Chapter 2
Developing Honors Education in Specific National Contexts

What exactly is an honors program and why are such programs developed? In this chapter we provide a working definition of an honors program and answer the question why honors programs are developed. We identify eight factors influencing the development of honors programs in a specific national context. These factors will be discussed and where possible, we will offer some basic statistics to facilitate characterization and comparison.

2.1 Defining Honors Programs

Defining an honors program is central for an inventory of such programs. Unfortunately, there is no simple definition. The American National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) has developed a list of 17 best practices that are common to successful honors programs and translated these into a set of 'Basic Characteristics of a Fully Developed Honors Program' (NCHC 2010). Not all these elements from the American context can be used for the (less-developed) European context,[1] but we have derived from the NCHC characteristics a number of basic requirements of an honors program, including the following:

- A clearly articulated set of admission criteria (e.g. Grade Point Average, a written essay, satisfactory progress, etc.) identifies the targeted student population served by the honors program. The program clearly specifies the requirements needed for retention and satisfactory completion;
- The program has a clear mandate from the institution's administration in the form of a mission statement or charter document that includes the objectives and responsibilities of honors;

[1] See Van Eijl et al. 2007, p. 71–72 for a list of main differences between American honors programs and Dutch honors programs.

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- The honors curriculum meets the needs of the students in the program and features special courses, seminars, colloquia, experiential learning opportunities, undergraduate research opportunities, or other independent-study options.

Based on these requirements, an honors program must be selective (compared to the regular program), have clear admission criteria, a clear goal and feature special educational opportunities.

In the Netherlands, a similar list of requirements was developed by a group of researchers in 2007 (Van Eijl et al. 2007, p. 106). In a 2012 article for the NCHC journal, the authors used the following definition for the Dutch context: 'honors programs are designed to offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than regular programs, and they are designed for motivated and gifted students who want more and have the capacity to do more than the regular' (Wolfensberger et al. 2012, p. 149–150).

Combining the NCHC characteristics and this definition, we use the following working definition in this book:

> Honors programs are selective study programs linked to higher education institutions. They are designed for motivated and gifted students who want to do more than the regular program offers. These programs have clear admission criteria and clear goals and offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than regular programs.

2.2 Types, Elements and Scales of Honors Programs

Honors programs exist in many different forms. Following Wolfensberger et al. (2012, p. 157), who made a typology based on their research in the Netherlands, we distinguish three types of honors programs:

1. Disciplinary programs, in which deepening the understanding of subjects, methodologies, and research within a discipline is the main goal;
2. Interdisciplinary programs, where the focus is on subjects and themes that include and go beyond different disciplines, and on interdisciplinary methodologies; and
3. Multidisciplinary programs, mostly in the form of liberal arts and sciences colleges, offering a full substitute for regular programs and a full honors bachelor's degree.

These different types of honors education are also aimed at different kinds of talented students. Some students excel in just one area, but others can (and will) develop themselves in many areas (Györi 2012, p. 222–223). It is also important to recognize that honors programs are by definition out-of-the-ordinary, and therefore not every program will fit in the above typology.

The Dutch experience shows that most honors programs are first developed in the bachelor or undergraduate phase of higher education. The Sirius Programme subsidies first only focused on the bachelor phase and were later expanded to include master programs as well. Currently in the Netherlands, various HEIs feature honors

programs during the master phase, while in the United States and most other countries honors is mostly focused at the undergraduate student-body. Consequently, little information is present about honors in the master phase of education (Van Ginkel and Van Eijl 2010).[2] In this study, we explored the development of programs at both bachelor and master level.

Apart from the different types of honors programs, there is also wide variation in the content and structure of the programs, as they are designed from the vision on excellence of each independent institution. To be able to discuss and check the quality of the programs of institutions, the Sirius compass has been developed within the Sirius Programme. The compass is based on the experiences of participating HEIs and available literature, offering a framework for discussion, analysis and quality assurance. The compass includes six areas of emphasis: vision on excellence, organization and governance, teachers, education chain and relations with the labor market, creating communities and the added value of the initiatives.[3] While research on excellence is not included as a separate element, it is envisioned to be implied in all six areas of the compass. Focus on all of these areas is needed in order to implement effective education to stimulate excellence.

Moving to the practical side of honors program, Van Eijl et al. (2007, p. 38–40) have developed a useful checklist containing 12 categories of different aspects of honors programs. These aspects include:

1. Mission/goals of the honors program
2. Program structure
3. Program content
4. Admission to program and target group (admission procedure/selection)
5. Honors teachers and their interaction with honors students
6. Further interaction within the honors program (formation of communities)
7. Feedback and assessment process in the honors program
8. Program size, position with respect to regular education and context
9. Reward (study results and reward for completion of program)
10. Evaluation (of the program)
11. Alumni (what are their future study/work careers)
12. Reception in the field (how is honors received in the fields of science, policy and business).

