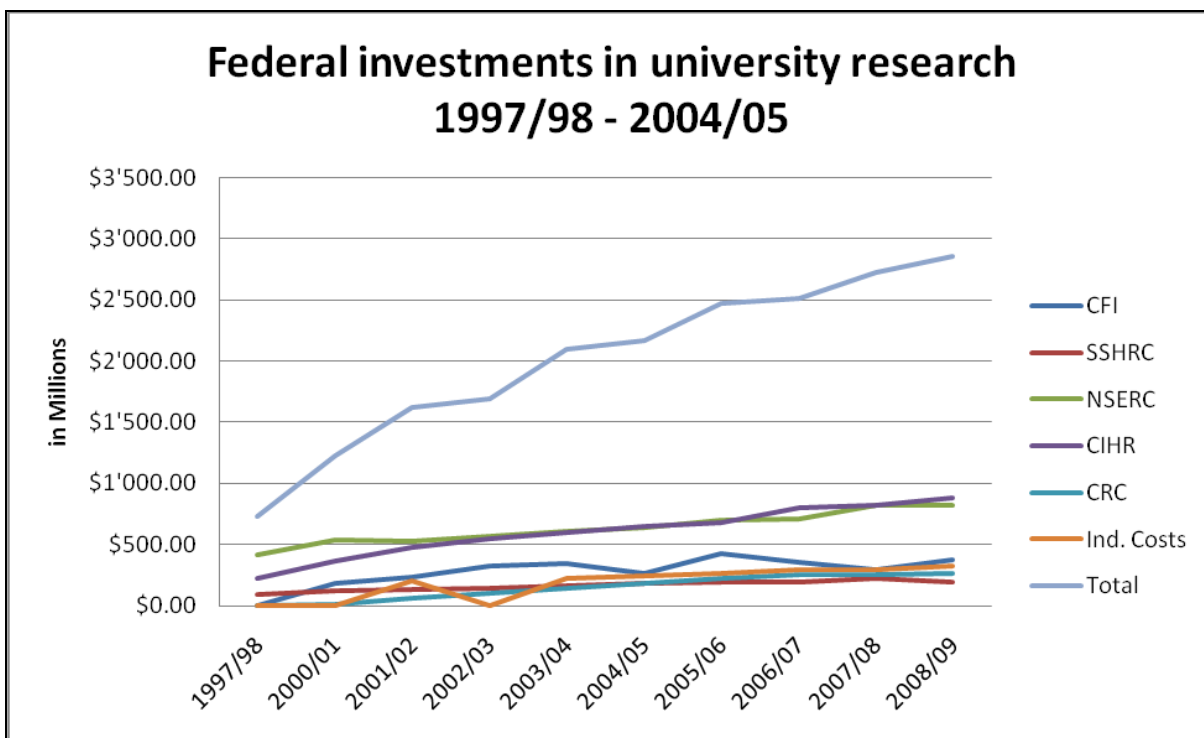
The former President of the University of Toronto, Robert S. Prichard referred to the aforementioned shift towards increased federal support for university research as a *New Paradigm* (2000). The new approach to supporting university research was initially based on four federal initiatives, some of which we have already briefly mentioned. The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), founded in 1997, finances major university infrastructure projects on the principle of matching funds. It covers 40% of the costs, whereas the remaining 60% are to be financed by the applying institution or a third party, such as provinces or private sector partners. The second major initiative, the Canada Research Chair Program (CRC) was announced in the 2000 budget and aimed at retaining or attracting the best academics in Canada by funding their salaries and research support. The allocations of the CRCs are based on the applicant's past success in obtaining support from the three research granting councils. In its initial phase, the federal government invested \$300m annually, which amounted to a third of the research granting councils' budgets. Taken these two initiatives

together, asserts Jones and Young (2004: p. 196), they “represent perhaps the most significant investments in university research activities in national history”. In addition to those two flagship initiatives, the Medical Research Council was transformed into the Canadian Institute for Health Research, with a doubled budget of nearly \$500m. The Networks of Centres of Excellence, created in 1989, became in 1997 a permanent instrument in the federal government’s toolbox to enhance the collaboration between researchers from universities, industry and non-profit organisations in very specific fields of expertise. Furthermore, the federal government restored the budgets of the three research granting councils and augmented it in the following years, so that their spending doubled within a couple of years (Collin and Kerr, 2006). Finally, the federal budget of 2001 included for the first time federal support to cover the growing indirect costs of universities caused by their enhanced research activities. Hence, as the chart below illustrates, whereas in 1997/98 university research and development was funded with \$800 million, the main federal agencies and programs<sup>22</sup> invested over \$2.8 billion in 2008/09 (Collin and Thomson, 2010: p. 15).

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<sup>22</sup> NSERC, SSHRC, CHRI, CRC, CFI, Indirect Cost Program

Chart 1: Federal investments in university research<sup>23</sup>



Source: Based on the numbers provided by Collin and Kerr (2006) and Collin and Thompson (2010).

Although Ottawa’s support of the university research has been historically accepted by the provinces, the “aggressive leadership” (Tupper 2006, p. 17) of the federal government has resulted in a negative impact on the federal-provincial relationship, for the provinces were not included in the design of the federal research policy (Shanahan and Jones 2007). The federal-provincial divide was furthermore exacerbated in two policy fields that are closely interlinked: federal student financial assistance and federal cash transfers.

With respect to financial student support, the announcement of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF) in the federal budget of 1998 and its subsequent implementation resulted in a major broil with the provinces. As part of the so-called ‘Canada

<sup>23</sup> Note that Excel 2007 does not offer black and white charts anymore, which is why this chart is only available in colour.

Opportunity Strategy', the CMSF was based on an endowment of \$2.5 billion, with which it was to support 100,000 students over a time period of ten years. The scholarships were aimed at students from all post-secondary institutions on the basis of demonstrated financial need and academic merit. Hastily created and without any prior consultation with the provinces, the new foundation was fiercely opposed by the provinces, especially Quebec (see Cameron, 2004). Because the Millennium Scholarships were not to be administered through the existing provincial mechanism, so as to establish a direct relationship between the federal government and Canadians and increase its visibility, provinces considered this initiative as a clear intrusion into provincial jurisdiction. The federal government eventually conceded to negotiate separate agreements with each province with respect to the implementation of the CMSF. Nonetheless, the debate on the effectiveness of the CMSF continued. The program was criticized for failing to improve accessibility for low and middle income families, since it was granted only to students who were already enrolled in university (see Fisher, 2006). As well, a frequent criticism was that the CMSF may have simply substituted existing provincial funds, rather than complemented them (Cameron, 2004). Other studies refute this suggestion (see Samson & Associates, 2007).

In any case, for several years federal transfers have led to much frustration among federal bureaucrats and politicians. Hence, in 1995, the EPF and the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) were combined to create the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). More important than the integrated funding mechanisms were the reductions amounting to 37%. The provincial anger over the transfer reductions was further mounting when it became apparent that the federal government did not intend to restore the transfers with the subsequent budget surpluses, but rather decided to channel the money towards 'boutique programs', such as the

Millennium Scholarship Foundation, that established a direct relationship of Ottawa with Canadian citizens in areas of provincial jurisdiction. The search of the federal government for greater visibility among Canadians and its attempts to establish through its spending power prerogatives a direct relationship with citizens in areas of increasing importance, such as education, has become even more significant and politically salient with the near-separation of Quebec in 1995. Hence, investing in the future of Canada's Youth has become for Ottawa's politicians not only a matter of economic and social importance, but also of 'nation (re)building'. In an attempt to establish the new 'rulebook' as to how both levels of jurisdictions should cooperate and interact, the provinces and the federal government entered into social unions talks, during which several provinces signalled their openness to national principles in post-secondary education.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) was signed off by all Anglophone Premiers; Quebec opted out. What some saw as potentially the "most far reaching reform in the workings of the federation" since the *Constitution Act* of 1982 (Lazar, 2000: p.2), turned out not to be sustainable. The federal government could claim a symbolic victory by having recognized its substantial role in social policy. But at the same time, the SUFA failed to put clear restraints on the federal spending power in areas of provincial jurisdiction (Shanahan and Jones, 2006). Moreover, Ottawa was bound to negotiate and consult the provinces before launching any new initiatives in areas of social policy. As the federal government needed only the approval of a majority of the provinces, it could initiate and impose new programs without the support of any of the big provinces, such as Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta (Telford, 2003). Despite the new framework, funding for post-secondary education was even more scarce as provinces had to fight their own budget deficits. Further, this was so in the context where health costs had

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<sup>24</sup> Greenspon E. "Social Union talks a balancing act", *The Globe and Mail*, 8 August 1998; See also Lazar (2000).

become the overriding issue (Jones and Young, 2004). Thus, in 2003, the federal government decided to split the CHST into the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and the Canada Social Transfer (CST), explaining that this would increase visibility and transparency, in particular with respect to health spending. The federal share for post-secondary education attributed now through the CST remained, however, still undefined. Unlike the *Canada Health Act*, there was no conditionality attached to the cash transfers. Eventually, the federal budget of 2007 (see Canada, 2007) earmarked for the first time the percentage of the CST dedicated to post-secondary education, set at 25%, including an escalator mechanism of an annual increase of three percent<sup>25</sup>.

Collin and Thomson (2010) conclude that the significant increase in spending for post-secondary education was built on the rationale that the return in investments benefits not only the individual, but society at large. The main focus of the investments was capacity building in Canada's post-secondary education system, more specifically with respect to the university research enterprise. Regarding student assistance, while prior to 1998 support was provided primarily through the CSLP and tax credits, considerable sums of non-repayable payments, such as grants and scholarships, have been provided under the new paradigm. For instance, in 2009/2010, the Canada Student Grant<sup>26</sup> (CSG) consisted of an annual investment of \$350 million; the expenditures for the Canada Graduate Scholarships amounted to \$126 million in 2008/09. Furthermore, tax-related measures for education and training purposes have been expanded considerably. In contrast, even though the federal transfers for post-secondary education have been augmented under the Conservative government, totalling \$3.3 billion in

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<sup>25</sup> Took effect during the 2008/09 fiscal year.

<sup>26</sup> The CSG, as announced in the 2008 budget, integrates the Canada Study Grant and Canada Access Grant, as well as the bursaries offered by the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation CMSF. In comparison, the CMSF in 2007 spent bursaries amounting to \$357 million (see Collin and Thomson, 2010).

2009/10, their relative share of the total spending on post-secondary education has remained lower than before the 1995-reductions. It is not surprising that in light of the dichotomy between the constitutional powers of the provinces, which have also become more assertive towards universities (see Shanahan and Jones, 2006) and the financial strength of the federal government, the confusion over who is responsible for what has been mounting equally. This has resulted in a blurring of the division of responsibilities (2006) and an ‘uncoordinated entanglement’ (Tupper, 2006), containing much potential for intergovernmental tension. For Fisher et al. (2006), Canada’s journey to becoming a knowledge society has been accompanied by growing intergovernmental tensions. It comes as no surprise, then, that several authors note a lack of intergovernmental coordination of post-secondary education policies. The suggested solutions, however, remain, for the most part, vague. Whereas Tupper (2006) urges simply for better intergovernmental coordination in higher education policy, Cameron (2004) speaks of the need for a social contract, in which federal and provincial governments together embrace “the interests of students, faculty, administration, and the general public”. Gauthier (2004) also speaks of a social contract, which shall substitute performance contracts and include all stakeholders in higher education in a cooperative manner. Noting that both “skill building” and “innovation” are critical to an innovative Canadian economy, Metcalfe (2009) demands an inter-ministerial and cross-agency program development in terms of research policy. Fisher and Rubenson (2006) demand the creation of a national post-secondary education strategy, with *Learning* and *Knowledge* as its “key elements” (p. 128).

The call for more coordination and collaboration is not limited to scientific literature. The next chapter presents some of the main ideas, positions and proposals by stakeholder groups

that seek to clarify the respective roles of the federal and provincial governments in post-secondary education since 1997.

#### 2.2.4. Looking forward: Policy ideas and proposals since 1997

In 1996, on the initiative of Senator Lorne Bonnell, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology of the Senate of Canada launched extensive consultations “to inquire into the ‘serious state of post-secondary education in Canada’ (SSCPSE, 1997). Although, a year later, the Senate Committee came to the conclusion that Canada’s higher education sector was not yet in a crisis, it asserted that it was time for the federal government to act. The main theme of its recommendations was that the federal government had to “renew its strong commitment to post-secondary education”, and “establish a mechanism to enhance the performance of its appropriate role in post-secondary education”. Yet, the Senate Committee remained vague on the nature of this leadership. Whereas a national ministry on education was seen as unconstitutional, the federal government ought to play the role of a coordinator, facilitating the collaboration between the federal departments, provincial authorities, universities, associations and foreign governments.

In 2002, for the second time after 1985, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, CAUT, proposed a Canadian Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Act (2002). Again, inspired by the *Canada Health Act*, the PSE Act aims at establishing long-term and predictable funding commitments from the federal government, as well as defining common standards and principles in the delivery of post-secondary education throughout the country. To implement these objectives, the CAUT advocates for the creation of a separate Post-Secondary Education Fund which would be constituted of a cash value of 0.3% of the GDP. Effectively, the

Canadian Social Transfer in its current form would be abolished. As well, to qualify for these cash transfers, provinces would have to respect principles such as public administration accessibility, collegial governance, comprehensiveness and academic freedom. Finally, the PSE Act foresees the establishment of an advisory council on post-secondary education, reporting to parliament and advising the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. This policy proposal was endorsed by, amongst others, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Federation of Students and the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université.

Three years later, in 2005, the Canadian Federation on Humanities and Social Sciences launched the 'National Dialogue on Higher Education' by organizing a major conference bringing together the major players and stakeholders. The urgency for a national dialogue was explained with the mounting challenges the higher education system faces and the difficult political context with respect to federal-provincial relations. With regards to the latter, conference participants appeared to be optimistic: "Sans faire montre de naïveté ni imaginer qu'on pouvait combler le fossé sur tous les plans, les représentants fédéraux et provinciaux ont donné l'impression que la future collaboration était plus susceptible de survenir que ce que bon nombre de participants avaient escompté » (CanFed, 2006 : p. 12). The conference report concludes that « un fédéralisme concerté, coopératif et constructif » (p. 16) will be needed for a pan-Canadian collaboration. However, the follow-up conference, which was announced in the report for the following year and was supposed to result in a roadmap for, amongst other, future federal-provincial collaboration in the higher education, never took place.

