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Third Space Professionals as Policy Actors

Abstract

This paper conceptually examines the role of third space professionals as policy actors in higher education. While studies in Europe have emerged more recently on the constitution of third space professionals and their roles within higher education, few have examined how these professionals partake in the processes of policy making and implementation. This paper aims at filling this gap by exploring what role they occupy in higher education, how we should analyze their participation in policy making and implementation, and why it is relevant to do so.

Keywords

Higher education, third space, professionals, policy analysis

Third Space Professionelle als organisations- und bildungspolitische Akteure

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit „Third Space" tätigen Hochschulmitarbeitenden als organisations- und bildungspolitische Akteure. Während neuere europäische Studien die Konstitution der Arbeit im „Third Space" thematisieren, wird wenig mit einbezogen, wie diese Personen in Prozessen der Festlegung und Umsetzung von organisations- und bildungspolitischen Richtlinien teilhaben. Der Beitrag geht dieser Frage nach indem er konzeptionell untersucht, welche Rollen und Aufgaben Mitarbeitende im „Third Space" einnehmen, welche Referenzrahmen zur Erstellung und Umsetzung von organisations- und bildungspolitischen Richtlinien und Akteuren berücksichtigt werden sollten, und weshalb es relevant ist, „Third Space Professionals" als organisations- und bildungspolitische Akteure zu sehen.

Schlüsselwörter

Hochschulbildung, Third Space, Professionelle, Bildungspolitik

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1   Introduction

In this paper I conceptually examine the role of third space professionals as policy actors in higher education. My exploration is situated within the European context, while occasionally drawing on comparisons with North American higher education institutions. While studies in Europe have emerged more recently about the constitution of third space professionals and their roles within higher education (BARNETT & DINAPOLI, 2007; WHITCHURCH, 2008; 2009), few explorations have examined how these professionals partake in the processes of policy making and implementation.

My paper aims at filling this gap by addressing what role these professionals occupy in higher education, how we should analyze their participation in policy making and implementation, and why it is relevant to do so. In order to respond to these queries I first describe the role of third space professionals in higher education (BARNETT & DINAPOLI, 2007; WHITCHURCH, 2008; 2009). In a second part I outline basic premises of educational policy analysis (FERLIE, MUSSELIN & ANDRESANI, 2008; KING, 2010; MALEN & KNAPP, 1998; PARADEISE et al., 2009; WEATHERLEY & LIPSKY, 1977) in order to consider in a final section third space professionals as policy actors. In the following I briefly address the relevance of my undertaking.

Amongst the reasons to examine the relevance of higher education third space professionals as policy actors stands the long-standing experience of the role of frontline professionals, i.e. teachers and administrative staff, in general education reform.[2] Time and again studies have found that the sustainability of reform efforts lies with the degree of "buy-in" and inclusion in decision-making of those groups of professionals who are directly tasked with the daily implementation of a policy. Top-down issued guidelines and directives stand little success to facilitate long-term structural and organizational change even if they appear to be successful at first.

Diane RAVITCH's (2010) summation of the results of 20 years of accountability and choice in U.S. general education as well as Linda DARLING-HAMMOND´s (2010) description of educational change and reform in general education systems internationally illustrate these dynamics well. Both authors rightly note that management strategies that work for businesses and private industry are insufficient when being applied to public education as the notion of profit is conceived differrently.

Though general education and higher education systems operate distinctively, especially as it concerns, among other things, the notions of performance and competition, the role of professionals as those who not only facilitate the implement-tation of policy measures but also engage in policy making can be paralleled. This is particularly the case in the event of reforms that fundamentally alter a public education system. As it regards universities in Europe within the last 15 years the combination of being granted autonomy, the building of the European higher education area, and the introduction of new technologies to teaching, learning, and

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[2] Throughout the paper the term "frontline professionals" includes academic as well as professional staff in educational institutions. The terms "administrative staff" (U.S.) and "professional staff" (UK) refer to the same group.

student administration have placed new demands on the activities of professional and academic staff.

Hence, if we are interested in exploring sustainable change in higher education one place to start concerns the roles of professional staff in general, and the role of third space professionals in particular as policy actors: In what ways and to what degree are professional staff in higher education institutions, in general and specifically in the third space, involved in the process of policy making and by extension, should be considered as policy actors? Prior to responding I outline the conception and role of third space professionals.

