Received: 04.10.2025
Revised: 18.11.2025
Accepted: 15.12.2025
Published: 19.12.2025

The Politics of Academic Legitimacy: Governance and Epistemic Justice in Poland and Romania

Anna BECKER•, Florin D. SALAJAN••

Abstract

This article examines how higher education governance in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe functions as an epistemic regime, shaping which forms of knowledge are legitimized and which are marginalized. Focusing on Poland and Romania, it traces continuities from socialist-era ideological control to post-1989 reforms framed around modernization, internationalization, and competitiveness. While such reforms dismantled overt political censorship, they introduced new exclusions through managerialism, bibliometric evaluation, and the dominance of English in scholarly publishing. Historical case studies, including the suppression of intellectual traditions under socialism and the marginalization of national-language scholarship in the contemporary period, illustrate how governance mechanisms act as 'epistemic filters.' Drawing on decolonial and critical epistemology frameworks, the analysis foregrounds the persistence of disregarded epistemologies, locally rooted, interdisciplinary, and community-oriented forms of knowledge excluded from institutional recognition. The paper argues that addressing epistemic injustice in CEE universities requires rethinking evaluative infrastructures, fostering multilingual and regionally relevant scholarship, and recovering marginalized intellectual traditions. By linking governance structures to the politics of knowledge, the study contributes to debates on epistemic justice in comparative education and calls for governance models that embrace plurality, linguistic diversity, and the democratization of academic legitimacy.

Keywords: academic legitimacy; governance; epistemic justice; Poland; Romania

• Assistant Professor, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, anna.becker@ispan.edu.pl
•• Professor, North Dakota State University, Fargo ND, USA, florin.salajan@ndsu.edu

Introduction

In the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, higher education has long served as a site of ideological negotiation, political control, and, increasingly, global adaptation (Gawlicz & Starnawski, 2018). Since the collapse of state socialism, universities in countries such as Poland and Romania have undergone far-reaching reforms intended to democratize governance, align institutional structures with European standards, and increase global competitiveness (Dobbins, 2017; Kwiek, 2012). These reforms, framed in terms of modernization, efficiency, and internationalization, have been well documented in the comparative education literature (e.g., Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007; Donina & Jaworska, 2024). However, less attention has been paid to their *epistemic* consequences: how governance reforms shape what counts as legitimate knowledge, which traditions are institutionalized or marginalized, and whose voices are authorized within the academic field.

This article examines the entanglement of governance and epistemic marginalization in post-socialist higher education through a comparative analysis of Poland and Romania. Building on case studies developed in Becker et al. (forthcoming) and Glava et al. (forthcoming), and extending the theoretical insights of decolonial and critical epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2014; Fricker, 2007; Connell, 2007), we argue that governance structures function not merely as administrative frameworks but as epistemic regimes. They allocate institutional visibility and legitimacy to particular forms of knowledge while excluding others, especially those rooted in local, interdisciplinary, or historically suppressed traditions. Although the analysis draws on historically grounded examples from Poland and Romania, the article is conceived as a theoretical intervention. Our aim is not to present an empirical study in the conventional sense but to develop a conceptual framework for understanding governance as an epistemic regime. The cases serve as illustrative anchors that help illuminate broader dynamics of epistemic marginalization and institutional change in post-socialist higher education.

We approach governance not simply as a matter of legal or policy reform but as a mechanism of epistemic filtering. Post-socialist transformations often reinforced existing hierarchies or introduced new exclusions, particularly through reliance on imported models of quality assurance, audit culture, and English-language publication metrics (Becker, 2026; Becker & Pentón Herrera, forthcoming). In this sense, contemporary governance reforms continue the work of epistemic marginalization initiated under socialism, albeit in different, arguably more obscure ways. More specifically, they do so not by directly censoring ideas but by shaping the evaluative infrastructures, funding dynamics, and language ideologies that determine which knowledges circulate and which are disregarded. As noted by Chankseliani and Silova (2018, p. 18), "the emphasis on social and moral dimensions of education appears to have visibly decreased, leading to growing concerns over declining education equity and persisting corruption in education."

By centering the notion of disregarded epistemologies, this article contributes to ongoing debates about epistemic justice in comparative education (jules et al., 2026). It calls for a shift from narrowly defined governance metrics toward an ethics of knowledge plurality, one that recognizes the long histories of exclusion and the structural conditions that continue to shape whose knowledge counts in post-socialist academia.

Historical Legacies of Epistemic Restructuring

To understand the contemporary configuration of epistemic hierarchies, it is essential to revisit the socialist-era transformations that reshaped the intellectual and institutional foundations of higher education in the region. The epistemic outline of post-socialist higher education in Central and Eastern Europe is deeply shaped by the intellectual and institutional architectures of the socialist period. In both Poland and Romania, the decades following World War II witnessed a deliberate transformation of the university from a relatively autonomous site of critical inquiry into an apparatus of ideological statecraft (Péteri, 1995). This transformation was not merely political or administrative; it extended to the epistemic: shaping the very ways knowledge is understood and produced. Knowledge production was thus reorganized around the principles of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, disciplines were restructured or dissolved, and intellectual traditions incompatible with the official ideology were erased or marginalized (Verdery, 1991; Connelly, 2000).

