



UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
Faculty of Education

Academic freedom in an international perspective

A case study of the university of Bologna and the University of Singapore

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Introduction

This research report is based on a study on academic freedom that I conducted for my PhD within the Marie Curie Initial Training Network UNIKE (Universities in Knowledge Economy) funded by the European Commission. During my doctoral studies, I was a young researcher at CEPS, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana; during this period, I was also involved in the NEAR EU project. I defended my doctoral dissertation on 13 September 2017, just before the *Ljubljana NEAR-EU consortium meeting and a conference* organised by the network (8–9 October 2017). At this conference, I presented some of my research results. Due to the interest of the participants in the topic and significance of the topic for the work of the NEAR-EU network, the idea emerged to publish selected results of the study. Based on my presentation during the meeting this research report shall serve as source of information for the network itself and its outreach activities.

1. Context: Academic Freedom a European Idea?

1.1 *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Setting the Scene*

Academic Freedom has a long history within European universities. Latest with foundation of the Berlin University based on the idea of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Friedrich Schleiermacher the concept of academic freedom spread, all around Europe and beyond (see for example Rüegg 2002). For Schleiermacher and von Humboldt, the ideal of a university was a place where scholars and students could devote themselves with the crucial freedom and reclusiveness to *Wissenschaft* (science) (von Humboldt 1997 [1809]). Only by creating a free space a university was able to adopt the function that Schleiermacher imaged, namely

[...] not to teach accepted knowledge that could be directly used as the colleges did, but to demonstrate how that knowledge was discovered, awaken the idea of science in students' minds and encourage them to think back to the fundamental laws of science in their every act. (Rüegg 2002, 45)

Academic Freedom in this context meant *Lehrfreiheit* (the freedom to teach) and *Lernfreiheit* (the freedom to learn). Whereas *Lehrfreiheit* should be given to professors, *Lernfreiheit* also included the students. For the professors it meant the possibility to conduct independent research without interference of teaching obligations, state objectives and aspects of usefulness. For the student *Lernfreiheit* included the release from a fixed curriculum and the duty as well as the right to contribute to the knowledge production to use contemporary language (Kopetz 2002). Thus, building an intellectual community with active participation of all members was crucial for this kind of a university and academic freedom was seen as precondition for it.

Even if the Humboldtian university model was never fully adopted, the idea became famous not only in Europe. From the 1830s on France, England and the Americas became interested in this 'new' university (Rüegg 2002). It was even exported to Japan and thus, also the idea of academic freedom has a long tradition within the Japanese higher education system (Yamamoto 2015). As such, the modern idea of academic freedom might be a 'Prussian' (re-)discovery but was definitely influential beyond Europe.

1.2 *The Magna Charta Universitatum: A Strong Foundation for Academic Freedom*

The next time in contemporary history when academic freedom became a significant issue was in 1986, when the University of Bologna suggested to draft a statement on academic values. The idea to draft such a strategic paper was a reaction towards modern challenges, described by the rector of the University of Bologna Pier Ugo Calzolari as follows

There was a need to return to and restate the fundamental principles, to re-knot the main threads in the elaborate tapestry that history had woven for the universities throughout their many centuries of illustrious service to society (Calzolari 2008, 18).

The idea to draft such a paper was well received by other European universities. Thus, in 1987 a board was elected by 80 European universities to draft the Magna Charta Universitatum, that became one of the most significant strategic papers on academic values. In the same year, the document was signed by 388 university rectors that attended the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna. Academic freedom in this document is described as follows:

[...] research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power (Magna Charta Observatory 2016 [1988], 1).

Again, the fundamentals for pursuing academic freedom within the academic community were laid in Europe but spread soon after around the world. In August 2018, 816 universities from 86 countries and all continents have signed the Magna Charta Universitatum and more will follow during the 30th Anniversary of the signature of this important document, this year.

1.3 The Bologna Process: Taking the Idea Further

From the initiative of European universities academic values and academic freedom have also entered the Bologna Process, today probably the most coherent ‘higher education area’ in the world. The Bologna Process was declared in 1999, and formally established in 2010 (Bologna Process 2010). With the Sorbonne Joint Declaration (Bologna Process 1998), France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom aimed at harmonizing higher education to foster and simplify mobility among students and staff. The long-term objective was to build a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Only one year later, 29 European states signed the Bologna Declaration and the number of member states steadily increased thereafter. In 2018, 48 countries and the European Commission participate in the Bologna Process (Bologna Process 2018a). The most commonly known and referred to documents within the Bologna Process are its declarations and communiqués that are published every second year. They are based on a complex negotiation process between different stakeholders such as the ministers of education of the participating states, experts, university leaders, associations and students. Despite, this work in the background and other publications and studies deriving from the Bologna Process its declarations and communiqués can be seen as the ‘common sense’ within the EHEA as they are officially declared by the ministers of education.

Thus, this research report focuses on the role of academic freedom within these documents. First of all, looking at the different declarations and communiqués shows the strong connection – not at least due to the involvement of university rectors, associations and students in the drafting process – between the Bologna Process and the Magna Charta Universitatum. All documents refer in one way or another to the values and mission laid down in the Magna Charta Universitatum. The Bologna Declaration as the first official document of the Bologna Process states for example:

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, *also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta*

Universitatum of 1988. This is of the highest importance, given that Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge (Bologna Process 1999, 2 emphasis added).

And still the most recent document, the Paris Communiqué reassures

Academic freedom and integrity, institutional autonomy, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education form the backbone of the EHEA (Bologna Process 2018b, 1).

Despite the mentioning and reference to the Magna Charta Universitatum, the meaning of academic values has changed within the different documents. The shift from social responsibility towards the concept of accountability is one of the most obvious ones. Next to it, the focus within the Bologna Process is on institutional autonomy instead of academic freedom as it is the case within the Magna Charta Universitatum. Many scholars also criticize this shift from the freedom of the individual scholar and the academic community towards the institution and connected administration and leadership (see for example, Zgaga et al. 2015; Erikklä & Pirronen 2014; Zgaga 2012; Wright & Ørberg 2011). To go deep in the shifting understanding of the concept itself within the Bologna Process would exceed the space of this research report (for a more elaborate account see Westa 2017). Nevertheless, what is important to note concerning academic freedom and the Bologna Process is that: (1) academic freedom is a prevailing concept within the Bologna Process and accepted by political powers; and (2) academic freedom is not a fixed and absolute concept – rather it is an outcome of repeated negotiations as is the Bologna Process. In the latest Bologna document, academic values came even back to the forefront due to political restraints in some countries and the Paris Communiqué states:

Having seen these fundamental values challenged in recent years in some of our countries, we strongly commit to promoting and protecting them in the entire EHEA through intensified political dialogue and cooperation (Bologna Process 2018b, 1).