Instead, it was the provinces which took the lead in directing the debate. The newly created Council of the Federation made post-secondary education one of the key issues at their gathering in Banff in August 2005<sup>27</sup>. Six months later, a summit on post-secondary education and skills<sup>28</sup> was convened under the title “Competing for tomorrow”, co-hosted by the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec. Again, the summit brought together stakeholders, including students, college, university and business professors as well as other Premiers, to identify key issues<sup>28</sup> and challenges in Canada’s post-secondary system<sup>29</sup>. One stakeholder was missing, though. The federal government was not among the invitees. Not surprisingly then, the follow-up report “Competing for tomorrow – A strategy for post-secondary education and skills in Canada” (CoF, 2006) reads less like a strategy or roadmap, rather than a pledge for more federal money. Its concluding remarks note: “The objectives outlined in this strategy require additional investments to those made by the provinces and territories. (...) In their works, minister noted that federal transfers to provinces and territories for post-secondary education and skills training had been reduced (...) Premiers will now engage the federal government to ensure that provinces and territories can meet the needs of Canada’s post-secondary education and skills training systems for the benefit of all Canadians” (p. 9- 10). Nonetheless, the priority areas identified by the Council of the Federation were welcomed by stakeholders, such as the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). Even the Conservative government, which stressed the need for clarification of the federal and provincial roles in

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<sup>27</sup> The Council of the Federation, *Communique*, 12 August 2005, [http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/communique\\_aug12.pdf](http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/communique_aug12.pdf) (accessed 10 April 2010).

<sup>28</sup> The identified issues were to: Improve access, enhance quality, increase participation in the skilled labour force, skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace and expand research and innovation.

<sup>29</sup> See also: The Council of the Federation, Media Advisory “Premier McGuinty and Premiers Charest to host national stakeholder summit on post-secondary education and skills”, 23 February 2006, [http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/Advisory\\_feb\\_23eng.pdf](http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/pdfs/Advisory_feb_23eng.pdf) (accessed on 10 April 2010).

post-secondary education in its budget in 2006 (Canada, 2006), saw the work done by the Council of the Federation as an important step in the right direction (Canada, 2007).

Established under the Liberal government, the Canadian Council on Learning has become, together with the CAUT, one of the most vocal advocates for a national post-secondary education strategy. Led by the former General Director of CMEC, Paul Cappon, the Council first published a report in 2006, entitled ‘Canadian Post-secondary Education: A positive record – An uncertain future’, which was its first stocktaking made of the national higher education landscape. Reviewing all provincial and territorial post-secondary education policies and strategies, it concluded that there are common objectives, which could serve as a starting point for a national dialogue. The second annual report, released in December 2007, provided a roadmap with conditions and strategies for the development of a pan-Canadian strategy. Accordingly, the two main requirements were, first, a national PSE data strategy, which would provide information necessary for governments, citizens, researchers as well as higher education leaders to make decisions and design effective policies. Rather than featuring ‘league tables’, the CCL data strategy proposed to define a set of indicators and benchmarks. Second, the report lays out the various fora in which decisions involving all stakeholders and governments could be taken and implemented.

Making reference to the CCL’s report deploring the lack of a national strategy in higher education, in February 2007, the NDP Member of Parliament Denise Savoie (Victoria) introduced the Private Member’s Bill C-398, entitled “Canada Post-Secondary Education Act”, in the House of Commons.<sup>30</sup> This was the direct result of the CAUT’s lobbying efforts,

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<sup>30</sup> See <http://denisesavoie.ndp.ca/node/181> (accessed 1 February 2011).

whose draft bill was taken over by the NDP Education critic. Subsequently, the bill was submitted to the Library of Parliament, which made several modifications.<sup>31</sup> For example, unlike CAUT's suggestion, the revised bill does not include the creation of a Post-Secondary Education Advisory Council. The NDP proposal received little media coverage, although student leaders drew some attention to it when protesting against the high tuition fees a few days after the bill was introduced. The bill passed the first reading in October 2007, but the process was effectively discontinued with the federal elections a year later. The Canada Post-Secondary Education Act was re-introduced a second time in March 2011 by the then NDP Education critic Niki Ashton. Bill C-635 did not make it to the first reading because of the federal elections in May 2011.

In his previous position as the President of the University of Waterloo, Governor General David Johnston, advocated for a "Canadian Innovation and Learning Act", or, in short, a "Smart Nation Act". Making reference to the Canada Health Act, Johnston argued that Canadians must address not only their physical, but also their intellectual health. Pointing to the internationally compared low level of R&D investments and the lagging production of advanced degrees, his vision consists of establishing national objectives in terms of creating education opportunities for everyone at every stage of life, and investing in learning and skills, as well as enacting measures to increase the investments in research and development.

Finally, the proposition that perhaps received the most media attention, not least because of its controversial nature, was the suggestion by the G5<sup>32</sup>-University Presidents to effectively create a two-tiered higher education system, in which the major research universities would receive additional funds for their research, based on their previous academic and research

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<sup>31</sup> This information is based on a confidential interview with a person involved in the process of drafting Bill C-398.

<sup>32</sup> University of Montreal, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, McGill University.

performance.<sup>33</sup> The objective would be to further support their status as world class universities by having a stronger focus on producing graduates at the Master and Ph.D. level, attracting more international students and faculty, and having greater latitude in determining tuition fee levels as well as financial student assistance. Meanwhile, smaller universities would receive a clearer mandate focused primarily on undergraduate students.

In sum, the increased investments of the federal government in the university sector in the past years have been paralleled by a number of proposals how to enhance the intergovernmental coordination. The debate includes national associations, political parties as well as university presidents. The provincial governments have also made efforts to bring all stakeholders to the table and nurture a pan-Canadian dialogue. Yet, they have deliberately excluded the federal government, which raises questions about their intentions in fostering a pan-Canadian debate without the major funder. Neither the various policy proposals nor the national conferences have resulted in much and continued media attention, let alone the establishment of a Canadian post-secondary education strategy, or Act. This brings us to the next chapter, which proposes our research question.

### **2.3. Summary and research question**

The goal of this literature review is to provide the reader with an outline of the major forces and developments in Canadian higher education. Reflected in the scholarly literature is the critical role attributed to universities in proposing solutions to emerging economic and social issues. A paradigm shift has been driving the redefinition of the state in post-secondary

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<sup>33</sup> Wells P., "Our universities can be smarter", MacLeans Magazine, 28 July 2009.

education: Away from a nationally-focused, post-industrial economy supported by a welfare state based on elaborate social safety networks, towards a globally connected knowledge-based economy, in which human capital and innovation-driven research constitute the key to sustainable economic growth and competitive global advantage, and where the state relies increasingly on the individual's self-responsibility. This paradigm shift has inevitably altered expectations and beliefs as to what mission higher education institutions are to fulfill and how they ought to be governed. It is thus not surprising that the advent of the knowledge-based economy in other federalist states has led to intergovernmental tensions and reforms with respect to education. This is mainly because both central authorities and local governments have come to recognize knowledge and human resources as the main drivers to nourish and sustain their competitive advantage. The examples from Europe, Germany and Australia illustrate how higher education reforms have resulted in lengthy debates and power shifts with respect to the management of the higher education and university research enterprise.

Alas, what about Canada? Scholars have traditionally depicted the Canadian post-secondary education system(s) as somewhat unique and distinct from other systems, mostly due to the federalist and decentralized nature of the university and college landscape. Yet, the federal and provincial policies regarding universities have faced very similar challenges as other jurisdictions following trends such as privatization of funding sources, the introduction of public management tools to increase accountability and the push towards commercialization of public research. *Academic capitalism*, as Metcalfe (2010) asserts, has now also arrived in Canada. Metcalfe's scholarly work stands, in our view, for a new approach to Canadian higher education research insofar as she seeks to adopt a stronger theoretical focus, moves away from province-to-province studies, and questions the Canadian "exceptionalism" in

higher education. Nonetheless, we agree with Jones (2004) that the Canadian case is particular with respect to the fact that, to date, the federal and provincial roles in higher education have still not been clarified. We shall add that not only have they not been clarified, but despite a continuous underlying debate about the lack of intergovernmental coordination and numerous public higher education dialogues and conferences, there have not been any serious attempts of decision-makers to put it on the intergovernmental agenda. Canadian higher education scholars have therefore called for a common vision and a more coordinated approach. However, the literature provides only limited insights into the reasons why there has not been more collaboration between both levels of governments in this crucial policy field. Researchers have typically adopted a state-centrist's approach, looking primarily at the federal-provincial relations in the broader context of Canadian federalism. Hence, the literature has missed several important aspects. First, no attempt has been made to explain the policy stability on theoretical grounds. Second, very little attention has been paid to other actors, such as interest groups and think tanks, which of course influence the discourse. Third, it follows from the state-centered approach that policy stability was understood primarily in terms of the structure of the political system, but not so much from the view point of the involved stakeholders. Finally, when discussing the actions of key decision-makers, there is a somewhat implicit assumption that they are driven only by self-interest. Therefore, building on the literature review, we shall aim at filling at least some of these knowledge gaps with respect to our understanding of the Canadian post-secondary education system. The research question that will guide our analysis is: Why is there, to date, no pan-Canadian strategy or institution to coordinate the policies of the federal and provincial governments in post-secondary education?

In order to address this question from a theoretical perspective, we have opted to use the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith. The ACF suits our needs in several respects. It focuses on policy change and policy stability, which is understood as a function of the interplay between the actors, grouped into Advocacy Coalitions, within a specific policy subsystem. The ACF allows for a comprehensive analysis as it takes into account the structure of the policy environment, as well as the actors' beliefs and resources. The following chapter will present the theoretical approach in more detail.

### **3. HIGHER EDUCATION, PUBLIC POLICY THEORIES AND THE ADVOCACY COALITION FRAMEWORK**

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To begin with, our theoretical discussion will first look at the use, or the lack thereof, of public policy theories in the field of higher education research. The second sub-chapter will then give an overview of the ACF, followed by explaining how the ACF has been applied previously by higher education researchers and how it will be utilized in our analysis.

#### **3.1. Public policy sciences in higher education**

Traditionally, public policy scholars have paid little attention to higher education as a field of study. Even though most universities in developed countries rely substantially on public funds, higher education has long been attributed a special status in the general stream of public policy analysis. Ferlie et al. (2008) explain this peculiarity with the Mertonian principles, according to which universities need to be autonomous to be able to fulfill their

role as producers of scientific knowledge. Because of the uniqueness of the mission of higher education institutions, that is, the advancement and preservation of knowledge, their governance must be different than the ones from other public institutions. However, since the end of the 1980s, this view has become under much scrutiny. Since the neoliberal paradigm change in the public sector, calling for more accountability and cost-efficiency, on the one hand, and the massification of higher education, on the other hand, higher education issues have become the subject of much public and political debate (Ferlie et al., 2008; Meek et al., 1991; Tight, 2004).

Nonetheless, the application of public policy theories to higher education issues has been only very recent. Jones' (1994) observation that most of the research on higher education policy issues is atheoretical was reiterated even a decade later by McLendon (2003). Tight (2004) supported these assertions with evidence illustrating that scientific articles on higher education issues, from national policy to teaching methods, were rarely based on explicit theoretical approaches. In most studies, theoretical assumptions were made only implicitly and a broader theoretical engagement was missing. However, since the proposed research agenda by McLendon (2003), there has been more theoretical engagement among higher education policy scholars. Referring to Jones' (1994) suggestion to frame the theoretical debates on higher education policy in terms of Alford and Friedland's analysis of political theories presenting three distinct public policy paradigms, several theoretical approaches have found application in the said policy field.

First, theories based on the *managerial paradigm* focus on the role of the state, namely on the processes, measures and instruments through which the state seeks to steer the higher education sector. In particular, the implementation analysis (Gornitzka et al. 2005; Hagman,

2005; Kogan, 2005) and the Principal-Agent-Theorie (Lande and Kivisto, 2008; McLendon, 2003; Gornitzka et al., 2004) have been used in recent studies of higher education systems in the U.S., as well as in Europe and Australia. Second, the perspective of theories belonging to the so-called *critical paradigm* look at the mentalities, social norms and discourses which constitute the framework directing human actions. In that regard, Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" emerges as an increasingly popular analytical tool in higher education literature, in particular in the context of the Bologna reform in Europe (Croché, 2008; Kupfer, 2008). Finally, the *pluralist paradigm* analyses higher education issues in terms the interests and pressure groups, their strategies, resources, linkages, ideas and interests, thereby mostly focusing on the policymaking process. As Ness (2010) illustrates, McLendon's (2003) suggestion to utilize policy process theories more systematically has resulted in a number of articles on higher education issues referring to the most successful theories, such as Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model, the punctuated equilibrium, the diffusion of policy innovations model and the Advocacy Coalition Framework. It is the latter one that we have chosen as a theoretical lens to guide our research. The following two sections shall thus discuss, first, the main attributes of this theoretical framework and the scholarly debate around it; and second, its application to higher education research, the rationale for selecting this theoretical approach and how it will guide us in our research.

### **3.2. The Advocacy Coalition Framework : A short overview**

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith and emerged in the late 1980s from the implementation analysis, rejecting the

traditional stages heuristic model and trying to combine the advantages of both the bottom-up and top-down approaches (Sabatier, 1986; Sabatier, 2005). Referred to as the most promising and successful theories in public policy (see Saint-Pierre, 2004), the goal of the ACF is to understand and explain policy change or stability through belief systems, rather than interests. In the following section, we shall first outline its main structure and amendment, and then discuss how the ACF explains policy change.

For the ACF, the primary level of analysis is the *policy subsystem*. The focus goes beyond the “iron triangle”, which includes government, legislative committees and formal interest groups, but can entail also actors such as specialized journalists, experts and judicial officials. As Sabatier (2007: p. 193) notes, defining the right scope of a policy subsystem is the “most important aspect of an ACF research project”. Within the policy subsystem, individuals or organizations are aggregated into so-called *advocacy coalitions*, which are the main actors in the policymaking process. There are typically between two and four advocacy coalitions in a policy subsystem, although Saint-Pierre (2004) demonstrates that in rare cases there might also be only one advocacy coalition. The advocacy coalitions are bound together by a *common belief structure* and a *nontrivial degree of coordination*. Note that in the ACF model, the concept of beliefs is understood in a rather broad way and, according to its authors, are closely correlated with self-interest. The belief system builds on three categories. First, the deep core beliefs are of a very basic, ontological and normative nature, and unlikely to change, “essentially akin to a religious conversion” (Sabatier and Jenkins, 1999). Deep core beliefs are defined by the relative priority accorded to notions such as liberty, equality or market vs. state regulation. Second, the policy core beliefs, receive the most attention in the ACF analyses. In contrast to deep core belief, policy core beliefs are limited to a specific

policy subsystem, and although they are rather unlikely to change, they must be subject to adjustment due to new information or experience. Finally, the secondary beliefs, which are more likely to be altered than the two former belief categories, are much more narrow in scope and refer to technical and procedural questions. The belief system is based on the premise that the individual's perception of the world is determined by cognitive biases and constraints. In other words, although the actor is assumed to act rationally, he or she perceives reality through a lens. Information is thus selected and processed through a lens, predetermined by the actor's values and beliefs. Sabatier and Jenkins' framework follow thus at least partly the tradition of the bounded rationality, inherent in other theories, such as Kingdon's multiple streams model or the Garbage Can model. Furthermore, in order to pursue their policy goals, advocacy coalitions rely on resources in addition to that of financial and human resources, such as Members of Parliament or agency officials, which have the formal legal authority to make decisions. A particularly important resource is specialized information, which explains why the ACF attributes a major role to scientists in the policy process. The interaction in the policy subsystem is affected by two exogenous factors. First, there are the relatively stable system parameters, such as the basic distribution of natural resources, fundamental socio-cultural values and basic constitutional structures. Although they remain unchanged for most of the time, they influence the behaviour of advocacy coalitions. The second group of factors called *external system events*, including changes in socio-economic conditions, changes in systemic governing coalition and policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems are more likely to occur and may have a fundamental impact on the dynamics in the policy subsystem.

