Systems Research and Behavioral Science

WILEY

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ideological Repurposing of Institutions of Higher Management Education: Historical Lessons and Contemporary Imperatives

Steffen Roth[1,2,3] | Vladislav Valentinov[3,4] | Franz Kasper Krönig[3,5] | Jolanta Bieliauskaitė[6] | Erik Aal[7] | Mark Pennington[8] | Lars Clausen[3,9]

[1]Excelia Business School, La Rochelle, France | [2]University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK | [3]Next Society Institute, Kazimieras Simonavičius University, Vilnius, Lithuania | [4]Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies, Halle, Germany | [5]Technische Hochschule Köln, Köln, Germany | [6]Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania | [7]Corvinus University of Budapest, Budapest, Hungary | [8]King's College London, London, UK | [9]UCL University College, Kolding, Denmark

Correspondence: Steffen Roth (strot@me.com)

Received: 23 July 2025 | **Revised:** 17 November 2025 | **Accepted:** 26 December 2025

Keywords: decision programmes | functional differentiation | higher management education | ideological repurposing | multifunctional organisations | social systems theory

ABSTRACT

This article examines the ideological repurposing of institutions of higher management education (IHMEs) from a systems-theoretical perspective. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems, we analyse both historical and contemporary cases to identify structural similarities in how institutions of higher education (IHEs) have been reoriented to serve external political imperatives. Through a functional comparison of Soviet, Nazi and nationalist regimes with current trends in sustainability- and DEI-driven transformations, we argue that repurposing efforts operate through similar mechanisms: modifications of personnel structures, communication channels, decision programmes and organisational culture. We conceptualise IHE as multifunctional organisations that mediate structural couplings between various function systems, particularly science, education and politics. Our analysis shows that when decision programmes become aligned too tightly with the logic of powerful political organisations, IHEs risk losing their operational autonomy and functional distinctiveness. The paper concludes by warning that even well-intentioned missions may lead to epistemic closure and ideological totalisation if historical lessons are neglected.

1 | Introduction

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) have long played a pivotal role in shaping societal norms, professional expertise and ideological orientations (Altbach et al. 2009; Rüegg 2004). From their mediaeval roots as theological and philosophical institutions to their modern incarnations as research-driven knowledge hubs, IHEs have frequently been subject to external pressures that redefine their missions (Arnove and Bowen 2013; Pettigrew and Starkey 2016). Today, a new wave of repurposing is unfolding—one that seeks to reorient particularly institutions of higher management education (IHMEs) away from their alleged neoliberal paradigm and towards the role of social-ecological change agents (Ferraro et al. 2015; Gümüsay et al. 2020; Gümüsay and Reinecke 2022; Rhodes and Pullen 2023; Stephan et al. 2016; Wegener et al. 2025; Wilson and McKiernan 2011).

This shift has been largely framed as a response to contemporary global challenges, particularly climate change, environmental sustainability, organisational democracy, social justice and corporate responsibility (Berkowitz et al. 2024; Davies et al. 2023). Business schools, in particular, have come under intensified scrutiny (Kitchener 2024), with growing expectations that they integrate ethical, environmental and societal considerations into their

© 2026 John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

curricula, thus moving beyond traditional market-driven frameworks (Pettigrew and Starkey 2016; Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2015). This evolution is often interpreted as progress towards a more responsible and engaged higher education sector, although some scholars caution against the potential erosion of academic rigour and institutional autonomy (Durand and Dameron 2011). The latter concerns notwithstanding, leading accreditation bodies such as the AACSB and EFMD now mandate that institutions demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and social responsibility, elevating these themes from peripheral concerns to core evaluative criteria (Davies et al. 2023; Marginson 2016).

Along these lines, IHMEs are increasingly expected to bring about 'positive social change' (Sharma and Good 2013; Stephan et al. 2016) rather than merely acting as value-free institutions of higher education and research. This expectation extends beyond business schools to encompass entire universities, aligning them with broader political and normative agendas. For instance, in following guidelines developed by 'Universities UK' or 'Advance HE', UK universities are now implementing comprehensive climate and sustainability as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, often as top-down institutional strategies rather than organically evolving academic priorities. Recent academic discourse strongly advocates for the integration of sustainability and DEI principles not only within UK higher education but also within its EU counterpart (European Commission 2022), arguing that such efforts are essential for fostering a climate of inclusive and environmentally responsible research and education.

1.1 | The Historical Blind Spot in Contemporary Debates

At first glance, this ideological[1] shift towards environmental and social sustainability may appear to represent an unprecedented and normatively desirable evolution of IHME, driven by the pressing need to address climate change, foster inclusivity and advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The fact that these challenges are widely framed as historically unparalleled in both scope and urgency further reinforces the largely uncritical expectation that IHME must assume an instrumental role in solving them—not only by producing relevant research but also by actively reshaping curricula, governance and institutional missions to align with these imperatives (Davies et al. 2023).

However, viewed through a historical lens, it becomes evident that the political repurposing of universities is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, IHEs have undergone ideological reprogramming in response to external pressures, particularly in times of significant political and societal transformation (Arnove and Thomas 2025; Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Hazelkorn 2015). Historical research demonstrates that universities in authoritarian contexts—such as the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, Nazi Germany and mid-20th-century Lithuania—were systematically repurposed to align with dominant political ideologies (Fitzpatrick 1979; Grüttner 2005; Koonz 2003; Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007).

Scholars have noted that even though the ideologies themselves—Marxism–Leninism versus National Socialism—differed, the *structural patterns* of repurposing were remarkably similar (Bailes 1978; Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Koonz 2003). In both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, universities lost autonomy, faculties were purged or forced into public displays of loyalty, and curricula were redesigned to reflect politically desired programmes (Fitzpatrick 1979; Grüttner 2005; Zickel 1989).

Given these historical precedents, the conceptual blind spot in contemporary debates on IHME repurposing lies in their historical amnesia. Although much scholarship critiques the 'neoliberalisation' of IHME (Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2015; Pettigrew and Starkey 2016; Rhodes and Pullen 2023), there has been little systematic effort to compare contemporary social-ecological repurposing to past ideological transformations. This article argues that such a comparison is essential if we are to understand the broader functional mechanisms underlying university repurposing and assess its implications for institutional autonomy, epistemic diversity and academic differentiation.

1.2 | Research Question and Functional Analysis as a Framework

This study is not concerned with whether the ideological content of contemporary repurposing efforts—such as sustainability and social justice—is inherently good or bad. Instead, it aims to elucidate the structural and functional mechanisms that accompany large-scale ideological reprogramming of IHE. The central concern is not whether universities should address climate change or social justice but rather whether these transformations exhibit structural parallels to past ideological repurposing efforts and whether they come at the expense of epistemic diversity, institutional autonomy and critical inquiry.

Recognising these concerns, we move beyond normative debates about whether contemporary repurposing is justified and instead interrogates its structural implications within a broader historical and functional framework. If contemporary transformations in IHME exhibit patterns reminiscent of past ideological reprogramming, then a systematic analysis is required to determine whether these changes contribute to or constrain academic rigour, institutional autonomy and epistemic plurality. To address this issue, we formulate the following research question:

> What structural and isomorphic continuities link past ideological repurposing to the contemporary socio-ecological transformation of higher management education institutions?

To answer this question, we build on social systems theory in the tradition of Luhmann's (1995, 2018) social systems theory to perform to comparative functional analysis of historical and contemporary cases of IHE and IHME repurposing. This analysis will allow us to compare different ideological repurposing efforts without normative bias, to analyse how decision premises in IHE and IHME change when external actors impose repurposing efforts and to assess whether contemporary repurposing introduces risks of epistemic closure and ideological totalisation.

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

1.3 | Structure of the Article

This article applies a comparative functional analysis to examine historical and contemporary repurposing of IHE and IHME. To do so, we systematically assess the decision premises through which universities have been reoriented in the past and evaluate whether similar patterns can be observed today.

The manuscript is structured as follows:

Section 2 establishes a theoretical foundation by conceptualising IHE as predominantly research- and education-oriented organisations that, although structurally coupled with multiple function systems, maintain distinct decision premises governing their autonomy and purpose.

Section 3 introduces functional analysis as a methodological framework, drawing on Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. We outline how different systems resolve analogous challenges through functionally equivalent mechanisms and explain how this analytical approach enables us to identify structural similarities between historical ideological repurposing and contemporary transformations in higher management education.

Section 4 provides a historical analysis of ideological repurposing in three different contexts:

- The Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, where universities were systematically restructured to produce ideologically aligned specialists and serve the objectives of the centrally planned economy.
- Nazi Germany, where universities were subordinated to National Socialist ideology, resulting in faculty purges, racialised curricula and alignment with war mobilisation efforts.
- Mid-20th-century Lithuania, a particularly instructive case due to the extreme oscillations between nationalist, Soviet and Nazi control, each imposing successive ideological transformations on the university system.

Section 5 applies functional analysis to compare past and present repurposing efforts. We examine how shifts in personnel, communication channels, decision programmes and organisational culture have historically served as key mechanisms of ideological reprogramming and assess whether similar transformations are underway in contemporary IHME.

Section 6 concludes by evaluating the systemic risks of ideological repurposing in higher management education today. We discuss whether the current social-ecological transformation introduces challenges of epistemic closure, ideological totalisation and mission drift, ultimately questioning whether IHME risk becoming politically instrumentalised to an extent that compromises their core function in society.

By thus embedding contemporary repurposing within a historical-functional framework, this study challenges the assumption that social-ecological transformations of IHME are inherently progressive. Instead, it urges a more critical reflection on the long-term consequences of politically driven repurposing efforts.

2 | Organisations, Decision Programmes and Functional Differentiation

Social systems theory conceptualises organisations as self-referential communication systems that sustain themselves through decision-making processes (Luhmann 2006, 2018). Unlike traditional views that treat organisations as aggregates of individuals or stable institutional entities, Luhmannian theory highlights their dynamic nature: organisations exist insofar as they continuously produce and reproduce decisions (Baecker 2006; Bakken and Wiik 2018; Besio et al. 2025; Grothe-Hammer and Rachlitz 2025). This operational closure ensures that organisations maintain their own structures and identities even while responding to external influences (Seidl and Becker 2006; Husted et al. 2022).