Recent historical scholarship further illuminates how universities in socialist Poland and Romania institutionalized particular configurations of authority, expertise, and participation. Hîncu and Zysiak (2023) show that despite ideological control, socialist knowledge production was not monolithic; it combined mass participation initiatives with specialized expertise, producing uneven epistemic spaces in which certain disciplines flourished and others remained ideologically constrained. Likewise, Zysiak's (2015) analysis of the post-war University of Łódź demonstrates that the early socialist university was shaped by negotiations among liberal academic traditions, social reformist ambition, and emerging socialist state agendas. These findings underscore that epistemic restructuring under socialism was not merely imposed from above but emerged through contested institutional practices, resulting in a dynamic that continues to shape post-1989 reform trajectories in both countries.

In Poland, the 1951 Law on Higher Education and the Act of December 15, 1951, marked the formal subordination of universities to a centralized ministry. These laws eliminated institutional autonomy, placing all aspects of academic life (e.g., governance, curriculum, and faculty/staff) under ministerial control (Sejm PRL, 1951). As Zysiak's (2015) case study of the University of Łódź illustrates, the implementation of socialist reforms was shaped by local institutional histories and academic actors who navigated the tensions between inherited scholarly norms and the new demands of a socialist state. Rather than a seamless Sovietization, the period was characterized by hybrid

arrangements in which pre-war intellectual traditions coexisted with socialist visions of mass education and ideological alignment.

Stachowiak-Kudła (2022) further observes that the evolving legal framework effectively erased the guarantee of academic freedom, restricting research to state-defined 'national interests.' The 1952 Constitution did not restore these freedoms, and subsequent legislation, such as the 1958 Higher Education Act, further entrenched ideological control. Article 1 of the 1958 Act mandated that "universities are actively involved in the construction and strengthening of socialism in the Polish People's Republic by conducting creative scientific research" (cited in Stachowiak-Kudła, 2022, p. 101), thereby consolidating the Minister's authority over academic content, institutional governance, and research direction.

Romania experienced a parallel, though in many respects more intense, process of epistemic engineering. The 1948 education reform law, modeled on the Soviet blueprint, dismantled private institutions and brought the entire education system under the control of the Communist Party. Academic content was revised to conform to ideological standards, while student admissions were subject to political and class-based quotas (Marin, 2018). One of the most emblematic cases of epistemic erasure is the dissolution of the sociological school founded by Dimitrie Gusti. Gusti's interwar connections and the political choices of some of his collaborators complicated their position in the new regime, but the early socialist authorities also viewed the school's empirical, community-focused approach as out of step with the demands of ideological certainty. As Golopenția (2014) shows, the dissolution of the institute and the dispersal, often persecution, of its members brought an abrupt end to this line of work. When sociology re-emerged in the 1960s, it did so in a different guise, shaped by the political and institutional priorities of the period rather than by any return to the tradition introduced by Dimitrie Gusti.

These reforms extended beyond the suppression of disciplines. They also reshaped the internal cultures of academic institutions. Trust was undermined by surveillance; collegiality was replaced by hierarchical command; and intellectual dissent was equated with political subversion. Promotion and research funding were tied not to scholarly merit but to ideological alignment (Tismăneanu, 2003; Kwiek, 2006). In this context, the university ceased to be a space for epistemic diversity and became instead a mechanism for reproducing an officially sanctioned worldview.

Yet alternative epistemologies persisted, often in marginal or underground forms. In Poland, the 'Flying University' (*Uniwersytet Latający*) offered dissident intellectuals a space to teach and circulate non-Marxist ideas, including Western philosophy, literature, and independent historical research (Pszenicki, 1979). In Romania, similar activities occurred in literary circles, private seminars, and religious communities, though often with less formal organization. Hîncu and Zysiak (2023) highlight that Romanian universities, much like their Polish counterparts, blended ideological expectations with forms of expert-driven governance. Although participationist rhetoric emphasized mass involvement, actual knowledge production relied heavily on centralized expertise and

narrowly defined disciplinary legitimacy. This uneven configuration helps explain why certain epistemic traditions remained marginalized even after the political transition of 1989. These dissident and community-based efforts preserved fragments of epistemic plurality, but their exclusion from institutional recognition meant that their influence on post-1989 reform was minimal.