One aspect deserving extra attention concerns the position of an honors program in relation to the regular academic program. By definition, honors education is not an integral part of the regular academic program. But often, there is a close relationship to the regular program. In some cases, honors education takes shape as a direct extension of the regular program, for example by giving students extra

[2] Van Ginkel and Van Eijl made an overview of honors programs in the master in the Netherlands and also found some programs in other countries. They also recognized the lack of international information on the issue.

[3] See http://www.siriusprogramma.nl/publicaties/het-sirius-kompas#.VLGINnvGiK0 for more information (Dutch only).

challenges directly related to regular courses. In other cases, the relationship is less direct, but the goals of the honors program are still tied to the academic curriculum.

While in Europe 'extracurricular' is an often-used term for any activity outside the formal program, the American tradition distinguishes between co-curricular and extracurricular activities. While co-curricular activities have some form of relationship to academic learning, extracurricular activities are not tied to course content or academic learning (see for example Darling et al. 2005[4]). Examples of co-curricular activities include study travel, debate competitions and academic project work. Extracurricular activities are for example social events, community service or sports events. In this book, we will use these terms according to American tradition.

Honors education in all its forms takes shape at different spatial scales. We structure the chapters in this book by country, as this spatial scale is especially relevant to understand the context in which honors education does or does not take place. Insight in the entry requirements for higher education will be provided in the various country chapters.

We do recognize that not all honors education is organized at the national scale and that programs have different scales of appeal. Most programs are organized by HEIs, per faculty, department or subject. While some programs might be set up by a HEI wishing to get a certain advantage in a regional competition for the best students, other forms of honors education have an international appeal. Indeed, some honors education is organized transnationally. We will mention this where relevant, but for the main analysis we stick to the national scale.

2.3 Talented and Motivated

Eventually all honors programs are meant for students who are talented and motivated to do something extra. How to define and find these students is a difficult question. The target group depends on the goals of the specific program, but in general programs are meant for the 'best' students. How 'best' is defined, is a choice laden with moral, political and scientific arguments and also very dependent upon the local context. In countries with strong egalitarian traditions, it may be difficult to present a program as meant for 'the best' students. In other countries, it may be well-accepted to select students on basis of grades, but the question arises whether this is the best way to identify talented and motivated students. There is no agreement among scientists about the best way to select students for an honors program. There is also no international agreement on terminology use. The term 'honors' is widely used in the Netherlands, but has not (yet) found its way to most other countries in this book.

[4] Explanation of the terms co-curricular and extracurricular can also be found on the website edglossary.org/co-curricular.

We will discuss the culture towards excellence in the different countries, including local terminology; and we will mention admission criteria used for the individual programs found. Often local terminology is linked to gifted education programs in primary and secondary education and their identification criteria.[5] Therefore we will mention the existence of such programs and their terminology where applicable.

2.4 Reasons to Develop Honors Programs

Our definition of an honors program and our short discussion of the types, scales and target groups brings us to the next central question in this research: why are such programs developed?

Our starting point to answer this question is the Netherlands. According to Wolfensberger et al. (2012, p. 151[6]), all Dutch research universities were carrying out honors programs in their bachelor programs for four main reasons: first, the general trend of broadening of undergraduate programs which creates new opportunities for honors programs that allow for enrichment; second, an increased need for distinction among students in order to be admitted to prestigious masters; third, a new emphasis on talent in political discussions; and fourth, the momentum present because of the implementation of the (new) bachelor/master structure (ibid).[7] The reasons to develop honors programs can be used to identify more general factors influencing the question whether these programs are developed.

Other researchers have also identified such factors (see for example Györi and Nagy 2011).[8] Broadly speaking, these factors are either more ideological, or more institutional in nature. Ideological factors are closely related to national cultures and views on issues such as democracy and the organization of the civil society. These ideological factors translate into a specific organizational structure of the education system. This is the first of the institutional factors.

[5] See Eurydice 2006 for a European overview on terminology use.

[6] This article is an overview of Dutch honors programs for the Journal of the NCHC.

[7] Wolfensberger et al. concluded about the last reason that 'considering the forward position of the Netherlands in the introduction of the bachelor/master system and in the implementation of honors, honors programs are likely to spread to other European countries as they adopt the system'.

[8] Based on their review of talent support programs in nine countries, Györi and Nagy they concluded that 'many experts are of the opinion that the talent support options should be sensitive to the errors/deficiencies of society/the educational system, i.e. the components which may withhold non-average children from optimising their abilities. If mainstream education is not sensitive enough to individual differences, talent support must emphasise that aspect; if it cannot pay sufficient attention to personality or creativity development, then talent support programmes must stress that point'.

We identify eight factors influencing the development of honors programs in a specific national context. Moving from more ideological to more institutional factors, they are:

1. Culture towards excellence
2. Political views towards excellence
3. Educational philosophy
4. Structure and selectiveness of education system
5. Competition between institutions
6. Labor market conditions
7. National results in comparative research.

Finally, there is one factor that cannot be categorized as ideological or institutional:

8. Innovators and pioneers

In the remaining part of this chapter, we describe and explain these factors in more detail. While doing so, we also give some examples and/or relevant data regarding the specifics of these factors in the countries in this study.