At the core of an organisation's self-reproduction lies its decision premises (Luhmann 2018)—that is, architectures of decisions that decide whether other decisions are made correctly, thus acting as both internal structures and frameworks through which organisations process external expectations and translate them into their own operations. In referring to past decisions in order to shape and constrain future decisions, organisations create a structured form of path dependency. Decision premises thus function as internal stabilisers that allow organisations to reduce complexity and maintain continuity by predetermining who can decide, what information is relevant for decision-making, how decisions are to be made and which decisions should guide decision-making (Andersen 2003; Roth and Valentinov 2023).

Luhmann (2018, 181ff) identifies four primary types of decision premises: personnel, communication channels, decision programmes and organisational culture. *Personnel* decisions regulate who qualifies as member and is thus included in decision-making processes, thereby influencing hierarchical structures, authority distribution and expertise selection. *Communication channels* determine how information flows within the organisation and specify who is authorised to make which types of decisions, effectively structuring decision-making hierarchies. *Decision programmes* serve as the formalised rules and guidelines that govern organisational action, differentiating between conditional programmes, which define responses based on external conditions (‘if X, then Y’), and purposive programmes, which establish end-goals that require means to be adjusted accordingly (Luhmann 2018, 213–215). Finally, *organisational culture* represents a set of tacit, ‘unconscious’ premises that shape decision-making in a manner that is not explicitly codified yet remains highly influential over time.

Among these four types of decision premises, decision programmes play a particularly central role in linking organisational purpose to function, as they determine whether an institution operates reactively, adjusting to external conditions, or proactively, restructuring itself based on internally defined goals. As such, the introduction of new purposive programmes—such as embedding sustainability

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

as a core mission—represents a more fundamental organisational transformation than merely modifying conditional programmes.

A critical implication of this perspective is that organisations do not function as passive conduits for external expectations. Rather, they selectively engage with and reinterpret pressures from their environment based on preexisting decision premises. By default, IHMEs are primarily structured around research and education, as reflected in their core decision programmes. However, they are also subject to diverse external pressures (Brandtner et al. 2024) that seek to reorient their activities towards politically, economically or other noneducational or nonscientific objectives.

2.1 | Decision Programmes and Functional Differentiation

Functional differentiation, a cornerstone of social systems theory, posits that modern society consists of multiple, autonomous function systems—such as the economy, politics, science and law—each governed by its own binary code (Luhmann 1995, 2013; la Cour et al. 2007). Organisations, although not function systems themselves, define their purpose in referring to selected function systems (Roth et al. 2018; Berkowitz et al. 2022).

As mentioned above, IHEs refer primarily to the scientific and educational function systems; yet, as self-referential decision systems, they can reference multiple function systems simultaneously. IHEs, in addition to their educational and scientific orientations, engage with the economic system through funding mechanisms, teaching content and labour market orientation; with the legal system through regulatory compliance; and with the political system through policy implementation (Brunsson et al. 2022). These couplings generate competing expectations that exceed the university's monofunctional self-description and produce the modern problem of 'identity'. In this sense, the university's search for an identity is not a failure of strategy but a structural consequence of multifunctionality: Society provides no single dominant programme that could stabilise a coherent organisational self-understanding. In this sense, their 'multifunctionality' (Roth et al. 2018; Roth and Sales 2025a) allows IHE to navigate complex polycontextural environments (Knudsen 2017) but does not inherently alter their core function.

The distinction between performance (how an organisation satisfies expectations from other organisations) and function (how an organisation contributes to society as a whole) becomes crucial in understanding the pressures exerted on IHE. Performance is system–system oriented: IHEs engage with governments, accreditation bodies and funding agencies to secure legitimacy and resources. Function, by contrast, is system–supersystem oriented: IHEs contribute to the reproduction of science and education as pillars of a modern, functionally differentiated society (Luhmann 2013). When organisations conflate performance pressures with functional transformation, they risk becoming instruments of external governance frameworks without maintaining their systemic identity (Roth and Valentinov 2023).

2.2 | The Role of Decision Programmes in Mediating External Pressures

Decision programmes provide the mechanism through which IHEs engage with governance demands while retaining their operational autonomy. Because this programme structure internal decision-making, they serve as interfaces that translate external expectations into organisationally meaningful information. For instance, when a government imposes sustainability or social impact mandates on an IHE, the latter's decision programmes determine whether such mandates are integrated substantively (e.g., as shifts in research agendas) or superficially (as compliance measures with minimal structural change) (Brunsson et al. 2022).

One of the key challenges for particularly for IHE is navigating the increasing expectation that they should align with broader socio-political agendas. Governments and accreditation agencies often impose performance-based metrics—such as impact rankings, diversity targets or ESG frameworks—that reframe universities as instruments of political and economic policy rather than autonomous scientific institutions (de la Cruz Jara et al. 2024; Gümüsay et al. 2020). This is particularly evident in the growing discourse on various 'third missions' of IHE, which extend beyond research and education to encompass entrepreneurial activities, societal engagement or policy advocacy. Although these additional roles may enhance universities' societal visibility, they also introduce governance complexities, as IHME must balance their scientific function with compliance-driven performance expectations.

2.3 | Institutions of Higher Education as Research- and Education-Oriented Organisations

Building on these insights, we position IHE as organisations that, by default, maintain strong ties with the function systems of science and education. However, as structurally coupled entities, they refer to multiple function systems and face varying degrees of pressure to conform to external agendas. Among these pressures, the most pronounced often come from political organisations, particularly governments, which exert influence through funding mechanisms, policy directives, ranking exercises and accreditation standards.

A crucial aspect of organisational repurposing lies in the transformation of decision premises, which shape how organisations—including universities—steer their operations. As shown above, decision premises can be grouped into four main types: personnel, communication channels, decision programmes and organisational culture (Luhmann 2018, 181ff). Personnel decision premises determine who qualifies as a member (Grothe-Hammer 2020; Grothe-Hammer and la Cour 2020), and it is thus allowed to participate in decision-making, influencing faculty recruitment, leadership appointments and governance structures. Communication channels regulate how information flows within the organisation, including formal reporting lines, accreditation procedures and internal review mechanisms. Decision programmes define the criteria for making decisions, encompassing goal-setting frameworks, curricula, research priorities and accreditation standards—all of which can be

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

reoriented under ideological repurposing. Finally, organisational culture functions as an implicit decision premise, shaping which perspectives, values and discourses are legitimised or marginalised within an institution. Taken together, these decision premises form the structural foundation of academic organisations, meaning that their alteration—whether through political pressure, ideological realignment or market-driven reforms—fundamentally reshapes institutional autonomy and epistemic differentiation.

Although IHEs may accommodate external expectations in ways that enhance their legitimacy and access to resources, such adaptations do not necessarily constitute fundamental functional shifts. Instead, they often represent performance alignments—adjustments made to satisfy external evaluations without altering the core focus on science and education. Understanding this distinction helps clarify why universities can appear highly responsive to political and economic agendas while maintaining their systemic orientation towards academic knowledge production and education. However, historical cases such as the ideological repurposing of universities and other institutions of higher education under Nazi and Soviet regimes illustrate how external influence can escalate beyond mere performance adaptation, leading to full-scale mission drift in which institutions of higher education lose their autonomy and become instruments of an external organisation's agenda rather than independent centres of research and education.

2.4 | Conclusion

The distinction between function and performance, mediated by decision programmes, provides a conceptual foundation for analysing the pressures faced by IHE. As autonomous decision systems, universities engage with external governance frameworks selectively, incorporating new demands in ways that align with their existing decision premises. However, external actors—particularly governments and accreditation agencies—often seek to instrumentalise IHE for broader policy objectives, leading to tensions between functional autonomy and performance mandates.

By applying social systems theory, we can better understand how IHE negotiate these pressures, ensuring that their scientific function remains intact even as they adapt to shifting external expectations. This framework sets the stage for further analysis of when and how deeper functional transformations occur, distinguishing between superficial compliance and genuine structural reprogramming.

3 | Functional Analysis and the Study of IHE Repurposing

Functional analysis, as developed in the tradition of Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, provides a comparative framework for studying the structural similarities between seemingly distinct forms of systems and their transformations. At its core, this approach is based on the premise that systems are defined by their ability to maintain and reproduce themselves through their own operations (Luhmann 1995). This self-referential mode of operation applies to three fundamental types of autopoietic systems:

1. Organisms, which reproduce themselves biologically lifeforms.
2. Psychic systems (minds), which reproduce themselves as forms of consciousness.
3. Social systems, which reproduce themselves through communication.

Each of these systems is operationally closed, meaning that its operations cannot directly intervene in the operations of another system. For example, a social system cannot 'think', just as a mind cannot communicate but only be 'irritated' by communication occurring in its environment. However, these systems coevolve, meaning that a transformation in one system may generate functionally equivalent adaptations in others.

The fundamental insight of functional analysis is that systems do not operate according to absolute principles but in response to specific functional problems (Luhmann 1974; Luhmann 1995, 15). As a consequence, Luhmann's functional method serves as an analytical approach that allows for understanding *what exists as contingent and what differs as comparable* (Luhmann 1995, 53). Rather than considering given states or events in isolation, this method connects them to problem perspectives and aims to identify ways in which a given issue can be resolved. However, the relationship between a problem and its resolution is not analysed for its own sake; rather, it provides a guiding thread for exploring alternative possibilities, ultimately leading to the identification of functional equivalences.

A clear example of this principle can be seen in the functional equivalence of memory in psychic and social systems, including organisational memory (Langenmayr 2016). In both cases, the actual function of memory is not to preserve the past but to regulate the balance between remembering and forgetting (Luhmann 2012, 162). As Luhmann (2012, 349) puts it: 'The main function of memory therefore lies in forgetting, in preventing the system from blocking itself by congealing the results of earlier observations'. This holds true regardless of whether memory operates through mental processes or communicative structures. However, despite their structural similarity, this does not imply that psychic and social memory are identical. Instead, it demonstrates that both represent functionally equivalent solutions to a common problem, each operating within its own distinct domain.

This logic extends to comparisons within the same systemic domain. For instance, in the social domain, oral and written communications offer functionally equivalent solutions to the challenge of double contingency (Luhmann 2012, 172). Despite being fundamentally different forms of communication, they address the same underlying problem, which is precisely why they can be meaningfully compared in functional terms.

Accordingly, in the subsequent comparison of different forms of repurposing in higher management education, it is crucial to emphasise that the objective is not to make essentialist claims, for example, about the moral qualities of the respective ideological

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

transformations. Thus, functional analysis provides a critical, comparative method for examining how different ideological repurposing efforts follow similar patterns or fulfil equivalent functions, also allowing for an assessment as to whether contemporary shifts in IHE are structurally new or whether they follow a recurring historical pattern.