The mechanisms through which epistemic disregard operated shifted significantly between the socialist and post-socialist periods. Under state socialism, exclusion was rooted primarily in ideological gatekeeping and institutional oversight: certain areas of research were eliminated because they appeared politically suspect, whereas others flourished when they aligned with state priorities. Yet this landscape was not uniformly closed. Historical scholarship also shows that socialist-era knowledge production operated within a multilingual and selectively internationalized environment. Translation flows and publishing practices in countries such as Hungary reveal that academic work circulated not only in Russian but also in German, French, English, Italian, and Spanish, with German retaining particular prominence throughout the socialist period (Karády, 2021). In Romania, academic mobility likewise fostered contact with multiple epistemic centers. As Hîncu (2021) demonstrates, successive generations of sociologists engaged in study visits, conference travel, and scholarly exchanges across both Western Europe and other socialist countries, drawing on French, German, Russian, and increasingly English-language literature. This uneven but persistent circulation underscores that socialist academia was linguistically and epistemically more plural than often assumed. The post-1989 shift toward English-dominant, bibliometric evaluation regimes thus represents a significant reconfiguration rather than a simple continuation of earlier linguistic practices.

After 1989, however, the basis for marginalization changed. Earlier contributions that had circulated across the region's multilingual scholarly networks were now evaluated through new regimes of value: English became the principal marker of 'internationality,' bibliometric systems structured visibility, and much pre-1989 work was dismissed as ideologically tainted or rendered invisible because it did not fit emerging evaluative infrastructures. Historical studies show that many socialist-era researchers had been internationally engaged through mobility and multilingual exchange (Hîncu, 2021; Karády, 2021), yet the new post-socialist system often repositioned these intellectual traditions as peripheral within global hierarchies (Starnawski & Warren, 2024). Thus, the mechanisms of exclusion shifted: epistemic constraints under socialism operated primarily through ideological and institutional oversight whereas post-socialist marginalization increasingly took linguistic, metric, and market-driven forms.

Crucially, the post-socialist period did not mark a clear epistemic break. While political pluralism and institutional diversification increased, the structural legacies of epistemic control were not dismantled. Instead, new forms of exclusion emerged, often under the banner of modernization or internationalization. Although critical and

community-based knowledge traditions had been pushed to the margins under socialism, their position did not automatically improve after 1989. The ambivalent epistemic configurations traced by Hîncu and Zysiak (2023) and Zysiak (2015) help clarify this continuity: post-socialist reforms interacted with earlier institutional logics rather than replacing them, allowing inherited hierarchies of legitimacy to persist within new managerial and metric-driven regimes. As a result, the university remained a site of epistemic gatekeeping; no longer through ideological fiat, but through metrics, rankings, and standardized evaluations (Smolentseva et al., 2018). Grappling with the epistemic legacies of socialism is not simply a matter of historical reflection; it is essential for understanding how present-day structures of knowledge production in CEE universities have been shaped, and how inherited arrangements continue to obstruct efforts toward epistemic justice. These legacies are not simply historical background; they form the epistemic context upon which post-1989 governance reforms were built. The next section examines how these reforms reconfigured earlier hierarchies.

Post-Socialist Reform and the Reconfiguration of Epistemic Hierarchies

The transition from state socialism to liberal democracy in the 1990s was widely interpreted as a rupture, that is, a moment when institutions would be restructured to reflect democratic, pluralist, and meritocratic values (Dobbins, 2011). In higher education, this transformation was driven by efforts to align national systems with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as promoted by the Bologna Process. Yet the actual impact of post-socialist reforms on knowledge production and epistemic justice has been far more ambivalent. While these reforms dismantled the overt ideological controls of the past, they introduced new mechanisms of exclusion rooted in managerialism, performance metrics, and international competitiveness (Kwiek, 2007).

In Poland, the 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science exemplifies the neoliberal turn in governance (Ostrowicka, 2022). Promoted as a tool for increasing university autonomy and research excellence, the reform concentrated decision-making power in the hands of rectors, introduced new evaluation regimes for faculty performance, and tied research funding to publication output in high-impact, often English-language, journals (Becker et al., forthcoming). Romania followed a similar trajectory, marked by university classification systems and performance-based funding that privileged institutions conforming to global standards (Gog, 2015). The National Council for the Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas, and Certificates (*Comisia Națională de Atestare a Titlurilor, Diplomelor si Certificatelor Universitare*; CNATDCU) has largely reinforced a metric-driven academic culture in Romania by incentivizing publications in Web of Science–indexed journals and imposing citation thresholds, especially in the social sciences and economics. This skewed the academic focus toward international, impact-factor venues, while research in the humanities (especially in Romanian or addressing national issues) became marginalized. As seen in political science, domestic journals have lost prominence because they do not meet international metric standards, pushing scholars

toward English-language, globally indexed outlets. This environment aligns with broader critiques of 'publish-or-perish' audit culture, where reliance on bibliometric metrics favors conformity and dissuades innovative or locally anchored scholarship (Andrei et al., 2016).