On the basis of this (original) framework, composed of the policy subsystem and advocacy coalitions on the one hand, and the two exogenous elements, the relatively stable parameters and the external system events, on the other hand, policy change may occur in two ways. Change through *policy oriented-learning* “refers to relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives” (Sabatier and Jenkins, 1999). In other words, policy oriented-learning is more likely to affect secondary beliefs, and therefore leads to minor policy change. In contrast, *major policy change* more likely happens when one of the above mentioned external events occurs, thereby creating a shock in the policy subsystem and altering the composition or resources of the advocacy coalitions. These external shocks have the potential to change the rather stable and resistant *policy core beliefs* of advocacy coalitions.

Table 1: The Advocacy Coalition Framework (Weible et al., 2009)

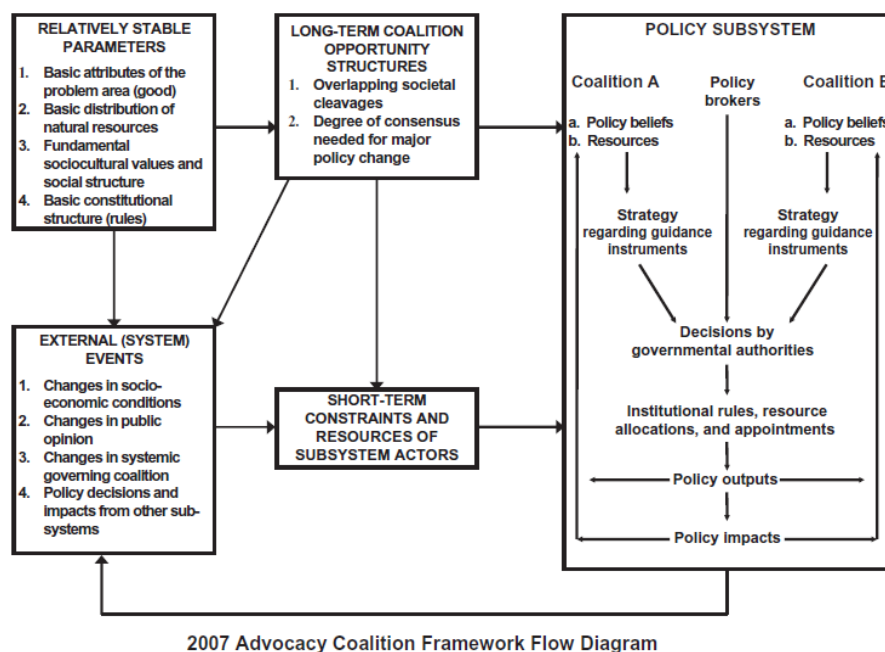


Figure 1. 2007 Advocacy Coalition Framework Flow Diagram.

Upon this basic structure of the ACF, Sabatier and Weible (2007) identifies three major additions to the framework: First, a third external factor to account for the corporatist regimes in Europe, the so-called Coalition Opportunity structures, which determine the degree of consensus needed for major policy change and the openness of a political system; second, a typology of policy-relevant resources; and, third, whereas the earlier ACF version argued that policy change could be triggered only from outside the subsystem, because of the bounded rationality of the involved actors, the third major revision consists of acknowledging the possibility of an internal shock.<sup>34</sup>

The authors' approach to developing the theory following the motto "we want to be clear enough to be proven wrong", has naturally invited its critics. Olson (2009) and Dudley et al. (2000), for instance, deplore the unspoken ambition of Paul Sabatier and his disciples to develop a policy process model that parallels the rigor traditionally known from the natural sciences. However, perhaps the most debated issue relevant for our research was the underlying assumption of the ACF that shared beliefs and values will automatically result in coordinated behaviour. In particular Schlager (1995) criticized that the ACF does not address the collective action problem. In other words, it cannot explain why an actor has an interest in investing time and energy to coordinate a common strategy with other coalition members if they act in his interest anyway without his help (i.e. the free-rider problem). Furthermore, she points to the fact that very little attention has been paid to the structure of coalitions, with its various degrees of coordination, and to their strategies. Hence, Schlager (1995) makes the point that instead of focusing on beliefs, policy analysts should concentrate rather on the second criteria of coalition building, the non-trivial degree of coordination. For that purpose,

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<sup>34</sup> Note that although these additions to the ACF may certainly contribute to a better understanding of the policy process, our research will not focus on these new aspects.

she suggests complementing the ACF with the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, according to which coalitions are more likely to emerge when organizing costs are relatively low and “individuals believe that by acting collectively to change policy they will be made better off” (Schlager, 1995: p. 249). Thus, the IAD analysis is based on a rational choice actor model and underlines the importance of repeated and regular interaction between the actors. However, as Kübler (2001) rightfully notes, the rational choice assumptions are not compatible with the ACF. As previously stated, in line with the bounded rationality argument, the ACF asserts that the thinking process of an individual is much more complex since each actor perceives reality differently. A first response to Schlager’s criticism by Zafonte and Sabatier (1998) consisted of distinguishing between “weak” and “strong” coordination. Weak coordination refers to coalition members with the same beliefs that pursue similar strategies, but don’t necessarily meet each other to formally coordinate. In contrast, a strong coordination presupposes the development of a common strategy to influence policy decisions and policy images. Sabatier (2007) complements the response by referring to two other rationales of the ACF. First, common beliefs and high trust among its adherents lower transaction costs. Second, because of a distorted, strongly negative perception of their opponents (referred to as *devil shift*), coalition members tend to exaggerate the expected benefits of common action and are therefore more likely to invest themselves in an advocacy coalition.

Perhaps the most promising path to a better understanding of the collective action issue in the ACF is to look deeper into the network structures and properties of the policy subsystem. Kübler (2001), for example, utilizes the concept of ‘mobilizing structures’. This conceptual lens studies the social network in terms of its incentive structures, its organizational resources,

such as the provision of know-how and communication technologies, and its cognitive factors influencing the motivation of individuals to act collectively. Drawing on the inter-organizational relations and policy network literature, a second, more prominent approach is to integrate the concept of ‘interdependencies’ into the ACF. Interdependency can be defined as “the condition by which the actions of one actor interfere with or contribute to the goal of achievement of another actor” (Chisholm, 1989: In Zafonte and Sabatier, 1998). It was Zafonte and Sabatier (1998) who opened the discussion about ‘functional interdependencies’ as an alternative or additional mechanism to study coordinated behavior. It is asserted that a higher frequency of coordination is expected when “overlapping functions induce (or produce) interactions between organizations and individuals who share similar beliefs” (Zafonte and Sabatier, 1998). Whereas Zafonte and Sabatier (1998) apply this concept primarily to coalitions in overlapping policy subsystems, Fenger and Klok (2002) also apply it to explain the behaviour of coalitions within policy subsystems, adding the subcategories of *competitive interdependency* (“where the action of one actor interferes with another actor’s ability to take action or achieve his goals” (p.162)) and *symbiotic interdependency* (“The situation where one actor’s actions contribute to another actor’s actions or goal achievement” (p. 162)).

Table 2: Coalition behaviour as the result of interdependency and belief congruence (Fenger and Klok, 2001: 164)

Interdependency	Beliefs		
	<i>Congruent</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Divergent</i>
<i>Symbiotic</i>	(1) Strong coordination	(2) Coalitions of convenience	(3) Unstable conflict, depolitization, learning
<i>Independent</i>	(4) Weak coordination	(5) No coalitions	(6) Weak conflict
<i>Competitive</i>	(7) Coalition with severe collective action problems	(8) Weak conflict	(9) Strong conflict

Furthermore, they assert that actors don't necessarily have to agree over values and beliefs, an instead may have independent or indifferent belief systems. In such cases, interdependency plays an important role since it may result in coordination. Hence, responding to Schlager (1995), Fenger and Klok (2001) expect severe coalition action problems only in situations in which beliefs are congruent and the interdependency is competitive (see Table 1). Hence, the interdependency structures of a policy subsystem influence coalition formation and, thus, policy change.

### 3.3. Applying the ACF in higher education

As Weible et al.'s (2009) stocktaking of the ACF shows, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's model has been applied across various policy fields, mostly in the environmental and energy policy area. As table 2 (see below) illustrates, the ACF has been applied only a few times in higher

education research, each time with a slightly different focus. Whereas Beverwijk et al. (2008) and Shakespeare (2008) utilize the ACF in a stringent manner, discussing the theoretical implications of their empirical research, other articles or papers apply the framework in a very general manner, without demonstrating much theoretical vigour.

*Table 3: The ACF in higher education research*

<b>Article</b>	<b>Subject of research</b>	<b>ACF focus</b>	<b>Theoretical conclusion</b>
Beverwijk, Goedegebuure and Huisman (2008)	Policy developments in Mozambican higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beliefs in nascent subsystem</li> <li>- Major policy change in unstable context</li> <li>- Role of beliefs and resources in common action</li> </ul>	- “ACF built on assumptions that do not necessarily apply to countries with a high degree of civil and political turbulence” (p. 376).
Shakespeare (2008)	Budget process for state tuition program in New York State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advocacy Coalitions and their information usage in the policy process</li> </ul>	-“ACF useful for organizing New York’s policy-making arena into a structure for analysis” (p. 894)
Kent (2005)	Policy change in Mexican higher education in the 1980’s and 1990’s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explains major policy change and shift in belief system with external event</li> <li>- More recent change are understood as change of secondary beliefs</li> </ul>	- Only partial application of ACF – no theoretical conclusions
Mora and Vidal (2005)	Developments in Spanish higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reference to ACF is made in the introduction, but no specific ACF focus apparent</li> </ul>	- No theoretical conclusions

Sabatier (2005) himself provides possible explanations for the reluctance of higher education scholars to apply the ACF. Besides the aforementioned observation that “higher education researchers do not stay abreast of theoretical developments in the general public policy literature” (p. 31), he speculates that in higher education there may be little potential for high goal conflict and competing belief systems and, thus little use for the ACF. Furthermore, Sabatier advances the possibility that actors in the higher education sector are more neutral

than in other policy areas, not being members of advocacy coalitions. Why, then, have we opted to be inspired by the ACF nonetheless, and how will it assist us in responding to the research question?

The ACF provides for a valuable theoretical lens in several respects. First, the ACF combines a structural or non-cognitive analysis with a focus on the subjective or cognitive belief and value systems of the actors. We believe that an in-depth analysis into our research question needs to go beyond the reading of traditional Canadian federalism studies and take into account the way by which policymakers perceive these structures and the role each institution or level of government ought to play in it. The actors' perception of a policy environment and of the issues in question is crucial to understanding their position and policy proposals. Second, the focus on the actors' beliefs and, thereby, their perception of the policy environment helps us to explain not only the constellations in which they are grouped, but also to understand the sort of policy proposals and instruments they put forward. More importantly, given that beliefs and values are said to be relatively stable over time, the ACF offers an interesting explanation for policy stability or, simply, inactivity. The comparison of differing belief systems is even more interesting in a policy area, such as higher education, which has received increased attention by the public and policymakers due to its instrumental role in securing economic growth and social prosperity. Finally, whereas most literature on intergovernmental relations in post-secondary education in Canada examined the issue from a political system level, the ACF's perspective from a policy subsystem level allows for a more differentiated insight into positions of and relations between organizations and, occasionally, individuals directly involved in the policy process.

## 4. METHODOLOGY<sup>35</sup>

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According to Singleton and Straits (1999: p. 18), what distinguishes science as a form of knowledge production from metaphysics, philosophy or mythology are the characteristics of its *product*, such as laws, principles and theories, and the *process* by which scientific knowledge is produced. Three key principles underlie the scientific process: *empiricism* (only observable data or information is acceptable), *objectivity* (or intersubjective testability, which implies that, under the same conditions and given the same observations, two or more researchers come to the same conclusions) and *control* (procedures to avoid or minimize misleading or biased results). Hence, in light of the above proposed theoretical approach, we thus shall now describe in detail the process by which the empirical evidence is gathered and analyzed. First, in light of the methodologies proposed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), the process of data collection and analysis will be explained. The second subsection will discuss any limitations to the data and research project in general, clarify the premises of the research question and present briefly how ethical considerations with regards to the conduct of interviews are taken into account.

### 4.1. Data collection and analysis

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) propose various methodologies to apply the ACF: elite survey, panels of knowledgeable observers and content analysis of relevant documents, as

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<sup>35</sup> The methodological approach was inspired by Gauthier (2009), in particular chapters 3, 5, 13, 16 and 19.

well as government documents and interest-group publications<sup>36</sup>. Accordingly, our empirical evidence is composed of three sets of data.

The principal set of data refers to a total of nineteen interviews that have been conducted between January and June 2011. The first set of participants (AUCC, CAUT, CASA, CSF, CanFed, NSERC, CFI) was determined based on information contained in the literature review and a brief analysis of the participants invited regularly to participate in the federal pre-budgetary consultations between 1997 and 2009. The second set of participants (Conference Board of Canada, CCL, Public Policy Forum, NDP, HECQO, G13-University President) were selected based on the snowballing technique, wherein, in the course of the first round of interviews, participants were asked to name the most important organizations with which they have partnered or which in their view exercise relevant influence on the federal government's higher education and research policy. The snowballing technique is necessary insofar as it helps to determine the policy subsystem. The third set of participants was constituted of representatives of the provinces. Out of four requests for interviews, two provincial education ministry officials, from Ontario and Nova Scotia respectively, agreed to participate<sup>37</sup>. Ontario was selected because it is the largest Anglophone province, with the highest number of higher education institutions and due to its traditional strong position in intergovernmental affairs. In contrast, Nova Scotia represents the Atlantic Provinces, which traditionally have been much less influential in the national context. Nova Scotia in particular has also struggled in the past with high tuition fees and high student debts.

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<sup>36</sup> Weible et al.'s (2009) stocktaking of the ACF has shown that besides the significant number of ACF articles which do not specify the methodological approach (over 40%), the most frequently used methods to obtain empirical evidence were interviews (20%) and content analysis (9%), or a mix of both (10%).

<sup>37</sup> The Quebec representative, chosen for its distinct higher education system characterized by low tuition fees and a strong discourse favoring accessibility, did not respond to the requests; the Council of Ministers of Education, which would have been interviewed to receive an overview over the positions of all provinces, declined to participate, referring directly to the provinces.