This study, therefore, applies Luhmann's functional method to systematically compare the current social-ecological repurposing of universities to past transformations. In doing so, it seeks to clarify whether today's shift towards sustainability and social justice represents a novel stage in the evolution of higher management education and research—or simply another historical iteration of ideological reprogramming.

4 | Historical Cases: Ideological Repurposing Across Three Regimes

To illuminate how higher management education can be radically repurposed by dominant ideologies, this section examines three emblematic contexts: the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, Nazi Germany under Hitler and Lithuania's tumultuous mid-20th-century oscillations between nationalist, Soviet and Nazi regimes. Although the doctrines driving repurposing differed—Marxist–Leninist, racial-nationalist or nationalist-liberation—the underlying processes of altering governance, curricula and academic culture exhibit remarkably similar patterns (Bailes 1978; Fitzpatrick 1979; Grüttner 2005; Millar 2004; Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007). Across these cases, universities were systematically refashioned to serve external political imperatives, offering historical parallels that shed light on the vulnerabilities and resilience of academic institutions, including contemporary business schools (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Lauglo 1988; Marginson 2016; Starkey and Tempest 2009). Among these, the Lithuanian case is particularly instructive, as its IHE underwent some of the sharpest, condensed and most rapid ideological repurposings in recent history, oscillating between conflicting regimes in a short time span, thus highlighting the extreme malleability of academic institutions under shifting political conditions.

4.1 | Soviet Union Under Lenin and Stalin (1917–1953)

4.1.1 | Revolutionary Ideals and Early Transformations

The Soviet Union's approach to higher management education after the 1917 Revolution epitomises an ideologically driven reorganisation of academia. Lenin and his allies sought a radical break from 'bourgeois' education and to build new socialist elites (Fitzpatrick 1979; Lauglo 1988). Universities were opened to working-class students who often lacked traditional entrance qualifications; class-based preferences replaced prior academic criteria, whereas 'formerly privileged' groups such as aristocrats and clerics were barred or restricted (Zickel 1989).

Yet the new regime also recognised its urgent need for technically competent specialists. Pragmatic concerns therefore tempered revolutionary zeal, leading to the partial readmission of experienced faculty under close surveillance by Communist Party cadres (Millar 2004; Frumin and Platonova 2024). The Commissariat of Education mandated Marxist–Leninist doctrine across universities and restructured governing boards to insert party loyalists into key positions (Bailes 1978). Rectors, deans and heads of department were often selected or approved by higher ranking party officials, illustrating a pattern of ideological capture in which nominal autonomy persisted but decisive offices were politically controlled (Fitzpatrick 1979; Zickel 1989; Lauglo 1988; Frumin and Platonova 2024). Early Soviet reforms thus combined aspirations of proletarian empowerment with institutional tactics that eroded prerevolutionary academic norms.

4.1.2 | Stalinist Centralization and Indoctrination

Under Stalin, ideological control intensified. In the 1930s, sweeping purges targeted 'unreliable' intellectuals accused of sabotage or counterrevolutionary thought (Fitzpatrick 1979; Zickel 1989). University governance was tightly centralised: the Communist Party controlled appointments, admissions and even syllabi content (Bailes 1978). By the mid-1930s, multiyear Marxism–Leninism courses became mandatory for all students, consuming a substantial share of instructional time (Frumin and Platonova 2024). Deviation from official doctrine exposed academics to dismissal, imprisonment or worse (Zickel 1989).

This indoctrination entailed large-scale curricular realignment. Economics faculties abandoned prerevolutionary and Western theories in favour of Marxist political economy, with programmes dedicated to socialist planning, the labour theory of value and moral critiques of capitalism (Millar 2004; Thomas and Wilson 2011). Institutes such as the 'Institute of Red Professors' were created to train Marxist academics to replace the old guard (Millar 2004; Frumin and Platonova 2024). Even fields seemingly remote from ideology, such as biology and agriculture, were subordinated to state doctrine. Stalin's endorsement of Lysenkoism marginalised genetics that contradicted Marxist interpretations, demonstrating how political ideology could dictate scientific truth (Frumin and Platonova 2024).

4.1.3 | Resistance and Subtle Adaptations

Despite pervasive surveillance, some pockets of academic resistance and adaptation persisted. In the natural sciences, the regime's need for technological progress occasionally shielded scholars from the most severe repression (Lauglo 1988; Zickel 1989). Some faculty quietly upheld scientific standards or taught non-Marxist content informally, though outright dissent was extremely risky. The Great Purges of the late 1930s targeted intellectuals labelled 'bourgeois', 'cosmopolitan' or politically suspect (Fitzpatrick 1979; Bailes 1978).

By Stalin's death in 1953, Soviet higher management education had been thoroughly repurposed to mass-produce ideologically loyal specialists for the planned economy (Millar 2004; Frumin and Platonova 2024). These foundational decades established a durable precedent for how state power could reshape universities to conform to a unifying socialist vision (Zickel 1989; Fitzpatrick 1979).

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

4.1.4 | Implications for Business Education

Although Western-style business schools did not exist in Stalinist Russia, proto-management and economics faculties were comprehensively reconfigured by ideology (Millar 2004; Thomas and Wilson 2011). Market-based frameworks were replaced by central planning theories, and capitalist practices were condemned as inherently exploitative (Bailes 1978; Frumin and Platonova 2024).

The key lesson for contemporary business education is that once external authorities control appointments, curricula and governance, entire fields of study can be rapidly recast, with universities functioning as instruments of political objectives rather than autonomous academic institutions (Starkey and Tempest 2009; Pettigrew and Starkey 2016).

4.2 | Nazi Germany (1933–1945)

4.2.1 | Gleichschaltung and Organisational Overhaul

Following Hitler's rise to power in early 1933, the regime initiated *Gleichschaltung*, rapidly bringing universities under National Socialist control (Grüttner 2005; Koonz 2003). The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service enabled the dismissal of Jewish, socialist and 'politically unreliable' faculty, resulting in hundreds of forced resignations at leading institutions (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Arnove and Thomas 2025). Academic self-governance was dismantled as Nazi-appointed rectors—often Party members—replaced existing leadership (Grüttner 2005). Membership in the National Socialist Lecturers' League (NSDDB) became compulsory for staff, consolidating political supervision over teaching and research (Koonz 2003; Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013).

4.2.2 | Curricular Realignment Under Racial Ideology

As in the Soviet case, the Nazi regime compelled all academic disciplines to conform to racial-nationalist doctrine (Grüttner 2005; Arnove and Bowen 2013). Humanities courses were reshaped to promote Aryan superiority and justify German expansionism (Koonz 2003), whereas even the natural sciences were reframed through ideological lenses—for example, 'Deutsche Physik' was advanced as an alternative to supposedly 'Jewish' theoretical physics (Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013). Medicine incorporated eugenics, 'racial hygiene' and anthropometry, directly supporting sterilisation and euthanasia policies (Koonz 2003; Grüttner 2005).

Economics and business studies (Betriebswirtschaftslehre, BWL) were likewise reoriented to serve the Führerprinzip (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Wächter 2017). Commercial faculties emphasised autarky, the Volksgemeinschaft and the subordination of firms to the wartime state (Grüttner 2005; Wilson and McKiernan 2011). Faculties who resisted or continued teaching 'unreliable' theories were pressured into retirement or removed, leaving BWL—formerly methodologically diverse in the 1920s—narrowed into a vehicle for Nazi propaganda (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Thomas and Wilson 2011).

4.2.3 | Surveillance, Symbolic Conformity and Limited Dissent

University life under Nazism combined pervasive surveillance with compulsory demonstrations of loyalty (Grüttner 2005; Koonz 2003). Faculty and students were expected to participate in ritual celebrations such as Hitler's birthday, with absence interpreted as insubordination (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019). Despite this enforced conformity, some scholars quietly maintained disciplinary standards in specialised areas that attracted less ideological scrutiny (Koonz 2003; Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013). By 1939, however, universities had largely embraced a uniform racial-nationalist ethos, enabling their deeper integration into the war effort through intensified research in military technologies, war economics and propaganda (Arnove and Thomas 2025; Grüttner 2005).

4.2.4 | Implications for (Proto-)Business Education

As in the Soviet case, the Nazi reorganisation of commerce- and economics-focused institutions illustrates the vulnerability of business education when state directives displace academic self-governance (Millar 2004; Pettigrew and Starkey 2016). Faculties either fled, were dismissed, or strategically conformed, whereas curricula reframed management theories through racial and nationalist paradigms (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Wächter 2017). That a core discipline such as BWL could be so rapidly redirected demonstrates how, under strong ideological mandates, management education can become a conduit for broader political agendas (Thomas and Wilson 2011; Koonz 2003; Grüttner 2005).

4.3 | Lithuania's Oscillation Between Nationalist, Soviet and Nazi Rule

4.3.1 | Interwar Nationalism and University Autonomy

The First Republic of Lithuania, declared on 16 February 1918, sought to establish a national system of higher education despite early instability—territorial conflicts, shifting capitals and the 1926 military coup that ushered in authoritarian rule (Mačinskas 1996; Pūraitė 2010). Initial plans centred on universities in Vilnius, but repeated Soviet and Polish occupations forced academic and governmental institutions to relocate to Kaunas.

In this context, the University of Lithuania—founded on 16 February 1922 and renamed Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in 1930—became the country's principal academic institution (Mačinskas 1996). Emerging from the earlier 'higher courses', a private initiative from 1920, VMU initially embodied a bottom-up academic ethos supported by voluntary scholarly work. Although it began with substantial autonomy, political oversight increased during the authoritarian 1930s (Veilentienė 2011; Pūraitė 2010).

Between 1922 and 1930, VMU remained largely free in matters of teaching and research, but this independence eroded following statutory reforms in 1930 and 1937. These amendments curtailed the University Council's authority and transferred

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

key decisions—appointments, departmental structures and governance—to the President and Minister of Education (Veilentienė 2011; Pūraitė 2010). The changes formed part of a broader effort to align university governance with state political aims, including the creation of new departments to strengthen ideological influence. Nevertheless, many professors continued to promote academic independence and cultivate critical, broad-minded graduates (Mačinskas 1996).

On 13 December 1939, shortly after Lithuania regained control of Vilnius, Parliament passed the Universities Act re-establishing Vilnius University (VU) alongside VMU. Although plans for VU dated back to 1919 (Veilentienė 2011), its reinstatement had been delayed by the long occupation of the Vilnius region. When finally revived, VU was rebuilt on the VMU model, using the 1937 statute as its foundation (Mačinskas 1996). These developments consolidated a dual-university landscape on the eve of the next wave of geopolitical upheavals.