2.4.1 Culture Towards Excellence

The culture towards talent, giftedness, excellence and other comparable concepts affects who is seen as talented or excellent (Freeman 2005), it shapes public discussion (see Laine 2010) and it reflects in the education system the values and talents that are considered important (Tirri 2007, p. 3). Therefore, it is very central to put a finger on the local culture in the countries studied. At the same time, this is very difficult because culture does usually not show in official documents and is hard to measure. Hofstede has tried to do this in his cultural dimensions theory, where systematic differences between national cultures were identified and partly expressed in numbers on four dimensions (Hofstede 1980), which was later expanded to six dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010). One useful element for this research is the power distance index, which can be defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Less power distance roughly translates into a more democratic and possibly egalitarian division of power.

Generally speaking, all countries in this book have some tradition of egalitarianism, especially compared to the USA. There are significant differences between the countries, however. The Nordic countries traditionally have the strongest egalitarian tradition (Persson et al. 2000; Persson 2009). In this culture, it is more difficult to talk about excellence than in countries where the education system focuses on the individual student. A supportive culture towards excellence enables teachers and students to stand out. The culture towards excellence within an HEI is often related

to the national culture towards talent development and excellence. We will elaborate on this factor in each individual country chapter and will summarize results in the concluding part.

2.4.2 Political Views Towards Excellence

The countries in this book have different state forms and political systems. There are also vast differences in the political organization of the education system, including legal provisions for differentiation in education and governmental (financial) support for talent development programs. Political views towards excellence can change over time and are most likely to change around elections. Talent development can be part of an economic agenda, for example to prioritize top sectors in order to keep up in a competitive international environment. Some countries clearly focus on a knowledge economy and therefore focus on an excellent education system. Talent development can also be part of a government's social agenda: giving maximum opportunities to all students, regardless of gender, socio-economic background or place of birth (migrant status) (Györi and Nagy 2011, p. 233).

There are regional differences in the extent of the influence of politics on education. This is closely related to the issue of scale. Education legislation in the Benelux and German-speaking countries tends to be inclusive. This means it contains general formulations on the rights of all children to adequate education, implying special provisions for the most able. The German-speaking countries are all federal or confederational and a lot of power is in the hands of the states and the cantons respectively. Regional differences in education policies exist and local politicians favoring excellence can make an impact. The Nordic countries have a more centralized form of government. Here, room for local initiatives is limited. There is a strict notion of 'equality and social collectivism at all levels of society', effectively hindering the development of honors programs (Persson 2009, p. 3–4).

2.4.3 Educational Philosophy

The traditions and culture of a country are reflected in its educational philosophy. This starts with the importance attached to education in general. One indicator for this importance is the public expenditure on education as a percentage of the country's GDP. Results are presented in Table 2.1.

In the Nordic countries and Denmark and Norway in particular, government is prepared to spend a large amount of money on education in general and tertiary education in particular. This willingness is connected to the specific culture regarding the goals of education.

Table 2.1 Public expenditure on education as % of GDP, 2010 (OECD 2013a, p. 218)

Country	All levels of education	Tertiary education
OECD average	*5.8*	*1.4*
Austria	5.9	1.6
Belgium	6.6	1.5
Denmark	8.8	2.4
Finland	6.8	2.2
Germany	n/a	n/a
Iceland	7.6	1.6
Luxembourg	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	6.0	1.7
Norway	8.8	2.6
Sweden	7.0	2.0
Switzerland	5.2	1.3

These goals are also closely related to the room offered to talent development programs. In equal opportunity cultures there is usually more room for talent development than in egalitarian cultures (Moon and Rosselli 2000; Mattsson 2013). As Swedish researcher Mattsson states: 'In an *equal opportunity philosophy* the emphasis is on meeting the individual needs of different students. Regardless of background the students should have equal access to opportunities to develop their abilities and interests. Within an *egalitarian philosophy* on the other hand, education aims at creating similar outcomes for all students by providing all students the same educational experience' (Mattsson 2013, p. 7).

One way to measure the outcome of this philosophical choice is by using indicators for 'equity in education'. This is measured in the OECD program PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).[9] In the PISA reports, scores of 15-year olds on standardized tests in a large number of countries are presented every 3 years since 2000. All 11 countries in this study take part in PISA and the results are taken very seriously (more about PISA in general in Sect. 2.4.7 below).

In the PISA report, equity in education is defined as providing all students, regardless of gender, family background or socio-economic status, with opportunities to benefit from education. This does not imply that everyone should have the same results. It does mean, however, that students' socio-economic status or the fact that they have an immigrant background has little or no impact on their performance, and that all students, regardless of their background, are offered access to quality educational resources and opportunities to learn.[10] In the PISA report, equity scores for countries are calculated, mostly based on the pupils' mathematics scores. A low percentage of variance in mathematics performance explained by socio-economic status (see Table 2.2) points to more equity in education (OECD 2013b, p. 16).

[9] Publication of the PISA report is organized by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

[10] Full explanation and all data can be found in OECD 2013b.