Interviewees can be classified into two groups: Current public officials as well as representatives of interest groups or think tanks, directly or indirectly involved in the post-secondary education policy debates, on the one hand; and ‘knowledgeable observers’, who until recently have occupied senior positions in the public service or in interest groups organizations and can provide detailed and unfiltered insights into the dynamics between and within advocacy coalitions. Semi-directed interviews were chosen as the most appropriate methodology not only because they provide for pertinent data to deduct the beliefs and values of the advocacy coalitions, but because they also allow collecting information about the coordination between coalition members. This is an aspect to which, as discussed in the previous chapter, should be paid more attention to. To complement the interviews, the second data consists of key documents used or referred to by the actors or the scientific literature. This includes reports, policy proposals or briefing notes, which are all publicly available. Finally, in order to compare the main elements in the discourse between the various advocacy coalitions, the third set of data refers to the presentations of two organisations representing the two advocacy coalitions, the AUCC and the CAUT, since 1997. This is when the Chretien government launched the so-called “Education Opportunities” budget and the federal budgets began to include “additional, sometimes substantial resources for higher education and training” (Colin and Kerr, 2006).

A content analysis was conducted to study these data sets. Content analysis is based on the premise that symbolic data of human action, such as newspapers, speeches or drawings, constitute an integral part of the social world, and not a mere reflection of it (Sabourin, 2009). The analysis is made on the level of themes and the coding framework is based upon the tripartite belief system of the ACF, more specifically the table proposed by Sabatier and

Jenkins-Smith (1993). This table (see table 4) lists the so-called illustrative components of each belief level, thereby providing the researcher with a broad grid to identify values and beliefs of each advocacy coalition. According to Sabatier and Weible (2007), it is sufficient to operationalize two to three components to make out the coalitions.

Table 4: Illustrative components of the belief systems (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993).<sup>38</sup>

	Deep Core	Policy Core	Secondary Aspects
Defining characteristics	Fundamental normative and ontological axioms	Fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving core values within subsystem	Instrumental decisions and information searches necessary to implement policy core
Scope /	Across all policy subsystems	Subsystem wide	Usually only part of subsystem
Susceptibility to change	Very difficult; akin to a religious conversion	Difficult, but can occur if experience reveals serious anomalies	Moderately easy; this is the topic of most administrative and even legislative policymaking
Illustrative components	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Human nature, i.e. Inherently evil vs. socially redeemable</li> <li>2. <b>Relative priority of various ultimate values:</b> Freedom, security, power, knowledge, health, etc.</li> <li>3. Basic criteria of distributive justice (Whose welfare counts?)</li> </ol> Socio-cultural identity (e.g. ethnicity, religion, gender, profession)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fundamental normative precepts:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Orientation on basic value priorities</li> <li>- Identification of groups or other entities whose welfare is of greatest concern</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Precepts with a substantial empirical component:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Overall seriousness of the problem</b></li> <li>- <b>Basic causes of the problem</b></li> <li>- <b>Proper distribution of authority between government and market</b></li> <li>- Proper distribution of authority among levels of government</li> <li>- Priority accorded various policy instruments</li> <li>- Participation of public vs. experts vs. elected officials</li> <li>- Etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seriousness of specific aspects of the problem in specific locales</li> <li>2. Importance of various causal linkages in different locales and over time</li> <li>3. <b>Most decisions concerning administrative rules, budgetary allocations, disposition of cases, statutory interpretation, and even statutory revision</b></li> <li>4. <b>Information regarding performance of specific programs or institutions.</b></li> </ol>

<sup>38</sup> Components marked in bold are used for the subsequent analysis.

#### 4.2. Limitations, clarifications and ethics

In our view, there are three relevant limitations to this research project. The first limitation pertains to the high degree of decentralization of the Canadian post-secondary education system and, therefore, the high number of institutions, organization and governments involved. Consequently, there is a considerable degree of generalization in the analysis, given that only nineteen individuals were interviewed. Second, in an ideal setting, the ACF requires the researcher to study the belief system for a time period of a decade or longer. However, it was beyond the scope of this research project to undertake a full analysis of the discourse involving all actors over the length of a decade. Nonetheless, the presentations of the two main actors, the AUCC and the CAUT, during the pre-budgetary consultations from 1997-2009 provide some indication as to whether there have been significant changes in the actor's positions or communication strategies. From a theoretical standpoint, in fact, we may also assume that the actors' belief systems have not undergone significant alterations since 1997, given that major policy change has not occurred ever since. Third, the empirical evidence with respect to the provinces is very limited, as only two representatives agreed to participate, while in the two other cases, the contacted persons declined or did not respond to the request. Thus, for a comprehensive understanding, further research into the various provincial positions and belief systems would be required.

Moreover, two clarifications need to be made. First, the theoretical approach is *inspired* by the Advocacy Coalition Framework, but not a full application of it. Second, in the course of the interviews, at least one participant has expressed concerns that the research is biased because the research question would imply that there *should* be a national strategy. Clearly, this is not the starting point and there is no underlying assumption that a national or centralized strategy

would be the best policy option. It must be stressed once again that the points of departure for this research project are twofold. First, the literature review and the policy proposals of various stakeholder groups have stressed for several years, if not decades, the need for more federal and provincial collaboration. Second, the comparative perspective has illustrated the trend in other federalist countries to clarify roles between different levels of government and to agree on a set of common objectives. On the basis of these two observations, we have formulated the research question which aims to understand and explain a social phenomenon, rather than trying to prove the necessity to institute a national strategy.

All precautionary measures have been taken in accordance with the requirements of the Ethics Commission of the University of Ottawa to mitigate potential ethical issues that may have arisen in this research paper. The measures taken have been met with approval by the Ethics Commission. More specifically, all interviews have been conducted anonymously. Participants have agreed to be referred to as representatives of the institution in question. All interviews have been conducted either in the participant's office or by telephone. In one exception, the respondent answered the questions in writing. The recordings of the interviews will be stored for five years according to the requirements of the Ethics Commission.

## 5. ANALYSIS

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On the background of the theoretical discussions about the ACF, this chapter will provide an analysis of the policy subsystem pertaining to Canada's post-secondary education sector with a particular focus on the role of the federal government. The analysis will take a look at the main elements of the policy subsystem, that is, the belief system (5.1.) and the degree of coordination between advocacy coalition members (5.2.). Furthermore, an overview, albeit not exhaustive, of the advocacy coalitions' key resources and their strategies will be offered in subchapter 5.3.

To begin with, table 5 presents the three proposed advocacy coalitions. They are named according to what we believe summarizes best their driving beliefs, that is, the *Equal Opportunity Coalition*, the *Economic Efficiency Coalition* and the *Provincial Responsibility Coalition*. The organizations listed in normal font have been interviewed, whereas those in *italics* have not. Latter's categorization is based on limited empirical evidence and is therefore only approximate.<sup>39</sup> The attentive reader will notice that there are no federal government departments or agencies, including national research granting councils, listed in any of the advocacy coalitions. Although the ACF considers government departments as possible advocacy coalition members, it also notes that not everybody has to belong to an advocacy coalition. This is particularly true for bureaucrats who, at least in their public discourse, adopt a neutral position (Sabatier, 1993). The interviews with several former and current representatives of federal agencies<sup>40</sup> have led us to conclude that, while there might be

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<sup>39</sup> With regards to the EO Coalition, the approximate categorization is based on information provided by interview participants about the public endorsements they have received. With regards to the PSE Strategy, the CCL lists the letters of support for the 2007 annual report it has received (see <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/PostSecondaryEducation/Archives2007/PSE2007support.html>), accessed on 25 June 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Interview requests with other federal agencies or departments were not answered or rejected.

underlying tendencies towards one coalition or another, there is not enough evidence to arrive at a definite conclusion. As well, federal departments or agencies have largely abstained from commenting on the policy proposals in question.

*Table 5: Overview of advocacy coalitions*

<p><b>Equal Opportunity (EO) Coalition</b></p>	<p>Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada (CanFed), New Democratic Party (NDP)</p> <p><i>(Canadian Labour Congress, Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d’université (FQPPU), and other provincial labour unions)</i></p>
<p><b>Economic Efficiency (EE) Coalition</b></p>	<p>Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC), G5, G13 (U15)<sup>41</sup> universities, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, Canadian Council on Learning, Conference Board of Canada, Public Policy Forum, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario</p> <p><i>(Most small- and mid-sized universities, Association of Canadian Community Colleges, and other economic and trade promoting associations)</i></p>
<p><b>Provincial Responsibility (PR) Coalition</b><sup>42</sup></p>	<p>Québec, Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick</p> <p><i>(British Columbia, Council of Minister of Education Canada CMEC, Quebec universities and associations, including student groups)</i></p>

<sup>41</sup> G13 are the 13 most research intensive universities, whereas the U15 are the 15 largest research universities adding the University of Manitoba and the University of Saskatchewan to the G13.

<sup>42</sup> Although no interviews were conducted with officials from Alberta and Quebec, the information collected from the press review and the interviews with other provincial representatives provides enough evidence to categorize them clearly as belonging to this advocacy coalition.

## **5.1. The belief system**

### 5.1.1. Deep Core beliefs: Equal opportunities vs. economic efficiency

The scope of deep core belief extends beyond a specific policy area and determines an actor's general approach to policy. One way to identify these basic beliefs is by establishing the relative priority of ultimate values such as freedom, power or security, for instance<sup>43</sup>. As in many other policy areas, the current post-secondary education debate in Canada is structured along the economic efficiency versus the equal opportunity spectrum. While all actors recognize that efficiency and equal opportunity are important elements of Canada's university sector, they prioritize them differently. These philosophically divergent approaches can best be illustrated against the backdrop of the accessibility/inclusiveness versus quality/excellence debate.<sup>44</sup>

The relative priority accorded to one or the other not only structures the relations between the three advocacy coalitions, but also between its members. The most homogenous coalition in this respect is the EO Coalition. Even though the need for efficiency is not entirely rejected, the focus of their advocacy activities resides in the notion of ensuring equal opportunities. Accordingly, all qualified students from all over Canada should be able to receive the same high quality education regardless of their socio-economic background, or whether they go to a small town university in a rural area or a large research university in a metropolitan region. The EO coalition tends to see accessibility and quality as largely compatible, given that there is enough public funding. Bob Rae (Rae, 2005: p. 21 – 22), a former NDP premier of Ontario and author of the report *Ontario – A leader in learning* has summarized this view as follows:

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<sup>43</sup> See Table 4.

<sup>44</sup> See CMEC's (1999) study on the commonly agreed core principles of Canada's post-secondary education.

*“Some will argue that quality and high standards are incompatible with the desire to make education more accessible. Others may contend that the central goal of social inclusiveness should trump ‘elitist’ concerns about excellence, that Canada can afford a pretty good system, but not one that achieves greatness. Each of these views is wrong. We need governments and institutions that are irrevocably committed to access for every Canadian who is qualified to attend.”*

Indeed, several actors of the EE coalition have raised concerns about the growing tension between providing high quality education and keeping the system inclusive and accessible at the same time. The perceived growing incompatibility between high quality education and wide accessibility is based on the view that public funding is and will remain scarce. In an environment of budgetary constraints and global competition, *efficiency and excellence* become the driving values. In contrast, policies seeking to impose equal opportunities are seen to achieve the very opposite, as the former President of the University of Toronto, Robert Prichard (2000: p. 33) asserted:

*“For too long Canada, in the name of equal opportunity, has had policies unduly favouring homogeneity, not differentiation, with the perverse result of limiting, not expanding student opportunity”.*

He further argues (p. 36):

*“This resistance to competition and preference for regulation is ill-placed in the growing global competition for intellectual talent. (...) Arbitrary limits and regulations, adopted in the name of avoiding the alleged destructive aspects of competition (e.g. eliminating the losers in a process for which winners and losers are inherent) will do nothing but constrain our effectiveness and undermine our commitment to performance and excellence.”*

His view is shared by Indira Samarasekera, President of the University of Alberta:

*“Canada maybe is beginning to recognize the need for differentiation. The view that everybody needs to be equal — in resources, in academic mission,*

*in mandate — puts fewer noses out of joint. But the reality is, that doesn't produce the winners.”<sup>45</sup>*

Thus, in this view, competition is inevitable and should be embraced. In order to be able to compete on a global scale, though, differentiation based on excellence is necessary. However, there is disagreement within the EE Coalition as to whether competition on a national level brings enough differentiation to compete on a global scale, or whether additional measures are required. While the G5 universities propose sort of a Canadian version of the German Excellence initiative, which singles out a small number of major research universities to receive additional resources for research in order to compete globally, the great majority of this advocacy coalition does not support such an approach. Carleton University President Roseann O'Reilly Runte argued: “If you say to the small institutions, ‘you can't compete,’ then they'll just fold their tents,” she says. “And if you say to the large institutions, ‘You've got it, you don't have to compete,’ they'll be complacent.”<sup>46</sup> Hence, in this view, competition will automatically result in greater differentiation, which from a macro-perspective will lead to more efficiency. More efficiency will eventually offer more opportunities to students and academics.

As for the PR Coalition, the interviews have not provided enough evidence to make any conclusive statements. Generally, though, the literature review suggests that higher education policies in the last fifteen years have definitely stressed the need for more efficiency and competition. For example, most provinces have put a price on education by deregulating tuition fees and want to move towards a more differentiated and integrated post-secondary education system. Quebec, on the contrary, has largely resisted these trends. As noted by

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<sup>45</sup> Wells P., “Our universities can be smarter”, *MacLeans*, 28 July 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Campbell C., “Small but smart”, *MacLeans*, 4 September 2009.

several respondents, inclusiveness and accessibility continue to be considered, for now, as non-negotiable core principles of its post-secondary education system. Yet, even the *belle province* joins the other provinces in stressing the necessity to be competitive. This is illustrated, for instance, by the fact that the motto of the post-secondary education summit organized by the Council of the Federation in 2006, but initiated by the provincial leaders of Quebec and Ontario, was: “Competing for tomorrow”.

In conclusion, it shall be stressed that in the economic efficiency versus equal opportunity debate, the advocacy coalitions do not opt for one or the other, but they prioritize them differently. Hence, the CAUT states on its website: “CAUT recognizes the important economic contributions that universities and colleges make, but believes that economic and commercial considerations should not drive government policy and institutional decision-making”<sup>47</sup>. Nonetheless, this antagonism is not only a central element in defining the deep core beliefs. As we shall illustrate in the following sub-chapters, this divergence on fundamental beliefs is reflected in various shades and forms on the level of policy core and secondary beliefs.

### **5.1.2. Policy core beliefs**

According to Sabatier (2007), at least two to three policy core beliefs must be operationalised in order to identify advocacy coalitions. For our purposes, the following illustrative components are the most relevant: a) The perception of basic problems and challenges in

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<sup>47</sup> CAUT, *Policy statement on post-secondary education and research*, November 2009: <http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=287&lang=1> (accessed on July 28, 2011).

postsecondary education; b) the proper distribution of authority among levels of government; and c) the priority accorded to various policy instruments.

a) Problems and challenges

According to Hall (1993) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), an important element in studying the policy process is to inquire into how actors assess the seriousness of an issue and frame the challenges, which, again, reflects their values and beliefs. From the perspective of the EO Coalition, the main issues are primarily related to the reduction of public funding in recent decades.