2   Third Space Professionals

According to WHITCHURCH (2008) higher education professional staff can be categorized in four groups: bounded, cross-boundary, unbounded and blended professionals. The distinguishing characteristic between these categories is the notion of boundaries among job descriptions. While a "bounded" professional operates within a given set of duties and tasks, the distinctions between "cross-boundary" and "unbounded" professionals varies with regard to the attribution of boundaries: cross-boundary staff strategically build capacity across delineated domains, unbounded employees are engaged in projects that are not tied to specific functions or required duties.

Differing from the "unbounded" professionals higher education staff situated within the fourth category of "blended" professionals describe employees who are appointed to work across "both professional and academic domains … such as regional partnership, learning support, outreach and offshore provision" (WHITCHURCH, 2008, 384). In all four areas staff operate with a range of professional backgrounds and professional or academic degrees. Whereas bounded positions are an existing part of an institution, unbounded or blended activities are more likely to develop by virtue of a particular project.

WHITCHURCH (2008) does not rest with delineating this ideal-type taxonomy of staff categorization. Going a step further she points out that the shifting boundaries also result in a new conceptual location from which to consider the *type of work* that is being performed, a space situated at the interstices of the academic and the professional and requiring emergent project development and management roles:

> "As a result of blurring boundaries between activities, what might be described as *third space* has emerged between professional and academic domains. On [one side there] … are professional and academic staff performing their traditional roles: professional staff in generalist, specialist and 'niche' functions, and academic staff undertaking teaching, research and 'third-leg' activity. Alongside these roles, 'perimeter' roles have grown up around, for instance, in the case of professional staff, outreach and study skills, access and equity, community and regional partnership; and in the case of academic staff, pastoral support, curriculum development for non-traditional participants, and links with local educational providers. Over time these 'perimeter' roles have increasingly converged in *third space* around broadly based projects such as student transitions, community partnership and professional development." (WHITCHURCH, 2008, 384, her emphasis).

In essence, bringing together the two conceptions, i.e. the categorization of staff by virtue of their boundedness to tasks and the creation of a new domain that documents a specific type of work, allows WHITCHURCH (2008) to specify that it is through unbounded and blended professionals that third space functions are taken up. Bounded professional staff as well as academic staff in the traditional roles of teaching, research, and service are rarely found in this domain.

WHITCHURCH's (2008) findings indicate that work in the third space is frequently conducted through collaborative networks, working – at times geographically dispersed – on short- and long-term projects based on external funding for a specific cause or due to an initiative driven to achieve a particular goal. As examples she lists projects in the areas of student transitions such as career and student welfare; university-community and university-industry partnerships; and professional development for academic and professional staff.

Central to the effectiveness of third space staff is the ability to code switch and translate between differing languages and in the process, form collaborative relationships, new structures and knowledge: "Individuals … worked backwards and forwards across internal and external boundaries, translating and interpreting between different constituencies, and creating new institutional spaces, knowledges and relationships" (386). Such cross-over facilitates a mode of interdisciplinarity between traditionally crafted roles of academic and professional staff, a process WHITCHURCH likens to the dismantling of disciplinary boundaries:

> "[It is a] process of joint working, seeing the building of communicative relationships and networks as more significant than the observance of organizational boundaries, so much that *third space* work may occur in spite of, rather than because of, formal structures" (386, her emphasis).

As third space professionals step into the broader realm of higher education, their continuous employment depends on the amount of credibility as a holder of institutional knowledge and relevant lateral and hierarchical relationships. From an institutional perspective the value of third space professionals additionally depends, aside from their performance and adherence to self-imposed boundaries, on the organization's desire to operate with stringent delineations between the domains of professional and academic, local and regional/national within the categories of bounded and unbounded work. As WHITCHURCH (2008) observes:

> "Organisational positionings of staff may … be more complex than … [existing] distinctions suggest, in that professionals are not operating at the 'centre' (in the central 'Administration') and the 'periphery' (for instance, academic departments), but are also creating new locales in *third space*" (391, her emphasis).

WHITCHURCH's (2008) analysis keenly points to the varied roles of higher education staff, whether professional or academic, and the changes that can be observed within the organizational structures of European higher education institutions. For the North American context where professional staff and blended work are more established and recognized (see for example WHITCHURCH, 2009) these considerations are helpful as they allow an institution as well as staff themselves to determine in what capacity they are operating. For both, the individual and the institution such understanding is beneficial.

It is particularly the hypothesis that third space domains are created in response to given structures that gives pause to reflect on how professional and academic staff are linked to higher education policy making and implementation and raises the following questions: What type of change is driven at when a traditionally organized university decides to newly hire or reallocate existing staff into third space work? What makes the roles of bounded or cross-boundary professionals appear insufficient opposite the new project or task that needs to be achieved?