Table 2.2 Equity in education in PISA 2012 (OECD 2013b, p. 15)

Country	Mathematics mean score	Percentage of variance in mathematics performance explained by socio-economic status
OECD average	*494*	*14.6*
Austria	506	15.8
Belgium	515	15.0
Denmark	500	16.5
Finland	519	9.4
Germany	514	16.9
Iceland	493	7.7
Luxembourg	490	18.3
Netherlands	523	11.5
Norway	489	7.4
Sweden	478	10.6
Switzerland	531	12.8

Overall, Finland is considered by the OECD to score best among the countries in this study, with both a high mean score and a low percentage of variance explained by socio-economic background. Norway and Iceland score best when looking just at the socio-economic variable, followed by Sweden, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

A 'good' score on the equity variable is probably welcome in a country with an egalitarian philosophy. But the equity score says little about the relationship between the educational philosophy and talent development. There is also another score, called 'resilience' by OECD. This is defined as the 'percentage of disadvantaged students who perform among the top 25 % of students across all participating countries and economies, after accounting for socio-economic status'. Basically, a high score means that many students 'beat the odds' and score better than could be expected of them because of their background. Resilience scores in PISA 2012 are shown in Table 2.3 and compared to the scores in PISA 2003. A negative trend means the percentage of resilient students has dropped between 2003 and 2012.

Interestingly, scores are well below the OECD average for all the Nordic countries (except Finland), while the egalitarian educational philosophy in these countries is supposed to promote resilience. The scores are therefore subject to public and political debate in these countries. Finland is also worried. It still scores above average, but has seen the largest drop in the percentage of resilient students among the countries included in this research (−3.3 %). Switzerland scores highest on resilient students and has an upward trend since 2003. Germany has the strongest upward trend, with the score rising 1.3 % to an above-average 7.5 %. The Netherlands scores well above average, but has a downward trend.

All in all, an educational philosophy is difficult to define and hard to measure. However, in the country chapters we will try to indicate the basic ideas and traditions regarding education, before discussing the specific form of the resulting education system.

Table 2.3 Resilience in education in PISA 2012 and change since PISA 2003 (OECD 2013b, figure II.2.2)

Country	Percentage of resilient students, 2012	Trends in the percentage of resilient students, 2003–2012
OECD average	*6.5*	*–0.3*
Austria	6.2	–0.6
Belgium	8.1	–0.2
Denmark	5.0	–1.8
Finland	8.2	–3.3
Germany	7.5	1.3
Iceland	5.3	–1.7
Luxembourg	6.1	–0.1
Netherlands	8.7	–1.8
Norway	5.4	1.1
Sweden	4.4	–2.9
Switzerland	10.0	0.7

2.4.4 Structure and Selectiveness of Education System

We now move to more institutional factors. This includes the level of differentiation in primary and secondary education, the selectiveness of higher education in general and admission requirements and tuition fees in particular.

Over the past few decades, the dominant norm governing access to European HEIs was that of providing equal opportunities. A good education should be accessible to everyone. However, starting points are not the same for all students, as some come from less privileged backgrounds. The 'equal opportunity' view therefore usually acknowledges the idea that 'merit-based admission needs to be augmented by some form of affirmative action' (Clancy and Goastellec 2007, p. 139), in order to ensure that the national elite in terms of education is drawn from all social classes. In other words, special measures are taken to promote equity in education. How this works out in admission procedures, depends on national traditions. The view towards the desired level of selectiveness of higher education can also change over time. Over the last few decades, access to higher education has become available to many more Europeans and in some countries, this has led to an explosive growth of the higher education sector (see also Sect. 2.4.5). This might necessitate a change in the organizational structure of the system. Especially in such times of change, the development of honors programs might be facilitated. Honors programs can also serve another purpose in the wider higher education system. Evidence from the Netherlands shows that honors programs 'have functioned as laboratories of educational innovation within university-wide curricula and had positive spin-off effects on the regular curriculum and also on the transfer of talented students from secondary into higher education' (Wolfensberger et al. 2012, p. 149).

Another process influencing the structure of education systems is the Bologna Process. Throughout Europe, the Bologna Declaration (1999) has led to great changes in the structure of higher education. In different countries, governments

have seen the Bologna Process 'as a tool to challenge extremely strong national or, as in Germany, regional structures in the university system' (Culver and Warfvinge 2013, p. 11). This is also relevant to the development of honors programs. As the structure had to be changed anyway, the opportunity was sometimes seized to develop honors education, especially in the Netherlands.

An important goal of the Bologna Process has been to increase the transparency of the credit system, now measured in the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). The credits that can be earned are generally referred to as ECTS credits. Usually students can earn 60 ECTS per academic year.

Another very important part of the Bologna Process is the harmonization of the qualification system in the so-called three-tier system. In this system, there are three cycles of higher education. The first is a bachelor phase, the second a master phase and the third a Ph.D. phase. The three-tier system has now been introduced in all countries in this book, but it is not spread in a uniform manner. The traditional national views about starting qualifications on the labor market are still strong. In some countries students are considered ready with a bachelor diploma, while in others it is highly unusual to leave higher education without a master diploma. This is shown in Table 2.4.