*„The future of post-secondary in Canada is at a crossroads. After years of public funding cuts, the quality and accessibility of universities and colleges are at risk. Skyrocketing tuition fees, fewer faculty, larger classes, few course offerings, reduced library holding, and the commercialization of research are all symptomatic of the continuing and chronic public under-funding of post-secondary education.” (CAUT, 2007)*

The lack of public funding refers more precisely to the insufficient public support for the universities' core funding, also referred to as the operational budget. The shift towards targeted and private funding is perceived to be the start of a wide array of problems that put in peril the key principles of Canada's post-secondary education sector. It is argued that in order to compensate for the lack of core funding, tuition fees had to be deregulated, which made the system less inclusive, less accessible and, thus, less equal. Especially for the CFS, high tuition fees and debt levels remain the number one problem. Furthermore, it is pointed out that operational budgets have been strained even more due to the indirect costs caused by the influx of federal money for research. This has also negatively affected the quality of the education mission. Finally, the targeted nature of the research grants and the promotion of greater commercialization of research are seen as an infringement on the autonomy of

institutions and researchers as well as on the pursuit of basic research. In sum, the challenges identified by the EO Coalition are characterized by concerns over the altered role of the state in post-secondary education, a role that is inspired by neo-liberalism and which has a drastic impact on the core principles of the Canadian university system. Generally, these challenges are framed mostly in a domestic context, emphasizing the importance of education for social cohesion and progress.

This contrasts with the EE Coalition's view that the most urgent issues Canada is facing are related to globalization, as illustrated by this statement of a G-13 university president.

*“We are competing with universities from all over the world for talents in students and faculty, for research money, for leadership in research, for membership in research networks. So, instead of concerning ourselves with parochial, political issues in the provinces, maybe we should raise our gaze up to the horizon, and see what is going on out there. And when we do that, we will see that we are ill equipped to compete. We have a patchwork of perfusion. Different levels of funding, different control mechanisms, different expectations on the part of the provinces, lack of focus and alignment of areas of specialization and expertise (...) We risk losing out in the global race.”*

The discourse of global competition has been present throughout the last decade (see, for example, also Prichard, 2000). In the late 1990s, “brain drain” was the buzzword that shaped the agenda of the EE Coalition. Even though the EO coalition occasionally makes reference to the globalized environment and the importance of international education, it has been a much less important element in their discourse. In some cases, the issue of global competition was put into question. For instance, at the height of the brain drain debate in 1999, the then-President of the CAUT, Bill Graham, asserted that “there is little indication that there’s a brain drain”<sup>48</sup>. It remains, nevertheless, that the EE Coalition sees the only way to compete in a global economy by nurturing the knowledge-based economy. According to this view,

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<sup>48</sup> Pre-Budget Consultations, 4 November 1999.

universities must produce highly skilled labour in line with labour market demand, as well as economically and socially relevant knowledge. Thus, the main focus of public policies should consist of supporting university in meeting these demands. In this respect, the fragmented nature of Canada's post-secondary education landscape creates barriers for universities to compete on a global level, even though for several respondents, the situation is "not terrible", but only suboptimal. Yet, the absence of a 'Masterplan' and the tendency to think of higher education only in a domestic or provincial frame, as another participant remarked, makes it difficult to tackle broader, yet critical issues such as demographic pressures and labour market needs in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, one of the key issues, raised by many in this advocacy coalition, is the lack of comparable and complete data. How can policy makers design policies that address the needs of the economy and the society if they don't have sufficient information? Especially the CCL (2007) has been vocal on this aspect, but also organizations such as CASA and HECQO have pointed to this problem.

As for the PR Coalition, the Council of the Federation's (COF) "Competing for Tomorrow – A strategy for Postsecondary Education and Skills Training in Canada" (COF, 2006) states that improving "postsecondary education and skills training in Canada is driven by both global competition and local challenges". In the interview process, though, the provincial participants have identified solely local challenges and have stressed that they differ from province to province. The primary concerns of the representative for Ontario are the management of the dramatic growth in the number of students, which is driven by a financing formula that favours enrolment. The financing scheme of the university system has also become a key issue because of the change in accountability requirements, which the universities oppose. The representative for Nova Scotia highlighted the unique features of the

post-secondary education system, such as the high number of universities per capita and the high participation rate and low tax base, which results in high recruitment costs and student debts as well as an aging infrastructure. Adding to the difficulty of adequately funding Nova Scotia's postsecondary education system is the design of the Canada Social Transfer, which puts the province at a disadvantage because the amount is calculated on a per capita instead of a per student basis.

One concern that all advocacy coalitions share, albeit to different degrees, is the state of federal-provincial relations in post-secondary education. Most participants agreed with the statement that there is a lack of coordination between the two levels of government, though for different reasons. Representatives of the EO Coalition deplored the 'decentralized' and 'opaque nature' in which post-secondary policy is made. For the EE Coalition, the fragmentation is inefficient in terms of allocation of resources as well as policy design. Finally, the criticism of provincial officials pertains primarily to federal investments in university research, which, they feel, occurs with little or no consultation of the provinces. This then brings us to the key question: Which role should the federal government play in Canada's post-secondary education sector?

b) “Spread the love” vs. “give us the money”: Defining the appropriate role of the federal government

Defining the role of the federal government in post-secondary education is at the core of the debate over the relevance of a national strategy. One interviewee argued that it is easier to define what its role is not, than what it is. Notwithstanding the many distinct views of individuals and organizations on this almost epic debate, three patterns can be distinguished.

The EO coalition sees post-secondary education as a shared jurisdiction. All representatives recognize that education lies within the constitutional responsibility of the provinces. However, the federal government has the constitutional right and duty to ensure that all Canadians have equal access to post-secondary education and skills training. Thus, as one interviewee put it, the main role of the Canadian government is to “spread the love”. Akin to its role in health care, the Canadian government should lead the process of defining and establishing nationwide principles and standards, which would ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to access the same high-quality education across the country.

As for the EE Coalition, their main concern is that the federal government must assume a leadership role in those areas in which its responsibilities have generally been accepted. This includes the realm of research (including covering indirect costs), international education, infrastructure, aboriginal post-secondary education and the support of students in need through the Canada Student Loan Program. As discussed, while the G5 universities went as far as suggesting that the federal government’s role encompasses the designation of a small number of universities as global flagship institutions, the vast majority of universities oppose any direct federal intrusion imposing a differentiated post-secondary education sector. In contrast, in the same vein of strengthening the international competitiveness, there is general consensus at latest since the two national conferences in 2005 and 2006, the Canadian government must assume a leadership role in this field, by providing scholarship and promoting Canada’s universities abroad. Finally, think tanks, such as the CCL, furthermore see the collection and distribution of data and information as one possible area in which national departments or agencies could (or should) play an important role.

The PR Coalition understands post-secondary education clearly as an exclusive provincial responsibility. The role of the federal government is to provide the provinces with the financial means to “make sure that provinces have the ability to do it the way they want” and “to help them fix problems”. One provincial representative bluntly put it: “Give us the money, we’ll take care of the rest”. In research, for example, federal support is considered intrusive insofar as it may have negative repercussions on the educational mission of universities and impact provincial budgets by imposing matching fund schemes. Nonetheless, federal involvement in research is generally accepted. In international education, Quebec’s “Conseil supérieur de l’éducation” (Quebec, 2005) notes that the objectives of both levels of government with regards to the internationalization of Quebec’s universities have converged in recent years. In British Columbia, the “Campus 2020” (Plant, 2007) report recommends that the provincial government collaborate more closely with the federal government with regards to infrastructure projects and immigration matters. In short, federal agencies and departments may play an important role in commonly agreed areas insofar as they address the specific needs of provinces and support their priorities.

The National Dialogue on Higher Education Conference in 2005 (CanFed, 2005) concluded that federal and provincial policy makers as well as stakeholders recognized that both levels of government assume “mutually valuable roles” in post-secondary education, though further discussion was needed, especially on ways to promote “collaborative, cooperative and constructive federalism” (p. 13). This brings us to the advocacy coalitions’ positions on appropriate policy instruments for developing a pan-Canadian approach to post-secondary education.

c) Policy instruments: incentives, punishment or neither of both

Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007: p. 4) define a public policy instrument as a “device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries”. The authors note that these instruments are in themselves not neutral. Rather, they carry and reflect a specific set of values as to how the relation between the state and its subjects is to be governed. The authors distinguish basically three types of instruments: the legislative and regulatory, the economic and fiscal and the ‘new public policy instruments’, including agreement- and information-based instruments as well as *de facto standards* and *best practices*.

As we have alluded to in the first part of this paper, the actions and public policies of the federal government addressed at universities are primarily of an economic and fiscal nature. Since 1997, the creation of new powerful funding institutions and programs has created financial incentives that have directed the behaviour of researchers and universities, aligning them with the priorities of the federal government of the day. In line with Lascoumes and Le Gales’ (2007) depiction of financial and economic instruments, these federal programs have a constitutional basis (the spending power prerogative) and draw their legitimacy from the social and economic benefits they are deemed to create for the community and the society at large.

For the EO Coalition, the incentives created through those financial instruments have sometimes perverse effects. The representative of the CAUT recalls a discussion with a provincial minister during which the latter supposedly said: “You must understand, there is a built-in incentive for us to increase fees. This is a way to leverage more money, because the

federal government will have to increase student loans”. Therefore, the EO coalition advocates a legislative instrument to clarify the federal-provincial relationship. The proposed Canada Post-Secondary Education Act put forward by the CAUT and endorsed by the NDP, seeks to regulate the cash transfers of the federal government to the provinces. On the one hand, it aims to create long-term stability and predictability with regards to federal transfer payments. On the other hand, its purpose is to improve the accountability of provinces and to guarantee the establishment and the respect of basic principles such as quality, accessibility and public governance of universities across the country. To this end, akin to the *Canada Health Act*, provinces are required to ensure that certain standards are met in order to receive funding. There are several noteworthy features of this policy instrument. First, the EO coalition believes that a certain degree of coercion is needed to foster closer federal-provincial cooperation. Second, although provinces would be consulted at one time or another<sup>49</sup>, the Act draws its direct legitimacy from the federal parliament. Third, the Act provides the legal framework for the federal government to use financial instruments in order to direct the behaviour of the provinces. However, rather than creating positive incentives, the legislation establishes a system in which non-complying provinces are punished by receiving reduced cash transfers. Fourth, the Act includes a provision stating that the province of Quebec would have the option to opt out of this arrangement, given its distinct approach to social policy and the unresolved Quebec-Canada relationship.

The EE coalition supports the objective of the Canada Post-Secondary Education Act to secure long-term funding, but does not consider legislation as the appropriate policy

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<sup>49</sup> If the Canada PSE Act is inserted as a Private Member’s Bill, the Member of Parliament or its party who put the proposal forward is not allowed to consult with the provinces prior to tabling the bill. If the act is sponsored by the government, prior consultations with the provinces are possible.

instrument. Some have expressed concerns that legislating post-secondary education matters on the federal level would reopen constitutional debates, for which there is currently very little appetite. This concern has also been shared by interview participants from the other two coalitions. Moreover, a federal Act is seen as too “rigid” and not sensitive enough to local and regional differences. For another interviewee, the Act tries to regulate too many aspects, such as the public governance of universities, and is more idealistic than pragmatic. Most importantly, however, the EE coalition rejects the idea of imposing sanctions on non-complying provinces. Rather, its representatives have highlighted the need for a broad consultation process with all involved stakeholders, including the business sector, on the basis of comprehensive data and research. With regards to the decision-making process, a step-by-step, incremental process is considered as the most pragmatic approach, as suggested for example by the Canadian Council on Learning’s report “Post-Secondary Education in Canada – Strategies for Success” (CCL, 2007). A key element in this process is the production of comprehensive data that would be widely distributed and discussed. Furthermore, against the backdrop of the international trend towards constant monitoring and reporting of the performance and progress in the post-secondary education sector, the CCL recommends establishing benchmarking in a limited number of areas of strategic importance, such as R&D personnel and graduation rates. In the end, referring again to Lascoumes and Le Gales’ (2007) typology of instruments, the EE coalition favours clearly the third category of policy instrument, that is the new governance policy instruments, as they were used for example in the Bologna process. These policy instruments rely on a new kind of legitimacy infused by its inclusive and broad consultation process as well as the scientific metrics that allow for

performance- and goal-oriented policymaking. Proponents of this approach see the role of the state as the facilitator and coordinator, rather than as a castigator.

With the exception of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, which have publicly endorsed CCL's 2007 annual report, most provinces have opposed or ignored it. In particular in Quebec, the idea of a pan-Canadian strategy found little support: "L'éducation est de compétence provinciale et le restera. Alors aucun plan ou structure pancanadienne n'est souhaitable"<sup>50</sup>, said a spokesperson for Quebec education minister Michelle Courchesne, and added: "On travaille déjà en collaboration avec les autres provinces avec le CMEC sur certains enjeux interprovinciaux. Cela suffit." Unlike their federal counterparts, Quebec student groups have also rejected the report stating that, while the report identifies the right challenges, the policy solutions are misguided<sup>51</sup>. The students association argues that the CCL's report implicitly recommends the creation of a national ministry for education and, most of all, promotes unhealthy competition. In general, the PR Coalition opposes any kind of policy framework or legislation that would touch upon the realm of post-secondary education. For the representative of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, the question of a national strategy or framework "is a debate that the federal government is having with itself." Those who share the same view also assert that these policy proposals mainly serve the interests of those federal-level organizations which "would like to carve out a larger role for themselves by implicating the government they are charged with lobbying more closely in the field."<sup>52</sup> In summary, any of the three policy instruments discussed above are in principle

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<sup>50</sup> Ballivy V., "Une stratégie pancanadienne est réclamée", *La Presse*, 12 December 2007, p. A20.

<sup>51</sup> Idem.

<sup>52</sup> Usher A., "CCL has been a dead man walking for year", *GlobeCampus Blog* (The Globe and Mail), 15 January 2010, <http://www.globecampus.ca/blogs/eye-higher-ed/2010/01/15/ccl-has-been-dead-man-walking-years/> (accessed on 21 June 2011).

rejected by the provinces by fear that they lead to centralisation in favour of the federal government. Rather, based on the belief that the federal government plays the role of a financial backup, coordination should occur on an ad-hoc basis and not be institutionalized. Thus, consultation should occur prior to and throughout the establishment of new federal programs for universities. The perception of how they should function belongs to the realm of secondary beliefs, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **5.1.3. Secondary beliefs**

Secondary beliefs are, as noted above, much more narrow in scope than the policy core beliefs and refer primarily to technical and procedural questions at the program level. Consequently, they are more likely to change over time even if the degree of policy change is usually much less important. We shall thus take a brief look at three areas of federal support for post-secondary education, that is student aid, federal transfers and research, in which some programs have been the subject of continued criticism and, in some cases, have been modified or even abolished as a consequence.

With respect to federal student aid, the program which perhaps sparked the strongest controversies in the past decade was the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation (CMSF). Recognizing the provincial jurisdiction over education, Human Resources and Skills Development Minister Pierre Pettigrew justified the program by asserting that access to education demanded a federal role.<sup>53</sup> From the perspective of the Provincial and the EO

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<sup>53</sup> Greenspon E., "Ottawa defends budget", *The Globe and Mail*, 5 February 1998, p. A5.