From this point of view, academic freedom and connected values are protected within the EHEA. Despite this fact, they are handled and described differently in each country. In Denmark, academic freedom refers, for example, only to research and not to teaching (Danish government 2011); whereas the Slovene Constitution (2013) even proclaims in Article 58, “freedom of scientific and artistic endeavor shall be guaranteed”. In other words, each member state of the EHEA has its own way of including the right of academic freedom in different forms and on different legislation levels reaching from higher education regulations towards constitutions. This is also due to the voluntary character of the Bologna Process.

1.4 The Bologna Process beyond Europe

Today the Bologna Process is not anymore, an inclusive European network but tries to connect to other regions, countries and international organizations. Latest with the Bergen

Communiqué from 2005 the mission to carry on the idea of the Bologna Process beyond Europe became clear, as it states that

[t]he European Higher Education Area must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world (Bologna Process 2005, 4).

With this meeting, the Bologna Follow Up Group (BFUG) was also asked to develop a so-called ‘external dimension’ of the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, the roots of the external or international dimension can be tracked back to the beginning of the Bologna Process (Zgaga 2006) and even to the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) that stressed the “international recognition and attractive potential of our system” (Bologna Process 1998, 1). After looking at the external dimension, the BFUG established a working group on *International cooperation* following the Yerevan Ministerial Conference in 2015. This working group (AG1) had the task to develop proposals for fostering a more “outward-looking“ EHEA. In the working process the group held many meetings and

[o]ver the six meetings the group also had informed discussions with ASEAN (through ASEM and SHARE) the Arab and North African Universities (AARU, ANQAHE), the AUF, Russia, the Mediterranean region (UNIMED and UfM) and bodies representing Latin American Universities (CCA, FAUBAI, OEI, OBIRET, UDUAL). We also had considerable email exchange with African regional associations but unfortunately only the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie was able to attend meetings. Several other regional associations could not attend for financial reasons and our group had no budget for external partners (Ritchie 2018 ,7).

In its final report the Advisory Group concludes

The international dimension is now an integral part of most aspects of the Bologna process and it was particularly important for AG1 to work closely with other groups in its transversal role. Consequently, AG1 worked closely with the WG2 on Implementation and WG3 on New Goals since the international and spatial dimension formed a key part of the work of these groups (Ritchie 2018 ,5).

As such, the international component of the Bologna Process is an ongoing endeavour that is supported by ministers who

propose the establishment of a Global Working Group in the next 2018-2020 Bologna work programme to take this agenda forward and we invite countries to express their interest to hold high level workshops on a yearly basis to continue the dialogue on social inclusion and the wider role of higher education (Bologna Process 2018c, 2).

The focus of proposed future international cooperation, is not on academic freedom and university autonomy that are a crucial part of the Bologna Process but on social inclusion and the wider civic role of higher education (ibid.). In other words, fostering academic freedom is part of the Bologna Process but mainly within member states and not beyond.

1.5 Academic Freedom beyond Europe

As already mentioned, academic freedom has its origins within the European University but was also important in other parts of the world within history. Between the two World Wars, there was for example, no time and space to think about academic values in Europe but academic freedom remained a key concern within the USA. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) was and still is one of the key organisations fighting for academic freedom within the USA. It published several reports on academic freedom as for example, the *1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* (AAUP 1970 [1925]). This statement proclaims freedom in research as

[t]eachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties; but research for pecuniary return should be based upon an understanding with the authorities of the institution (ibid., 2)

and the freedom in teaching.

Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject. Limitations of academic freedom because of religious or other aims of the institution should be clearly stated in writing at the time of the appointment (ibid., 2).

With a long lasting experience concerning this statement, AAUP decided not to draft a new one but to give guidance for the interpretation of the document (AAUP 2016). The connection between academic freedom and tenure is of great importance in the US context – a difference for example, to the European idea on academic freedom.

UNESCO also reinforces the importance of academic freedom with its recommendation on the *Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel* from 1997 by stating

that the right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and autonomy for institutions of higher education and that the open communication of findings, hypotheses and opinions lies at the very heart of higher education and provides the strongest guarantee of the accuracy and objectivity of scholarship and research (UNESCO 1997, 1).

The presence of academic freedom in the work of UNESCO is of particular interest as it represents in 2018, 195 member states and 11 associated members from around the globe (UNESCO 2018). With joining UNESCO, these members have indirectly committed to academic values.

By now, countries and universities show not only their support of academic freedom by joining for example, UNESCO or by signing the Magna Charta Universitatum but many of them also draft individual declarations and communiqués. Just to name a few, there is for example, the Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education (World University Service 1988), the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics (ARISA, COCOSA, IDMASA, IFMASA, SUASA and UDASA 1990), and the Kampala Declaration on

Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (Symposium on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Intellectuals 1990) (for a more comprehensive list see also Zgaga 2010).

1.6 Summary

Summarising, academic freedom (1) is not an exclusive European value but finds supports all around the world; (2) it is part of the Bologna Process and finds due to political changes increased attention; and (3) there is not one single definition of academic freedom. The diverse understandings of academic freedom are already visible in the above cited policy statements not to think even about scholarly discussions in which the meaning ranges from *freedom of speech* (Hayes cited in McCrae 2011) towards a full concept or better

a fundamental principle for universities, and with it comes the idea of responsibility of all members of the scholarly community. In the knowledge society, academic freedom relating to teaching and research must also exist ‘virtually’, outside classrooms where there is little scope for control by those who distribute research resources (Aarveaara 2010, 59-60).

As such, it becomes even more interesting to look at the status of academic freedom in different cultural spaces and to explore how a European idea is perceived in other parts of the world. By doing this, the research that underpins this report is also of importance for the NEAR-EU network. By exploring a concept underpinning the idea and the potential of higher education within and outside Europe, “an inter-regional, collaborative academic space to enhance the study of European higher education policy and academic internationalization” (NEAR-EU 2018) can be fostered.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The data used for this research report derives from a more comprehensive research project concerning “Academic freedom in higher education teaching in Europe and the Asia-Pacific-Rim” (Westa 2017). The main aim of the study is to deepen the understanding of academic freedom from the perspective of academics, by investigating the research questions: *What does academic freedom – especially academic freedom in higher education teaching – mean in different cultural spaces?*

The study is based on two case studies, one with the University of Bologna and one with the National University of Singapore. The University of Bologna was chosen, due its possibility to show how academic freedom is perceived within an institution that has a long tradition adopting academic values. It is one of the oldest universities founded in 1088 and was also initiator of drafting the Magna Charta Universitatum. Today, it still hosts the Magna Charta Observatory that was founded to promote and protect the Magna Charta Universitatum by monitoring, enhancing and advising on issues related to

academic values, especially academic freedom and university autonomy (Magna Charta Observatory 2016). Thus, the University of Bologna is a traditional European university with a strong connection to academic freedom.