4.3.2 | First Soviet Occupation (1940–1941)

In 1940, the Soviet annexation of Lithuania brought an abrupt transformation of higher education. VMU was renamed and rapidly 'Sovietised', with Marxist–Leninist doctrine replacing national or religious content (Staliūnas 2007; Senn 2007). Theology was abolished, Lithuanian history reframed around class struggle, and administrative positions transferred to party-approved personnel (Arnove and Bowen 2013; Zickel 1989). Several faculty members were dismissed or arrested as 'bourgeois nationalists' (Senn 2007). This first Soviet repurposing demonstrates how quickly a university's mission can be reconfigured under authoritarian control (Starkey and Tempest 2009; Lauglo 1988).

4.3.3 | Nazi Occupation and University Closure (1941–1944)

When Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in June 1941, Lithuania fell under new occupiers who at first allowed a partial resurgence of nationalist elements—for example, momentarily restoring VMU's original name (Staliūnas 2007). However, tensions quickly escalated. By 1943, as suspicion of Lithuanian resistance grew, Nazi authorities closed VMU entirely, partly in retaliation for the university community's refusal to comply with recruitment demands for the SS (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007). This abrupt shuttering illustrates a different mode of repurposing: total suppression of higher management education when the occupier judges it a threat to ideological or military objectives (Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013; Koonz 2003).

4.3.4 | Return of Soviet Control (1944–1990)

Following the German retreat, Soviet forces reoccupied Lithuania, swiftly reinstalling Marxist–Leninist oversight of universities (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007). VMU was renamed Kaunas State University and then restructured so extensively that it lost its comprehensive university status. Faculties were disbanded, consolidated or transferred to other Soviet institutions. By 1950, what remained had morphed into specialised institutes—Kaunas Polytechnic Institute and Kaunas Medical Institute—fully embedded in the Soviet system (Staliūnas 2007; Zickel 1989). For the second time in 5 years, an entire national university had been redefined to comply with the overarching ideology and political apparatus (Senn 2007; Arnove and Bowen 2013).

4.3.5 | Implications and Extreme Vulnerability

Lithuania's history is especially striking for the pace and scale of oscillations: from nationalist to Soviet, to Nazi and back to Soviet, all within a decade (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007). Each regime meticulously recasts curricula, leadership structures and even the university's very name. Certain faculties—such as theology or law—were shut down whenever they conflicted with the reigning ideology. Others, like engineering or medicine, survived but were harnessed to serve the occupant's strategic purposes (Lauglo 1988). This 'ideological whiplash' underscores the fundamental precarity of higher management education when political forces hold unchecked power over institutional governance (Arnove and Thomas 2025; Koonz 2003). In less extreme but still significant ways, contemporary business schools may face repeated reorientations if different agencies or accreditation bodies impose shifting sets of performance metrics and ideological agendas (Wilson and McKiernan 2011; Davies et al. 2023).

4.4 | Summary

This section has shown how higher management education was repurposed under three distinct ideological regimes: the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Lithuania's successive nationalist, Soviet and Nazi governments. Despite their different doctrines—Marxist–Leninist, racial-nationalist and nationalist-liberationist—each regime reconfigured university governance, curricula and academic culture to match external political demands.

In the Soviet Union, higher education was redesigned to produce loyal specialists through class-based admissions, centralised control and mandatory Marxist–Leninist instruction. Faculty appointments, research agendas and teaching content were tightly aligned with state doctrine.

Nazi Germany pursued a similar strategy through rapid *Gleichschaltung*: dismissing Jewish and politically suspect academics, imposing racial-nationalist curricula and integrating business education into autarkic and wartime economic planning. Dissenting professors were pushed out, resulting in ideological uniformity.

Lithuania illustrates the extreme malleability of institutions exposed to repeated regime changes. Within a decade, its universities were reorganised multiple times—nationalist, Soviet and Nazi authorities all renamed, closed or restructured institutions and reshaped teaching according to their respective ideological priorities.

Together, these cases demonstrate how quickly higher management education can be reprogrammed when governance

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

and curricula are subject to political control, underscoring the vulnerability of academic institutions to external ideological pressure.

5 | Functional Analysis: Decision Premises and the Repurposing of IHE

Building on the historical cases analysed in Section 4, this section applies functional analysis to examine the structural similarities between past ideological repurposing efforts and contemporary transformations in IHME. As discussed earlier, decision premises serve as the guiding structures through which organisations, including universities, process external expectations and maintain internal coherence (Luhmann 2018). By trying to influence these decision premises, external actors aim to redefine the governance, curricula and institutional culture of IHME in a bid to ultimately reshape their function in society.

The following subsections explore how personnel decisions, communication channels, decision programmes and organisational culture were intended to be changed in past ideological repurposing efforts and how similar patterns can be observed in contemporary repurposing efforts in higher management education.

5.1 | Personnel: Controlling Academic and Administrative Leadership

5.1.1 | Historical Cases

Personnel control has been a primary mechanism of ideological repurposing across historical cases. In the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin, university leadership and faculty appointments were subjected to strict political vetting, ensuring that only those aligned with Marxist–Leninist doctrine were allowed to hold academic positions (Fitzpatrick 1979; Millar 2004). Stalinist purges eliminated dissenters, replacing them with loyal Communist Party members (Zickel 1989). Similarly, in Nazi Germany, the Gleichschaltung ('coordination') policy led to the dismissal of Jewish, socialist and politically unreliable faculty, replacing them with academics loyal to the National Socialist ideology (Grüttner 2005; Detzen and Hoffmann 2019). In midcentury Lithuania, repeated shifts in occupation (Soviet–Nazi–Soviet) resulted in multiple waves of faculty purges and forced alignments, each time reflecting the dominant ideology (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007).

5.1.2 | Contemporary Parallels

Modern IHMEs do not experience such direct political purges, but external governance structures increasingly shape personnel decisions, particularly through accreditation bodies, government policies and funding mechanisms. In the United Kingdom, for example, initiatives such as 'Advance HE' and 'Universities UK' promote hiring policies aligned with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) frameworks, creating indirect ideological filters for academic recruitment. Similarly, many universities now incorporate sustainability and social responsibility criteria into hiring and promotion evaluations, influencing the composition of faculty and leadership teams. Although these policies aim to enhance inclusivity and social impact, they also introduce structural constraints on academic pluralism, potentially excluding scholars whose perspectives diverge from dominant paradigms.

This shift raises a fundamental tension between competence and compliance in faculty selection and career progression. When political alignment with institutional agendas becomes an implicit or explicit criterion for hiring and promotion, there is a risk that academic merit and disciplinary expertise take a backseat to ideological conformity. As a result, universities may prioritise candidates who demonstrate alignment with prevailing political narratives over those with the strongest research credentials or pedagogical competence, ultimately affecting the quality and integrity of teaching and scholarship. From a legal standpoint, invoking factors external to the rational and meritocratic foundations of hiring decisions has been ruled unconstitutional.[2] Ironically, the legal system has compelled universities to comply with the very principles of decision-making that they had themselves eroded. Jonathan Haidt (2022) interprets this as a large-scale shift in the institutional purpose of universities—from the pursuit of truth to the promotion of social justice. However, he does so without examining the conditions of possibility or the structural logic of this transformation.

5.1.3 | Conclusions

To illustrate the extent of ideological irritation exerted on contemporary IHE, consider the following mental experiment: Imagine replacing current academic role descriptions that reflect environmental sustainability and DEI ideologies with titles associated with past political regimes. For instance, seemingly neutral job titles such as 'Professor of Sustainable Business', 'Professor of Ecological Economics', 'Professor of Sustainable Development' or 'Professor for Social-Ecological Transformation' might be reimagined as 'Professor of Lithuanian Business Studies', 'Professor of Marxist–Leninist Economics', 'Professor of Socialist Development' or 'Professor for Aryanisation'. This substitution highlights how deeply current ideological frameworks have become embedded in academia, to the point where their prevalence is often overlooked. By juxtaposing these contemporary titles with those reminiscent of earlier totalitarian[3] systems, we can better recognise and critically assess the ideological influences shaping today's IHE.

5.2 | Communication Channels: Structuring Information and Decision-Making

5.2.1 | Historical Cases

Ideological repurposing has historically restructured communication channels within universities to ensure alignment with external directives. In the Soviet case, universities were integrated into the centralised planning system, with party-appointed administrators controlling faculty discussions, research agendas and disciplinary policies (Frumin and Platonova 2024). Similarly, in Nazi Germany, academic communication was strictly monitored by the NSDDB (National Socialist Lecturers'

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

League), which ensured that all scholarly discourse adhered to National Socialist ideology (Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013). In Lithuania, frequent reorganisations of university governance under shifting regimes fragmented academic communication, compelling faculty to constantly realign with new ideological directives (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007).

5.2.2 | Contemporary Parallels

Modern IHME still features some degree of decentralised governance structures, yet the flow of communication within and across institutions is increasingly shaped by top-down managerial oversight, accreditation frameworks and politically aligned research agendas. Accreditation bodies such as AACSB, EFMD and national quality assurance agencies impose criteria that directly influence internal reporting structures, faculty meetings and institutional governance (Marginson 2016). In parallel, university administrations adopt standardised messaging strategies, ensuring that institutional discourse aligns with predefined social-ecological objectives and DEI imperatives (Wilson and McKiernan 2011).

A crucial development in this context is the managerialisation of IHME, which is often conflated with neoliberalisation (Rhodes and Pullen 2023) but actually represents a fundamentally different shift to state control. The ratio of managers to faculty has steadily increased over the past decades, with administrative staff gaining disproportionate influence over curricular content, research priorities and faculty evaluation (Deem et al. 2007). Under the pretext of competence development, standardisation and alignment with accreditation requirements, these administrators dictate what should be taught and researched, effectively altering internal communication channels by subordinating faculty discourse to managerial directives.

Beyond managerial oversight, ethics boards and research funding committees now play a growing role in defining the boundaries of permissible inquiry. Research that aligns with dominant political and ideological imperatives—such as sustainability or social justice—finds institutional support, whereas work that challenges these paradigms often faces additional bureaucratic hurdles or is excluded from funding altogether (Pettigrew and Starkey 2016). This shift signifies a departure from traditional market-driven research evaluation, where academic demand was shaped by disciplinary innovation and external economic forces, towards a politically guided model of research approval. As a result, IHE communication channels—once structured around disciplinary self-governance and epistemic autonomy—increasingly reflect externally imposed ideological and administrative constraints.