In countries such as Austria and Denmark, it is traditionally highly unusual to enter the labor market with a bachelor's degree. Most students continue into a master program. In other countries, such as Norway, a bachelor degree is seen as a good starting qualification on the labor market. Here, continuing in a master program is seen as selective. From a Norwegian point of view, this might lessen the 'need' to develop (selective) honors programs at this level. In the country chapters, the structure of the national education system will be described and the impact of this structure on the room for excellence in general and honors programs in particular will be discussed.

Table 2.4 Progression of students in higher education (European Higher Education Authority country reports 2012)

Country	% of bachelor graduates continuing in master[a]	% of master graduates continuing in Ph.D.
Austria	83 %[b]	34 %
Belgium (Flemish community)	25–50 %	8–10 %
Belgium (French community)	25–50 %	n/a
Denmark	84.5 %	11 %
Finland	50–75 %	n/a
Germany	50–75 %	n/a
Iceland	10–25 %	<10 %
Luxembourg	75–100 %	n/a
Netherlands	10–25 %	12 %
Norway	23 %	14 %
Sweden	25–50 %	6 %
Switzerland	50–75 %	20 %

[a]Within 2 years of graduation from bachelor program
[b]Percentage for public universities

2.4.5 *Competition Between Institutions*

In many countries, funding education institutions is based on student numbers, which means there is an incentive to attract more students. From this point of view, the promotion of excellence can be framed as a central strategy that will help HEIs to prosper in an increasingly open and competitive environment (Frølich and Stensaker 2010, p. 359).

Among the countries in this book, there are huge differences in the (development of) participation of the population in higher education (see Fig. 2.1 and Map 2.1), although they have all experienced growth between 2002 and 2011.

The selectiveness of entry is a relevant factor. This may be due to high admission standards, restricted numbers of student seats and/or tuition fees. We will see how recruitment and admission is organized in the country chapters and come back to this issue in the concluding chapters.

In some countries participation in tertiary education has increased enormously over the last decade. Data are shown in Table 2.5.

In all countries, participation rates have gone up, but significant differences exist. Austria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Iceland and Switzerland have seen increases of 40 % or more, while in Finland and Norway the proportion of students hardly changed (see UNESCO 2011).[11] The exact reasons for the increase in participation rates fall beyond the scope of this book. However, in general, countries strive to get a highly-educated population and changes can be the result of political decisions.

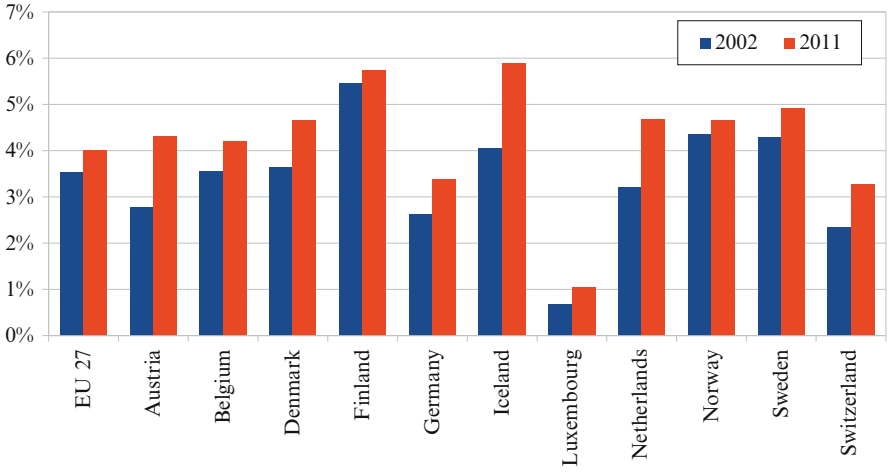
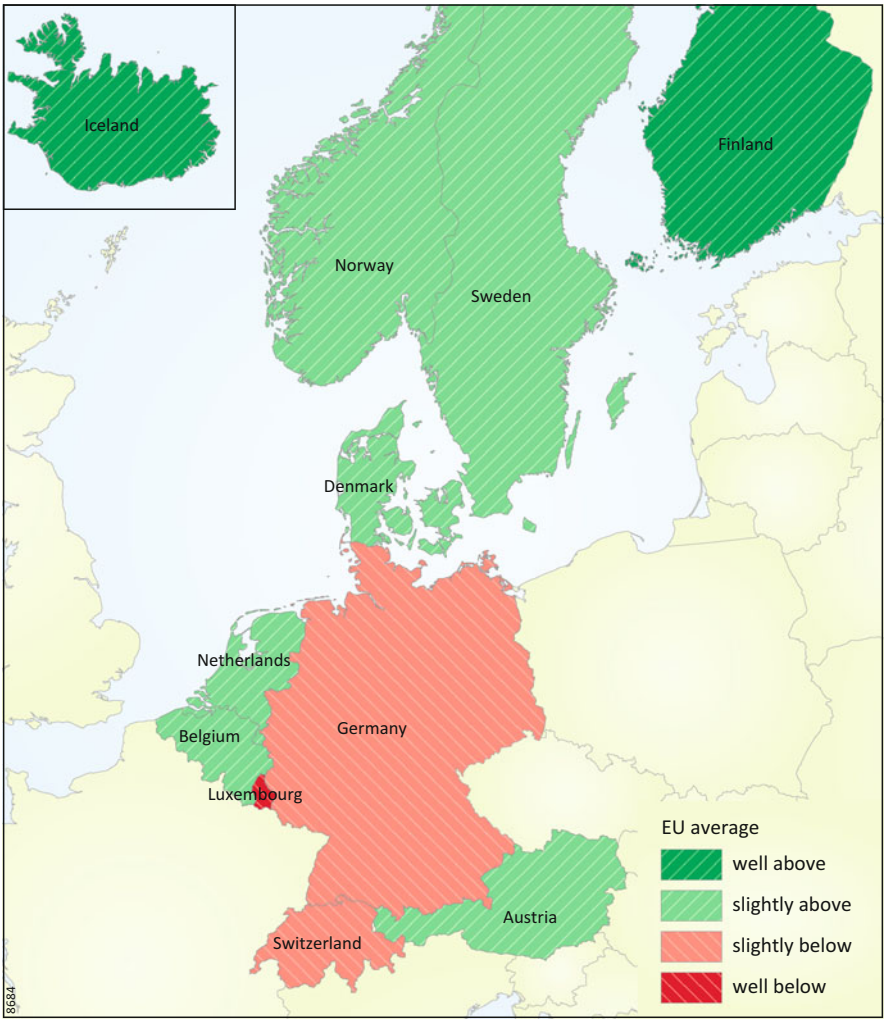