In comparison, the National University of Singapore is a rather young institution, with its roots in 1905 and its establishment under the current name in 1980. Despite Singapore's history as a British colony that also influenced its higher education system (Kim 2001), Singapore counts today together with Japan, China, Hong-Kong China, Korea and Taiwan to the Confucian education zone (Marginson 2016). Thus, Singapore is a particular interesting case as it is influenced by Europe but has also (re-)adopted Asian values after their independence. This is also true for the National University of Singapore as the first state university of Singapore (NUS 2016; Mukherjee and Wong 2011; Kim 2001). During the time of data collection, the National University of Singapore hosted the Association of Pacific-Rim Universities. This is important as it shows that Singapore and the National University of Singapore do play a key role in building a regional network. In comparison to Europe, Singapore has a long history of informal bans for the expression of "oppositional views" (Altbach 2001, 213) on certain topics. This makes it extremely interesting to see if academic freedom does play a role for academics working at the National University of Singapore.

Comparing these two very different cases might seem odd on the first sight but in fact, it is leading to the main aim of this study, namely depicting plurality instead of giving fixed definitions or judging the degree of freedom in a certain place. Only by doing so, it is possible to foster a deep dialogue about the importance and meaning of academic freedom in different contexts, times and spaces. As already pointed out, there is no absolute freedom as it is always part of negotiation between various stakeholders. In order to protect and foster academic freedom, a deep and detailed understanding of various meanings of academic freedom is crucial. Mere judgments on the degree of freedom often do not result in useful ideas on how to steadily improve the situation, taking the specific context and needs into account.

To reach a level of contextualized understanding of the concept of academic freedom this research project looked at different dimensions using the main data collection methods of policy analysis and semi-structured interviews with academics from different disciplines and at different career stages. The data collection process took place on a macro-, meso- and micro level (see *Figure 1*). The order from a macro to a micro level does not intend to cause the impression that one is superior to the other but is meant to be an ordering element for the data presentation. All levels do influence each other.

The method of data analysis is thematic analysis according to Braun and Clark (2006). This data analysis method is suitable to depict plurality of a certain concept as it can identify various patterns in the data. This way it is open for emerging ideas on academic freedom but also provides an overview of the identified topics and patterns and helps to organize them. For a more detailed overview of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study, see Westa 2017. In the following, this research report will focus on the results of the semi-structured interviews with academics and it will provide a short summary of the policy analysis to give some context.

Figure 1: Data collected from a macro- to micro-level (taken from Westa 2017, 104)



2.2 Practicalities and Participants

The interviews with academics from the University of Bologna took place between October and December 2014 and the interviews with academics from the National University of Singapore between January and March 2015. When selecting interview participants two principals were adopted. First, to gain rich data by selecting interviewees that would reflect different opinions. As experience, disciplinary background and gender might influence the experience and understanding of academic freedom diversity in this respect was a guiding principal. Second, the participants should be motivated to share their ideas on the topic to get detailed insight into their ideas on academic freedom and to achieve rich data. Thus, a mixture of purposive and convenient sampling was adopted. Purposive sampling should secure diversity within the group of participants and convenient sampling through a contact person within each university should enhance an atmosphere of trust during the interview situation. The interviewees with details on their career stage and discipline are presented in *Table 1* and *Table 2*.

Table 1: Interview Participants University of Bologna (UniBO) (adopted from Westa 2017, 104)

Participant Code	Gender	Discipline	Position
I 1	Male	Statistics	Full professor; leadership position
I 2	Male	Medicine	Researcher

I 3	Female	Law	Full professor; leadership position
I 4	Female	Law	Junior Researcher
I 5	Male	Astronomy	Full professor; leadership position
I 6	Female	Bio-Technology	Full professor; leadership position
I 7	Male	Engineering	Full professor
I 8	Male	Mathematics	Full professor; leadership position
I 9	Male	Sociology	Researcher
I 10	Female	Political Science	Full professor
I 11	Male	Psychology	Full professor

Table 2: Interview Participants National University of Singapore (NUS) (adopted from Westa 2017, 104)

Participant Code	Gender	Discipline	Position
S 1	Male	Natural Science	Adjunct Lecturer, Researcher
S 2	Male	Natural Science	Professor, leadership position
S 3	Female	Natural Science	Lecturer, Researcher
S 4	Male	Applied Science	Lecturer, Researcher
S 5	Male	Humanities	Professor; leadership position
S 6	Female	Arts and Social Science	Professor, leadership position
S 7	Male	Arts and Social Science	Professor

Overall, it was much easier to get access to Italian participants than to Singaporean ones. Some of the interviewees in Singapore were also afraid to be identified that is the reason why the details given about interviewees in Singapore are less concrete than the information on the Italian ones. I do mention this at this point as it might be connected to the topic of academic freedom.

The Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana gave ethical approval for the study and all ethical guidelines from both research sites were taken into account. In addition, all participants received the quotes that are used before publication to secure their anonymity and accuracy.

3. Results

This section presents some selected aspects on academic freedom deriving from the research. The focus lies on showing the variety of meaning of academic freedom within and across different cultural, legal and individual contexts. The first part sets out to give some more information about the regional context without any claim to be complete. Rather than engaging with a deep policy analysis this part is meant to give the reader contextual information to further the understanding of the academics working environment. Similar counts for the national and institutional context presented in the following sections. This research report focuses on individual voices of academics, thus the main part poses three significant questions on academic freedom: (1) What is academic freedom and why is it important?; (2) Do you have academic freedom; and (3) What are problematic restrictions to academic freedom? By answering these questions from the perspective of the interviewees this report shows how diverse the meaning of academic freedom, the individual situation and problems connected to academic freedom are. It points out that often the personal situation of academics is more significant for the experience of academic freedom than the system itself. In other words, academic freedom is not only dependent on the wider context but also on the specific micro-level context of the individual.