5.2.3 | Conclusions

Shifts in the structuring of communication channels represent a subtle yet powerful mechanism of ideological repurposing. Whether through historical mechanisms of direct control or contemporary strategies of managerial oversight and politically guided accreditation, internal university discourse becomes increasingly oriented towards compliance rather than inquiry. As the communicative infrastructure of IHME is reconfigured to transmit external expectations, the space for autonomous epistemic differentiation contracts—often without the need for formal censorship.

5.3 | Decision Programmes: Changing Curricula and Research Priorities

5.3.1 | Historical Cases

One of the most significant elements of ideological repurposing is the reconfiguration of decision programmes, particularly curricula and research mandates. In the Soviet Union, curricula were overhauled to conform to Marxist–Leninist doctrine, with mandatory courses in scientific socialism and dialectical materialism imposed on all students, regardless of discipline (Fitzpatrick 1979; Zickel 1989). Similarly, under Nazi Germany, Betriebswirtschaftslehre (business administration) was redesigned to align with the Führerprinzip and racial-nationalist economic policies (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Wächter 2017). In Lithuania, universities oscillated between nationalist, Soviet and Nazi curricular frameworks, reflecting rapid ideological realignments (Staliūnas 2007; Senn 2007).

From Leninist indoctrination courses to Nazi 'racial science' or 'Aryan leadership' modules, curricular transformation has been a hallmark of ideological repurposing (Bailes 1978; Koonz 2003). Mandated course content, textbook rewrites and revised disciplinary foundations have historically signalled a realignment of intellectual capital with the ruling regime's worldview (Detzen and Hoffmann 2019; Grüttner 2005). Under Stalin, Marxist–Leninist dogma became a required pillar in every field—economics, literature and law—often crowding out alternative methodologies (Millar 2004; Frumin and Platonova 2024). Similarly, under Nazism, racial doctrines permeated medicine, anthropology and even business administration, leading to entire disciplines being reshaped to fit National Socialist ideology (Wächter 2017; Weiss-Wendt and Yeomans 2013).

5.3.2 | Contemporary Parallels

Today, curricula in many IHME are undergoing systematic transformations, driven by sustainability and social responsibility agendas. Business schools, for instance, are increasingly required to embed ESG (environmental, social and governance) principles into coursework, often at the expense of more traditional market-oriented frameworks (Davies et al. 2023). National education policies and accreditation bodies emphasise sustainability literacy, social justice and ethical leadership as core educational outcomes (Gümüsay and Reinecke 2022).

Parallel processes can be observed in modern business education, where the rapid incorporation of sustainability imperatives—such as mandatory courses on the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs)—or the integration of social-justice frameworks across core subjects like finance, marketing and strategy reflect significant curricular shifts. Although many scholars laud these reforms as necessary corrections to historically narrow, shareholder-centric models (Pettigrew and

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Starkey 2016; Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2015), the historical record warns that imposed doctrines can undermine the pluralism and critical inquiry that are integral to rigorous research and robust education (Hazelkorn 2015; Starkey and Tempest 2009).

5.3.3 | Conclusions

The historical and contemporary cases examined in this section reveal a common pattern: politically mandated repurposing shifts the focus of organisational decision programmes away from the core missions of education and science, reorienting them towards externally imposed political or politically endorsed agendas. Whether the underlying ideology is red (communist/socialist), brown (Nazi), or green (environmentalism), the transformation of curricula and research priorities introduces the risk of mission drifts so severe that IHME may no longer be able to fulfil their original function for society. When universities are tasked primarily with advancing ideological or policy-driven objectives, their capacity to produce knowledge in a differentiated and autonomous manner is compromised.

Thus, the key risk of ideological reprogramming in IHME is not merely that certain perspectives are promoted over others but that the very basis of academic legitimacy becomes subordinated to political considerations. This raises critical concerns about the long-term viability of IHME as independent organisations capable of pursuing their core purpose while fulfilling what is one of their core functions, namely, the production of knowledge that is not merely politically expedient but scientifically rigorous.

5.4 | Organisational Culture: Shaping Norms and Institutional Identity

5.4.1 | Historical Cases

Beyond formal decision-making structures, ideological repurposing profoundly impacts organisational culture by shaping implicit norms, values and expectations. In the Soviet and Nazi cases, universities were not just structurally reoriented but also imbued with ideological loyalty rituals, such as mandatory Marxist–Leninist indoctrination in student organisations or public displays of allegiance to Nazi ideology (Grüttner 2005; Zickel 1989). In Lithuania, ideological shifts required faculty and students to frequently realign their public statements and professional affiliations to avoid repression (Senn 2007; Staliūnas 2007).

5.4.2 | Contemporary Parallels

In modern IHME, organisational culture is increasingly shaped by institutional commitments to social and environmental causes. Universities now frequently adopt mission statements that position them as 'agents of positive change', embedding sustainability and DEI principles as institutional identities rather than optional frameworks. These shifts, although often well-intentioned, risk transforming universities from sites of open inquiry into mission-driven institutions, where certain worldviews become institutionalised as the normative default (Durand and Dameron 2011). The growing expectation that academics actively promote institutional sustainability goals or social justice agendas mirrors, in some respects, the ideological commitments required in past repurposing cycles (Wilson and McKiernan 2011).

5.4.3 | Conclusions

In both historical and contemporary cases, organisational culture proves to be a decisive medium through which ideological repurposing becomes sustainable. Although culture is less formalised than decision programmes or communication structures, it determines which meanings, values and worldviews are considered legitimate within the institution. When certain normative orientations—such as sustainability or DEI—are elevated to core components of institutional identity, they can crowd out competing perspectives and thereby narrow the scope of epistemic diversity. In this sense, organisational culture acts as the sedimentation layer where prior structural transformations become naturalised, rendering ideological repurposing not only effective but also enduring.

5.5 | Summary: Functional Similarities in Past and Present Repurposing

This analysis highlights how the structural transformations observed in historical cases of ideological repurposing find strong functional parallels in contemporary IHME transformations. Although the normative content of these transformations seems to differ—'green' goals today seemingly contrast with the totalitarian 'red' or 'brown' ideological projects of the past—the mechanisms employed remain remarkably consistent:

- Personnel changes and updates job descriptions ensure ideological alignment in faculty recruitment.
- Communication channels regulate how ideas and decisions are framed.
- Decision programmes reshape curricula and research priorities to fit dominant paradigms.
- At the level of organisational culture, IHME repurposing aims to cultivate unquestionable mission drifts to political imperatives within organisations whose identity was once primarily centred on science and education.

Although accreditation processes already indicate how external expectations may influence the internal structures of IHME, it is in the broader alignment of organisational decision programmes with those of powerful external organisations—particularly the state—that the deeper logic of repurposing becomes fully visible.

5.6 | From Structural Coupling to Programme Alignment: IHME as Multifunctional Organisations Under Political Pressure

As previously discussed, organisations are a primary site of structural coupling of function systems in modern society. This

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

becomes particularly evident in the case of IHE, which function as multifunctional organisations. That is, they maintain internal references to multiple function systems such as science, education, economy and, increasingly, politics. Their decision programmes—especially purposive programmes—constitute the concrete forms through which such references are maintained and operationalised. In this sense, multifunctional decision programmes are the organisational loci of structural coupling.

From this perspective, structural coupling does not denote direct function system–function system relationships. Rather, it is a consequence of organisational multifunctionality and is internalised in the structures of decision-making. These decision programmes translate the binary codes and performance expectations of function systems into stabilised premises for action. Their capacity to do so, however, is contingent upon the organisation's ability to maintain its operational closure—that is, its capacity to produce decisions recursively and to distinguish its own operations from external inputs.

In totalitarian regimes, where political authorities directly appoint university leadership, determine institutional missions and enforce compliance through surveillance or coercion, the process of repurposing appears rather straightforward. The decision programmes of IHME are restructured in line with state objectives, yet, even under such circumstances, the organisation retains a degree of operational closure. It continues to distinguish between decisions and their environment and to organise communications that recursively produce further decisions. In this case, the IHME may no longer be best conceptualised as an educational or scientific organisation structurally coupled to the political system, but rather as a subsystem of another, strongly politically oriented organisation like a state party or government itself. The distinction between heteronomy and autonomy collapses when the IHME becomes absorbed into a subsystem of a political organisation or meta-organisation, respectively.

By contrast, in functionally differentiated societies, repurposing takes on a more complex form. Here, a government cannot directly instruct the operations of autonomous systems and must instead influence IHME indirectly in terms of context management, that is, for instance, through performance expectations encoded in funding structures, legal frameworks and accreditation mechanisms. These do not determine operations but condition the range of plausible internal adaptations of the target system.

Thus, a further complication arises where ideological repurposing converges with financial–reputational pressures. Contemporary funding schemes increasingly embed normative and policy expectations—whether sustainability, DEI or mission-oriented innovation—into their eligibility and evaluation criteria. As a result, access to external finance becomes conditional upon the alignment of research with these programmes. In Luhmannian terms, economic decision programmes and political-ideological decision programmes become coupled in ways that amplify their steering effects. Universities and researchers thus face not only ideological expectations but also economic incentives to reproduce them, making repurposing both more subtle and more pervasive. This fusion of normative purpose and financial dependency renders higher education particularly susceptible to shifts in policy-defined 'impact', as organisational survival increasingly hinges on demonstrating compliance with externally codified societal priorities.

The threshold at which such indirect influence becomes de facto control is critical. Systems theory conceptualises this shift in terms of a loss of structural coupling and the emergence of strict or causal coupling. Although structural coupling allows systems to remain autonomous—that is, to select and translate environmental demands into internally meaningful distinctions—strict coupling removes this selectivity. If compliance with external demands becomes a condition for institutional survival (e.g., legal status, funding and certification), then the internal adaptation is no longer autonomous. In this case, the organisation's decision programmes cease to translate external expectations; they begin to implement them.

The degree to which such steering occurs can be indexed by examining the structures that organisations modulate in response to environmental pressures. At the loosest level lies the self-description: institutions adopting fashionable terms like sustainability or DEI to signal responsiveness. These descriptions are easily modified and often serve symbolic or strategic purposes. As Luhmann (1995, 170) notes, self-descriptions are the loosest structure of a social system. Universities frequently adapt such descriptions by integrating politically virulent semantics—terms like *sustainability*, *social justice* or *DEI*—in order to signal responsiveness to dominant performance expectations. In the context of research funding, similar linguistic adaptations can be found in grant applications, where buzzword compliance often aims to align with political or economic expectations, even if the actual research logic remains largely unaffected (Luhmann 2013). Yet even seemingly cosmetic semantic changes can sediment into structural consequences. As Stäheli (1998) emphasises, semantics are not idle talk: They condition structures and may destabilise internal consistency.