Fig. 2.1 Population in tertiary education (ISCED 5–6) as % of total population, 2002–2011 (Eurostat 2014, own calculation)

[11] Please note that tertiary education is defined as ISCED level 5–6, which includes bachelor/master/Ph. D. education, but also short-cycle tertiary education that is more practical in nature.



Map 2.1 Participation in tertiary education as % of total population, 2011, compared to EU average (Eurostat 2014)

Opposing views of higher education as elite education or mass education can be the subject of intense debate. Mass participation in higher education may increase the need for differentiation within higher education and thus foster the start of honors programs.

Another relevant set of data with respect to the competition between HEIs is its performance on international rankings, such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities Top 500, better known as the Shanghai list and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. While mostly based on research performance, these rankings are also used by HEIs in marketing efforts to attract new

Table 2.5 Growth in participation in tertiary education (ISCED 5–6), 2002–2011 (Eurostat 2014, own calculation)

Country	Growth in participation in tertiary education, 2002–2011 (corrected for population growth) (%)
EU average (27 countries)	*13.4*
Austria	55.2
Belgium	18.1
Denmark	28.0
Finland	5.0
Germany	29.0
Iceland	45.8
Luxembourg	56.2
Netherlands	45.9
Norway	7.2
Sweden	14.5
Switzerland	39.7

students. A university with excellent results on such a ranking, can adopt a strategy to attract excellent students more easily. International comparative research also makes an impact at the national level. This will be discussed below under factor 7. There, we also provide more details about university rankings.

2.4.6 Labor Market Conditions

The economic crisis of the last few years has made an impact on all the countries in this book, but the picture is varied. Norway – with large oil reserves – has been able to keep a low unemployment rate, while in countries such as Belgium and the Netherlands unemployment has risen significantly.[12]

Skills that are valued on the labor market differ per country and over time. Of course institutions operate in an economic reality, which means they will take account of their students' chances on the labor market after they finish their studies. Governments have labor market strategies to ensure the best match between the education system and labor market demands is made. In unfavorable labor market conditions, students themselves can also experience an increased need to stand out from the crowd. Economic conditions and strategies to deal with these conditions are relevant for honors programs. For example, HEIs can seek close cooperation with the private sector to prepare students for 'the real world'. Companies can also take the initiative to cooperate with successful institutions and seek direct contact with talented students. This is especially the case in sectors and economic conditions where talent is scarce and a 'war for talent' is raging, as it was called in a 2001

[12] Data on GDP per capita and unemployment rates were presented in table 3.1.

American book.[13] Labor market conditions can differ between regions and countries and honors education can also be developed as a measure to prevent regional or national 'brain drain'. In problematic labor markets both institutions and students might feel more urgency to be exceptional and have talents recognized. Situations where the educational system and the labor market situation do not match can provide an incentive to develop and participate in honors programs.

Also, some programs heavily rely on the private sector. Funding from this sector can be important for the development of talent programs, but this can get endangered in times of crisis. There can even be a direct relationship between honors education and sectoral development on the labor market: if a certain sector performs poorly, sectoral support for an honors program can be withdrawn as a budget cutback measure.

