

Higher Education in an Age of Disruption:

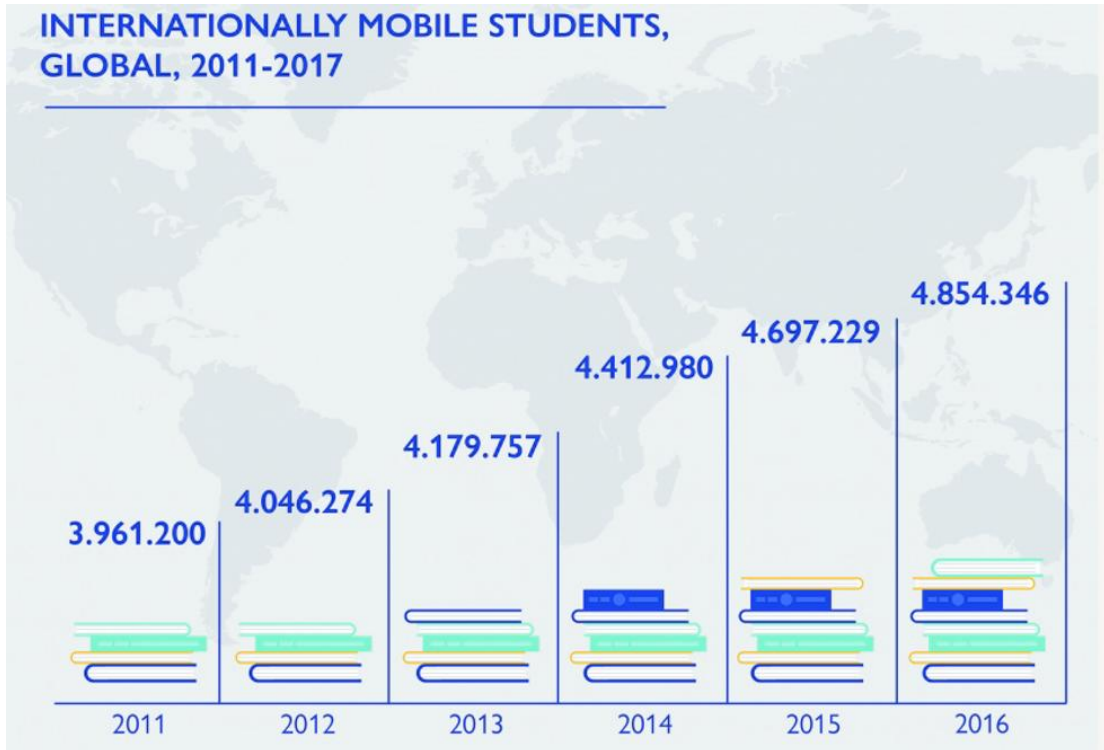
A comparison of English, French, and German higher education internationalization policies reacting to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic

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CGHE Webinar March 4, 2025

1. Introduction: Internationalization of higher education (HE)



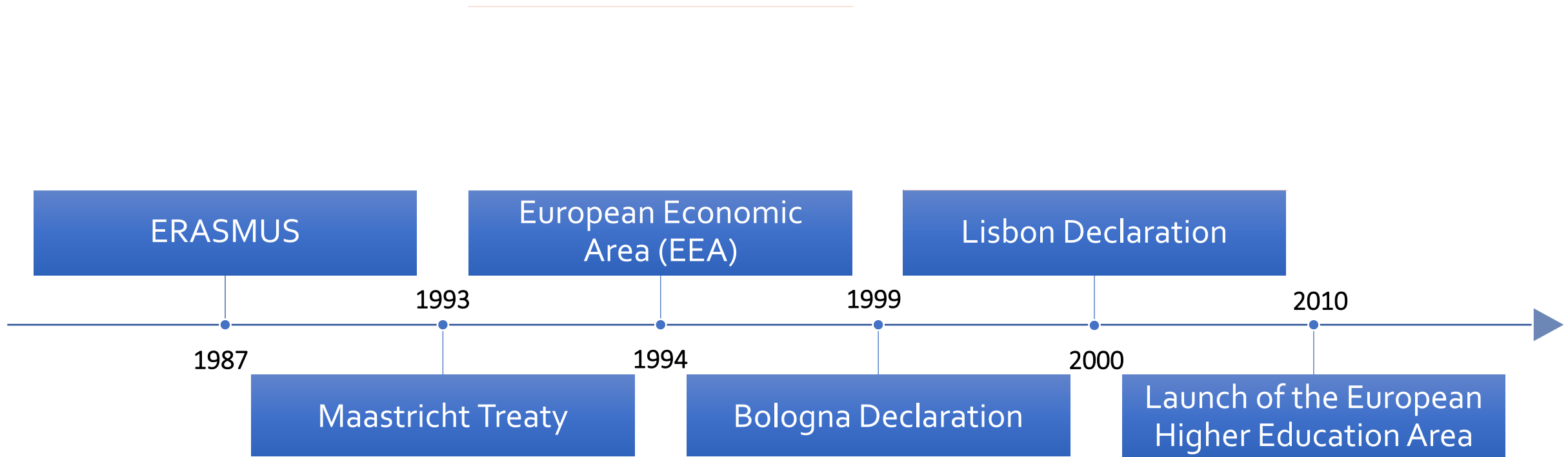
International Office for Migration (2018). Global Migration Indicators. GMDAC: Berlin, p. 25.