Problematically, the invocation of internationalization and modernization as reform imperatives often masks the persistence of epistemic stratification. Governance frameworks formally promote pluralism and autonomy, yet in practice reproduce hierarchies among disciplines, institutions, and scholars. Fields like education, literature, and regional studies are often relegated to the periphery of academic prestige, while elite institutions concentrate resources in English-language programs aligned with global labor markets (Donina & Jaworska, 2024). Post-socialist reform has thus produced a paradox: the institutional liberalization of higher education has not been accompanied by epistemic democratization. Instead, the legacy of centralized control has been replaced by a technocratic regime of control through indicators, audits, and rankings. As de Sousa Santos (2014) notes, the shift from overt ideological censorship to more subtle forms of epistemic invisibility may be less visible, but it is no less consequential, as it continues to marginalize non-hegemonic knowledge through bureaucratic and metalinguistic mechanisms.

To understand the present conditions of knowledge production in CEE, it is therefore necessary to interrogate not only the historical legacies of socialism but the epistemic effects of the very instruments of reform. This article argues that governance metrics, language policies, and institutional classifications function as gatekeeping devices that determine who can speak, what counts as knowledge, and which research is considered worthy of institutional support. These evaluative infrastructures have reshaped what knowledge becomes institutionally legible today, setting the stage for the linguistic and metalinguistic exclusions discussed in the following section.

Language, Legibility, and Epistemic Filtering

One of the most pervasive yet underacknowledged dimensions of epistemic exclusion in post-socialist higher education concerns the politics of language. Language functions not only as a medium of scholarly communication but as a gatekeeping mechanism that determines whose knowledge is legible within dominant academic regimes (Canagarajah, 2002). In Poland's and Romania's current higher education landscape, English has become the principal currency of academic legitimacy, with profound implications for epistemic diversity and justice (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Muresan & Nicolae, 2015).

The dominance of English in global academic publishing is often justified in the language of internationalization, excellence, and competitiveness and has subordinated local languages, methods, and epistemologies. As Canagarajah (2002) argues, English functions not merely as a medium of communication but as a gatekeeping mechanism that filters which voices and forms of knowledge are recognized in global academia. This

'epistemic filtering' privileges scholars who can access and reproduce Anglo-American norms of writing, citation, and framing (Lillis & Curry, 2010). In both Poland and Romania, such filtering is institutionalized through research evaluation systems that reward publications in international, English-language journals indexed in databases like Scopus or Web of Science, while undervaluing locally grounded, context-sensitive, or community-engaged scholarship (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Mironescu et al., 2023). This linguistic shift is not simply about translation or accessibility; it reconfigures the epistemic field by marginalizing traditions of thought, methods, and vocabularies that do not align with the dominant linguistic and conceptual paradigms (see also jules et al., 2026). The use of English often entails the use of Anglo-centric theoretical frameworks, citation networks, and stylistic conventions. As Mignolo (2011) and de Sousa Santos (2014) note, such forms of knowledge production risk reinforcing epistemic coloniality, where local knowledges are either excluded or assimilated into Western paradigms under the guise of universality.

Thus, language, in this context, is not merely a communicative tool but an epistemic filter that determines which forms of knowledge are institutionally legible. As Phillipson (1992), Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), and Delpit (2006) have long argued, linguistic hegemony in education produces structural inequalities that affect not only what is taught but how knowledge is valued. In higher education governance, this manifests as a double exclusion: scholars working outside dominant language frameworks are both materially disadvantaged and epistemically delegitimized.

This regime of legibility is further compounded by digital and infrastructural asymmetries. Access to high-impact journals, international conferences, and global citation networks is unevenly distributed, reflecting entrenched geopolitical hierarchies in knowledge production (Altbach, 2002). Scholars in semi-peripheral systems such as Poland and Romania may face additional barriers including high article-processing charges, restrictive travel funding, and limited institutional support for open-access dissemination. The linguistic politics of higher education are therefore inseparable from its political economy: the push for 'global visibility' frequently aligns with the marginalization of epistemologies that do not easily conform to the dominant publication formats or commercial logics of the international academic market (Soler & Kaufhold, 2025). The consolidation of the scholarly publishing industry into a small number of multinational corporations has intensified these dynamics, creating 'oligopolistic conditions' in which English-language journals command disproportionate prestige, control access to scholarly legitimacy, and extract profits from publicly funded research systems (Larivière et al., 2015). As Hyland (2015, p. 2) notes, "academic publishing has gradually extended its reach to become a global enterprise, increasing its outlets and profits, and tightening its grip on higher education." The result is an epistemic environment in which linguistic hegemony, market concentration, and infrastructural inequality intersect to reinforce existing hierarchies of knowledge and perpetuate the invisibility of locally embedded scholarship. Thus, efforts to promote internationalization

in CEE higher education, however well intentioned, often reproduce epistemic exclusions under a new guise. They reward linguistic and cultural conformity while sidelining local languages, alternative research traditions, and situated epistemologies. In so doing, they perpetuate the historical dynamics of disregarded epistemologies that this article aims to foreground.