After examining the literature of educational policy making and implementation with special consideration of the role of actors, I return to respond to these questions, first from a general, then from a specific perspective of the role of third space professionals as policy actors. Three areas require consideration:

(1) hallmarks of policy analysis;

(2) the role of policy discourses; and

(3) the participation of frontline professionals in policy making.

3   Higher Education Policy Analysis

3.1   Multiple Dimensions

MALEN & KNAPP (1998) explore how the complex relationship between policy and practice in education can be analyzed to better understand how and when policies work to strengthen organizational responses, improve practices or increase motivation – or in the obverse, weaken these issues. As these authors contend, among the problems of understanding how policies work are the differing perceptions of the effect of policy on practice:

> "By some accounts, policy is so powerful it can hamstring schools, handcuff educators, and harm students; or conversely transform schools, empower educators, and inspire students. By other accounts, policy is so powerless it can be routinely ignored, ingeniously circumvented, effectively offset by forces that lie beyond the reach of policy, or essentially neutralized through adjustments that convert policy initiatives into conventional practices." (309)

In essence, depending on the focus through which we analyze whether a policy has been effective, or alternatively, in what ways it fell short, differing accounts will ensue. These accounts do not mutually exclude one another. Rather the divergence addresses a central issue as it regards policy making and implementation – within the complexities of competing discourses, values, processes, power, and resources not everyone will agree with a particular policy let alone be satisfied by its implementation.

Traditionally, policies are examined in terms of three broad contexts:

(1) *means-end relationships*, i.e. how notions of purpose, process, outcome, theories of action, etc., can be attributed to the policy process in action;

(2) *role of assumptions* about actors, problems, role of information and values to policy making; and finally,

(3) *implications* as it regards the shaping and influencing of policy
implementation processes.

These contextual areas form the core questions within the descriptive dimensions that are applied to analyze how effective a policy is. Frequently used dimensions are the rational, organizational, political, symbolic, and normative perspectives that ideally are considered in combination with one another (MALEN & KNAPP, 1998). I briefly outline each dimension.

Considered from a *rational perspective* the crafting and subsequent implementation of policy follows a linear, sequential process guided by a unitary actor in which a problem is vetted, outlined, and continuously evaluated empirically and comprehensively with regard to its severity and causes as well as its value-maximizing solution. Within a rational perspective a policy is considered to be

> "the instrumental means for achieving the stated ends … [in order to] indicate how policy is used to address the 'problem' … [by suggesting] that causal connections have been identified [and] anticipated gains and corresponding costs have been specified. … When … tradeoffs have been made explicit, a rational calculation of one's options comparative advantage over one another can be made" (424).

A sole focus of analysis through the rational perspective is limiting as it avoids considerations that imply uneven implementation and possible mistakes in diagnoseing a problem from the outset.

The *organizational perspective* views the creation and implementation of policy as a response to disruptions to institutional stability. As such, the policy directs actions to remedy destabilization by adjusting standard modes of functioning while avoiding to change existing practices significantly. Policy actors in this perspective are considered to be in charge of parts of but not the whole problem which results in fragmented problem solving. In comparison to the rational dimension, MALEN and KNAPP (1998) posit that "[w]hile rational perspectives cast policy as an impetus, organizational perspectives cast policy as a response" (426).

Hence, from an organizational perspective a policy's strength to effectively producing change is assessed by establishing whether the organizational conditions that limit a policy's effectiveness can be broadened or tailored to existing practices and by doing so, encourage institutional learning. As organizational dynamics are central to this perspective, the role of the actors as active and autonomous change agents is less relevant.

By contrast, an analysis of policy making and implementation through a *political perspective* allows precisely a consideration of the role of the actors who broker interests and power in order to influence the outcome of a policy. Politically seen, a policy serves to

> "regulate social conflict and retain institutional legitimacy … by mediating … disputes, allocating scarce resources and valued outcomes, and maintaining public confidence in the system's right and responsibilities to make authoritative decisions about [the distribution of resources]" (MALEN & KNAPP, 1998, 428).

Given the diverse range of collaborative and competing interests as well as the unequal distribution of power among actors the political perspective does not

assume a linear, homogeneous or consistent implementation of policy. Instead, information, knowledge, and values become tools in a continuous process of negotiation among differing interest groups and coalitions. Through a political lens, thus, a policy is considered successful when it effectively mediates conflict around change as well as maintains an institution's credibility by aptly responding to criticism.