Coalitions, the program achieved the very opposite. The provinces, especially Quebec<sup>54</sup>, saw the program as a major intrusion of Ottawa into provincial jurisdiction since it established a direct link between a federal agency and Canadian citizens in post-secondary education. For the Canadian Federation of Students, the CMSF was “at best a public relations gimmick” which had little or no impact on accessibility because CMSF scholarships simply replaced provincial loan remissions.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, the EE coalition showed far fewer concerns about jurisdictional conflicts and saw the program as “a good thing”. Even smaller provinces, such as Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, noted the positive working relationship with the CSMF on research projects, which they could not have realized, given their limited policy research capacities. In spite of this, the conservative government did not renew the CMSF (see Canada, 2008). Instead, it was integrated with the already existing Canada Student Grant Program. This reversal of the federal government’s approach to student support can be explained by the Conservative party’s own beliefs that the CMSF constituted an unacceptable intrusion and unnecessary provocation of Quebec’s separatists<sup>56</sup>; a view, by the way, that was also shared by some senior liberal Members of Parliament coming from Quebec, such as then intergovernmental affairs minister Stéphane Dion.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the decision to abandon the CMSF was supported by both, the PR and the EO Coalition, and was not fiercely opposed by the EE Coalition, as everybody understood the negative impact of the program on intergovernmental relations.

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<sup>54</sup> Quebec eventually opted out of the CSMF and received the equivalent sum to run its own scholarship program.

<sup>55</sup> Canadian Federation of Students, *Millennium Scholarship Foundation - A failed Experiment in Student Financial Aid*, 2007, <http://www.cfs-fcee.ca/html/english/research/factsheets/factsheet-msf.pdf> (accessed on 23 June 2011).

<sup>56</sup> McCarthy S., “Scholarships a PQ weapon, Conservative Senators warn”, *The Globe and Mail*, 16 June 1998, p. A11.

<sup>57</sup> Yakabuski K., “King of the Hill”, *The Globe and Mail*, 20 January 2007, p. F4.

As for the federal transfers, the Liberals' concerns over missing accountability and visibility continued far beyond the cuts in 1995. One participant recalled a discussion with then Finance Minister Paul Martin whom he reported as saying: "Why would I put more money into a transfer that is going to allow the government of Alberta to cut taxes and British Columbia to build more roads?" A year after coming to power, the new Conservative government declared in their budget their willingness to "clarify roles and responsibilities" and "restore the fiscal balance" (Canada, 2007). For this purpose, an additional \$800m for the Canada Social Transfer and a yearly automatic increase of 3% were announced. Although the increased transfers still came without any strings attached, the share designated for post-secondary education was earmarked publicly at 25%. The EO coalition has regarded this as a major success and the result of years-long advocacy work. The EE coalition has supported increased transfers over the last decade as well. However, there is a sense that the transfers are not the main issue any more and that the period of unconditional federal cash transfers is over. Thus, the AUCC, for example, has instead shifted its advocacy focus towards the issue of indirect costs.<sup>58</sup> This approach has also less potential for conflict among its own membership. The representative of the AUCC noted that university presidents have been divided over the transfer issue. Smaller and mid-sized universities with limited research activity tend to believe that the federal government must ensure that provinces do invest the designated money for post-secondary education in universities, rather than in K-12 education, where its responsibilities are undisputed. In contrast, Quebec universities support their provincial

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<sup>58</sup> For example, in the 1999 pre-budget consultations, AUCC President Robert Giroux stated in the hearing that "First and foremost, the federal government must restore transfers to the provinces for the support of post-secondary education". Seven years later, the AUCC stopped advocating actively for an increase of transfer payments, and instead called for stronger federal support in covering indirect costs (see AUCC Pre-Budget Consultation statement, 27 September 2006). Furthermore, neither the CASA's "Roadmap to a Pan-Canadian Accord" nor the CCL's 2007 annual report make significant mention of the cash transfers.

government's view that Ottawa should have no say in post-secondary education matters and simply increase transfers. Hence, the modifications of the CST followed a years-long debate and a policy learning process that was favoured by the Conservative government's belief in stronger decentralization of the federal government's role in post-secondary education.

With respect to programs supporting research university infrastructure, the government's approach has, in principle, remained the same. The increased funding for research was welcomed by all advocacy coalitions. Yet, the design and the implementation of the programs are the subject of criticism by the PR Coalition and the EO Coalition. Regarding the program design, the Ontario representative pointed to the fact that the provinces end up having to subsidize federally funded research because the increasing indirect costs are covered by the operating budget of the universities. For bigger provinces which have their own research and innovation agendas, this seems even more frustrating as the federal research priorities are not necessarily congruent with theirs. At no point have there been any federal-provincial consultations on defining common priorities and objectives. In addition, smaller provinces such as Nova Scotia see themselves disadvantaged by the design of the federally funded research programs which tend to benefit provinces with strong knowledge-based industry sectors, research-intensive universities and provincial administrations with substantial fiscal capacities.<sup>59</sup> According to a report by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC, 2000), those "design issues" have contributed to the Atlantic Provinces' declining

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<sup>59</sup> For example, the MPHEC (2000) notes that the Canada Foundation for Innovation's (CFI) program design disadvantaged the Atlantic's smaller universities because allocation was set according to a formula based on previous granting council successes. As well, the absence of matching funds constituted another disadvantage. According to the representative of the Nova Scotia Education ministry, because of the province's inability to provide matching funds, some universities could not access CFI funds which led to some frustration among university executives.

share of national R&D expenditures.<sup>60</sup> Hence, the CAUT asserts these targeted funding programs have “not addressed the central problem”<sup>61</sup> and, instead, have resulted in “less accessibility and more regional inequalities”<sup>62</sup>. Apart from the design issue, the Ontario representative noted with respect to the most recent major federal initiative, the Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP): “Although it may seem ungrateful to complain, the fact of the matter is that the way in which it happened was very intrusive”. He referred in particular to one case, in which the federal government had retroactively approved a proposal by a small university in Ontario despite the prior rejection of the proposal by the provincial ministry. In contrast, for Nova Scotia, which is familiar with major university infrastructure deferrals, the KIP was a great help for the province, explained its representative. Generally, the EE coalition has welcomed the federal government’s research support initiatives.

#### **5.1.4. Connecting the dots: An overview of the belief systems**

An overview of the advocacy coalitions’ belief systems illustrates that deep core, policy core and secondary beliefs are closely interlinked. The fundamental values are reflected in various shades and forms in the two lower belief categories. This is especially true for the supporters of more intergovernmental coordination, that is, the EO and EE Coalition. Their respective belief structure can be summarized as follows: According to the EO Coalition, public policies with regards to post-secondary education must give priority to accessibility and providing equal opportunities to all Canadians. For this advocacy coalition, which is closely associated

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<sup>60</sup> The Atlantic share of the national R&D expenditures declined mainly in the 1990s, from close to 6% in 1988 to 3.6% in 1996. There has been a further decline following the launch of the federal programs to 3.4% in 2003. The most recent statistics indicate that the share has risen again to 3.8% (see MPHEC, 2000; Statistics Canada, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> See CAUT presentation at pre-budgetary consultations on 4 November 1999.

<sup>62</sup> See CAUT presentation at pre-budgetary consultations 17 September 2003.

with the Labor Union and Social-Democrat movements, post-secondary education policy should be at least as important as a tool of social policy as of economic policy. Therefore, higher education policies must aim at both providing equal opportunities and offering comprehensive and high quality education to everyone, everywhere. Governmental policies towards universities should not be driven by economic considerations only and, hence, the principle of independent scientific inquiry must be safeguarded. To this end, the role of the state in the governance of the university sector is crucial. According to the EO Coalition's view, the changing state-university relationship over the last decades, particularly with respect to the financing of higher education institutions, is considered to be at the core of what its proponents consider to be the main challenges. Alas, the 'solution' rests with the state as well. In terms of policy instruments, this translates into legislative and (preferably) coercive measures. It reflects the belief that in spite of Canada's federalist system, the central government is to play a leading role in assuring social equality and cohesiveness throughout the country. Statements made, such as the one by an interviewee who suggested that Canada has not had any visionary national projects since the time of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, imply the notion that higher education should become the new focal point of a national identity-fostering Canadian welfare state. In this sense, the many references to the *Canada Health Act* can also be related to a time period of a strong, socially progressive federal government.

In contrast, the EE Coalition fundamentally believes that the pursuit of excellence, particularly in research, is not compatible in a post-secondary education system that wants to be equally inclusive. In fact, according to some of its members, policies that favor equal treatment hinder the development of equal opportunities. In other words, the EE Coalition

believes that only a differentiated university sector can adequately respond to the demands of excellence in research on the one hand, and equal opportunities and accessibility on the other hand. The EE Coalition's calls for a more efficient allocation of resources through a differentiated post-secondary education system and better federal-provincial cooperation is framed in the context of the global knowledge-based economy and the competition for talents. The universities understand themselves as a central part of the national economy that seeks to increase its productivity and competitiveness levels through knowledge and innovation. Hence, the discourse of the EE Coalition is primarily driven by economic rationales. It thus comes as no surprise that this advocacy coalition associates the main challenges of Canada's university sector less with the altered role of the state, than with the global market forces. To face these challenges, the state must not legislate and impose, but coordinate, inform and provide the right financial incentives to produce 'winners'. In that sense, the various federal programs launched since 1997 are regarded as highly beneficial. Yet, the efficiency of the post-secondary education system is suboptimal in terms of meeting the demands of the economy and of competing on a global level. Therefore, in the view of the EE Coalition, closer federal-provincial collaboration with a more strategic focus is necessary. As well, better data is considered important not only to design effective policies, but also to provide universities with better information about the higher education market. Thus, to a significant degree, the market is accepted as a regulating force. The primary role of the state is to support the universities in their capacity to compete, whether on a local or global level.

With respect to the PR Coalition, the post-secondary education reforms of most provincial governments in the last two decades have featured the introduction of market mechanisms and stressed the need for differentiation and more responsiveness to the demands of the economy.

Quebec is a notable exception insofar as inclusiveness and accessibility remain *the* ultimate value. Thus, it is not the deep core beliefs which hold this advocacy coalition together, but rather the policy core and secondary beliefs. The interviews suggest that the problems and adequate solutions are primarily perceived in a provincial context, stressing that the challenges differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Consequently, the PR Coalition believes that the role of the federal government is to assist them in “fixing problems” by providing adequate funds through unconditional transfer payments. The negative experience of reduced transfer payments and the unilaterally established programs by the federal government in the mid-1990s have considerably impacted the perception, especially of the larger provinces, that a fruitful and equal collaboration with the federal government is not possible. As mentioned though, poorer provinces such as Nova Scotia and Manitoba have been more flexible and have publicly endorsed the CCL’s suggestion for a pan-Canadian strategy.<sup>63</sup> It remains that with regards to their positions on the federal programs, for example in support of university research, provinces are united in their perception that their design does not reflect provincial priorities and specific circumstances. Hence, their secondary beliefs have reinforced their policy core beliefs that an even stronger role of the federal government (which is assumed to be inevitable in the case of a pan-Canadian post-secondary education strategy) would not be in the interest of the provinces. As we shall see in the next chapter, the provinces have been very successful in organizing themselves to defend this position.

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<sup>63</sup> See chapter 5.3. for further explanation.

Table 6: Overview of the belief system on post-secondary education in Canada

	Deep core beliefs	Policy core beliefs	Secondary beliefs
<b>EO coalition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PSE system must foremost be inclusive and provide equal opportunities to all Canadians</li> <li>• Equality and Quality are compatible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Problems and Challenges</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Erosion of public core funding for universities threatens accessibility, independent scientific inquiry, basic research and quality of education.</li> <li>- Primarily of domestic nature</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Role of federal government</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- PSE is a shared jurisdiction</li> <li>- Ensure equal access and quality education throughout the country</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Policy instrument</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legislative</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Student aid</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CMSP was intrusive and did not significantly improve accessibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Federal transfers</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Separate PSE transfer with conditions necessary</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Research</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Important contributions to strengthen research capacity of universities, but:</li> <li>- Targeted funding threatens independent scientific inquiry</li> <li>- Funding programs towards commercialization may infringe principle academic autonomy</li> <li>- Federal ‘boutique’ programs may enhance inequality between provinces and institutions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>EE Coalition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient allocation of resources through a differentiated PSE system necessary for excellence in research and high quality teaching</li> <li>• Equal treatment hinders equal opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Problems and Challenges</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global competition for talents</li> <li>- Nurturing the knowledge-based economy by responding to labour market needs and innovation-focused research</li> <li>- Lack of data to design effective public policies</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Role of federal government</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support universities through funding for research (incl. indirect costs), infrastructure, international and aboriginal education.</li> <li>- Coordinating production of data and PSE research</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Policy instrument</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial incentives and new governance instruments (no coercion)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Student aid</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CMSP fulfilled its purpose.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Federal transfers</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased transfers are welcome, but:</li> <li>- Belief that they are not sustainable.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Research</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Important contributions to strengthen research capacity of universities</li> <li>- Indirect costs must be fully covered by federal government</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p><b>PR Coalition</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally<sup>64</sup>, provincial policies stress the need for differentiation and more responsiveness of the universities to labour market needs</li> <li>• Quebec: Inclusiveness and accessibility of PSE system is a priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Problems and Challenges</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In each province different</li> <li>- ON: strong student enrolment, financing schemes for universities</li> <li>- NS: old infrastructure, high student debts</li> <li>- Mostly, problems are seen on a provincial level.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Role of federal government</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fix problems</li> <li>- Support core funding of universities</li> <li>- Tolerated fields of action are research, infrastructure, international education and aboriginal education</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Policy instrument</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unconditional transfers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Student aid</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CMSP was intrusive and did not significantly improve accessibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Federal transfers</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Should be increased to pre-1993 level</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Research</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Important contributions to strengthen research capacity of universities, but:</li> <li>- Federal government should cover indirect costs</li> <li>- Fed. Government should consult with provinces on research priorities and agenda</li> <li>- Fed. Research programs should take into account particular situation of smaller provinces.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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<sup>64</sup> Empirical evidence not sufficient to make conclusive statement, which is based on information from the interviews, as well as the literature review (in particular, Jones (2007)).

## **5.2. Advocacy coalition coordination and interdependencies**

Recent literature on advocacy coalitions has stressed the need to go beyond identifying belief structures and to pay more attention to the degree of coordination. This coordination can be informal or institutionalized and depends on the degree of functional interdependency between the coalition members defined by the congruency of the belief systems and the extent of the functional overlap. In other words, the more advocacy coalition members share the same beliefs, and the more the actions of one advocacy coalition member furthers the goals of another member, the stronger the coordination (see Fenger and Klok, 2001).

Although there are no formalized or institutionalized forms of collaboration, there is nevertheless a significant degree of cooperation in the EO Coalition. This can be explained in terms of a relatively high degree of interdependency. On the one hand, members share largely the same values and worldviews. On the other hand, their relations are symbiotic as there is no competition between them since they operate in different policy arenas or serve different constituencies. Moreover, the NDP representative noted that there is a regular exchange of people and ideas between the party and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). As well, Bill C-398 was a direct consequence of the close relationship between the NDP and the CAUT.