3.1 The Regional Context

In the case of the University of Bologna, the most significant regional identification in the field of higher education is of course the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the connected Bologna Process. Even if as outlined under 1.3 the meaning of academic freedom changed within the Bologna Declarations and Communiqués, academic freedom is a significant value inherent in the Bologna Process and the EHEA. Thus, academic freedom in Europe has a profound basis and academics and students can refer to the right to have freedom in research and teaching.

Singapore and the National University of Singapore can be counted towards two major regional organizations, namely the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a political union and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) as a union of single leading universities. ASEAN was founded in 1976 by the foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippine, Singapore and Thailand and is a follow-up joint venture of the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA). The main aspiration of ASEAN is to “to strengthen further the existing bonds of regional solidarity and cooperation” (ASEAN 1967, 1) due to the idea

[...] that in an increasingly interdependent world, the cherished ideals of peace, freedom, social justice and economic well-being are best attained by fostering good understanding, good neighbourliness and meaningful cooperation among the countries of the region already bound together by ties of history and culture (ibid., 1).

This excerpt shows that freedom is an important value within ASEAN. Nevertheless, it is not inherent in the aims of ASEAN connected to higher education that are, for example,

3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres; [...]
6. To promote South-East Asian studies; [...] (ibid., 2-3).

In other words, the target for cooperation in higher education is a learning culture and less connected to a common value system, despite promoting regional studies. Summarising it can be stated that ASEAN with Singapore as one of the founding members, do support freedom but not academic freedom in particular at least on paper.

APRU was founded in 1997 by universities from the USA (California Institute of Technology, the University of California Berkeley, the University of California Los Angeles and the University of Southern California). As such, it is not an Asian organisation but many Asian universities joined throughout the years. Today in 2018, APRU has 50 universities from Australia, Canada, Chile, China and Hong Kong SAR, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Thailand and the USA as members. Among them is also the National University of Singapore (APRU 2018) that hosted APRU during the time of the study. With the initial aim

to establish a premier alliance of research universities as an advisory body to international organisations, governments and business on the development of science and innovation as well as on the broader development of higher education. The vision now encompasses focusing new knowledge on the global challenges affecting the region (APRU 2016a).

the founders of APRU focus clearly on influencing the higher education landscape in the region. Today, the thematic priorities of APRU are to

advance the aspirations of its members and contribute to global society by:

1) Shaping Asia-Pacific Higher Education and Research

APRU universities can together shape the policy environment for higher education and research and influence social, economic, political and cultural forces that impact the future of universities.

2) Creating Asia-Pacific Global Leaders [...]

3) Partnering on Solutions to Asia-Pacific Challenges

[...] with partners from government and business, international organizations, other universities and community leaders [...] (APRU 2012, 4).

World-class leadership is thus a core idea of APRU that tries to connect single universities to support their endeavour of becoming and remaining world leaders and to create a strong network of those leading universities. From this perspective APRU can be described as a 'networked region' concerning higher education in the Pacific-Rim (Duara 2015). Concerning academic values, APRU has not adopted a strong bond, as academic freedom is only mentioned in one single document.

Universities offer forums for debate and public dialogue. With an established culture of academic freedom, they have long played a traditional role as the critical conscience for society (APRU 2016b).

As such, APRU is not an appropriate reference point for academic freedom within the region.

Overall, the regional organizations that Singapore and the National University of Singapore are part of do not offer a supporting framework for academic freedom but do give hints that freedom (in the case of ASEAN) and academic freedom (in the case of APRU) should be a right. In comparison, it can be claimed that Italy and the University of Bologna do have a supportive regional framework for claiming and exercising academic freedom.

3.2 The National Context

The regional protection of academic freedom in EHEA is also reflected within the Italian law, as academic freedom is a constitutional right. In this respect, Article 3 safeguards the “freedom of art and science and the teaching thereof” and states, “[h]igher education institutions, universities and academics, have the right to establish their own regulations within the limits laid down by the law” (Senato della Repubblica 1948). Despite this law, many scholars claim that academic freedom was only adopted recently (Moscati 2009). Only after reforms in the late 1960s, the implementation of academic freedom started (Ballarino and Perotti 2012) and the needed transformation of the Italian university system only took place in the 1980s due to changes on an EU level (Moscati 2014). After the most recent Italian university reform (the Gelmini Reform) that included a focus on quality management and increased managerial autonomy many scholars resume that university autonomy did not increase and that academics still have a decent amount of freedom in their work (Donina, Meoli and Palerari 2015; Ballarino and Perotti 2012; Moscati 2012). Overall, Italy provides a supportive framework for academic freedom on a practical level, even if Beiter, Karran and Appiagyeyi-Atua (2016) and Estermann, Nokkala and Steinell (2011) have concluded in their studies on measuring the degree of academic freedom and university autonomy that Italy is still below the European average.

The case is very different and short to summarise when it comes to Singapore. There is no mentioning of academic freedom in any higher education law of Singapore [see for example, Singapore Management University Act Chapter 302A (The Law Revision Commission 2014), the Education Act Chapter 87 (The Law Revision Commission 1987), and the National University of Singapore (Corporatisation) Act Chapter 204A (The Law Revision Commission 2006)]. Only the word autonomy is mentioned in press releases from the Ministry of Education (see for example, MOE 2005a; 2005b; 2000). Autonomy in these publications means autonomy in organisational and financial terms and not academic autonomy (see also Marginson 2011; Mukherjee and Wong 2011; Mok 2010; Olds 2007). Thus, it can be summarised that academic freedom is not a standing concept within the Singaporean legal framework.

Nevertheless, fundamental liberties are part of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore (The Law Revision Commission 1999). They include the right of free speech, assembly and association (ibid., art 14). The same law restricts these freedoms soon after as they can be suppressed due to security, moral and public reasons, which leaves a wide spectrum for interpretation. They also do not apply to foreigners which affects all visiting academics and academics who are not Singaporeans. There is only one possible justification for academic freedom, namely the fact that Singapore joined UNESCO in 2007. Thus, it indirectly acknowledges the UNESCO recommendation on the *Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel* described in 1.5.

Comparing both cases, it becomes obvious that the legal protection of academic freedom on a national level is extremely different. Whereas Italy has a good foundation for exercising academic freedom, there is almost no acknowledgment of it in the Singaporean context.

3.3 The Institutional Context

During the time of the study, the strategic plan 2013-2015 was the most comprehensive overview of the university's missions, goals and aspirations next to the university's website. In the document, the University of Bologna describes itself as

[p]roud of its heritage and its records; strong in its autonomy and the wealth of its knowledge; aware of its scientific and educational vocation and high social and moral responsibilities, the alma Mater aims to be a natural environment for the innovation of knowledge, the recognition of merit and the full education of its citizens (Alma Mater Studiorum 2013, 17).