The more an IHME internalises such externally-induced semantics, the more likely it becomes that its decision premises—especially those governing its purposive programmes—begin to mirror political rather than disciplinary or educational logics. This shift remains manageable as long as it affects only surface-level communication. However, once these semantics begin to inform the mission statement—the more condensed and institutionally consequential layer of self-description—the structural implications intensify.

The mission statement, although still modifiable, plays a structurally stronger role in guiding purposive programmes. It sets the direction and limits for internal decisions and filters the semantics that are deemed plausible or legitimate. As Kühl (2025, 120) notes, purposive programmes often rely on the guidance provided by a shared understanding of the organisation's final objective, expressed in its mission. In this sense, management by objectives increases decentralised autonomy only within boundaries set by this core orientation. Where these boundaries shift—say, when a university commits to 'social justice' or 'climate responsibility' as core values—entire categories of decision become more or less plausible, even justifiable. A commitment to such values may, for instance, problematise standards and meritocratic criteria in teaching or examination on the grounds of exclusion or inequality,

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

thereby affecting the operational logic of academic evaluation itself. The more dominant the alignment to external expectations becomes, the more tightly purposive programmes are realigned. These programmes—unlike conditional programmes that follow simple if-then logic—require shared understandings of goals and criteria. Once these are repurposed under political imperatives, internal flexibility narrows.

At the most condensed level, one may ask whether such changes ultimately affect the function of the organisation. Although the function of IHME is, from a systems-theoretical perspective, an observation rather than a thing in the ontic sense, this observation is not arbitrary. Functionally differentiated society depends on reliable organisational forms to address structurally distinct societal problems. Schools address the problem that primary socialisation does not equip individuals with competencies necessary for modern societal roles; IHMEs, by contrast, address the problem that schools do not equip individuals to actively participate in the function systems themselves—as teachers, artists, researchers or entrepreneurs (Luhmann 1991, 165; Luhmann 2019, 127f). Although the classical qualification thesis may overstate the role of schooling, postsecondary education plausibly fulfils this qualification function. If IHME begins to define their function in terms of political alignment, behavioural transformation or ideological mission rather than knowledge transmission and functional preparation, they may lose their functional distinctiveness even if they retain their organisational form.

In sum, the alignment of IHME decision programmes with those of powerful organisations such as governments constitutes the decisive mechanism for attempted repurposing in past and present societies. A vivid historical illustration of this dynamic is provided by the Lithuanian case, where IHME underwent successive restructurings under nationalist, Soviet, and Nazi regimes. Each transition redefined the institutions' mission statements, personnel and curricula, demonstrating how decision programmes can be rapidly overwritten by dominant political organisations. This example also highlights how structural couplings may be recoded under extreme volatility and how multifunctional organisations adapt—or fail to adapt—when subjected to contradictory external programmes.

Thus, the key question is no longer whether influence by particularly influential organisations such as governments does exist or is un/desirable, but whether IHME retains the ability to translate and modulate such influence through autonomous multifunctional decision programmes—or whether their decision programmes have been aligned to such a degree that they now reflect the ideology, that is, the political programme of another, particularly influential organisation. In such cases, not only the programmes but also the semantics and internal logic of differentiation may begin to mirror the coding of the dominant function system—most often politics—and marginalise or displace competing references such as education, economy or science.

5.7 | When Decision Programmes Become Politically Aligned

The preceding analysis demonstrated how multifunctional organisations adapt their decision programmes to multiple performance expectations and how political pressure may condition or dominate these programmes. The following observations illustrate how such pressures may compromise the functional autonomy of IHME—particularly when political imperatives overwrite the internal logic of scientific and educational decision-making. They highlight the risk of programme capture, where multifunctional decision programmes cease to translate between function systems and instead begin to reproduce the logic of another particularly influential organisation that promotes the precedence of one dominant system, typically the political system. The question, then, is why the vast majority of scholarship on IHME repurposing—including studies focused on the repurposing of business schools and the supporting management and organisation theories—enthusiastically endorses the alignment of IHME with political goals such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals or supra/national DEI initiatives yet does not, for instance, advocate an equally conceivable religious alignment of IHME (Roth and Sales 2025a).

Against the background of this strong political bias, particularly, the Lithuanian experience serves as a cautionary lens through which to view contemporary political pressures on IHME. Although today's political transformations are less abrupt than regime change, the cumulative effect of overlapping ideological demands—from sustainability and DEI to global health and climate governance—may produce a comparable structural outcome. When ideological programmes are successively or simultaneously (self-)prescribed to contemporary IHME, their own functional focus on higher management education and research may be changed to such an extent that they risk enacting their own version of the Lithuanian programme oscillation, not through sequential external occupation but through layered and competing claims for institutional purpose. The Lithuanian case reminds us that it is not only the content of external demands, but their contradictory accumulation and structural integration, that threatens institutional coherence.

Against this backdrop, the current inflation of increasingly rigid external expectations—particularly those demanding alignment with political or politically endorsed missions—raises a fundamental question: What happens when IHMEs no longer function according to their ostensible primary functions of research and education but instead align their performance with external political imperatives? The consequences of such repurposing (Roth and Sales 2025b) become particularly visible in moments of crisis, where IHMEs are expected to provide independent, critical and scientifically robust knowledge. However, if their decision premises have already been reoriented towards ideological conformity and political alignment, their ability to perform this role becomes compromised. In such cases, IHMEs may either fail in their traditional role as providers of differentiated, autonomous scientific expertise or—if viewed from the perspective of external political actors—succeed in fulfilling a different function: the provision of pseudo-scientific legitimacy for decisions that are, at their core, motivated by politics rather than informed by science.

A stark recent example of this phenomenon occurred during the coronavirus crisis, when political pressures shaped academic discourse to an unprecedented degree (Roth 2021; Žažar 2022; Žažar and Roth 2025). Research and opinions that deviated from

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

officially endorsed public health positions were often systematically discredited, marginalised or even suppressed. As a result, IHME—particularly in their scientific dimension—struggled to operate according to their core epistemic code of true/false, instead becoming entangled in political codes of government/opposition or power/powerlessness. This dynamic illustrates how external political imperatives, once institutionalised in decision programmes, can undermine the functional autonomy of IHME, reducing their ability to function as open fora for scientific inquiry and debate. This circumstance is the more critical as, during the coronavirus crisis, several commentators drew explicit parallels between the measures deemed necessary to mitigate the pandemic and those proposed to combat climate change. Latour (2021) notably suggested that the pandemic should be understood as a 'dress rehearsal for the next crisis', implying that the societal transformations imposed to contain COVID-19 foreshadow the measures required to address climate change. Similarly, Lise Kingo, then Executive Director of the United Nations Global Compact, described the pandemic as 'just a fire drill' for the effects of the climate crisis (The Guardian, 15 June 2020). These statements reflect a broader discursive shift in which public health emergencies and environmental crises are framed within the same governance logic, justifying exceptional interventions to alter individual behaviour on a large scale (Roth 2021).

This logic is openly endorsed, inter alia, by Prof Heinz Bude, co-author of a strategy paper published under the auspices of the German Ministry of the Interior, which later became known as the 'panic paper' due to its apparent promotion of fear-based communication (*Angstkommunikation*) as a tool for policy enforcement. In a subsequent interview, Bude explicitly stated that such strategic fear messaging should not be confined to public health crises but should also be employed in future crises related to climate change, war and pandemics. He argued that in these situations, governments would inevitably have to intervene in individual behaviour, even to the point of exerting coercion against those who dissent based on alternative sources of information (see Friedrich 2024).[4]

Such statements exemplarily underscore how the political techniques deployed during the COVID-19 crisis and promoted by members of more than IHME—from individual behavioural regulation to communication strategies designed to generate organisational compliance—are being actively considered as templates for broader application in the context of climate change governance (for another prominent example, see Fuso Nerini et al. 2021).

This aligns with pathologisation of 'unsustainable' lifestyles in terms of (collective) behavioural addictions (Costanza et al. 2017; Costanza 2020). This mindset bears resemblance to that which justified the political abuse of psychotherapy and psychiatry as means to manage dissent in the USSR (Alexéyeff 1976; Faraone 1982; Fulford et al. 1993; Koryagin 1989) and elsewhere.

In a recent editorial, published simultaneously in over 200 academic journals (e.g., Abbasi et al. 2023), the pathologisation of unsustainable lifestyles or collective behavioural addictions, respective, is scaled to the planetary level, as the authors declare that it is high time for the WHO 'to treat the climate and nature crisis as one indivisible global health emergency'. From the framing of climate change as a global health crisis, it is only a small step to demands that the WHO recommend—and national governments implement—measures to manage this crisis in ways analogous to those applied during the coronavirus pandemic. The question, then, is why IHME and their individual members adopt, or are expected to adopt, such a mission.

There is, hence, a potential for totalising 'green' ideologies on a planetary scale and pushing beyond 'tipping points' where originally well-intentioned attempts at repurposing organisations, including IHME, risk creating social conditions that are far less distinguishable from earlier 'red' or 'brown' totalitarian systems than their advocates might assume (Roth 2021).

Against this backdrop, our findings suggest that historical literacy is essential for assessing contemporary changes in IHME, ensuring that efforts to repurpose universities remain conducive to academic autonomy, epistemic diversity and institutional resilience.

6 | Conclusion: From Functional Transformation to Ideological Totalisation?

This article has argued that institutions of higher management education (IHME) are currently undergoing a process of ideological repurposing that exhibits structural similarities to past reprogramming efforts under totalitarian regimes. Drawing on Luhmannian systems theory, we have analysed these developments in terms of changes to decision premises, particularly multifunctional decision programmes. Our key finding is that IHME remain the primary locus of structural coupling in a functionally differentiated society and that the integrity of their function depends on their capacity to autonomously translate rather than merely implement the programmes of other—often politically powerful—organisations.