There is also a relatively high degree of coordination in the PR Coalition with regards to their stance on the federal role in post-secondary education. The coordination among provinces has even increased in the last decade when the Council of the Federation - under the leadership of Quebec's Jean Charest - was founded in 2003. It gathers the Premiers of all provinces and

territories twice a year<sup>65</sup> with the goal “to play a leadership role in revitalizing the Canadian federation and building a more constructive and cooperative federal system” (Council of the Federation, 2003). Yet, as Rocher (2009: p. 107) notes, the Council was created in the first place to actively counter the federal intrusion into provincial jurisdictions, based “on a strongly negative perception of how the Canadian federal system has evolved over the course of the past three decades”. Post-secondary education was on top of the Council’s agenda in 2005 and 2006, when it was identified at the Banff meeting as one of the key issues. A few months later, the summit on post-secondary education and skills training, hosted by the premiers of Quebec and Ontario, took place in Ottawa; this meeting, however, excluded the federal government though. Further interprovincial collaboration in post-secondary affairs occurs within the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), which was, similar to the Council of the Federation, originally created to defend itself against federal intrusions (Cameron, 2005). While the Council of the Federation gathers provincial leaders on the highest levels and is therefore more political in nature, CMEC is a forum to discuss policy issues, consult and cooperate on specific projects of mutual interest.<sup>66</sup> Almost since its first days, CMEC has been regularly subject to debate regarding its potential to be a truly pan-Canadian, if not national, focal point for post-secondary education. To date, however, CMEC has not been able to play this role; the statements by the provincial interviewees concede that CMEC is “ineffective and unwilling to take positions”. According to interviewees, this is also because the provinces send mostly low-level officials to the meetings, and thus do not attribute to CMEC the significant role it could play. When interviewed for a 2002 review

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<sup>65</sup> Prior to the foundation of the Council, Premiers met once a year at the Annual Premier’s Conference. In contrast to its preceding institution, the Council is a more formalized and has a permanent secretariat (see McMenemy, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> See [www.cmec.ca](http://www.cmec.ca) (accessed on 30 March 2010).

report, CMEC's own secretariat staff emphasized "the need for provinces to rise above individual jurisdictional concerns in the pursuit of common objectives" (CMEC, 2002: p. 14). The provinces that are considered to dominate the agenda-setting and to have the most weight in both bodies, the CoF and the CMEC, are Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. According to a former senior government official, Quebec and Alberta were not only the most fervent defenders of provincial supremacy in post-secondary education, but they also appeared to have closely coordinated their positions. In short, the interprovincial coordination is mostly institutionalized and characterized by the very influential positions of the larger provinces, which leverage these same interprovincial institutions for their own purposes. Hence, among the provincial heavy weights, there is a high degree of belief congruence and their relations are symbiotic since they share the same objective, which is to oppose federal involvement in post-secondary education.

As for the EE Coalition, the degree of coordination is much more scattered and, therefore, much less important. There are several coordinating groups within the advocacy coalitions. On a national level, universities collaborate and coordinate their activities through the AUCC, for example in the field of student mobility and institutional accreditation. In addition, G5 and G13 universities collaborate particularly closely on the research front, with much success. Think tanks, such as Conference Board of Canada or the Canadian Council on Learning, act largely independently, though the latter has been cooperating regularly with smaller provinces such as Nova Scotia on specific research projects. Coordination may also happen indirectly and informally. For example, both the Conference Board of Canada and the Public Policy

Forum have at least one G5 University President on their Boards of Directors<sup>67</sup>. Thus, the low degree of coordination in the EE coalition can also be explained in terms of its interdependency structure. The relations between the EE Coalitions members are not always symbiotic and can be indifferent or in some cases even competitive. For example, Canada's largest research universities cooperate to advocate for more federal money, but at the same time they compete on a daily basis for the highest share of this funding pie. Also, smaller universities compete each semester for students and faculty. Finally, the belief system is more heterogeneous and, therefore, not as congruent compared to the other two advocacy coalitions. Nonetheless, the AUCC, which represents 95 member institutions with sometimes diverging interests, is considered by many as the most successful organization in lobbying the federal government in the last fifteen years. As explained in the next chapter, this is a result of its contact networks and strategies.

### **5.3. Resources and strategies**

Although the direction in which advocacy coalitions seek to move government programs are strongly influenced by the belief systems, their capacity to do so depends on their *resources* (Sabatier, 1999). Resources encompass legal authority, public opinion, information, mobilizable troops, financial resources and skilful leadership (Sabatier, 2007). Though it is beyond the scope of this research paper to provide a full analysis of the resources available to

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<sup>67</sup> Indira Samarasekera, President of the University of Alberta, is on the Boards of both organizations; Stephen Toope, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of British Columbia, is on the Board of the Conference Board of Canada.

each advocacy coalition<sup>68</sup>, we can, on the basis of the interviews, outline the types of resources mobilized within a broad strategy to advance their position in the policy subsystem.

The success of major universities in lobbying for more research grants, which led in 1997-1998 to the so-called paradigm change in federal support for universities, goes back to the coordinated actions of a very small group of G5 university executives and the former AUCC President, Robert Giroux, who had a direct and close relationship with the then-Clerk of the Privy Council Kevin Lynch, a key figure within the administration. The former UBC President Martha Piper summarized the approach as follows: “What you need to do is you need to listen to government, listen to their concerns and then try to figure out how you can help them solve their concerns.”<sup>69</sup> Hence, the strategy of the AUCC consists in collaborating with the federal government. One former senior government official explained that there is a relatively strong interdependence, as the AUCC wants to be heard by the government which in return wants the support of the universities for its S&T agenda. For this reason, AUCC recruited senior government officials into its ranks who brought to the table not only insights into how the federal government works but, more importantly, the right contact networks. The AUCC’s success therefore is based on skilful leadership and an important tight network with key decision-makers. Other EE coalition members, however, lost considerable resources. For instance, CCL’s budget was completely cut by the federal government as of 2011. As a consequence, the organization will have to continue with 5% of its original budget.

As for the EO Coalition, the current CAUT leadership and the CFS have adopted a more confrontational approach towards the federal government, which includes mostly critical

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<sup>68</sup> Even Sabatier (2007) admits that while the conceptualization of resources is relatively easy, its operationalization “has proven extraordinarily difficult”.

<sup>69</sup> Piper M., “A five-step program for change”, University Affairs, 6 October 2008.

statements on the yearly budgets and the organization of student protests. For the CAUT, the PSE Act was the key policy lobbying document, with which it approached senior government officials, politicians and other post-secondary education associations or organizations. Its goal was to get the federal funding role renewed by “capturing the imagination of the public”. It did capture the attention of New Democratic Party, but neither the sponsoring Member of Parliament, Denise Savoie, nor the CAUT expected the bill to pass in parliament. Rather, the PSE Act was a means to receive some media attention and to draw the attention of a larger audience to what they perceive to be the main issues in post-secondary education. Hence, for the EO Coalition, raising public awareness “is part of effective lobbying”, as the CFS representative noted.

After all, however, it is the PR Coalition which is by far the most resourceful advocacy coalition, not least because of its constitutional powers. The largest and richest provinces, in particular Quebec and Alberta, have mobilized and invested considerable resources in leading the coalition opposing further federal intrusions, for example through the creation of the Council of the Federation. In addition, Quebec constitutes a united front, having the students and most universities behind them, which indirectly weakens the other two advocacy coalitions. A perhaps unconventional, but nevertheless pertinent resource is the latent separatist sentiment, which can be mobilized to oppose federal programs. In contrast, smaller have-not provinces such as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Manitoba have much less influence in interprovincial deliberations. Hence, they rely more on the federal support given their limited fiscal and policy capacities, and thus are more cooperative.

In conclusion, all three advocacy coalitions have adopted different strategies, depending on their resources and their constituencies. Major universities, with the help of the AUCC, have

established direct links with the highest government levels, presenting themselves as key partners to solve Canada's educational challenges. On the other hand, the EO coalition followed mostly a confrontational approach that aimed at raising awareness and public support. Finally, under the leadership of the most resource-rich provinces - whether in oil or separatists -the PR Coalition has further institutionalized their common front against the federal government.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

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Our research question aims at deepening our understanding as to why, to date, there is no pan-Canadian or national post-secondary education strategy in Canada. In this chapter, we will first discuss the results of the analysis on the basis of the preceding chapters and provide a response to the main research question. Second, Fisher et al.'s (2006) assertion that Canada is heading towards a national post-secondary education strategy will be reviewed. Finally, we will consider the policy implications and will propose a possible research agenda.

### **6.1. Why is there no pan-Canadian post-secondary education strategy?**

There are three key elements in the ACF model explaining policy stability. They are: 1) the advocacy coalitions' beliefs; 2) their degree of coordination and resources, and 3) the relatively stable parameters which structure the interaction within the policy subsystem. With respect to the first aspect, policy stability is explained by the fact that there have been no major changes in the actors' beliefs. Both the PSE Act and PSE Strategy advocacy coalitions support a more coordinated approach to post-secondary education, but there are significant

differences in their fundamental convictions, i.e. which values should have ultimate priority, and what form and direction a comprehensive pan-Canadian policy should take. Their divergent belief systems can be interpreted as a result of the developments and shifts that have been taking place in Canada's post-secondary education sector as a consequence of meta-forces such as globalization, neo-liberal ideology and the knowledge economy paradigm. The EO coalition is critical towards many of these trends and advocates largely a return to the public managerial model. Its criticism is based on a negative perception of the altered role of the state in higher education, as we discussed at the outset. There is a sense that Canada's post-secondary education sector should continue to build on the same principles upon which it has expanded with much success in the last fifty years. This view is connected to a larger world view that stresses equal opportunities as the ultimate goal of education policy, even more so in times when higher education is understood as a social right. Hence, this advocacy coalition is closely associated with the labour union and social-democratic movements. In contrast, the EE coalition will always support the EO coalition in advocating for more public funding, but it has, to a large extent, embraced the changes and new challenges, albeit sometimes reluctantly. Major research universities see themselves competing on a global level, so do smaller- and mid-sized universities, though to a lesser degree. For all universities, competition for students, researchers and new sponsors has become the new *modus vivendi*. The G5 proposal can be taken as an indicator that the efficiency – equal opportunity dichotomy has widened, not least by the government's push to commercialize research. While this development has created tensions even within the EE Coalition, it has had little effect on the PR Coalition's largely shared belief opposing further federal government intrusion. From the late 1990s until the mid-2000s, post-secondary education was one of the major battle

fields on which federal-provincial disagreements were played out. The PR Coalition's fierce opposition to federal-provincial collaboration in post-secondary education can be attributed to what the ACF refers to as a *devil shift* (see Sabatier, 2007): advocacy coalitions' experiences of losses lasts longer and is felt more strongly than victories. The drastic cuts of the federal transfer payments in 1994 and the subsequent creation of 'boutique' programs have caused such a devil shift and, to this day, is still very present in the discourse of the PR Coalition. Despite the more conciliatory 'Open Federalism' approach by Prime Minister Harper, there is an underlying feeling of mistrust about the federal government's initiatives, not least because they are often launched unilaterally.

Second, the fact that no major policy change has occurred can be explained in terms of the degree of coordination in the advocacy coalitions as well their resources and strategies. The EO coalition has demonstrated a relatively high degree of interdependency and shared values, which has contributed to a minor policy change of having earmarked the share for post-secondary education within the CST. At the same time, it is understood that a PSE Act including conditionality is unlikely to be adopted. Therefore, the PSE Act's proposal is also a public relations tool seeking to foster a sense of shared identity tying in with what is considered a key event in the history of social rights similar to the universal access to health care through the *Canada Health Act*. In contrast, the EE coalition rejects such an approach, based largely on a different belief system, but also on a strategy that wants to be more pragmatic and incremental. However, the relations among its membership are much less coordinated and interdependent. In fact, in some circumstances the relationship is even competitive. Thus, although the CCL proposal for a national data strategy and a pan-Canadian post-secondary education strategy has largely been endorsed, no organization appears to have

invested many resources to promote it. Finally, the PR Coalition's success in opposing any sort of collaborative mechanisms with the federal government resides, of course, foremost in its constitutional powers. But it has historically also been quite effective in defending its rights by institutionalizing its collaboration. Having not only the Quebec government on board, but also Quebec's universities and students, has certainly contributed to weakening the other two advocacy coalitions.

Ultimately, the relatively stable parameters, which structure the interaction between the actors in the policy subsystem, provide a third element in explaining policy stability. One important aspect in this respect is the nature of the policy good itself. A comparison with health care is pertinent, as it is also a provincial responsibility, but regulated through the *Canada Health Act*. Many interview participants have pointed to the inverse correlation between health care and higher education spending, noting that the former would always win over the latter. This is explained by the fact that education expenditures are long-term investments, whereas spending on health care has fast and tangible results, which is more attractive to politicians. More importantly, in the health care sector, there is a constant sense of urgency. News about people dying because of insufficient access to proper health care makes headlines and further creates public pressure on politicians. As everybody is concerned about one's health, the constituency for politicians is also much larger than in post-secondary education. Although advocacy groups, especially students groups, try to create a sense of urgency, it is, as one respondent admitted, a very difficult undertaking. Not only are potential students who cannot access post-secondary education not as visible as people in need of health care, there is also

no complete and undisputed data, which would favour policy change (Sabatier and Weible, 2007).<sup>70</sup>

A second important parameter in our study is obviously the basic constitutional structure, which is at the core of the issue. As discussed, there is an inherent tension between the responsibilities attributed to the provinces by the *British North American Act* of 1867, and the spending power of the federal government which is also based, albeit not explicitly, on the same founding document. This tension has been exacerbated by the fact that the provinces are in charge of delivering services in increasingly costly policy areas such as health care and post-secondary education, but do not have the fiscal power to cover the expenses on their own. Canada's constitutional structure features another central characteristic, which is its relation with the province of Quebec. One francophone interviewee noted that, for Quebec in particular, education is closely linked to language. Thus, Quebec's post-secondary education policy, focusing on accessibility and inclusiveness, must also be seen in the light of its 'battle' to protect the francophone culture in North America. This particularity is mirrored in the belief systems of Quebec associations, which largely support the defensive position of their government.<sup>71</sup> The Quebec split is also replicated within national associations, such as the AUCC, when it comes to the role of the federal government, and influences the policy proposal of the CAUT whose PSE Act offers Quebec the possibility to opt out of the arrangement. As many interview participants pointed out, following the constitutional battles under Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney, and the near-separation of *la belle province* in 1995, no political party wishes to reopen the constitution over post-secondary education.

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<sup>70</sup> For example, note that OECD's Pisa studies, which have gathered comprehensive data on the learning performance of children in K-12 education and which were widely published, have triggered education reforms in numerous countries.

<sup>71</sup> One exception is the FQPPU, which has endorsed the CAUT's Post-Secondary Education Act.