A1.3 Host countries with the highest numbers and proportions of international students (2017)¹

Host country	Number of international students
USA	984,898
<u>United Kingdom</u>	435,734
Australia	381,202
<u>Germany</u> ³	265,484
<u>France</u>	258,380
Russia	250,658
Canada	209,979
Japan	164,338
China ²	162,996
Turkey	108,076

DAAD (2020). Wissenschaft weltoffen. Bonn: DAAD, p. 14.

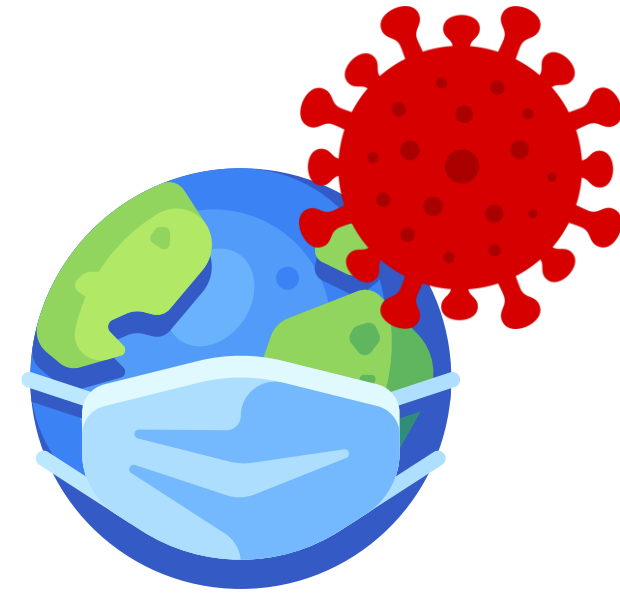
1. Introduction: European HE Integration



1. Introduction: The age of disruptions



2016: Brexit referendum



2020: COVID-19 pandemic

 Politico.eu

Brexit, no sector left unscathed

Brexit threatens to wreak havoc in many of Europe's biggest sectors, ... from fish supplies to greenhouse gas-cutting measures to student exchange programs.

29.03.2017

 Nature

Universities will never be the same after the coronavirus crisis

How virtual classrooms and dire finances could alter academia: part 1 in a series on science after the pandemic. Alexandra Witze. Alexandra Witze.

01.06.2020

1. Introduction

Research question

- How have Brexit and COVID-19 actually impacted HE internationalization policies in different country contexts?

Case selection

- England, France, and Germany: most internationalized European HE systems in terms the number of inbound international students
- Different types of HE systems: market-based (England), state-led (France), Humboldtian (Germany)