The *symbolic perspective* focuses on how any type of symbol, whether imagery, metaphor, gesture, etc., sends and develops signals by which the meaning of the policy – that is, the solution to a problem or the implementation of a new institutional parameter – is communicated. When considering policy implementation through the symbolic perspective the audience is granted a central role in this process:

> "[T]he policy process proceeds from perceived institutional needs in the policymakers' eye, to the promulgation of cues and the transmission of messages to key audiences" (MALEN & KNAPP, 1998, 430-31).

Essentially, change is effected by shaping perceptions rather than by facilitating actual changes. The role of the actors is to convey meaning and in turn gather interpretations and perceptions about the implementation process. The transfer from policy to practice through this lens, thus, can be understood as a process of meaning making by varied players and stakeholders.

The *normative perspective* of policy analysis, finally, operates under the assumption that a policy is crafted and implemented in order to create or perpetuate norms about worthy ideals and conditions within and toward which change should be driven at. As such the question of value is central for the consideration whether a policy is effective in outcome and implementation:

> "The worth of a policy is gauged by examining whether the ends sought confirm to conceptions of the good society and whether the means employed are consistent with these ideals in practice and principle" (MALEN & KNAPP, 1998, 433).

Thus, seen from this perspective, the role of actors is to enhance values through policy implementation. The chosen value serves as the standard by which success is measured. In a broader sense, policy actors can also offer insights into how an adapted policy will impact the value orientation, e.g. the mission, of an institution.

3.2   Policy and Governance Discourses

Focusing on the analysis of third space professionals as policy actors requires an understanding of the public management contexts within which European higher education institutions are situated. For example, FERLIE, MUSSELIN & AN-DRESANI (2008) argue that as state governments are increasingly involved in shaping university agendas, university governance and steering can no longer be analyzed in isolation but instead must be considered within frameworks of public policy management similarly to other domains of the public sector work, specifically as it regards the modalities of regulation and collaborative relationships.

In spite of this convergence, the organizational structure and needs of universities' administrative and management systems can also vary in great measure. In parti-

cular, the usage of public funds and the distribution of power across local, national and international stakeholder groups demand a set of requirements that are carefully monitored by performance indicators, strategic plans, and financial reports which in turn impacts the allotment of professional and academic staff to specific tasks or projects.

In their study of higher education reform and change processes within seven European countries PARADEISE et al. (2009) point out that policy discourses are situated within three general narratives: New Public Management (NPM); Network Governance (NG); and neo-Weberian. Undergirding the NPM system is the assumption that public bureaucracies change from rule-driven to market-oriented enterprises that serve the public with maximum efficiency as clients and customers. By contrast, the NG narrative draws upon an imagery of "horizontally organized networks of actors rather than hierarchically organized public bureaucracies [that] formulate, administer and implement public policies" (90).

In this perspective employees are seen as policy actors who effect change by virtue of engaging in new collaborative constellations to structurally reshape and add new knowledge to solve policy problems. The neo-Weberian narrative, lastly, maintains its adherence to the largely hierarchical role of state authority to the governing of public services albeit with enforced measures for efficiency and stability as well as greater permeability towards external oversight. FERLIE, MUSSELIN & ANDRESANI (2008) add that the notion of narrative is attributed to these frameworks as they "are not purely analytical, … [but] mix technical and also political and normative elements, [that] tell a policy and management story" (335).

PARADEISE et al. (2009) caution to retrospectively neither rationalize convergences of policy outcomes to one narrative discourse only nor attribute a logical sequencing from one policy context to the next, a point FERLIE, MUSSELIN & ANDRESANI (2008) underscore. While the intellectual legacies and their ensuing pathways favor one managerial model more strongly than another – e.g. the United Kingdom and the Netherlands lean more towards NPM, Germany and France toward a neo-Weberian discourse, with France taking to the NG system – the discursive approaches tend to be applied in response to as well as in extension of one another, resulting in a complex web of strategies and tools in regulating, managing, and governing higher education institutions.

In addition to the three general narratives, PARADEISE et al. (2009) indicate two other reference points from which to consider European higher education within its recent history that warrant consideration here: the implementation of reform processes and the changing modalities of university steering. Both these contexts are relevant to shaping professional work in the third space. As it regards implementtation processes PARADEISE et al. describe two distinguishing characteristics.