## 6.2. Is policy change ahead?

When the Conservative government of Stephen Harper came into power and presented its second budget in 2007, it made the clarification of roles and responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments a priority. In subsequent years, changes were made to post-secondary education programs and transfers in an attempt to ease the previously tense relationship. Are the minor policy changes an indicator of a more comprehensive policy change in the near future?

According to the ACF, there are two paths towards policy change: *policy oriented learning* and *external perturbations*. The former occurs when there are “alternations of thought or behavioural intentions that result from experience and/or new information and that are concerned with the attainment or revision of policy objectives” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1999: p. 123). Policy oriented learning is particularly conducive under conditions in which there are accepted quantitative data and a forum prestigious enough to force professionals from different coalitions to participate. Our research has demonstrated that many experts as well policy makers and stakeholders agree that there is a lack of comparable and appropriate data on Canada’s post-secondary education system. Various initiatives that have been launched to improve this situation have either been curtailed or not produced sufficient data. Moreover, almost all interview participants have deplored the absence of a pan-Canadian or national forum on post-secondary education. Again, there have been attempts to create such a

national focal point, but they have not developed into any sustained format<sup>72</sup>. The most durable interprovincial institution, CMEC, has also been regarded by some as a possible platform (Allison, 2006; CMEC 2002). To this day, however, provincial governments have refused to give the federal government a permanent seat and to transform CMEC into an institution of intergovernmental cooperation. Therefore, the absence of an informed and continued dialogue on Canada's post-secondary education sector makes it very difficult to change current perceptions, practices and policies.

As far as external perturbations are concerned, the ACF proposes three possible events that may cause rapid policy change, i.e. alterations in socio-economic conditions as well as in systemic governing conditions and policy decisions from other subsystems. Regarding the first external factor, many participants have argued that provinces will be more open to substantial intergovernmental cooperation only when forced by budgetary constraints. This has happened already with the smaller have-not provinces which have indeed been more cooperative with agencies such as the CCL. However, the latest economic and financial crisis in 2008, which turned even a large jurisdiction such as Ontario into a have-not province, has not provoked any substantial discussions over new federal-provincial arrangements in post-secondary education. On the contrary, in an economy in which knowledge is understood as the only resource that guarantees sustainable economic growth and social prosperity, higher education policy has become increasingly important for Quebec in defending its particular status (Courchene, 2004). With regards to a change in governing coalitions, the perception prevails that the establishment of a pan-Canadian or national strategy is currently not a

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<sup>72</sup> For example, the CCL is perceived by many as having lost its credibility given the issue over its federally-dominated governance structure; the national conferences in 2005 and 2006 have not seen any long-term follow-up.

question of *who* is in power. As discussed, the current Conservative leadership's approach to 'clarifying roles and responsibilities' has demonstrated little appetite for consultation and deliberation, even within a larger framework focusing, for example, on a comprehensive innovation policy. Under a Liberal government, few see the possibility of a major policy change. Indeed, even though the Liberal platform for the 2011 elections featured a Canadian Learning Strategy, including a Canadian Learning Passport offering funding for students through the Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP), there is no indication that a more comprehensive approach to post-secondary education is on the Liberal agenda. This is not surprising given that the last major education initiative in 1998 caused a long lasting intergovernmental brawl. Even under an NDP led government - no longer deemed as an unrealistic scenario - the establishment of the PSE Act with its current design including conditionality is questionable. According to an NDP representative, the goal of Bill C-398 was primarily to get the issue talked about. However, he was uncertain as to whether the current NDP leadership would support an Act that includes possible sanctions against non-complying provinces. Finally, with respect to impacts from other subsystems, one possible 'window of opportunity' suggested by several respondents is the up-coming negotiations for equalization payments in 2014, which impacts the Canada Social Transfer. However, others have again argued that the current Conservative government is eager to avoid entering into any discussions that could potentially touch upon constitutional questions.

In concluding, our analysis suggests that the probability for major policy change towards a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to Canadian post-secondary education is low. Even though Prime Minister Harper's approach has eased the main tensions with the provinces by dealing on a one-on-one basis with each Premier, there is an underlying, yet

significant element of mistrust. Therefore, any policy proposal that seeks to address the perceived lack of coordination would have to consider this current characteristic of federal-provincial relations. Therefore, what policy implications can we draw from our analysis and what does it mean in terms of shaping a future research agenda?

### **6.3. Policy implications and research agenda: Towards an *Innovation platform***

At the beginning of this paper we have stressed that the purpose of this research was not to demonstrate the necessity of a post-secondary education strategy, but to understand the reasons why there is none. There are, nevertheless, policy implications. At latest since Kingdon (2003), we know that in public policy, problems do not necessarily precede solutions; instead, advocacy groups may ‘create’ problems to advance their own interests and leverage their influence by suggesting their solutions. Alas, from a public policy sciences perspective, it first needs to be determined *what* can be improved. Critics of national higher education proposals are not entirely wrong suggesting that the respective advocacy groups have not been fully convincing in establishing the rationale for more collaboration. The current rationale of national strategy proponents consists of saying that, yes, Canada’s post-secondary education sector is performing well; but it will not be able to face the new challenges in the future if change does not happen now. As illustrated, national strategies have been suggested since the 1960s as various solutions to resolve the particular crisis situation of its time, or to avoid an impending one. Half a century later, Canada possesses undoubtedly a strong university system, despite all these crises. That said, neither the advocates of a “provincialized” higher education landscape have been able to demonstrate the merits of the

*status quo*, or of an even more decentralised system. Thus, from a policy sciences perspectives, a first step would consist of bringing provincial and federal governments as well as all relevant stakeholders together to produce and share the necessary data. As we know, data collection and the establishment of indicators is in itself not a neutral process. This is why all participating parties would have to negotiate and agree on a set of principles defining what should be measured. In short, what is needed is data and a forum. Obviously, this is *not* a new proposal and many policy makers have advocated for it. In fact, the CCL was created for this very purpose and has produced much valuable research on Canada's post-secondary education system, providing a long needed country-wide perspective. At the same time, the way by which the CCL was established illustrates the very reason, why intergovernmental cooperation has - so far - largely been unsuccessful, that is, the lack of mutual *trust*. The best policies fail if there is mistrust among the main partners. Although we believe that the CCL has made important contributions to the understanding of the Canadian post-secondary education sector, it has failed in bringing the major provinces to the table and build trust ties. How can trust be built up? Of course, this question goes beyond the scope of our quest for policy implications and, in fact, has been occupying politicians and scholars of Canadian federalism since almost the very beginning of Canadian Confederation.

That said, we believe that building trust implies working in partnership and collaboratively, and not simply devolving responsibilities to the provinces, as the current government's hands-off approach suggests. Partnerships typically work best when they gather parties around a topic, which addresses the interests and needs of all participants. The concept of *innovation* has been driving policymaking in recent years and could well provide a focal point for

federal-provincial collaboration. According to the OECD<sup>73</sup>, innovation must be understood in a comprehensive and holistic way. It not only refers to new or significantly improved products and processes, but includes also organizational innovation. Hence, as sort of a meta-concept, an *Innovation platform* could constitute a forum bringing together policymakers from all levels of government and stakeholders to develop policy aiming at promoting not only economic and social innovation, but also new ways for policy- and decision-making processes. For example, one could be inspired by Janice Stein's (2006) proposal of a *networked federalism*. In a nutshell: *Networked federalism* aims to enhance informal political and social relationships among public officials, policymakers and stakeholders from all levels of government in a non-hierarchical setting with common goals to solve policy problems. Noting that the confidence among Canadian public officials has been low since the mid-1990s, Stein argues that networked federalism can start incrementally rebuilding 'trust ties', which would not need any constitutional amendments.<sup>74</sup> Without going further into detail, we invite readers to read Stein's (2006) proposal and ask: Wouldn't post-secondary education present the ideal policy field to make a first step towards an *innovation platform* based on an innovative *networked federalism* concept aimed at building trust?

On the basis of the preceding chapters, two paths for further research are suggested. First, the literature review has illustrated that Canadian higher education research has long focused on individual jurisdictions. Only recently, a stronger national approach has been adopted highlighting the common rather than diverging elements. Nonetheless, further research is

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<sup>73</sup> See [http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_33723\\_40898954\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,3746,en_2649_33723_40898954_1_1_1_1,00.html) (accessed on 2 July 2011) .

<sup>74</sup> In this respect, is it interesting to point to the case of Switzerland. According to the recent study of Fisher et al. (2010), strong trust ties among the major stakeholders and government levels have been instrumental in finding consensus on the constitutional amendments of 2006, which have established new intergovernmental mechanisms to enhance intergovernmental coordination in the field of higher education.

necessary to complete the picture. In particular, there is no or little research done on the ecosystem of national post-secondary education associations and lobby groups, which may exercise considerable influence on the federal policy processes related to universities.<sup>75</sup> Even more so important is to understand their interaction with their provincial members or counterparts in order to appreciate what factors are driving their advocacy priorities. Are, in fact, national post-secondary education strategies just a means to further their own interests? How do they coordinate and consult with their provincial members? Therefore, this research agenda would seek to develop a better understanding of how policy agendas in higher education and research are shaped on both levels of governments, and how they depend on each other.

The second possible research topic is linked to our discussion and proposal for an *innovation platform* based on the concept of *networked federalism*. An action research on current intergovernmental coordination ‘policy spaces’ in education and research, as well as in other Canadian policy fields, could determine what ingredients have made collaborative working relationships between federal and provincial governments successful. The first annual CCL (2006) report has taken stock of the current coordinative mechanisms in place. However, a future research agenda would have to go beyond the institutional aspects and – in the sense of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith’s approach - take into account cognitive factors as well as the personal social interactions and perceptions of policymakers.

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<sup>75</sup> One exception of Morgan (2009), which provides an interesting insight into AUCC’s lobbying efforts with the federal government.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

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Two observations were made at the beginning of this research project. First, in the Western world, the growing importance of universities for wealth creation and social prosperity has resulted in many higher education reforms. In federalist states, this has also meant the redefinition of roles and responsibilities of local and national governments by launching common strategies or creating collaborative institutions. Second, Canada has been an exception in this respect insofar as there are no mechanisms to coordinate federal and provincial higher education policies. This phenomenon has generally been explained in terms of Canada's federalist system and its related issues. The purpose of this research was to go beyond that and develop a more in-depth understanding of why this is, by looking at the beliefs and perceptions of the advocacy coalitions, and focusing on the policy subsystem, rather than the broad political environment. We have found that the discussion on a national post-secondary education strategy reflects a larger debate over the fundamental values that should guide the sector in the future. Inclusiveness has long been the cornerstone of Canada's university sector, which should also be seen in light of Canada's need to distinguish itself from its southern neighbour. The strong belief in the value of accessibility has been an important driver in the expansion of the higher education sector, which, in itself, is seen as a success. However, as Sörlin (2007) notes, the trends towards more competition - producing winners and losers - creates tensions especially in higher education systems with an egalitarian culture. This antagonism also largely determines the sort of pan-Canadian or national approach to post-secondary education that is advocated. Hence, the two belief systems of the EO and EE Coalition must be seen against the background of the gradual shift from an exclusively public managerial, idealist regime to a functionalist, academic capitalist

regime. What we have named the EO Coalition believes that akin to the *Canada Health Act*, the Canadian government has the responsibility to ensure that access to post-secondary education, as it was understood before the mid-1990s, remains the core principle. This includes a state which ensures equal opportunities throughout the country, but entirely respects the independence of the academic enterprise. Going into the future, therefore, means to build upon past strengths. This view is mirrored in the policy core beliefs. The proposed Canada Post-Secondary Act, which stresses values such as public administration and collegial governance, reflects the willingness to return to the public managerial regime. In contrary to the New Public Management (NPM) approach, these higher education regimes stress values such as democracy and legitimacy, instead of efficiency and value for money (see Ferlie et al., 2008). This also explains the criticism of the federal programs and budget allocations that have increasingly supported commercialisation and accelerated the shift towards an academic capitalism system. The EE Coalition, in contrast, does not reject traditional values in themselves admitting that the system works well. It is argued, however, that universities no longer operate only in a national, but increasingly also in a global context. This means mounting competition among national economies as well as among universities. Thus, for sustainable economic growth and social prosperity, a system that works well is not good enough, and competition in search for excellence and efficiency becomes the driving force. This translates into policy core beliefs that stress the need for better federal-provincial collaboration and to produce comprehensive data in order to design more effective policies. Hence, the EE Coalition favours policy instruments relating to the New Governance approach, such as benchmarking and exchange of best practices, which are seen as more flexible than legislative measures. With respect to the PR Coalition, although provinces may

stand differently on the excellence versus equal opportunity spectrum, they do agree on the general principles of Canada's post-secondary education sector (see CMEC, 1999). There is nonetheless a dividing line between richer and less well-off provinces, in particular with respect to their positions on the role of the federal government in this area. For instance, the Atlantic provinces are much more open to intergovernmental collaboration than, say, Ontario. Quebec and Alberta have led the advocacy coalition by establishing interprovincial coordination structures, such as CMEC and the Council of the Federation. Besides the obvious legal resources, they also benefit from sensitive Quebec-Canada relations. In comparison, there is no coordination between the two other advocacy coalitions. As well, the EO coalition coordinates relatively closely, but has little resources. The EE coalition is marked by a relatively low degree of coordination and its most important representative, the AUCC, has largely abstained from the discussions about intergovernmental coordinative mechanisms.

Of course, the transformation from an exclusively public managerial, idealist regime to a functionalist, academic capitalist regime has also caused tensions in other countries. Canada, however, is perhaps distinct in that its universities have faced the transformation from an elite to a mass system earlier than many other countries. Accessibility and inclusiveness have thus not only had a longer tradition, but are also seen as having contributed to this success. On the other hand, because of the weak R&D investments by the business sector, policy makers consider universities as key institutions in promoting innovation, perhaps more so than in many other countries. Among the G7 states, Canada's higher education sector ranks first in terms of R&D expenditures as a percentage of the GDP. This is mainly due to the federal government's R&D investments since 1997-1998. For this reason, the polarization might be

stronger in Canada than elsewhere, which makes coordinated action between the PSE Act and the EE Coalitions in favour of a national or pan-Canadian approach to post-secondary education even more difficult. We have furthermore argued that a major policy change in this respect is not likely. The specificities of ‘education’ as a policy field and the absence of a common forum as well as the general underlying mistrust between the two levels of government will continue to make talking to each other, let alone acting together, very difficult.

Hence, does our research reinforce the view of the Canadian *exceptionalism*? Maybe. But we believe that in the past, this perspective has favoured a general attitude that accepts the *status quo* as a given and tends to avoid any meaningful and sustained dialogue about how to improve the governance structures in the higher education sector. Ironically, the distinct decentralized nature of the system would make innovative mechanisms for coordination and collaboration even more important. In this sense, we shall conclude by finishing the introductory quote by Governor General David Johnston:

...

***“When we set our sights together,  
we can do better and inspire each other  
to achieve great things.”***

Governor General David Johnston  
Installation Speech, Parliament of Canada  
1 October 2010

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<sup>76</sup> Only quoted newspaper articles are listed.