2. Theoretical framework: New institutionalism

Historical Institutionalism

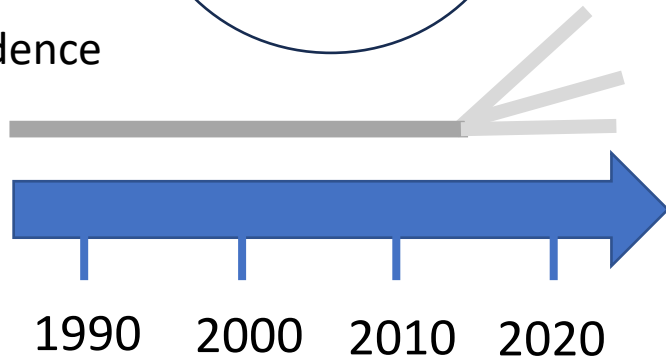


Exogenous shock, critical juncture



Gradual institutional change

Path dependence



2. Theoretical framework: New institutionalism

Historical Institutionalism



Sociological Institutionalism

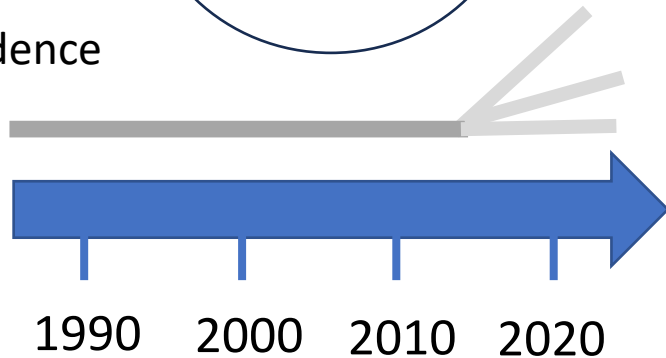


Exogenous shock, critical juncture



Gradual institutional change

Path dependence



Institutional dimensions

(Scott, 2008)