We further argue that addressing the politics of language is central to any meaningful effort toward epistemic justice in higher education. Language is not a neutral medium for scholarly exchange; it is a structuring element of academic legitimacy, shaping who is heard, what is recognized, and how knowledge circulates (Becker, 2021). Recognizing this requires moving beyond token acknowledgements of multilingualism to actively reconfiguring the evaluative infrastructures that sustain linguistic hierarchies. This involves revisiting research assessment frameworks, diversifying publication venues, and creating institutional incentives that value scholarship produced in national or regional languages, as well as in collaborative, community-based, and non-traditional formats (Becker, 2024). Without such systemic interventions, the rhetoric of 'international excellence' risks functioning as a mechanism of epistemic erasure, consolidating dominant epistemologies while marginalizing those embedded in local histories, cultures, and social needs. A genuine reform agenda must therefore see linguistic diversity not as an obstacle to global engagement, but as an essential condition for a more plural, equitable, and intellectually vibrant academic field. The following section considers what is needed to imagine epistemic plurality beyond such regimes.

Toward Epistemic Plurality in Post-Socialist Academia

Because governance structures have long functioned to marginalize particular forms of knowledge, in both the socialist and post-socialist eras, higher education in Central and Eastern Europe faces a challenge that extends beyond institutional reform to the restoration of epistemic diversity. As de Santos (2014) reminds us, the struggle for *epistemologies of the South* is inseparable from the dismantling of 'epistemicides,' that is, the structural erasures of knowledge systems, that persist in the aftermath of colonialism and authoritarianism. In CEE, these erasures are historically rooted in socialist-era ideological control and have been reconfigured in the neoliberal reforms of the post-1989 era (Dobbins & Kwiek, 2017). The task ahead is to confront these long-standing exclusions and to create governance systems capable of sustaining multiple, coexisting knowledge traditions.

Addressing the historical and contemporary marginalization of alternative epistemologies requires moving beyond rhetorical commitments to internationalization, autonomy, and excellence toward a more substantive politics of epistemic plurality. This begins with a critical rethinking of the evaluative infrastructures that define academic recognition. Fricker (2007) introduces the notion of testimonial injustice, which occurs when a person's credibility is unjustly reduced because of identity prejudice. Such prejudice, based on characteristics such as race, gender, class, or place of origin leads

others to give less epistemic weight to the their testimony than it deserves, producing both ethical harm (undermining the person's status as a knower) and epistemic harm (obstructing the circulation of knowledge). Fricker distinguishes between isolated instances and systematic patterns embedded in social structures, noting that her framework focuses on credibility deficits rather than excesses. In the CEE higher education context, national-language scholarship, locally grounded methodologies, and regionally specific research agendas are often treated as less credible within global academic regimes dominated by English-language publication and Western methodological norms (Cerwonka, 2012). Such structural prejudice systematically undervalues the testimony of certain scholarly communities, limiting their institutional recognition, funding opportunities, and impact.

A second pillar of epistemic plurality is sustained institutional support for multilingual, transnational, and intercultural scholarship. As Kiramba (2018) and Becker (2023) demonstrate, language ideologies operate as powerful mechanisms of epistemic exclusion, privileging certain linguistic repertoires as 'legitimate' while subordinating others. Although Kiramba's study focuses on multilingual classroom settings in Kenya and Becker's (2023) on Switzerland, the underlying dynamics are mirrored in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, where English occupies the apex of the publication prestige hierarchy. This hierarchy is reinforced by research assessment frameworks that reward output in high-impact, English-language journals indexed in databases such as Web of Science and Scopus (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Mironescu et al., 2023). Such arrangements disadvantage national-language and minority-language scholarship, limiting its circulation, citation, and policy uptake. Countering these imbalances requires systemic measures: dedicated funding streams for high-quality publications in national and regional languages; the establishment and international promotion of rigorously peer-reviewed regional journals; and the expansion of indexing systems to better reflect scholarly production beyond the Anglophone core. These interventions would diversify the academic canon while ensuring that research remains legible and relevant to local communities, policymakers, and practitioners. Third, epistemic plurality demands recovering and reintegrating the region's marginalized intellectual traditions. The Flying University in Poland, operating clandestinely under partitions and during socialist censorship, and the interwar sociological school of Dimitrie Gusti in Romania, which developed innovative locally-informed research methodologies, represent forms of scholarship that persisted outside dominant institutional frameworks (Golopenția, 2014; Pszenicki, 1979). Post-socialist reforms, however, often privileged imported governance templates over the revitalization of these traditions (Steiner-Khamsi, 2002). Revisiting such intellectual legacies can serve as a resource for decolonizing CEE higher education by grounding institutional design in regionally adapted epistemic traditions rather than purely external models.