Despite this reference to its heritage academic freedom is not part of the strategic plan or the website with only one exception, the link to the Magna Charta Observatory.

Nevertheless, the importance of the academic community finds recognition by mentioning that as a

responsible community of students, teaching, administrative and technical staff, the alma Mater works to ensure that everyone, and in particular young people, can grow by experimenting the uniqueness of culture with rigour and passion, in a multitude of disciplinary and scientific languages (ibid., 17).

Next to the emphasis on a supportive academic community, there exists another passage in the strategic plan that might be interpreted as academic freedom, as the university,

an institution open to both internal and external dialogue, pursues its goals in conformity with the values of autonomy, respect for diversity and social responsibility (ibid., 19).

From this excerpt it does not become clear if autonomy refers to the individual and hence means academic freedom or if it refers to institutional autonomy. Still, it is very surprising that the University of Bologna has no clear expression of academic freedom despite its connectedness to the Magna Charta Universitatum as the host of its observatory. It is not clear if academic freedom is such a natural value within the

University of Bologna that it does not even require mentioning or if it is just not an important part of major representation forms of the university. Whether this has any influence on academics' perspectives on academic freedom and their practical experiences, cannot be said with certainty but an insight into this will be given in the following parts of this report.

Not surprisingly, the word academic freedom is not mentioned in any major publications from the National University of Singapore, which shadows the regional and national situation. Rather than focusing on academic values, the National University of Singapore has world-leadership and excellence in teaching, research, and service in its mind. This is also reflected in its mission and vision statement:

Vision

A leading global university centred in Asia, influencing the future

Mission

To transform the way people think and do things through education, research and service (NUS 2016, 1).

The National University of Singapore wants to achieve this aim by equipping students with life skills and not only knowledge from textbooks; employing world leading professors; fostering interdisciplinary and high-level research; offering entrepreneurial education; establishing and maintaining partnerships with other leading universities, research organisations and global networks; offering artistic and cultural events and courses; as well as engaging in community work that creates a value for society (ibid.).

Summarising both universities do have a concrete idea on their mission and vision that is connected to the greater good of society and their students. Academic freedom is only a side concept within the strategic plan and website of the University of Bologna and not mentioned at all in the case of the National University of Singapore.

3.4 What is Academic Freedom and Why is it Important?

After outlining the context of each case this section of the research report engages with the academics' perspectives on academic freedom. Thus, it shows in how far the context influences the individual experiences with, and ideas about academic freedom. The first question that will be answered is tackling the core of academic freedom namely the meaning and importance of this concept for academics. The aim of this section is not end up with a universal definition of academic freedom but to show the wide variety of definitions that academics have in mind. There was no difference in the ability of academics to define or justify the importance of academic freedom for their work between Singapore and Italy. This might also be connected to the fact that all participants from the National University of Singapore have studied or worked outside of Singapore mainly at elite universities in the US and UK. This is not a coincident but can be attributed to the university's mission of attracting the leading researchers and teachers. Looking for participants of this study it became clear that it would be impossible to find

academics within the National University of Singapore that had remained their whole career including study time within Singapore.

Academic freedom has plenty of meanings and academics do summaries different aspects – as the definitions were given spontaneously during the interviews it cannot be expected that each academic could give a comprehensive definition on the spot. Rather the ideas on academic freedom developed further when reflecting on and talking about the concept. Many participating academics have not spent much time on thinking about academic freedom, as they are occupied with other issues in their regular work. As such, the interview situation gave them the room to reflect actively on their own situation and the meaning of academic freedom for them. Thus, some adopted their assessment throughout the interview situation and stated

“... because maybe I was wrong ... when I said that in my case there is no problem with academic freedom ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

This citation highlights the process of reflecting about the concept and the individual situation during the interview. Therefore, it shows that the consciousness about academic freedom can only be raised by conversations and critical reflection.

All academics did have a concrete idea on the meaning of academic freedom. The following citations shall give an overview of different ideas.

“...by academic freedom we understand that an academic just because of his position should be free to think and write and publish and produce the kind of knowledge he believes is important.” (I2: UniBo; researcher; medicine)

“A researcher in my opinion should be granted to be free to work on subjects that he or she thinks are important.” (I5: UniBo; full professor; Astronomy)

“I would think that academic freedom is about freedom from the governing power” (I9: Unibo; researcher; sociology)

“Well, that you can select ... on the basis of your ... let’s say professional ... let’s say competence, the topic, or the research question that you feel are most important in your field at the moment” (Unibo; full professor; political science)

“That you are free to organise yourself [...] to have freedom to collaborate.” (I11: UniBo, full professor; psychology)

“... academic freedom means ... the freedom to do research and to have appropriate tools for it. It means that you can work in a team and decide on a topic that is important to advance your discipline.” (S3: NUS; researcher; natural science)

Academic freedom thus, has a variety of aspects, for example, the freedom to choose topics for research based on expertise, freedom of self-organisation, freedom to collaborate, and freedom from governing bodies. The freedom of teaching was not mentioned spontaneously but finds recognition in other parts of the interviews. The main question is not only about the nature or academic freedom but also about the justification and reasoning why academics should possess freedom. Academics in general find valid and convincing reasons to explain the need:

First, academic freedom is a condition for developing new ideas and innovations.

“...you should have some space to create in the in the world of ideas” (I 10: UniBo; political science; full professor)

In order to do this, academics need time and space to test if a pathway is leading to success.

“I need time, maybe I need ... two weeks just to think without doing anything and so this two weeks ... what you say, that your production was zero ... no it's just intellectual work is ... it's like this ... you cannot evaluate the amount of scientific work as you evaluate the amount of bureaucratic work ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

“... they are free to follow their idea and then maybe in two years' time, it's time to see if their idea was right or not ... but they have to be free to follow their idea, it's very important for the development of new strategies or new elements ...” (I4: UniBo; junior researcher; law)

“Sometimes you need a series of discoveries before it leads to something big ... research is like that! You don't know where it is going to lead” (S2: NUS; professor; natural science)

In other words, academic freedom is needed due to the nature of research, that is often time consuming and unpredictable. In order to follow unknown paths and to make new discoveries academics need a high amount of motivation and persistence.