Regulative

Visa policies,
HE access,
Erasmus

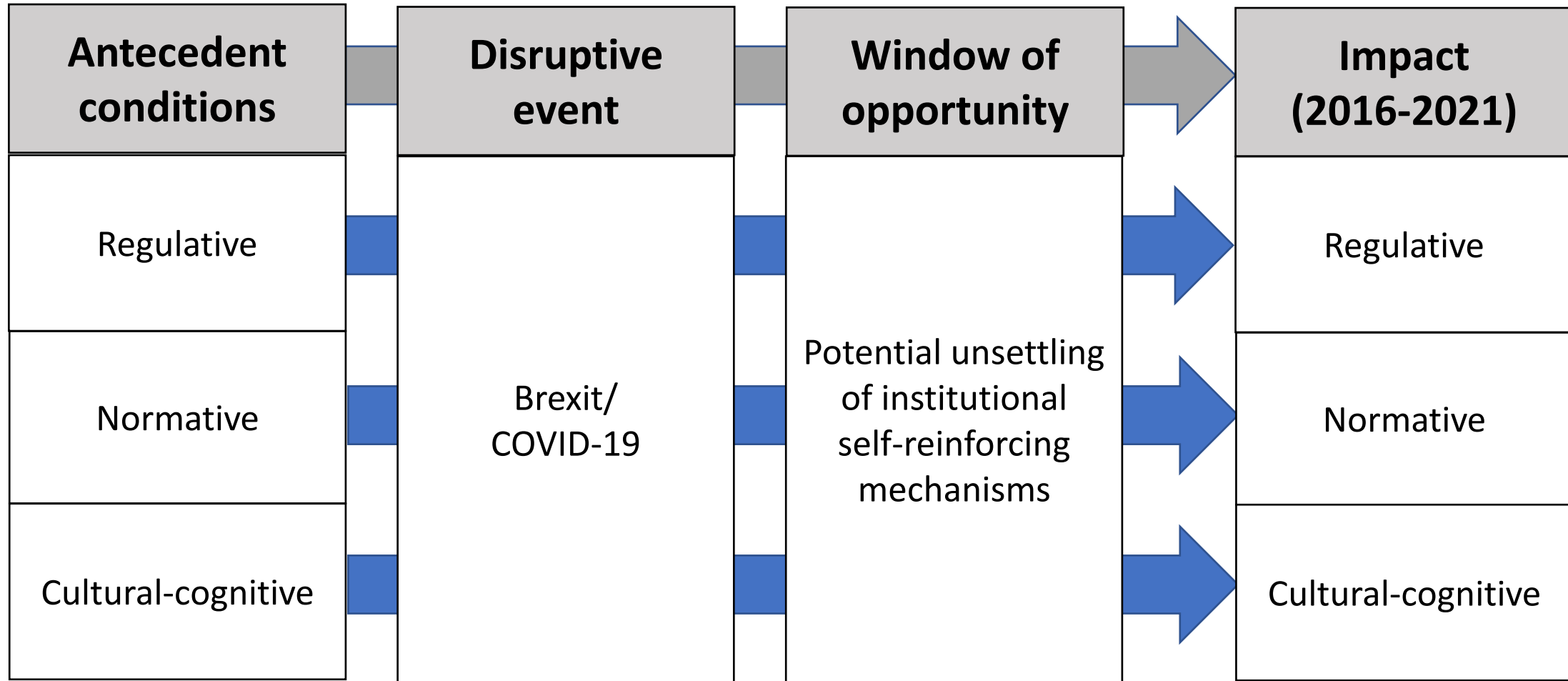
Normative

Common
values,
standards

Cultural-
cognitive

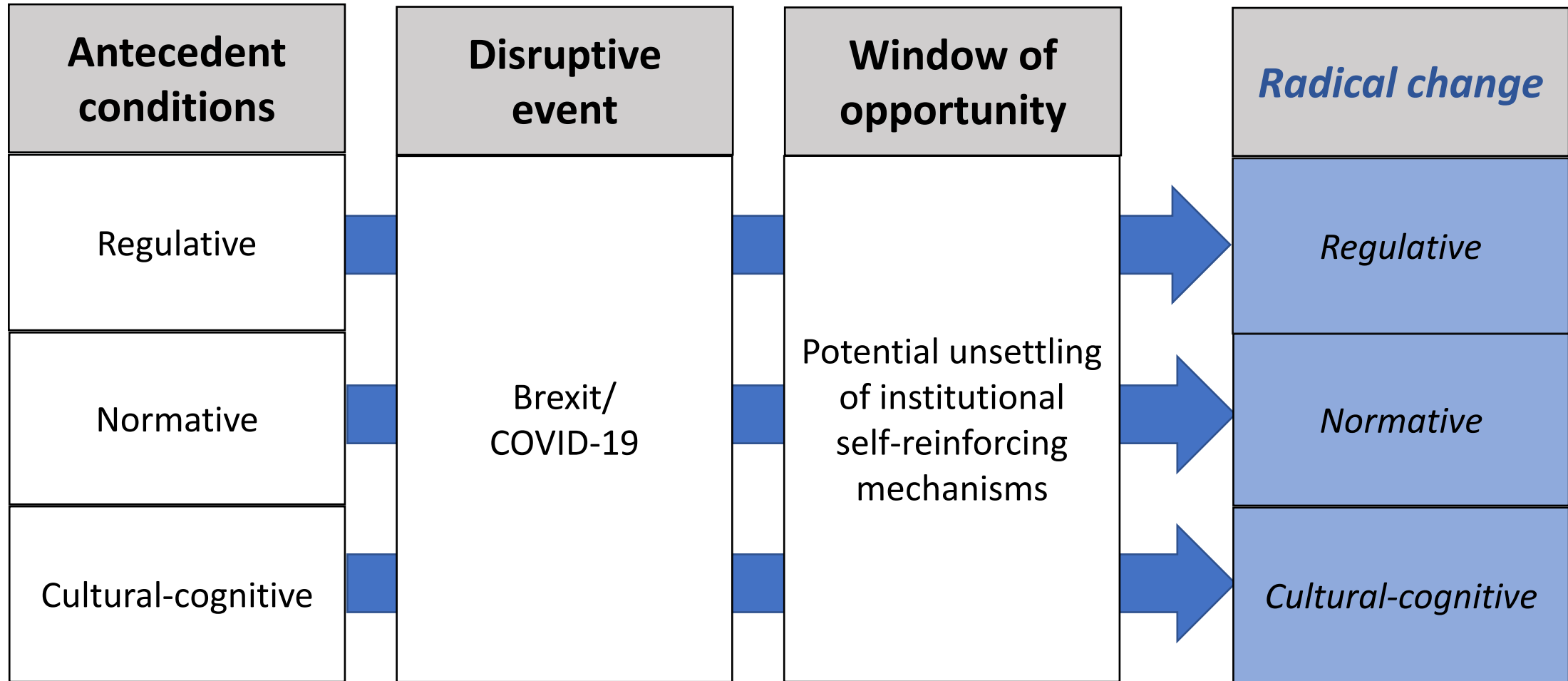
Taken-for-
granted
ideas

2. Analytical framework