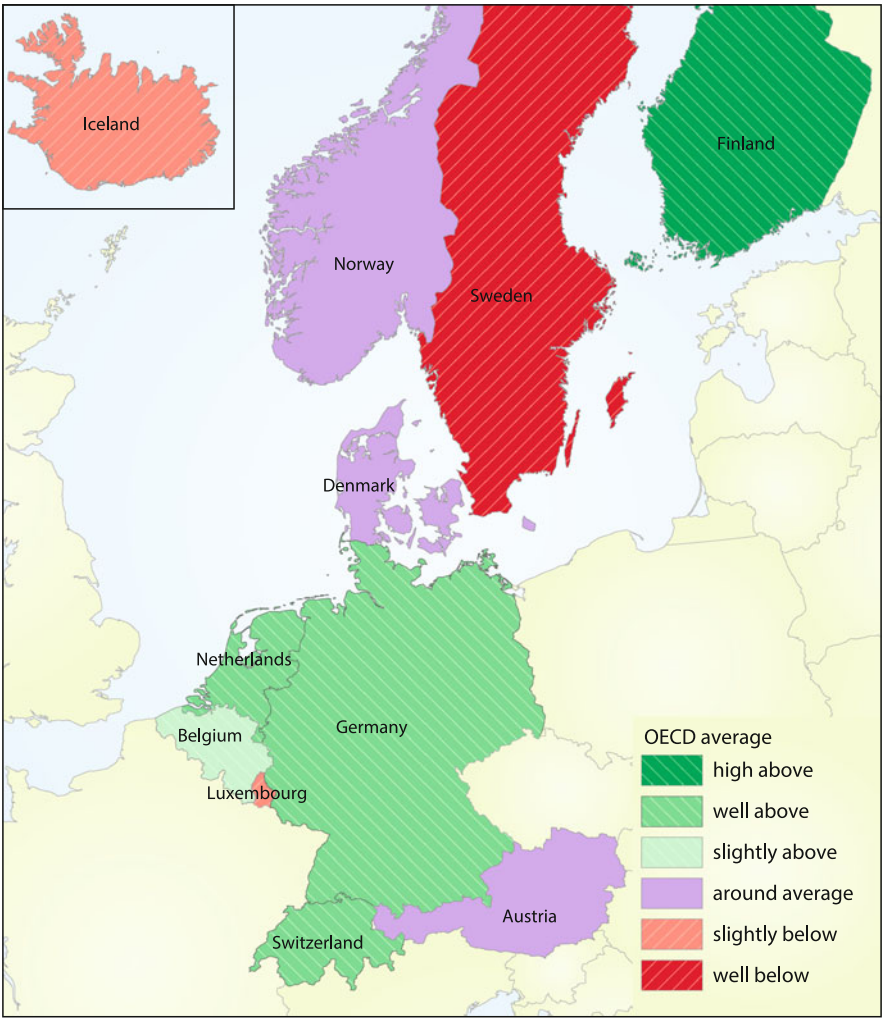
2.4.7 National Results in Comparative Research

Evaluation of educational achievements in international rankings is important for individual HEIs, as seen in our discussion of competition between HEIs (factor 5) above. But results in comparative research are also very relevant at the national level. Negative developments in high-regarded comparative education reports can be an incentive for change. The performance of national education systems is assessed in different ways. A number of international comparative rankings are well-known in both academic and public debates. For secondary education, the best-known report is OECD's PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).[14] All the countries in this book take part in PISA, which examines 15-year-old's performance in three subjects: mathematics, reading and science. The 2012 results, which were released early December 2013, are presented on Map 2.2. Details of scores in the 2012 report and a comparison with results from the 2003 report are shown in Table 2.6.

From the PISA results, it immediately becomes clear that Sweden is not doing well. It now has the lowest scores in all subjects and has dropped from fifth to last place among the 11 countries in this study. Iceland and Luxembourg are also below the OECD average in all subjects, and Norway in mathematics and science. Especially in Sweden this has led to intense discussion in media and among politicians about ways to improve results. One way would be to make the education system more 'open' to excellence initiatives. Finland, the Netherlands and Switzerland have good overall scores in all subjects. Still, the Finnish scores raise concern in the country: although it maintains its top position among the 11 countries in this research, scores have dropped significantly since 2003. In the Netherlands, deeper analysis of the scores shows that relatively few students reach the highest

[13] The book 'The war for talent' by Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones and Beth Axelrod was released in 2001 by Harvard University Press and was heavily debated in the following years.

[14] Publication of this report is organized by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For more explanation, see factor 2 above.



Map 2.2 PISA scores 2012, compared to OECD average (Country score is calculated by adding PISA scores in maths, science and reading and comparing them to the OECD average of 1,491) (OECD 2013b)

scores. This was cause of concern for the government and one of the reasons to develop new policies to stimulate talented children in primary and secondary education (see Rijksoverheid 2014). Finally, Germany has shown the greatest improvement in scores between 2003 and 2012.

Moving to higher education, research university performance is calculated in different international rankings. We use two of the best-known rankings to give an indication of the performance of the countries' university system: first, the Academic Ranking of World Universities Top 500, better known as the Shanghai list (ARWU 2013); and second, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2014).