On the one hand, higher education in Europe stands in the legacies of the British, the Humboldtian and the Napoleonic university systems with each tradition requiring a unique implementation of the same reform paradigms, thus leading to varying degrees of differentiation. On the other hand, nations with political pressure to uphold local control of universities struggle with slow, uneven and

unsystematic implementations of reform efforts. As a caveat to such variety, KING (2010) cautions to not over-emphasize national and local variation:

> "The era of policy internationalization, perceived through agents, structures and networks in processes of mutual constructions, begins to challenge over-simple binary distinctions between policy convergence and divergence and recognize their symbiotic relationship in diffusion of global standards" (593).

As it regards higher education steering, PARADEISE and her colleagues (2009) note that it is the addition of non-academic government, industry, and community members to the governing boards of universities that has increased the range of actors involved in the decision-making processes concerning higher education leadership and coordination. This broadening in turn creates opportunities for third space work:

> "The involvement of multiple heterogeneous actors as potential university stakeholders questions the traditional regulatory role of the state. Indeed, a new distribution of power between the various actors is observed. Vertically, stronger and more autonomous universities come together in associations to foster shared visions, share good practices and develop ways to defend their interest in relation to public authorities. So do professional managers, whose specialization, role and numbers are growing within universities. In addition the horizontal distribution of power within universities is changing as university governing bodies are opened to include new actors and stakeholders." (PARADEISE et al., 2009, 99)

By the same token, when examining a university's internal functioning PARADEISE et al.'s (2009) comparative findings indicate that the distribution of internal control and power remains uneven. Although several universities have set up rectorates or chancellorships that hold formal control over strategic discourses and operational oversight, the actual power to shape agendas frequently lies with other internal stakeholders. Moreover, quality assurance agencies as well as other national bodies of university regulation produce guidelines for higher education development that stand in tension with traditional forms of regulation and administration:

> "[T]here are clear signs that the 'old administrative world' has hardly receded: new procedural rules have not eliminated old substantive ones in most countries. At the present time, each national higher education and research sector exhibits a specific mix between old and new patterns, with a variable emphasis on both sets of tools" (PARADEISE et al., 2009, 97).

3.3　The Role of Frontline Professionals to Policy Making

WEATHERLEY & LIPSKY's (1977) study illustrates how frontline professionals of public service agencies[3] – in order to cope with the everyday demands of their jobs – alter and adapt the implementation of top-down issued policies for reform

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[3] Weatherley and Lipsky's work focuses specifically on special education teachers although they initially frame their argument in the broad context of public service bureaucracies. By doing so, they can include a variety of professional and academic staff in their analysis which is necessary since the special education domain is inhabited by a range of disciplines, actors and stakeholders.

that target public service sector who serve people on a mass basis. As the authors contend:

> "These 'street-level bureaucrats', as we call them, interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work. For such public workers, personal and organizational resources are chronically and severely limited in relation to the tasks that they are asked to perform. The demand for their services will always be as great as their ability to supply these services. To accomplish their required tasks, street-level bureaucrats must find ways to accommodate the demands placed upon them and confront the reality of resource limitations. They typically do this by routinizing procedures, modifying goals, rationing services, asserting priorities and limiting or controlling clientele. ... These accommodations and coping mechanisms that they are free to develop form patterns of behavior which become the government program that is "delivered" to the public. In a significant sense, then, street-level bureaucrats are the policymakers in their respective work arenas." (172).

For WEATHERLEY & LIPSKY (1977) this form of task delivery obliges policy analysts to employ a two-pronged approach when studying the success or failure of a policy: the suggested modification needs to be analyzed from articulation through alteration in deliberative processes as well as from the perspective of how the policy impacts the everyday decision-making of frontline professionals. Said differently, implementation at the level of those professionals who are directly in contact with the public must be considered part and parcel of policy making. As the authors note: "The relationship between the development and implementation of policy cannot be known until it is worked out in practice at the street level" (173).

Played out in the analysis of special education reform efforts in Massachussetts WEATHERLEY & LIPSKY (1977) observe that the implementation of a policy that sought to streamline administrative procedures uniformly across schools could not be achieved. Due to the impossibility to control the range of external variables that interacted with one another, such as student characteristics, parents' educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, resources – time, space, and funds – viability of a school, availability of specialist staff, etc., each setting implemented the reform measures differently in accordance to their capacities and constraints.

Returning to the emergence of third space work and the role blended professionals hold in the growth and development of higher education institutions, I address in the following how the perspectives of policy and management can be applied to situate third space work within part of a broader higher education policy and development discourse. In particular, I examine how the outlined parameters of policy analysis and governance narratives can help with assessing

(1) what institutions stand to gain from third space work,

(2) why WHITCHURCH believes that this type of work has developed in response to formal structures, and

(3) to what risks third space professionals as policy actors are exposed.