Finally, advancing epistemic justice requires centering the voices of those most affected by exclusionary governance: early-career scholars, faculty in under-resourced

regional universities, and academics from linguistic and ethnic minorities. These groups face overlapping challenges such as precarious contracts, limited research funding, restricted access to publication networks, yet their perspectives are vital for envisioning more inclusive academic practices (Becker, 2024). Mechanisms such as participatory university senates, inclusive grant review boards, and institutionalized support for collaborative, community-driven research can help redistribute epistemic authority. As Mignolo (2011) notes, such participation is not an optional 'add-on' but a condition for dismantling the 'coloniality of knowledge' that continues to shape global and regional academic hierarchies.

While regionally embedded forms of scholarship are crucial for epistemic plurality, they also raise concerns about possible parochialization. The challenge is not to retreat into localism but to imagine academic ecosystems that are situated yet outward-looking. Comparative examples from outside CEE help clarify what such alternatives might entail. Ivancheva's (2023) work on the Bolivarian University of Venezuela shows how one of the most ambitious contemporary attempts to build an 'alternative university' sought to counter the global decline of the public sector and respond to intensified precarization, privatization, and marketization. Her analysis demonstrates both the possibilities and the contradictions of designing a university around principles of social inclusion, mass participation, and public responsibility rather than competition and market logics. Intercultural universities in Latin America, as discussed by Guilherme and Dietz (2017), offer a different but related model: they institutionalize epistemic plurality by bringing Indigenous and Afro-descendant knowledge systems, community-based pedagogies, and polyphonic understandings of 'interculturalidad' into higher education. These experiments indicate that alternatives to the Anglophone, scientometric university are not simply nostalgic returns to the local. They are relational, socially grounded practices that engage broader publics and epistemic traditions and offer insights with clear relevance for CEE.

A number of contemporary initiatives across the region already conceptualize what such epistemic plurality might look like in practice. Multilingual and regionally oriented journals that continue to publish in national languages alongside English, such as *Academia* (https://journals.pan.pl/academiaPAS/152934?language=en) in Poland and *Revista de Pedagogie* (https://revped.ise.ro/), *Revista Transilvania* (https://revistatransilvania.ro) or the *Journal of Performing Arts* (https://reviste.ulbsibiu.ro/jas/) in Romania, as well as series published by university presses in both countries, demonstrate the ongoing vitality of research that is locally anchored yet globally relevant. Open repositories such as the Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), along with newer institutional archives, help bring into view scholarship that falls outside the narrow boundaries set by Web of Science or Scopus.

Community-engaged research labs, urban democracy groups, feminist collectives, and civic-oriented publishing projects, including those linked to *Krytyka Polityczna*

(*Political Critique*), offer a different way of thinking about how knowledge circulates in the region. These initiatives work across languages, publics, and institutional boundaries, and they unsettle the idea that scholarship gains value only when it passes through Anglophone, citation-driven channels. Noticing and citing these experiments is a form of citational justice: they demonstrate that alternative modes of producing and sharing knowledge in CEE already exist, even if they remain unevenly supported or institutionally peripheral.

The pursuit of epistemic plurality will be neither linear nor uncontested. It involves challenging entrenched power structures, reconfiguring the political economy of academic publishing (Larivière et al., 2015), and redefining what constitutes scholarly excellence. Yet without such efforts, the CEE university risks remaining a site of epistemic reproduction rather than transformation. The stakes extend beyond the academy: they touch on the capacity of these institutions to serve as democratic spaces where diverse knowledges can coexist, inform public life, and imagine alternative futures. These emerging initiatives do not yet resolve the challenges identified earlier, but they reveal spaces of possibility. The conclusion returns to the broader implications of treating governance as an epistemic regime.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the reform of higher education governance in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, while frequently framed in terms of modernization, autonomy, and internationalization, has also operated as a process of epistemic selection. In both Poland and Romania, governance structures have not only shaped institutional hierarchies and administrative procedures but have played a decisive role in legitimizing some forms of knowledge while marginalizing others.

Drawing on historical and contemporary case material, we have shown that the suppression of epistemic plurality under socialist regimes, through ideological control, curricular restructuring, and institutional purges, created enduring legacies that have not been fully dismantled to this day. Instead, these have been reproduced in new forms, often under the guise of technocratic reform and global benchmarking. The emphasis on international publication metrics, managerial efficiency, and English-language dominance has further entrenched hierarchies of knowledge that privilege the already dominant and silence the local, interdisciplinary, and critical.

The concept of disregarded epistemologies offers a productive lens through which to understand the layered exclusions that persist in CEE academia. These are not only relics of the past but ongoing effects of governance frameworks that remain epistemically narrow. Addressing them requires more than minor adjustments to institutional metrics or symbolic gestures toward diversity. It requires a fundamental reimagining of what universities are for, whom they serve, and whose knowledge they honor.