Table 2.6 Educational performance in PISA, 2003–2012 (calculations based on OECD 2004, 2013a, b, Education GPS)

Country	PISA scores, 2012[a]	PISA rank, 2012[b]	PISA scores, 2003	PISA rank, 2003	Change in scores, 2003–2012[c]
OECD average	*494 + 496 + 501*	–	*499 + 494 + 496*	–	*+2*
Austria	506 + 490 + 506	6	506 + 491 + 491	8	+14
Belgium	515 + 509 + 505	5	529 + 507 + 509	3	−16
Denmark	500 + 496 + 498	7	514 + 492 + 475	9	+13
Finland	519 + 524 + 545	1	544 + 543 + 548	1	−47
Germany	514 + 508 + 524	4	503 + 491 + 502	7	+50
Iceland	493 + 483 + 478	10	515 + 492 + 495	6	−48
Luxembourg	490 + 488 + 491	9	493 + 479 + 483	11	−14
Netherlands	523 + 511 + 522	2	538 + 513 + 524	2	−19
Norway	489 + 504 + 495	8	495 + 500 + 484	10	+9
Sweden	478 + 483 + 485	11	509 + 514 + 506	5	−83
Switzerland	531 + 509 + 515	3	527 + 499 + 513	4	+16

[a]PISA score = maths score + reading score + science score in PISA 2012
[b]PISA rank = Rank among 11 countries in this study based on added total of scores. This is only an indication of a country's relative score
[c]Change in scores is calculated by taking the added total of 2012 scores and subtracting the added total of 2003 scores. This is only an indication of a country's relative performance

Main difference is that the Shanghai ranking is mostly based on quantitative research data (such as publication statistics), while the Times ranking makes use of a broader set of data. While focus in the Times list is still on the universities' research performance, 30 % of a university's score is based on teaching performance.[15] Results are shown in Table 2.7.

From the scores, it is clear that most research universities in the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium are included in the Top 500. The percentage of universities reaching the Top 400 or 500 is less 'overall good' for other countries. The rankings give little information about the quality of teaching at the universities and do not include universities of applied sciences, but still these rankings are usually taken very seriously by policy makers in both HEIs and governments.

2.4.8 Innovators and Pioneers

The effect of individual efforts is a highly relevant factor for the development of honors programs, in fact pioneers and innovators play a key role in the initiation of programs. Early adapters in higher education staff are needed to start the development of a program. These pioneering talent support actors are often idealistically

[15] See ARWU 2013 and Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2014 for more details about the methodology behind these rankings.

Table 2.7 Performance of research universities in university rankings per country (ARWU 2013; Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2014; Eurydice 2014)

Country	No. of research universities	Entries in top 500, 2013 Shanghai list	Highest rank on Shanghai list	Entries in top 400, Times list	Highest rank on Times list
Austria	22	7	151–200 (Vienna)	6	170 (Vienna)
Belgium	11	7	85 (Ghent)	7	61 (KU Leuven)
Denmark	8	4	42 (Copenhagen)	5	117 (DTU)
Finland	14	5	76 (Helsinki)	5	100 (Helsinki)
Germany	106	38	50 (TU Munich)	26	55 (LMU Munich)
Iceland	7[a]	–	–	1	251–275 (Iceland)
Luxembourg	1	–	–	–	–
Netherlands	14	12	52 (Utrecht)	13	67 (Leiden)
Norway	8	4	69 (Oslo)	4	185 (Oslo)
Sweden	14	11	44 (Karolinska)	10	36 (Karolinska)
Switzerland	12	7	20 (ETH Zurich)	8	14 (ETH Zurich)

[a]In Iceland no differentiation is made between different types of higher education

motivated and 'seem to be fully aware of their *social responsibility* concerning the fate of talented individuals' (Györi and Nagy 2011, p. 232). While efforts of dedicated individuals are necessary to develop honors programs, this is impossible to find in statistics. This factor will therefore be discussed in the country chapters where relevant.

2.5 Discussion

The eight factors discussed above not only influence the development of honors programs. Partly, they also shape the forms these programs might take. But participating students and staff also play an important role in the specific form a program takes. Also, programs usually develop and change over time. The reasons for students to join honors education may be related to the factors above, but students can also have many other motives, such as the desire to undertake a personal challenge or simply a personal interest in the subject matter. These motives are an interesting research topic, but as we focus on finding and describing programs, this falls outside the scope of this study.

We will now start to discuss the situation in the individual countries. However, first we need to make one more general remark. The reasons to develop a program not always become clear in official documents issued by the organizing HEI. Mission statements are often written after the start of a program, and strongly reflect the desired outcomes of the program rather than the (practical) reasons to start the program. In a review of mission statements of honors programs in the USA, Bartelds et al. also found that 'a connection between mission statement, performance indicators, and program assessment is not clearly visible' (Bartelds et al. 2012, p. 141).

Their lesson for other countries is that they 'might do well to build such an alignment into the design of their programs' (ibid). We will see in the coming chapters if this is the case in Europe and come back to this issue in the concluding part.

However, before moving to the specific national contexts, we will first explain the methods used in this study and the limitations in the next chapter.

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[16] ***Note:*** *Literature used to prepare this book is included on this list. Some of the entries are in local languages and have not been read completely by the researchers. Instead, they have been searched with keywords to retrieve relevant information.*

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