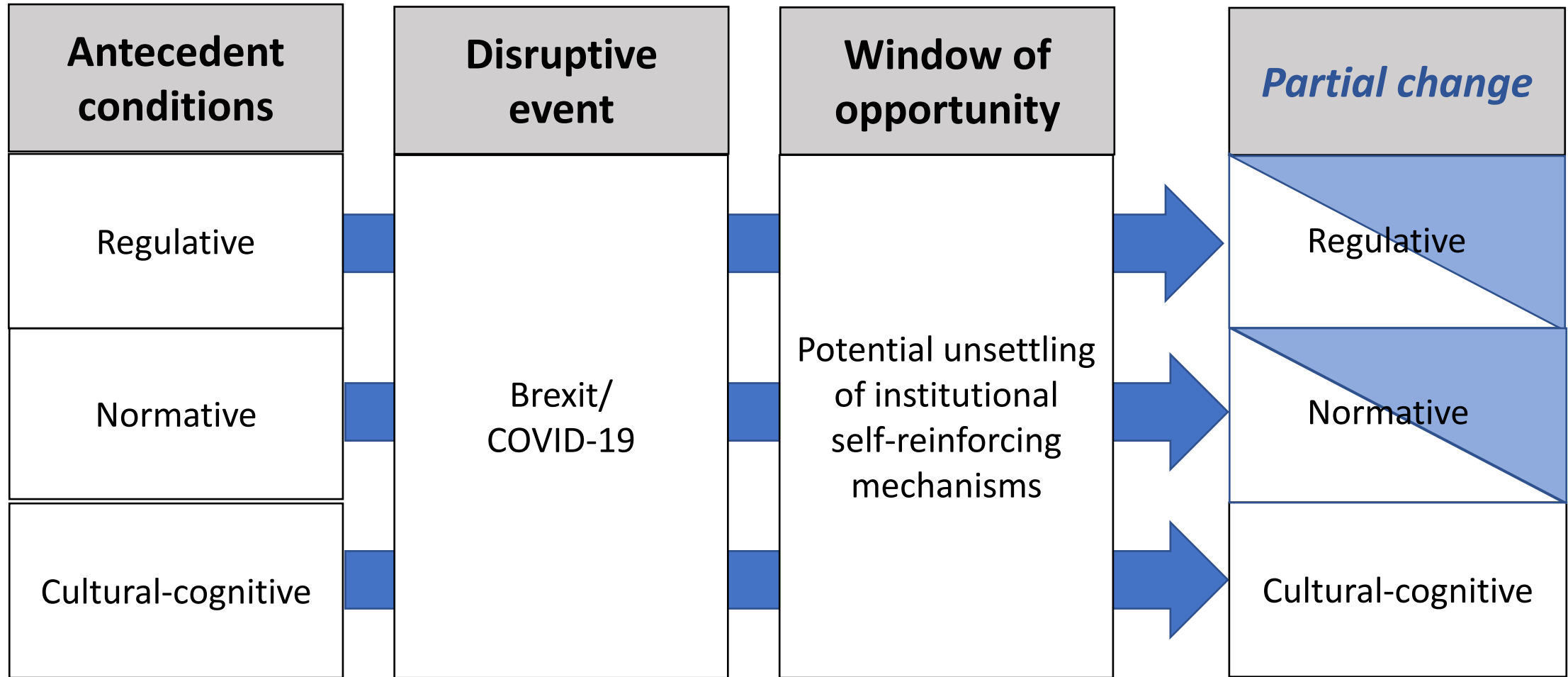
Source: Author's own depiction. Framework elements derived from a synthesis of Capoccia & Kelemen (2007), Collier & Munck (2017), Ebbinghaus (2005), Mahoney (2000), Scott (2008), and Soifer (2012).

