

## **How excellence initiatives in higher education influence universities' actorhood and autonomy?**

### **Abstract:**

Most studies of organizational change in higher education agree that universities develop organizational actorhood partly as a response to their relations with the state. As most governments decrease their interference in higher education institutions, they change the structure of the governance to be based on "steering from a distance". Universities develop organizational actorhood to attract more resources, manage their relations with old and new stakeholders, and to demonstrate their accountability, strategic development, and financial sustainability. At the same time, in many countries the government's involvement into universities' development is becoming stronger. The governments claim they extend the pressure on universities to strengthen their actorhood. They justify their pressure by blaming universities in not being capable to change.

The presentation explores this contradictory strategy of the governments looking at Russia as a case. In the past ten years, the level of direct involvement of the state in higher education has increased in Russia. The government implemented a number of initiatives to change the universities. According to the previous studies this increased level of control by the state should have prevented the development of organizational actorhood at Russian universities. But at the same time we observe that a number of universities have developed some elements of organizational actorhood.

The presentation shows that some public policy instruments provide incentives for the "awakening actorhood", while some policy instruments stimulate the imitation of the initiative and autonomous actions of the universities. The way they influence higher education institutions' behaviour depends on the level of organizational autonomy of the universities.