3.4 Third Space Professionals as Policy Actors

WHITCHURCH (2008) stipulated, as mentioned earlier, that third space work on the one hand develops in response to formal structures and that, on the other hand,

blurs the traditional distinctions between center and periphery in the organization of university administration and management by operating at a new location. Both these postulates invite a policy analysis from an organizational perspective. However, since this perspective falls short of examining the role of individual actors I additionally draw on the political and normative dimensions to consider third space professionals as policy actors and examine what value standards are sought to be upheld when employing third space workers. As a word of caution, my examination remains largely in the abstract, while occasionally drawing on research findings from WHITCHURCH (2009).

Seen through the organizational lens, work in the third space can be viewed as a response to a situation to ensure institutional stability or, even more dramatically, the survival of the organization or one of its subunits. While the university should not be altered fundamentally, existing practices should be expanded to more efficiently address the problem. As the availability of information and knowledge under this paradigm is believed to be costly as well as uncertain – its purpose being to gauge the impact of a disruption – it could be argued that third space projects are set up to find new modes of generating, systematizing and applying knowledge and information. Hence, under this assumption the newly situated domain between the academic and the professional is purposefully created to address a problem that cannot be solved within the existing structures and functions of bounded work.

Considered from a political perspective, policy actors operate in the context of shifting coalitions in order to solve a conflict or propose new practices and by doing so, retain and renew the system. Under the political vestige, the role of information and knowledge is considered to be controversial, influential, and driven by particular interests. As such actors must continuously mediate and broker between competing coalitions and needs. WHITCHURCH (2009) observes precisely this dynamic for blended work:

> "Such activity could also have a political dimension, when individuals entered contested space and played a part in 'the power struggles and battles that go on'" (408).

Thus, by virtue of negotiating the political field and recommending solutions or new practices the argument can be reiterated that third space professionals are instated in order to act with greater independence and flexibility than bounded staff. WHITCHURCH (2009) echoes this assumption as well:

> "Working in this uneven terrain often involved seeing opportunities in the unexpected and building alliances, for instance bringing together learning and/or business partners from within the university and community. It also involved accepting that although some initiatives might fail, they might also create a dialogue that had not existed before, and lead to new forms of activity" (409).

Seen from a normative perspective, finally, the engagement of third space workers would be driven by the desire to uphold the value standards and quality measures of a university operating under new conditions. That is, existing bounded positions again appear too restrictive to serve the upcoming needs of the institution. Instead, resources are allocated to create third space opportunities that meet administrative and operative demands of modern universities through innovative work formats for which new provisions must be made. Through the normative lens problems are considered to be complex, at times representing value tensions that require additio-

nal guidelines for resolution. The latter can be read as an additional indication of why an institution would use third space professionals to gain organizational stability. Similar to the political dimension, then, these employees might act with greater independence as they are less partial to existing processes, tasks, etc.

As discussed with PARADEISE et al. (2009), an assessment of third space professionals as policy actors varies in accordance to particular historical, national and political narratives as well as governance contexts within which universities operate. The Network Governance discourse and the broadened multilevel steering approach are likely to foster a climate for professional work across boundaries, in the strongest sense leading to utilizing third space work as an instrument to facilitate institutional development. As these approaches favor horizontal rather than hierarchical forms of management and administration, relationships and networks become the primary mode of operation. This analysis maps on to WHITCHURCH's (2008) findings that third space work is conducted through the lateral building of authority with colleagues and is a "process of joint working, seeing the building of communicative relationships and networks as more significant than the observance of organizational boundaries" (386), as quoted earlier.

Taking together the examination of higher education steering models by PARADEISE et al. (2009) and KING's (2010) claim that policy internationalization heightens convergences, another central consideration for an appreciation of third space professionals as policy actors can be added. As the diversity and numbers of those who are involved in higher education governance increases, new actors in new roles are required to create coherence among stakeholder groups. To reiterate an excerpt of a previously cited quote:

> "Vertically, stronger and more autonomous universities come together in associations to foster shared visions, share good practices and develop ways to defend their interest in relation to public authorities. So do professional managers, whose specialization, role and numbers are growing within universities" (99).

In essence, one could assume that it stands in the interest of the institution to create a category of blended professionals who engage locally, nationally, and internationally across structures and stakeholders and by doing so, consciously partake in policy making. Such a positioning, however, would depend not only on the skills of the professional, but also on the intention of the institution's leadership: "[In] the institution with the most permeable boundaries, and the greatest movement of professional staff around them, senior managers were seeking to implement directional change in form of local partnership and outreach activity" (WHITCHURCH, 2008, 390).