Scenario 1: Radical change



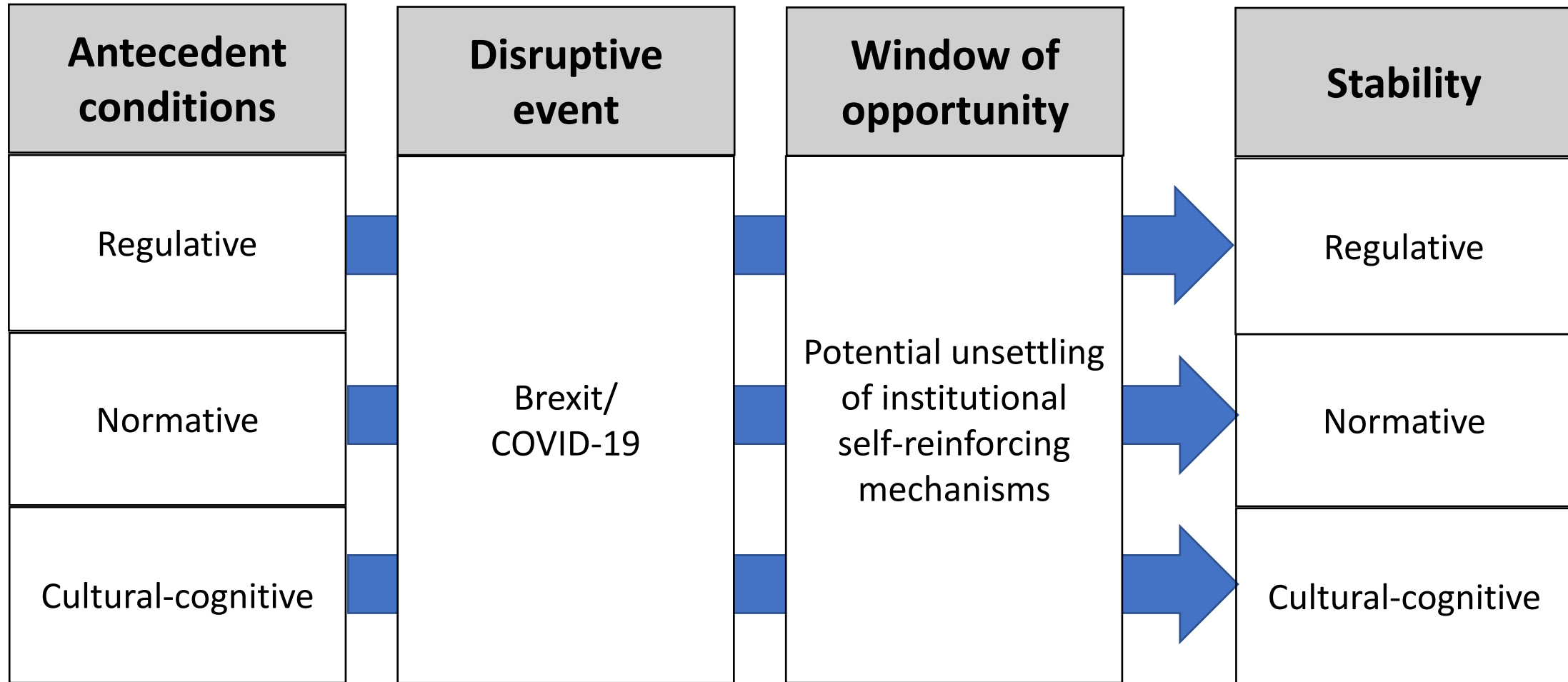
Blue = change
White = stability

Scenario 2: Partial change



Blue = change
White = stability

Scenario 3: Stability





Blue = change
White = stability

3. Data & Methods

- 44 expert interviews conducted virtually with Senior Internationalization Officers (university level) and policymakers (national level, e.g., DAAD, British Council, Campus France, education ministries) between Sept 2020 and Dec 2021
- Document analysis (n=234) (national/organizational strategies, policy briefs, press releases, news items)
- Qualitative content analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2019) using MAXQDA
- Triangulation with very limited available secondary literature

4.1 Findings: Brexit








	England: Partial change 		
Regulative	<i>Displacement of EU laws on HE, Erasmus</i> <i>Introduction of new regulations (EU visa, fees, Turing Scheme)</i>		
Normative	<i>Government push towards global commercial HE internationalization</i> <i>vs.</i> <i>HE organizations' reinforced commitment to EU partners</i> 		
Cultural-cognitive			




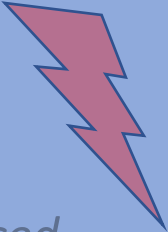


“[Brexit] was kind of a kick in the teeth because [...] the UK university sector was massively pro-European. I mean, we flew the EU flag for weeks after Brexit from the main building. And there was a letter from the UK Vice Chancellors to the government saying, 'Don't do it'. What we realized basically was that we hadn't been paying enough attention to our European partners because it was always taken for granted. [...] It's a problem we have in the UK with kind of exceptionalism that needs to be addressed.”

(ENG6)


	England: Partial change 		
Regulative	<i>Displacement of EU laws on HE access & immigration, Erasmus)</i> <i>Introduction of new regulations (EU visa, fees, Turing Scheme)</i>		
Normative	<i>Government push towards global commercial HE internationalization</i> <i>vs.</i> <i>HE organizations' reinforced commitment to EU partners</i> 		
Cultural-cognitive	British exceptionalism vs. European integration		



	England:  Partial change	France:  Partial change	
Regulative	<p><i>Displacement of EU laws on HE access & immigration, Erasmus)</i></p> <p><i>Introduction of new regulations (EU visa, fees, Turing Scheme)</i></p>	<p><i>Re-categorization of the UK to third country (visa requirement)</i></p>	
Normative	<p><i>Government push towards global commercial HE internationalization</i></p> <p>vs.</p> <p><i>HE organizations' reinforced commitment to EU partners</i></p> 	<p><i>Strengthened focus on intra-European student mobility</i></p> <p><i>Instigation of European Universities Initiative (EUI) by Emmanuel Macron</i></p>	
Cultural-cognitive	<p>British exceptionalism vs. European integration</p>	<p>European HE integration & collaboration</p>	