“... to develop the ideas that you find consisting and motivating.” (I7: UniBo; engineering; full professor)

“... you need to follow what is motivating you ... what is the challenge that you feel that is motivating you, that is well ... it's something which is really a very strong spring, that's the very strong spring ... without this ... the government says you know ... you person, you Bologna, you department, you universities, now have to study this ... this maybe last for some years ... but if that is forever ... that will change the compelling force that we have inside to look for something new into some say routine work which is definitively not motivating” (I7: UniBo; full professor; engineering)

Academic freedom can provide a fertile ground for this. Finally yet importantly, academics in this study mention their expertise in the field as a justification for academic freedom.

“... of course, you need some freedom because you know your field best and you talk to practitioners about their needs ... so you're responsible that your research has some impact, I mean not immediately but in the long-term. Having freedom does not mean to stop communicating with your environment ... you need to be aware of their needs and you have to contribute to society... but for doing this you need to be free to follow your own way of discovery because if we all do the same things in the same way there is no place for creativity and innovation” (S4: NUS; researcher; applied science)

Thus, the academics in this study argue that academic freedom is important. Yet, do they also think that they have this kind of freedom to follow their profession? The next section will give an answer to this all-important question and will raise the point that academics also need to act responsible when being given a high amount of freedom.

3.5 Do you have Academic Freedom?

In general, most academics who participated in this study do feel that they have a decent amount of academic freedom. This did not depend on the country they work in. Some examples, how academics described their freedom or lack of freedom are listed below,

“I never had any problem ... with academic freedom ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

“... if you don't ask for power then you have a very large autonomy, you can do almost everything you want. Within the laws of course, but you are very, very free to do anything you want. But then ... you don't have to ask for resources or funds or money or power within the organisation etcetera. But if you ... if you accept to leave all this aside then you are really, really free in Italy” (I9: UniBo; researcher; sociology)

“More than any other country probably Singapore has handled its, has balanced its authoritarianism better than most, so there are certain topics that are banned particular you cannot say any personal about ... but its lower than in China ... so the limitations are much more restricted ...” (S5: NUS; professor; humanities).

“... the government is also exercising control and it made some decisions that have scared a lot of people out but it's by no means heading to disaster ...” (S5: NUS; professor; humanities)

Despite these rather negative voices from Singapore, not only Italian academics do think that they have freedom in teaching.

“... and so the faculty is free to innovate and use different kinds of pedagogic that would encourage discussion ... and sort of yeah debate ...” (S6: NUS; professor; arts and social science)

“For teaching I think we are also protected by constitution ... the freedom of teaching and topics. So, from this point of view we are free” (I11; UniBo; full professor; psychology)

Some of them relate this freedom to a structure that needs to be given for the sake of students but do not feel that this is a restriction to their academic freedom:

“... because again we are free ... but still you need to have this freedom which is also combined into the organisation of your teaching activities, so just to give a very simple example, imagine that you have a programme where you have ten courses and the programme is about administrative science, so you, each professor should be free, of course, because this is a way to allow the individual professor to give her or his best in the class, right? But still you should avoid overlapping ... you should avoid

overlapping in terms of content but also overlapping in terms of time, of schedule, this are silly details presumably but when you have this at a larger scale in a university ... of course this starts to become important. So, yes, you have freedom but this freedom should be, you know, integrated into an organised setting ...” (I9: UniBo; researcher; sociology)

“... they [the leadership of the university] will look at the complete list of their faculty and they will look at their interest ... so they will match what you have done in your PhD with what you are teaching ... obviously you have to follow the general structure right, if they want you to cover a certain topic then you have to put it in ... but I do know that you have freedom to structure it and of course, someone has to approve it when you come up with a plan” (S1: adjunct lecturer; natural science).

They also mention their freedom in research,

“... I mean in terms of research it [academic freedom] is considered as granted, you know, ... as a granted principle, I would say ...” (I10: UniBo; full professor; political science)

“... when I'm studying I feel completely free ... I'm working on a difficult topic which is the relationship between politics and justice but still I fell completely free” (I10: UniBo; full professor; political science)

The degree of academic freedom seems to have something to do with the disciplinary background and the career stage of academics

“... in my field ... Astrophysics ... I never had any problem of academic freedom ... I imagine that academic freedom can be an issue in some more ... society related disciplines ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

“Then I'm not totally free in the sense that ... I should discuss before the topic that I'm choosing, the path that I'm following, the things that I'm doing ... and this I think is also quite correct, because the limit of your freedom, the amount of freedom that you have ... I think is directly linked ... to your experience ... But it's not so great yet ...” (I4: UniBo; junior researcher; law)

For some academics, even the fact that they have freedom was a reason to remain in academia.

“... because here you are free. ... [the private companies] offered me an analytical work not a research position ... but here I am completely free ... I feel free ...” (I4: UniBo; junior researcher; law)

Having academic freedom is connected to accept and to do justice to the social responsibility that comes with it. This was also taken into consideration by the academics of this study.

“... and I take my responsibility on them ...” (I4: UniBo; junior researcher; law)

“... of course, you need a sort of ... peer pressure, because I cannot say ... I am an astronomer, I have academic freedom and now I start to do astrology ... again, of course this is a borderline ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

However, not all academics believe that the academic community still satisfies this condition.

“... well I think that they have struggled in the past generations ... have struggled to get this freedom and now they just live on what they have gained. I think that if we were, we the academics today, were really challenged by society we couldn't resist the challenge and we should surrender a part of our academic freedom ... I think that the government and the families and the state should really call her ... call academy to its function. Yeah, I think that, now in this context we have too much freedom as university system ... so not on the side of course, of the contents, that you have ... you must have freedom on what you teach or what you choose to do research about but on what is your utility ... your use in the society. I think that now ... the Italian university should be constrained, should be obliged to answer to their stakeholders which are in the end the government and the society, ja. We have too much freedom just like our students have too much freedom and that means that we have lost the sense, the meaning of our work” (I9)

3.6 What are Problematic Restrictions to Academic Freedom?

As mentioned, in general academics do feel free and think that they work in an appropriate environment, both at the University of Bologna and the National University of Singapore. Nevertheless, as academic freedom is not an absolute concept but depends on repeated negotiations there are in both cases some minor to major drawbacks described by academics from Italy and Singapore.

One of the most obvious ones, for all working within academia is probably the high level of bureaucracy. Despite the fact that this is rather an organisational problem than one directly connected to academic freedom, I will show some examples of it here.