To move toward epistemic justice, CEE higher education must embrace evaluative frameworks that recognize the value of knowledge rooted in linguistic diversity,

community engagement, and historical continuity. It must support structures that allow marginalized scholars to contribute not as exceptions but as central participants in shaping the academic field. Most importantly, it must confront the legacies of epistemic exclusion not as anomalies but as systemic patterns that demand structural transformation.

The politics of knowledge are inseparable from the politics of governance. As the region continues to navigate its position between historical legacies and global aspirations, the future of its universities will depend on their capacity to reckon with the exclusions of the past and the epistemic possibilities of a more plural, just, and inclusive academic future.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive feedback, which significantly strengthened the clarity, framing, and analytical depth of this article. Their generous engagement with our arguments greatly improved the manuscript.

This research is part of the project No. 2022/45/P/HS2/02547 co-funded by the National Science Centre and the European Union Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 945339. For the purpose of Open Access, the author has applied a CC-BY public copyright licence to any Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM) version arising from this submission.

References

Altbach, P. (2002). Knowledge and education as international commodities. *International Higher Education, 28*, https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2002.28.6657

Andrei, T., Teodorescu, D., & Mirică, A. (2016). Beyond the impact factor: measuring the international visibility of Romanian social science journals. *Scientometrics, 108*, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-016-1949-7

Becker, A. (2021). "I'm always in this conflict" – Students' struggle of plurilingual identity expression, linguistic insecurity, and assimilation in Switzerland's higher education. *European Education, 53*(1), 15-30. doi.org/10.1080/10564934.2021.1971542

Becker, A. (2023). *Identity, power, and prestige in Switzerland's multilingual education.* Transcript.

Becker, A. (2024). Applied linguistics Communities of Practice: Improving the research-practice relationship. *Applied Linguistics, 45*(2), 272-286. doi.org/10.1093/applin/amad010

Becker, A. (2026). Decolonizing language in comparative and international education: Between epistemic filtering and linguistic injustice. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*.

Becker, A., & Pentón Herrera, L.J. (forthcoming). Reimagining ethical, relational, and context-sensitive practices of openness in L2 research: A duoethnographic inquiry. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.

Becker, A., Wacławik, M., & Pentón Herrera, L.J. (forthcoming). Higher education governance in Poland. In F.D. Salajan & t.d. jules (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of comparative higher education governance.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Bleiklie, I., & Kogan, M. (2007). Organization and governance of universities. *Higher Education Policy*, 20(4), 477–493. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300167

Canagarajah, S. (2002). *A geopolitics of academic writing*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Cerwonka, A. (2012). Higher education 'reform,' hegemony, and neo-Cold War ideology: Lessons from Eastern Europe. In H. Wright, & M. Morris (Eds.), *Cultural studies of transnationalism.* Routledge.

Chankseliani, M., & Silova, I. (2018). Reconfiguring education purposes, policies, and practices during post-socialist transformations: Setting the stage. In M. Chankseliani, & I. Silova (Eds.), *Comparing post-socialist transformations: Purposes, policies, and practices in education* (pp. 7-26). Symposium Books.

Connelly, J. (2000). *Captive university: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish higher education, 1945-1956*. The University of North Carolina Press.

Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Polity Press.

de Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.

Delpit, L. (2006). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New Press.

Dobbins, M. (2011). *Higher education policies in Central and Eastern Europe: Convergence towards a common model?* Palgrave Macmillan.

Dobbins, M. (2017). Exploring the governance of Polish and Romanian public higher education: Between policy convergence and organizational differentiation. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(4), 681–707. https://doi.org/10.1086/692602

Dobbins, M., & Kwiek, M. (2017). Europeanisation and globalisation in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe: 25 years of changes revisited (1990–2015). *European Educational Research Journal*, *16*(5), 519-528. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904117728132

Donina, D., & Jaworska, A. (2024). University governance reforms in Central and Eastern Europe: Between managerialism and Europeanization. *European Journal of Higher Education*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ejhe.xxxxx

Duszak, A., & Lewkowicz, J. (2008). Publishing academic texts in English: APolish perspective. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 7*(2), 108-120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2008.03.001

Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. Oxford University Press.

Gawlicz, K., & Starnawski, M. (2018). Educational policies in Central and Eastern Europe: legacies of state socialism, modernization aspirations and challenges of semi-peripheral contexts. *Policy Futures in Education*, *16*(4), 385-397. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210318777415

Gog, S. (2015). Competitiveness and research-oriented teaching in Romanian universities: The neo-liberal transformation of the higher education system. *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, 60*(1), 23-61.

Golopenţia, S. (2014). The sociological school of Bucharest between its heyday and suppression. *Revista română de sociologie, 9*(5-6), 379-404.

Glava, C., Glava, A., & Salajan, F.D. (forthcoming). Higher education governance in Romania. In F.D. Salajan & t.d. jules (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of comparative higher education governance.* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Guilherme, M., & Dietz, G. (2016). Winds of the South: Intercultural university models for the 21st century. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, *16*(1), 7-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022216680599

Hîncu, A. (2020). Academic mobility and epistemological change in state socialist Romania: Three generations of sociologists, Western social science, and quality of life research. *Serendipities, 5*(1-2), 4-18.