	England: Partial change 	France: Partial change 	Germany: Partial change 
Regulative	<p><i>Displacement of previous regulative frameworks (EU laws on HE access & immigration, Erasmus)</i></p> <p><i>Introduction of new regulations (EU visa, fees, Turing Scheme)</i></p>	<p><i>Reactive re-categorization of UK to third country (visa requirement)</i></p>	<p><i>Re-categorization of the UK to third country (residence permit requirement)</i></p>
Normative	<p><i>Government-led push towards global commercial HE internationalization</i></p> <p>vs.</p> <p><i>HE organizations' reinforced commitment to EU partners</i></p> 	<p><i>Strengthened focus on intra-European student mobility</i></p> <p><i>Instigation of European Universities Initiative (EUI) by Emmanuel Macron</i></p>	<p><i>Strengthened focus on intra-European student mobility</i></p> <p><i>Opportunism with regard to country's position on global HE market</i></p>
Cultural-cognitive	<p>Competing logics of British exceptionalism vs. European integration</p>	<p>European HE integration & collaboration</p>	<p>European HE integration & collaboration</p>

4.2 Findings: COVID-19






	England: Partial change 		
Regulative	Adherence to existing regulations, no financial support policies		
Normative	<i>Legitimization of “digital routes to market” (ENG3), i.e. online student recruitment</i>		
Cultural-cognitive	Market approach, little coordination/ collaboration across HE sector		

	England: Partial change 	France: Partial change 	
Regulative	Adherence to existing regulations, no financial support policies	<i>Introduction of regulations for online education</i> <i>Visa digitalization reform (as planned in 2018 Bienvenue en France Strategy)</i>	
Normative	<i>Legitimization of “digital routes to market” (ENG3), i.e. online student recruitment</i>	<i>Legitimization and acceleration of already planned digitalization reforms</i>	
Cultural-cognitive	Market approach, little coordination/ collaboration across HE sector	State-led collaborative HE internationalization	



“It’s evolution, not revolution in the internationalization.”
(FR11)

	England:  Partial change	France:  Partial change	Germany:  Partial change
Regulative	Adherence to existing regulations, no financial support policies	<i>Introduction of regulations for online education</i> <i>Visa digitalization reform (as planned in 2018 Bienvenue en France Strategy)</i>	<i>Introduction of regulations for online education</i>
Normative	<i>Legitimization of “digital routes to market” (ENG3), i.e. online student recruitment</i>	<i>Legitimization and acceleration of digitalization reforms</i>	<i>Legitimization and accelerated implementation of lagging digitalization reforms</i> <i>Virtual mobility as a systematic pillar of HE internationalization</i>
Cultural-cognitive	Liberal market approach, little coordination/ collaboration across HE sector	State-led collaborative HE internationalization	State-led collaborative HE internationalization with involvement of the academic community











“It was already planned. We had been quietly working on [the digitalization initiative] [...] And when COVID hit and the question was: What can we do now? We pulled it out of the drawer and said ‘Here it is’.

(GER9)

4.3 Brexit and COVID-19 compared

Institutional change patterns: Partial change

		Regulative	Normative	Cult.-cogn.
Brexit 	England 	X	X	
	France 	X	X	
	Germany 	X	X	
COVID-19 	England 		X	
	France 	X	X	
	Germany 	X	X	

5. Discussion

- The analysis found **no radical change** in any of the disruption-country combinations. This suggests that **the transformative impact of the disruptions was overestimated by contemporary witnesses.**
- The disruption-induced **acceleration of ongoing incremental change challenges** the classical theoretical **dichotomy** between **exogenously prompted critical junctures** and **endogenous actor-driven gradual institutional change.**

7. Outlook

Avenues for further research

- Analysis of further country cases (e.g., according to governance type, degree of HE internationalization, region-based), types of HE organizations, and other disruptive events
- Analytical framework could be applied to the same cases at a later point in time to investigate the stickiness of the institutional developments

For more detailed findings, check out my book 😊

Lohse, A.P. (2024). *Higher Education in an Age of Disruption*. Palgrave Macmillan.