This autonomy is increasingly at risk. Although past ideological repurposing occurred through overt mechanisms of political control, contemporary repurposing relies on more subtle instruments of governance: performance-based accreditation, mission statement reforms and the semantic saturation of key terms such as sustainability, DEI or climate responsibility. Although these terms may initially appear normatively uncontroversial, they often operate as carriers of political semantics. Once institutionalised in the mission and decision programmes of IHME, they can gradually supplant other function system references—such as economic or scientific logics—thereby structurally privileging the political system. If this dynamic continues unchecked, it leads to a totalisation of the political code within IHME, ultimately compromising their ability to perform their societal function in a differentiated and autonomous manner.[5]

In light of this analysis, we have suggested that contemporary antineoliberal discourse may misdiagnose the source of politicisation in IHME. Although neoliberalism has been widely criticised for introducing market logic into academia (Jemielniak and Greenwood 2015; Jensen and Zawadzki 2024), this paper has shown that the current wave of repurposing is better understood as the implementation of statist programmes that increase

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

the influence of political organisations over nonpolitical ones. True neoliberal programmes are, in contrast, designed as buffers (Roth and Valentinov 2023): They aim to limit state intrusion into autonomous organisations. From this perspective, the campaign against neoliberalism—often accompanied by calls for sustainability transitions, DEI enforcement and third mission mandates—risks replacing a logic of autonomy-limiting marketisation with one of autonomy-dissolving politicisation.

This shift must be problematised not only because it leads to the erosion of functional differentiation but also because it risks opening the door to forms of ideological totalisation. We have shown that the COVID-19 crisis functioned as a paradigmatic moment in which political expectations captured scientific decision programmes, subordinating truth/false distinctions to political dichotomies of power and legitimacy. Climate governance discourse, as we have illustrated, is increasingly being modelled on these same logics, raising the spectre of a green ideological regime that may be no less totalising than the red or brown regimes of the past.

Against this backdrop, historical literacy becomes a critical resource for evaluating contemporary transformations in higher management education. We conclude that IHME can and should reflect on past episodes of repurposing—not to deny the need for societal engagement but to ensure that engagement does not come at the expense of epistemic diversity, institutional resilience and functional autonomy.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Endnotes

[1] If, in what follows, we speak of ideology, we do so in a systems-theoretical, that is, functional, sense. As ideologies are political programmes, it is of little analytically use to describe them as the producers of untrue truths and to critique them accordingly (Luhmann 1991, 63). Were their function located within the domain of science, ideologies would be analysed not as solutions but solely as problems. The heuristic starting point of systems theory, however, is to ask: To which problem does something that has evidently stabilised respond, and how does it thereby present itself as a solution? For Luhmann (1991, 60, transl. by the authors), ideologies resolve the consequential problems of observing action within a causal schema: They reduce ‘the infinity of causal consequences from the perspective of value’. Organisations similarly rely on ‘neutralising the consequences of action and thereby enabling decisions among several rationally serviceable solutions’ (Luhmann 1991, 60 f., transl. by the authors). Thus, when Luhmann (1991, 61) regards ideologies as solutions, they simultaneously pose a problem, insofar as they do not account for their own contingency. By ‘coordinating actions with conflicting value orientations’ (Luhmann 1991, 62, transl. by the authors) and rendering the contingency of observing or constructing action in a particular way invisible, ideologies are largely restricted in their capacity for reflection, hence generating risks of epistemic closure and totalisation. As noted, this limitation arises only for the scientific observer; for the function of ideology itself, it is not a problem but a necessary condition for fulfilling that function.

[2] In June 2023, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* that Harvard University's race-conscious admissions policies violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court concluded that Harvard's use of race in admissions lacked sufficiently clear and measurable objectives, applied race in a negative manner, relied on racial stereotyping and failed to define meaningful endpoints.

[3] Here and in what follows, we use a very lean notion of totalitarisation. In terms of social theory, this refers—solely in contrast to functional differentiation—to the central steering of all societal domains by politics, whereby those domains lose their status as autonomous systems. Instead of pointing to supposedly typical structural features such as ‘terror’, Luhmann considers it totalitarian whenever politics claims a central, overarching position as the representative and steering instance of society as a whole (Luhmann 2002, 270f.). From the perspective of observation theory, this manifests itself in a contrast to the polycontextural modes of observation characteristic of function systems—each of which constitutes its own ‘world’ through its specific coding. Totalitarization, by contrast, rests on the idea of a central, superordinate observational logic (Luhmann 1987, 162) according to which, for example, *everything is political* (Krönig 2022) or likewise *everything is religious*.

[4] In Prof Bude's words, uttered during a discussion hosted by the University of Graz on 24 January 2024 (own translation), this reads as follows: ‘We will have to deal with the fact that authorities must influence individual behaviour (...). And coercion will have to be exercised against those who say: “But I have different information” (...). We will increasingly encounter such crises in the future—climate, war, pandemics—crises that require individual behavioural changes if we are to maintain collective agency as a society. And that is the crucial argument. Are we even capable of this in a modern liberal society? Is this possible? And do we not have to resort to seemingly dreadful instruments such as fear-based communication—social-psychological mechanisms—to achieve the necessary compliance for behavioural transformation? The crises ahead of us resemble wars, pandemics, and extreme weather events. This is foreseeable. And we must reflect in advance on the kinds of social-scientific instruments needed to address these predictable challenges’.

[5] It should be noted, however, that from a systems-theoretical perspective, it makes little sense to analyse loss of autonomy as heteronomisation imposed from the outside. The historical analysis presented here demonstrates that functional systems and organisations are exposed, at different times, to different performance expectations and, seemingly paradoxically, autonomously relinquish or preserve their autonomy. They do so by establishing structural couplings to external performance expectations (e.g., political, economic, religious or legal) in order to respond to the respective perturbations in specific ways. The question of how such orientation towards external performance expectations—which can only ever occur on the basis of the system's own operations and operational logics, that is, autonomously—affects the system's operational logic or coding can, for example, be addressed through the theory of secondary coding (Krönig 2007), but exploring this here would go beyond the scope of this paper. The historical analyses also indicate that there is a tipping point at which system–system relationships can no longer be reconstructed on the basis of functional differentiation, operational closure and structural coupling, and where loss of autonomy must be analysed, contrary to the logic of differentiation in modern society, as determinative heteronomisation.

References

Abbasi, K., P. Ali, V. Barbour, et al. 2023. “Time to Treat the Climate and Nature Crisis as One Indivisible Global Health Emergency.” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 27, no. 10: 9–15.

Alajoutsijärvi, K., K. Juusola, and M. Siltaoja. 2015. “The Legitimacy Paradox of Business Schools: Losing by Gaining?” *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 14, no. 2: 277–291.

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Alexéyeff, S. 1976. “Abuse of Psychiatry as a Tool for Political Repression in the Soviet Union.” *Medical Journal of Australia* 1, no. 5: 122–123.

Altbach, P. G., L. Reisberg, and L. E. Rumbley. 2009. *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution*. UNESCO Publishing.

Andersen, N. Å. 2003. “Polyphonic Organizations.” In *Autopoietic Organization Theory: Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Perspective*, edited by T. Bakken and T. Hernes, 151–182. Copenhagen Business School Press.

Arnove, R. F., and G. A. Bowen. 2013. *Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local*. 4th ed. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Arnove, R. F., and R. M. Thomas. 2025. “Education: Nazi Germany.” In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc (Updated February 27, 2025). https://www.britannica.com.

Baecker, D. 2006. “The Form of the Firm.” *Organization* 13, no. 1: 109–142.

Bailes, K. E. 1978. *Technology and Society Under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917–1941*. Princeton University Press.

Bakken, T., and E. L. Wiik. 2018. “Ignorance and Organization Studies.” *Organization Studies* 39, no. 8: 1109–1120.

Berkowitz, H., R. Bocquet, H. Delacour, and B. Demil. 2024. “Introduction: Scaling Perspectives on Grand Challenges in Management and Organization Studies.” *Management* 27, no. S1: 1–9.

Berkowitz, H., N. Brunsson, M. Grothe-Hammer, M. Sundberg, and B. Valiorgue. 2022. “Meta-Organizations: A Clarification and a Way Forward.” *M@n@Gement* 25, no. 2: 1–9.

Besio, C., C. Fedtke, M. Grothe-Hammer, A. Karafillidis, and A. Pronzini. 2025. “Algorithmic Responsibility Without Accountability: Understanding Data-Intensive Algorithms and Decisions in Organisations.” *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 42, no. 3: 739–755.

Brandtner, C., W. W. Powell, and A. Horvath. 2024. “From Iron Cage to Glass House: Repurposing of Bureaucratic Management and the Turn to Openness.” *Organization Studies* 45, no. 2: 193–221.

Brunsson, N., I. Gustafsson Nordin, and K. Tamm Hallström. 2022. “‘Un-Responsible’ Organization: How More Organization Produces Less Responsibility.” *Organization Theory* 3, no. 1: 1–20.

Costanza, R. 2020. “Ecological Economics in 2049: Getting Beyond the Argument Culture to the World We All Want.” *Ecological Economics* 168: 106484. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2019.106484.

Costanza, R., P. W. B. Atkins, M. Bolton, et al. 2017. “Overcoming Societal Addictions: What Can We Learn From Individual Therapies?” *Ecological Economics* 131: 543–550. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2016.09.023.

Davies, B., B. Doherty, and S. Knox. 2023. “Business Schools Post-Covid: Sustainability, Legitimacy, and Impact.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 184, no. 2: 243–259.

de la Cruz Jara, M. F., J. Spanjol, and T. Doppstadt. 2024. “Strategic Social Value Orientation and Sustainability Performance: A Commensuration Perspective.” *Organization Studies*, advance online publication 46: 635–666.

Deem, R., S. Hillyard, M. Reed, and M. Reed. 2007. *Knowledge, Higher Education, and the New Managerialism: The Changing Management of UK Universities*. Oxford University Press.

Detzen, D., and S. Hoffmann. 2019. “Accountability and Ideology: The Case of a German University Under the Nazi Regime.” *Accounting History* 25, no. 2: 174–192.

Durand, R., and S. Dameron. 2011. “Where Have All the Business Schools Gone?” *British Journal of Management* 22, no. 3: 559–563.

European Commission. 2022. *Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: On a European Strategy for Universities*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Faraone, S. 1982. “Psychiatry and Political Repression in the Soviet Union.” *American Psychologist* 37, no. 10: 1105–1112.

Ferraro, F., D. Etzion, and J. Gehman. 2015. “Tackling Grand Challenges Pragmatically: Robust Action Revisited.” *Organization Studies* 36, no. 3: 363–390.

Fitzpatrick, S. 1979. *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934*. Cambridge University Press.