The possibility of reading third space professionals as policy actors needs to be accompanied by two connected caveats. First, the degree to which strategic decision-making is distributed along the organizational chart of a university varies considerably as "some institutions are more boundary-driven that others" (WHITCHURCH, 2008, 390). Second, the creation of instruments to actively steer and manage higher education development, i.e. strategic, accounting and human resource plans, financial incentives, etc., are not necessarily distributed evenly.

Thus, the use of a staff category such as third space professionals as an additional option for policy making and implementation might stand in great distance to an institution's usual practices. Even if third space activities are cultivated these changes do not necessarily substitute but rather stand side-by-side with traditional modes of management. WHITCHURCH (2009) underscores this observation:

> "There could also be issues about ways in which [blended professionals] were … line managed, for instance, not given discretion over a budget so as to be able to re-invest savings elsewhere on a project, or being excluded from the outcomes of a decision" (416).

Applied to third space professionals as policy actors WEATHERLEY & LIPSKY's (1979) analysis, finally, can be read in two ways. In one instance, one could determine that their focal group of special education teachers are predominantly bounded staff. As bounded professionals these employees are tasked with upholding the system. Seen from this perspective, bounded professionals, as they broker time and other resources, actively shape a policy through daily decision-making in practice, a notion that WHITCHURCH (2008) addresses as well:

> "[Bounded professionals] are not simply enacting roles, for instance vis-à-vis institutional processes and policies, but become active agents" (383).

At the same time, it could also be argued that special educators hold what WHITCHURCH defines as 'perimeter' roles, especially when working in inclusion settings. By actively needing to collaborate with school psychologists, regular education teachers, other specialists, etc., as well as needing to be cognizant of legal regulations, child development, general and special education teaching practices, etc., these professionals are engaging in interdisciplinary third space type work, albeit within the bounded context of a school's bell schedule, funding structure and top-down procedural regulatory system.

WEATHERLEY and LIPSKY's study, then, exposes the central question of what the 'street level' factors are, respectively, how the concept of 'street-level' should be delineated within each of WHITCHURCH's four categories of bounded, un-bounded, cross-boundary and blended professionals. Also here, one of WHITCHURCH's (2009) findings speaks to this point:

> "At the same time as working within formal, hierarchical structures and lines of responsibility … individuals were also developing lateral relationships and networks" (409).

In essence, what do these analyses mean for third space professionals as policy actors? Under what circumstances can higher education professional and academic staff act in the third space and what type of preconditions are necessary to expand or, in the obverse, what issues impede the expansion of this role? And finally, what are the risks involved for these professionals when they actively engage as policy makers?

Central to responding to these questions is the perspective of seeing third space professionals as working within the auspices of new public management and network governance discourses. As discussed above, these frameworks of policy making and implementation favor not only a cross-lateral working within network formations and partnership structures, whether inter-organizational, cross-university, industry-uni-

versity or community-university, but also demand flexible collaboration over traditional boundaries of rank and file as well as within task and role attribution.

If BARNETT (2000) is right and higher education institutions are engaged within contexts of supercomplexity, hallmarks of which are ongoing uncertainty and disorderliness, then the traditional employment of academic and professional staff to work within fixed hierarchies and bounded tasks no longer suffices. Instead, in order to facilitate or gain access to structures that lie embedded within systems that have been accustomed to interact to far lesser degrees, the now required boundary-crossing calls for blended type work.

By way of example, internationalization campaigns such as the distribution of grants to promote the creation of international joint degree programs, that combine teaching and research agendas, have led to the proliferation of – at times quite large – offices of international affairs. In order for these initiatives to succeed sustainably over a mid-range or longer-term period academic and professional staff as well as the governing bodies of a university are called to develop new integrative work formats in content and processes as these projects are unable to unfold in adherence to existing administrative and legislative structures. Hence, by purposefully collaborating conceptually and operatively across these varied boundaries, third space professionals engage in policy making.

Preconditions for third space work to be desirable beyond short-term projects are undoubtedly the commitments from higher education institutions' leadership and governing bodies. The allocation of staff time and tasks – academic or professional – into new arenas must add to an institution's value, while it needs to be acknowledged simultaneously that such emergent collaboration requires time to develop efficiently and effectively. Likewise, permission must be granted that third space staff can shape policy, as it would be fruitless to facilitate a new structure or combination of practices without anchoring them within a policy initiative.