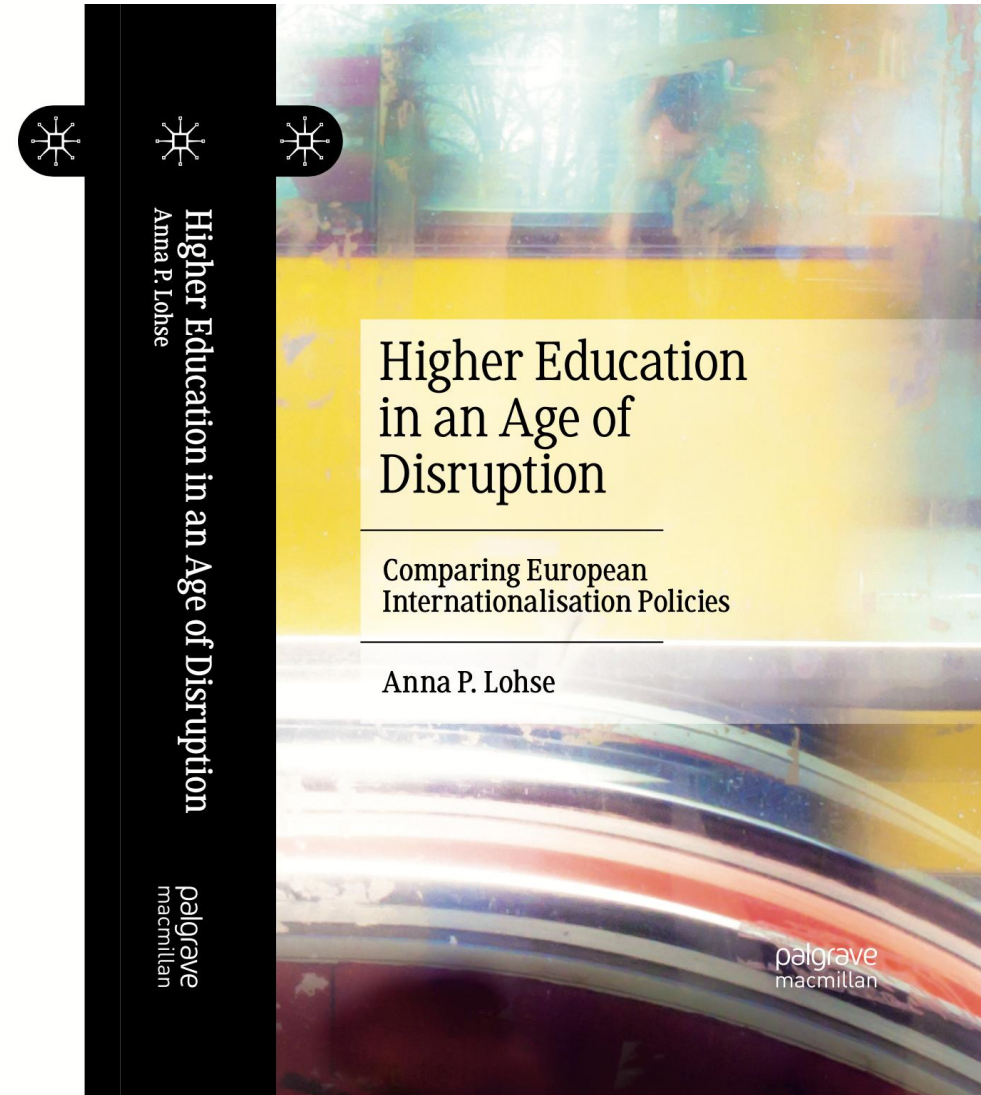
"This is a fascinating read. Based on meticulous cross-national research in England, France and Germany, it provides a detailed and original account of the impact of both Brexit and COVID-19 on processes of higher education internationalisation. It will be of interest to scholars across the social sciences, offering important insights into two key 'disruptions' of recent years."
—Rachel Brooks, Professor of Sociology, University of Surrey, UK

"At the nexus of higher education research and policy, Anna Lohse's book examines institutional change and stability in England, France, and Germany amid Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. This timely book offers significant theoretical and empirical insights, enriching our understanding of higher education and contemporary internationalisation policies in Europe. Lohse challenges conventional notions, uncovering different types and dynamics of change. Despite these disruptions, she identifies a surprising lack of radical institutional change. Lohse's book provides a better understanding of cross-border education and internationalisation for academics and important implications for policymakers and higher education stakeholders."
—Justin J. W. Powell, Professor of Sociology of Education, University of Luxembourg

This book investigates European higher education internationalisation policies during a period marked by extreme upheaval due to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. Situating her analysis at the intersection of higher education research and policy studies, the author combines historical and sociological institutionalism to investigate how this time of disruption impacted higher education policies in England, France and Germany. Based on extensive qualitative data derived from expert interviews and document analysis, the study offers timely insights into dynamics of institutional change and stability in higher education governance, as well as implications for the future of cross-border education and internationalisation. The book will appeal to academics and students interested in education policy and the internationalisation of higher education.

Anna P. Lohse is a postdoctoral researcher in Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education, Technical University Berlin, Germany.

palgrave
macmillan





2016



2020

Thank you for your attention!



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