“The bureaucracy takes a lot of time ... that is not my job, so I mean it is not so supportive in doing your job” (I6: UniBo; full professor; bio-technology)

“... we have a lot of bureaucracy so ... my personal feeling is that I spent too much time with bureaucratic matters ... much more than what I think would be normal in a standard country and so this is a little bit worrying to me because it's taking time from more important aspects...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

“Yeah, on one hand I understand the fact of a spending review, the fact that the university has economic problems like all the institutions ... so I understand the rationale of it, but sometimes I believe it can be a block. Because if I have, you know, to bring about all these documents ... sometimes I am overwhelmed ... with administrative documents and I say okay ... than I prefer not to invite anyone because otherwise I lose too much time on that ...” (I4: UniBo; junior researcher; law)

Some of the restrictions also come from within the academic community in form of predominate schools of thought

“... but I can see ... that there are schools of thoughts in different solutions or also technical things have some ... are based on some interpretations which are not so

objective ... even so, they may be presented in say, an objective way but they are ... interpretations and the same facts ... which are unique when you are ... when now described qualitative or when you describe the results of an experiment the same facts can now be interpreted in different ways ... and I see that there are schools of thought which are rather strict in promoting only their way of thinking and banning, literally banning the opposite way of thinking or alternative ways of thinking ... that can also arrive at the freedom of teaching. But it's more a freedom of interpreting, so I can see that publishing in journals ... you can see these fights, which are fights against different interpretations based on different interpretations and schools of people who made their career out of some interpretation ... they strongly provoke the interpretation fighting against ... I'm sure ... that will prevent also people in their schools from teaching a subject in a different way ... (I7: UniBo; full professor; engineering).

“So, the important intervention is upstream ... is not on the actual disease itself, so that ... that's our approach and that's also the reason why we are seen as a as a strange cell of political activism ... actually we have been called as a heretic cell ... within the school of medicine, but that was some years ago. Now there are, of course ... since also the mainstream medical literature is talking about these things ... also my colleagues have to acknowledge that. After all they have to come to terms with what we do” (I2: UniBo; researcher; medicine)

Other academics think that this is an important aspect of peer-review.

“... [changing disciplines is] not easy because, of course, you have also to compromise with let's say you know ... context in life ... but you need to compromise because when you are evaluated, you are evaluated as a professor or candidate or applying professor in something ... economics, sociology, political science, so ... you should be able to show that you stand at this ... the level that is requested for the position you are applying for ... which is fine in my view, so I think you should, you know, try to keep a balance between what is requested by the institutional context which is important because it creates a sort of ... an objective level of standard for all people that are, you know, doing work in a discipline ... and what is in your mind, your scientific research, which is enriched by different disciplines, so that's I think, this is a big challenge, this is a big challenge, yeah” (I10: UniBo; full professor; political science)

A significant aspect that was raised by academics can be illustrated using Biesta's (2010) description of the 'Age of Measurement'. This corresponds to research,

No, I think academic freedom ... there is something more subtle that can make some problem with the academic freedom ... so this is in my opinion the exceptional weight that is now put on the number of papers that you write, how many students you have, of course, some check is useful but you cannot classify people just saying oh you published ten papers, the other published nine papers ... so let me explain in detail ... For example in Astronomy, right now ... in Astronomy we have two major lines of research, one is the huge big cooperation's, like people doing practical physics at CERN in Geneva ... so you have collaborations of several hundred Astronomers

working for ... in what they call surveys, so of course, you need, like in Germany ESO ... you need big telescopes and, of course, to have big telescopes you need countries and you need hundred peoples scores, so it's a huge huge investment ... many people, so you can imagine when such a big project starts to produce, you write ... you are hundreds of people, so you write hundred papers per year okay? Now let's look to the other aspect, like myself, people doing theoretical Astrophysics, you don't need telescopes ... what you really need is time, because you have to think some problem ... you have to start to work on this problem and maybe after a couple of months that you are working on the problem you just realise that it's a dead ... dead way ... and start again, so of course, if you ... if you work on theory, I am not saying it's more difficult ... it takes longer to produce something, by nature not just because you are lazy ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

and this has effects on career planning of young academics and in the long-run for the scientific engagement in theoretical developments

“... because young people ... now they look, of course, because everyone will do the same, what's the most probable ... the most simple way to reach a position and they move in in the bigger projects and so less and less people are doing theory ... and so this is a subtle ... an indirect effect for academic freedom, because you are in some sense forcing people to choose something to work on ... and I think this is a problem, in fact I was discussing this with a colleague of Harvard University and remember that I ... in this case, I am not blaming Italy, because this stupid way of counting papers was invented in the United States ... we know Americans they like to count everything, so they count papers but now, they realised that this is a problem and in fact this colleague tells me well yes this is true in many places they count papers, in Harvard we start again to read the papers so I think this ... they realised that this approach at the end can be dangerous for the academic freedom ... “ (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

The problem of measurement can be also seen within higher education teaching

“You cannot evaluate people just putting crosses on the mathematic examination and say okay, three are a yes, two are empty answers ... so I evaluate the people ... this is completely stupid you cannot judge a person like this. I prefer a white paper where people write on the paper ... and so you can learn what they have right in their mind, what they have wrong in their mind, of course, this is a much more expensive, time consuming and also sometimes boring process but it is the only way ... really to educate people ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

The pressure on numbers seems to be more problematic in Italy than in Singapore.

“... you know I could not have this kind of live anywhere else ... you know in the US, right you would be much more stressed to produce more and the work ... the work environment is much more complicated and in Europe when you are trying to get research funding it is really tough ... here I can do my research time ... so my time is research time ... so it gives me a lot of time to distribute my research ... you don't find a place like this anywhere in the world, you know I have good

collaborators, I have good funding ... so there are lots of advantages of working here and very few disadvantages” (S2: NUS; professor; natural science)

The focus on numbers is also reflected propaganda of the mass media and thus, becomes a problem for academic freedom.

“... mass-media ... it’s twenty years that there is a campaign saying: oh you have the university ... people working at the university are just not doing anything for the society ... so the reaction for this attack was to say okay, so now we will ... politicians, for example, they say now we will do a real control of the university ... so this is understandable, this can be also right in some sense ... and so how can you quantify for the public opinion, well if you count a product ... a so extremely low level check just ... how many papers you produce, okay? ... there is a confusion between quantity and quality, I can produce tons of papers meaningless and so my university would be better just because I produce hundreds of papers ... meaningless, no but in the ... in the public opinion this is a quantity that at least can be measured ...” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

According to this interviewee, the reaction of universities is not helpful either.