In the obverse, doubt or apprehension towards blended work by important stakeholders can lead to the abandonment of third space work. In particular, the fear that third space professionals could gain too much power can lead to a conscious or unconscious sabotaging of these efforts. It appears crucial, thus, for higher education institutions to cultivate a dialogue of what type of management framework and steering processes surround and undergird the institution and how these narratives legitimize these new work formats as strengthening the institution as a whole. Specifically, the institution's management must flesh out the roles its academic and professional staff occupy and offer a clear positionality how blended work leads to desired policy change.

Risks involved for third space professionals as policy actors are varied. In the instances that this role is not transparently communicated and integrated into a university's understanding of who is permitted to participate actively in policy making processes, these professionals will need to tread carefully when informing and negotiating how their work provides guidance for a new strategy or practice within institutional development. By unfavorably touching upon the policy setting agenda of one or more members of the leadership or governance bodies, third space professionals might be considered too unsettling.

As a result they might not be listened to, curtailed in their role, and in the worst case, the projects or positions will be abandoned. Additionally, third space professionals can be held back, advertently or inadvertently, by peers who work in bounded settings. As the blended activity calls for a "new way of doing things", it can also affect work of bounded professionals. Without transparent communication and planning that anticipates potential effects onto other task domains, third space professionals as policy actors carry the burden of implementing change and risk failure by being stalled. In sum, ideally, higher education institutions that actively promote third space work should create a profile of staff categories and task analyses – considering a taxonomy such as WHITCHURCHs – in order to prepare the institution, stakeholders, and staff for broadening participation among policy actors.

4   Conclusion

I began my paper by asking three questions: What role do third space professionals occupy in higher education? How should we analyze their participation in policy making and implementation? And, why is it relevant to do so?

Reflecting on WHITCHURCH's (2008, 2009) research through the literature on general education reform, I argued that it is relevant to inquire how we might analyze and regard third space professionals as policy actors in order to achieve sustainable higher education change and development. In the course of my elaborations I tailored the above questions to focus more specifically on what type of change is being driven at through the creation of third space positions, asking at what point the roles of traditional bounded staff appear insufficient opposite a new project or task.

As WHITCHURCH presents a valuable analysis and heuristic of professional staff categorization as well as issues recommendations about the professional development of blended professionals, she does not directly address the role of these professionals to policy making and implementation. Although her analyses provide several indications of how institutions might consider such participation, for example by outlining how work in the third space could be mainstreamed to broaden a university's capacity, she cautions her readers that her research does not allow her "to be overly definitive about conditions that might stimulate the development of blended identities" (WHITCHURCH, 2009, 417, her emphasis). As such my paper attempts to address this gap.

The three works I employed to provide a conceptual backdrop of policy analysis serve as reference points to ground my exploration in theoretical frameworks. There are of course several other studies and theoretical works that could be used for the same purpose. This cautionary remark is relevant as a validation of third space professionals as policy actors – as discussed with PARADEISE et al. (2009) – depends on the discourses and perspectives that are used to examine this question.

Keeping in mind WHITCHURCH's (2008) conception of third space professionals working as "multifunctional teams" (385) as well as the recommendations to consider how third space work reshapes higher education and how it should be purposefully fostered by higher education institutions, third space professionals

themselves, professional development agencies, and national higher education regulatory bodies (see for example WHITCHURCH, 2009; NICKEL & ZIEGELE, 2010), an in-depth empirical study of how third space professionals are actually situated in the organization and contribute to shaping policy, is crucial.

As the contributions in this volume as well as the increasing activities within professional development for higher education professional staff demonstrate, the continuously changing environment of university governance and steering, the current adaptations and consolidation of the Bologna reform process and the increasingly fierce international competition within higher education lead to new demands and complexities in administration and management.

While WHITCHURCH's work allows us to examine the range of capacities within which blended professionals operate, it would be helpful to undertake an examination of how the specific historical, national and local contexts of a university influence what categories of professional staff are employed for what purposes. Additionally, since the backgrounds and tasks in third space work range widely from academics taking on professional functions to professional staff engaging in academic domains, an exploration of the varied ways in which third space professionals partake in the policy making process requires consideration.

By doing so, higher education institutions stand to gain an overview of how policies and practices are actually shaped within a highly politicized environment in which multiple actors operate in various constellations of power, how problems can be solved effectively by purposefully engaging professional staff in new ways, and how employees can be protected from insecure or instable working conditions.

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