Hîncu, A., & Zysiak, A. (2023). Socialist culture, participation and expert knowledge in Poland and Romania in the long 1960s. *European Review of History, 30*(2), 234–256.

Hyland, K. (2016). Academic publishing: Issues and challenges in the construction of knowledge. Oxford University Press.

Ivancheva, M. P. (2023). *The alternative university: Lessons from Bolivarian Venezuela.* Stanford University Press.

jules, t. d., Salajan, F. D., Becker, A., & Scherrer, B. (2026). *Decolonial epistemologies in comparative and international education: Anticipating the cultural turn?.* Emerald Publishing.

Karády, V. (2020). The social sciences in Hungary during the Cold War and after. *Serendipities, 5*(1-2), 19-32.

Kulczycki, E. (2019). Internationalization of Polish science: Evaluation, university rankings, and publication practices. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 73(4), 429–444. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12192

Kwiek, M. (2006). *The university and the state: A study into global transformations*. Peter Lang.

Kwiek, M. (2007). Emergent European educational policies under scrutiny: The Bologna process from a Central European perspective. In V. Tomusk (Ed.), *Creating the European Area of Higher Education: Voices from the periphery* (pp. 87-116). Springer.

Kwiek, M. (2012). Changing higher education policies: From the deinstitutionalization to the reinstitutionalization of the research mission in Polish universities. *Science and Public Policy*, 39(5), 641–654. https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scs042

Larivière, V., Haustein, S., & Mongeon, P. (2015). The oligopoly of academic publishers in the digital era. *PLOS ONE, 10*(6), e0127502. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127502

Lillis, T., & Curry, M. J. (2010). *Academic writing in a global context: The politics and practices of publishing in English.* Routledge.

Marin, M. (2018). Education in communist times: the case of Romania. *Sociologie Românească, XVI*(102), 27-41.

Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of Western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.

Mironescu, A., Moroşanu, A., & Bibiri, A.-D. (2023). The regional dynamics of multilingual publishing in web of science: A statistical analysis of central and eastern European journals and researchers in linguistics. *Scientometrics, 128*, 1133-1162. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-022-04595-0

Muresan, L. M., & Nicolae, M. (2015). Addressing the challenge of publishing internationally in a non-Anglophone academic context: Romania – a case in point. In R. P. Alastrué, & C. Pérez-Llantada (Eds.), *English as a scientific and research language* (pp. 281-310). De Gruyter Mouton.

Ostrowicka, H. (2022). Economization of discourse on education and pedagogization of economic problems: media debate on higher education reform in Poland. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 43*(1), 86-100. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1811957

Péteri, G. (1995). On the Legacy of State Socialism in Academia. *Minerva*, *33*(4), 305–324.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

Pszenicki, C. (1979). 'The flying university.' *Index on Censorship, 8*(6), 19-22.

Silova, I. (2010). Rediscovering post-socialism in comparative education. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 12(1), 1–7.

Silova, I., Millei, Z., & Piattoeva, N. (2017). Interrupting the coloniality of knowledge in comparative education: Post-socialist and post-colonial dialogues. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(S1), S74–S102. https://doi.org/10.1086/690458

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education—or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Smolentseva, A., Huisman, J., & Froumin, I. (2018). Transformation of higher education institutional landscape in post-Soviet countries: From Soviet model to where? In J. Huisman, A. Smolentseva, & I. Froumin (Eds.), *25 years of transformations of higher education systems in post-Soviet countries*: *Reform and continuity* (pp. 1-44). Palgrave Macmillan.

Soler, J., & Kaufhold, K. (Eds.) (2025). *Language and the knowledge economy: Multilingual scholarly publishing in Europe*. Routledge.

Stachowiak-Kudła, M. (2022). The evolution of higher education law in Poland: Centralization, decentralization, and recentralization. *Journal of Education Policy and Law*, 2(1), 14–33.

Starnawski, M., & Warren, S. (2023). Central and Eastern Europe in academic internationalization: Peripherality, neoliberalism, and knowledge production. *Studia Litteraria et Historia, 12,* 1-16.

Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2002). Reterritorializing educational import. In: Nóvoa, A., & Lawn, M. (Eds.), *Fabricating Europe* (pp. 69-86). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-47561-8_7

Tismăneanu, V. (2003). *Stalinism for all seasons: A political history of Romanian communism*. University of California Press.

Verdery, K. (1991). *National ideology under socialism: Identity and cultural politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. University of California Press.

Zysiak, A. (2015). Modernizing Science: Between a Liberal, Social, and Socialistic University – The Case of Poland and the University of Łódź (1945–1953). *Science in Context*, *28*(2), 215–236. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0269889715000083