“... university system tries in some sense to defend ... itself and the only possibility to reply to such low-level statement is just to present ... look we are doing something ... unfortunately a serious evaluation is a lot more complicated, more subtle, enters in aspects about quality that are completely above the average level of Italian electors” (I5: UniBo; full professor; astronomy)

The university system, changes in the governing system and budget allocation raises some more concerns of academics.

“We have experimented ... a different model before the last reform and ten years ago, or also 5 years ago ... we had more independence in our organisation and possibility to have control on the decision process. Now we have much minus autonomy in the decision process” [due to the merging of smaller faculties into bigger ones often at different places, for example, Bologna and Rimini] (I1: UniBo; full professor; statistics).

“... it is not as autonomous, not as near as autonomous in these developing Asian nations [in comparison to the western world] because of course the states were much more concerned about productive knowledge, right ... knowledge that will be here ... to nation building and state building and so the autonomy factor was reduced but it was still there ...” (S5: NUS; professor; humanities)

“I’m not in favour of the argument which says that we receive from the government an amount of money which is proportionate to the numbers of students that we have ... so we have to accept as many students as we can ... because that is not a good economic argument to me ... that is not leading to an institution which is at the end recognised for the quality of the graduates that its schools have... so if we want to be an institution known for the quality of the graduates we have to pursue the quality of the graduates ... not accepting everyone that’s the main iteration” (I7: UniBo; full professor; engineering)

“I am worried about the future because the state is not so much interested in investing money in research ... and I think that if they cut the research aspect of this university, particularly in my scientific field we will be professors of a secondary school not of a university ... in my personal experience ... research is fundamental also for the teaching aspect of our activities because really you can improve ... otherwise you can read a book and you can go ... you know to explain to the student what you read ... that is not the university that is a secondary school ... Because really if you do research ... you really need to, you know, using cutting-edge technology, you need to read a lot for your research ... but when you go to the class and you are teaching ... you transfer all that knowledge that is supported ... that is pushed by the research that is the point... I give an example if you go to the shop you can eat the chocolate cake, you can enjoy the chocolate cake but if you learn how to make the chocolate cake, you can improve it, you can change it to your taste” (I6: UniBo; full professor; bio-technology).

The problem of allocating funds to the university is not such a problem in Singapore and this is also one reason why academics have the feeling to be in a supportive environment.

“... [government was putting a lot of money in research] so that meant research was booming and it still is, so I have been in the right place at the right time because in Europe, in the US funding has been cut so badly that now even if you have a very good grant it is almost impossible to get the money ... and that meant that you could do so much more [here] because without the money you cannot do anything ... even if [you have] got great ideas. I have been given everything that I needed because in the US you would be much more stressed to produce more ... and you know in Europe finding research funding is very tough” (S2: NUS; professor, natural science).

“I enjoy working here, it is just a good place because I know that there are no major funding cuts and that I will keep my job when I do good work. This is good to know especially if you have a young family” (S3: NUS; researcher; natural science).

“... so research funding, it’s still fairly uneven ... there are certainly more sources of funding in science and technology sectors ... having said that ... we certainly have not access to funding of the same size ... there are sources of funding from the ministry of education, the university that will also support social sciences or humanities research so ... certainly we could do more but a shortage of research funding is certainly ... it’s not a major issue right now” (S6: NUS, full professor, social science).

Still, other academics wish to have more clarity about the long-term allocation of money.

“As far as my own work is concerned, and I told you, I have been very productive ... they have been very generous. Institutionally there is no real clearance in the budget in the long term and that is ... you are always worried about what’s going to happen with the money... I mean there is not much clarity in the whole process of funding ... I think that is also happening in a lot of other places due to economic crisis, but you know Singapore is very rich they should not have to do that, but maybe that’s also their sense of accountability and to make sure that you are giving all the deliverables

and so on ... but it makes this ... unless you have a few years where you can plan your educational projects ... it becomes a little bit harder...” (S5: NUS; professor; humanities)

Despite, the feeling of Singaporeans to be in the “right place” (S2: NUS; professor, natural science), enjoying their work (S3: NUS; researcher; natural science). There is also some fear about being published on certain topics as one quotation shows

“... and here I want you to ask me before you quote because I do not want to get excluded” (S7: NUS; professor; arts and social science).

I will not engage in the topic that was raised in this respect to protect the anonymity and wish of the interviewee, but I think it is important to mention this incident talking about academic freedom.

Overall, there are many areas where academics’ situation concerning academic freedom can be improved not only in Singapore but also in Europe. Nevertheless, academics in both countries feel that they have good working conditions and do enjoy their work.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report showed that academic freedom is not a sole European idea but important for academics in different contexts even if the legal framework does not protect academic freedom. The individual situation does play a major role in the experience of academic freedom, this does not only include the legal framework but above all the individual context such as personal experience, the close academic community including leading schools of thought, the career stage, the discipline and individual needs. As such all academics from this study could find some space to exercise their freedom. Not only academic freedom seems to make a supportive working environment for academics but also funding, the possibility to engage with international scholars and a supportive working atmosphere. Despite this, the academics in this study do think that academic freedom is necessary to fulfil the tasks and duties related to academic work, but not always all academics do justice to it in practice.

During the interview process it became also obvious that academics do need space and time to reflect on their working conditions and especially on academic freedom. This is the only way in which problems that might be serious for academic work can be predicted in early stage and prevented. Academic freedom thus, is a right that needs attention to protect it. Without the academic community fighting for their freedom it might disappear without further notice. Based on insights from this study, there are several recommendations for enhancing academic freedom, taking the perspective of academics into account.

- a) A mutual understanding and appreciation of different meanings of academic freedom is needed in order to enhance dialogue between different cultures and stakeholders on the topic.

- b) Clear policies need to be in place that protect not only the academic freedom of the academic community but also the individual academic in order to pave the way for a plurality of ideas and thoughts.
- c) Open dialogue about academic freedom and its subtle dimensions needs to be established across disciplines, universities, and countries.
- d) Therefore, space and time need to be provided for open-dialogue between members of the academic community (Westa 2017, 216).

Concluding it can be documented that academic freedom is a complex issue as it is adopted and understood differently across the world. Thus, further research is needed to explore academic freedom in daily situations and from an international perspective to find a joint way of safeguarding it in different situations and contexts. Safeguarding academic freedom in this respect means also to make the important role of universities and the necessity of academic freedom visible for society and the public. It also means to do justice to the social responsibility that comes along with the right to have and exercise academic freedom. Safeguarding academic freedom thus, also means to improve communication between universities, academics and society and to find new and appropriate ways to evaluate academic work on a qualitative and not only quantitative level.

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