Friedrich, J. P. 2024. “Wir Haben Gesagt, Wir Müssen ein Modell Finden, um Folgebereitschaft Herzustellen.” Die Welt, 22 March 2024.

Frumin, I., and D. Platonova. 2024. “The Socialist Model of Higher Education: The Dream Faces Reality.” *Daedalus* 153, no. 2: 178–193.

Fulford, K. W. M., A. Y. Smirnov, and E. Snow. 1993. “Concepts of Disease and the Abuse of Psychiatry in the USSR.” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 162, no. 6: 801–810.

Fuso Nerini, F., T. Fawcett, Y. Parag, and P. Ekins. 2021. “Personal Carbon Allowances Revisited.” *Nature Sustainability* 4, no. 12: 1025–1031.

Grothe-Hammer, M. 2020. “Membership and Contributorship in Organizations: An Update of Modern Systems Theory.” *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 37, no. 3: 482–495.

Grothe-Hammer, M., and A. la Cour. 2020. “Organization and Membership: Introduction to the Special Issue.” *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 37, no. 3: 419–424.

Grothe-Hammer, M., and K. Rachlitz. 2025. “Multi-Organizational Couplings of Societal Domains: A Typology of Meta-Organizations in a Functionally Differentiated Society.” *Theory and Society* 54: 1–31.

Grüttner, M. 2005. “German Universities Under the Swastika.” In *Universities Under Dictatorship*, edited by J. Connelly and M. Grüttner, 75–111. Penn State University Press.

Gümüsay, A. A., L. Claus, and J. Amis. 2020. “Engaging With Grand Challenges: An Institutional Logics Perspective.” *Organization Theory* 1, no. 3: 1–23.

Gümüsay, A. A., and J. Reinecke. 2022. “Researching for Desirable Futures: From Real Utopias to Imagining Alternatives.” *Journal of Management Studies* 59, no. 1: 236–242.

Haidt, J. 2022. *When Truth and Social Justice Collide, Choose Truth*, 23. Chronicle of Higher Education.

Hazelkorn, E. 2015. *Rankings and the Reshaping of Higher Education: The Battle for World-Class Excellence*. 2nd ed. Palgrave Macmillan.

Husted, E., M. Moufahim, and M. Fredriksson. 2022. “Political Parties and Organization Studies: The Party as a Critical Case of Organizing.” *Organization Studies* 43, no. 8: 1327–1341.

Jemielniak, D., and D. J. Greenwood. 2015. “Wake up or Perish: Neo-Liberalism, the Social Sciences, and Salvaging the Public University.” *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 15, no. 1: 72–82.

Jensen, T., and M. Zawadzki. 2024. “Contextualizing Capitalism in Academia: How Capitalist and Feudalist Organizing Principles Reinforce Each Other at Polish Universities.” *Organization* 31, no. 8: 1214–1236.

Kitchener, M. 2024. “Re-Purposing Business Schools: Potential, Progress, and Precarity.” *Journal of Management Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.13171.

Knudsen, M. 2017. “Conditions for Critical Performativity in a Polycontextural Society.” *Management* 20, no. 1: 9–27.

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Koonz, C. 2003. *The Nazi Conscience*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Koryagin, A. 1989. "The Involvement of Soviet Psychiatry in the Persecution of Dissenters." *British Journal of Psychiatry* 154, no. 3: 336–340.

Krönig, F. K. 2007. "Die Ökonomisierung der Gesellschaft. Systemtheoretische Perspektiven." Transcript.

Krönig, F. K. 2022. "The Politicization of the Educable Child Through Aethereal Power." *Childhood & Philosophy* 18: 1–15.

Kühl, S. 2025. *Führung und Gefolgschaft. Management im Nationalsozialismus und in der Demokratie*. Suhrkamp.

la Cour, A., S. Vallentin, H. Højlund, O. Thyssen, and B. Rennison. 2007. "Opening Systems Theory: A Note on the Recent Special Issue of Organization." *Organization* 14, no. 6: 929–938.

Langenmayr, F. 2016. *Organisational Memory as a Function. The Construction of Past, Present and Future in Organisations*. Springer.

Latour, B. 2021. "Is This a Dress Rehearsal?" *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. S2: S25–S27.

Lauglo, J. 1988. "Soviet Education Policy 1917-1935: From Ideology to Bureaucratic Control." *Oxford Review of Education* 14, no. 3: 285–299.

Luhmann, N. 1974. "Funktion und Kausalität." In *Soziologische Aufklärung. Aufsätze zur Theorie sozialer Systeme*, edited by N. Luhmann, vol. 1, 9–30. Westdeutscher Verlag.

Luhmann, N. 1987. "Tautologie und Paradoxie in den Selbstbeschreibungen der modernen Gesellschaft." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 16, no. 3: 161–174.

Luhmann, N. 1991. *Soziologische Aufklärung 1. Aufsätze zur Theorie Sozialer Systeme*. 6th ed. Westdeutscher Verlag.

Luhmann, N. 1995. *Social Systems*. Stanford University Press.

Luhmann, N. 2002. *Die Politik der Gesellschaft*. Suhrkamp.

Luhmann, N. 2006. "System as Difference." *Organization* 13, no. 1: 37–57.

Luhmann, N. 2012. *Theory of Society*. Vol. 1. Stanford University Press.

Luhmann, N. 2013. *Theory of Society*. Vol. 2. Stanford University Press.

Luhmann, N. 2018. *Organization and Decision*. Cambridge University Press.

Luhmann, N. 2019. "Schriften zur Organisation 3." In *Gesellschaftliche Differenzierung*, edited by E. Lukas and V. Tacke. Springer.

Marginson, S. 2016. *Higher Education and the Common Good*. Melbourne University Publishing.

Millar, J. R., ed. 2004. "Institute of Red Professors." In *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, vol. 2, 687–688. Macmillan Reference USA.

Mačinskas, Č. 1996. *Aukštasis Mokslas Lietuvoje 1918–1940 Metais [Higher Education in Lithuania in 1918–1940]*. Lietuvos Policijos Akademija.

Pettigrew, A., and K. Starkey. 2016. "The Legitimacy and Impact of Business Schools—Key Issues and a Research Agenda." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 15, no. 4: 649–664.

Pūraitė, A. 2010. "Lietuvos Aukštojo Mokslo Institucijų Veiklos Teisinis Reglamentavimas 1918–1940 m. [Legal Regulation of Higher Education Institutions in Lithuania in 1918–1940]." *Socialinių Mokslų Studijos* 4, no. 8: 251–273.

Rhodes, C., and A. Pullen. 2023. "The Good Business School." *Organization* 30, no. 6: 1273–1280.

Roth, S. 2021. "The Great Reset. Restratification for Lives, Livelihoods, and the Planet." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 166: 120636.

Roth, S., and A. Sales. 2025a. "Multifunctional Organisation — a Systems-Theoretical Concept and Its Practical Implications." *Kybernetes*. https://doi.org/10.1108/k-05-2025-1387.

Roth, S., and A. Sales. 2025b. "Purpose and Organisation Studies: On the Limits to Organisational Repurposing." *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*. https://doi.org/10.1002/sres.3177.

Roth, S., and V. Valentinov. 2023. "Toward a Theory of Multifunctional Liberalism: Systems-Theoretical Reflections on the Nature of Statehood." *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 40, no. 6: 945–954.

Roth, S., V. Valentinov, J. Kaivo-Oja, and L. P. Dana. 2018. "Multifunctional Organisation Models: A Systems–Theoretical Framework for New Venture Discovery and Creation." *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 31, no. 7: 1383–1400.

Rüegg, W., ed. 2004. *A History of the University in Europe: Volume III, Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800–1945)*. Cambridge University Press.

Seidl, D., and K. H. Becker. 2006. "Organizations as Distinction Generating and Processing Systems: Niklas Luhmann's Contribution to Organization Studies." *Organization* 13, no. 1: 9–35.

Senn, A. E. 2007. *Lithuania 1940: Revolution From Above*. BRILL.

Sharma, G., and D. Good. 2013. "The Work of Middle Managers: Sensemaking and Sensegiving for Creating Positive Social Change." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 49, no. 1: 95–122.

Stäheli, U. 1998. "Die Nachträglichkeit der Semantik. Zum Verhältnis von Sozialstruktur und Semantik." *Soziale Systeme* 4, no. 2: 315–339.

Staliūnas, D. 2007. *Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus After 1863*. BRILL.

Starkey, K., and S. Tempest. 2009. "The Winter of Our Discontent: The Design Challenge for Business Schools." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 8, no. 4: 576–586.

Stephan, U., M. Patterson, C. Kelly, and J. Mair. 2016. "Organizations Driving Positive Social Change: A Review and an Integrative Framework of Change Processes." *Journal of Management* 42, no. 5: 1250–1281.

Thomas, H., and A. D. Wilson. 2011. ""Physics Envy," Cognitive Legitimacy or Practical Relevance: Dilemmas in the Evolution of Management Research in the UK." *British Journal of Management* 22, no. 3: 443–456.

Veilentienė, A. 2011. "Universiteto Autonomija Lietuvoje 1922–1940 Metais [University Autonomy in Lithuania in 1922–1940]." *Parlamento Studijos* 11: 105–133.

Wächter, L. 2017. *Ökonomen auf Einen Blick: Ein Personenhandbuch zur Geschichte der Wirtschaftswissenschaft*. Springer-Verlag.

Wegener, F. E., J. Y. Lee, A. Mascena Barbosa, G. Sharma, and P. Bansal. 2025. "From Impact to Impacting: A Pragmatist Perspective on Tackling Grand Challenges." *Strategic Organization* 23, no. 1: 31–53.

Weiss-Wendt, A., and R. Yeomans, eds. 2013. *Racial Science in Hitler's New Europe, 1938–1945*. University of Nebraska Press.

Wilson, D., and P. McKiernan. 2011. "Global Mimicry: Putting Strategic Choice Back on the Business School Agenda." *British Journal of Management* 22, no. 3: 457–469.

Žažar, K. 2022. "Fighting the Virus, "Hunting the Witches"–Moralizing in Public Discourses During the Coronavirus Pandemic in Croatia." *Kybernetes* 51, no. 5: 1833–1848.

Žažar, K., and S. Roth. 2025. "Political and Economic Instrumentalisation of Science: Towards an Extended Concept of Corruption." *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 42, no. (3): 702–712.

Zickel, R. E., ed. 1989. *Soviet Union: A Country Study*. Federal Research Division.

10991743a, 2026, 3, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/sres.70012 by Steffen Roth - Projet Istex , Wiley Online Library on [15/05/2026]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License