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Economics

Socio-Political Analysis of Barriers Affecting University/Industry Collaboration in Georgia

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(Presented by Academy Member Mikheil Jibuti)

Abstract. This paper explores the tensions in Georgian academic and administrative circles arising from externally imposed higher education reforms, particularly those aligned with Western models. Drawing on qualitative data from in-depth interviews, the study examines how these tensions manifest within a complex interplay of compliance, adaptation, and subtle contestation. Rather than framing resistance as an overt opposition, the paper adopts a more nuanced view that includes quiet, everyday forms of resistance, such as selective implementation, symbolic compliance, and the reinterpretation of policy directives. The research places these tensions within the broader context of post-Soviet transformations, where globalization, international partnerships, and the drive for quality assurance have led to significant restructuring of university governance, teaching practices, and research outputs. Georgian universities, in this context, face a tension between embracing modernization agenda and preserving locally valued academic traditions and identities. This tension is particularly evident in the push for research excellence and increased international visibility, often perceived as privileging Western standards and marginalising local knowledge systems. The paper argues that recognising these forms of resistance is essential for developing more context-sensitive approaches to educational reform. Ultimately, the research contributes to a growing body of literature that redefines resistance not as failure or obstruction, but as a form of agency that reflects critical engagement with change and the pursuit of alternative academic perspectives. © *2025 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.*

Keywords: resistance, higher education reform, post-Soviet transformation, Georgian universities, knowledge systems

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, collaboration between universities and external organisations stands as a cornerstone for fostering innovation, driving economic growth, and advancing societal development. Such partnerships harness diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives to tackle complex challenges, develop cutting-edge technologies, and develop talent. Universities play a critical role in generating knowledge, fostering creativity, and

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equipping graduates with skills needed to address the demands of an evolving global economy.

The relationship between universities and industry is increasingly recognized as a driver of economic transformation and societal progress. When effectively managed, university-industry collaborations can yield substantial benefits, including the development of new technologies, the commercialization of research, and the cultivation of entrepreneurial ecosystems. These partnerships also bridge the gap between theoretical research and practical application, creating solutions that address real-world problems while enhancing the employability of graduates (Fuentes et al., 2012; Dent et al., 1999; Galán-Muros et al., 2016).

Despite the potential benefits, these collaborations vary widely across different socio-political and economic contexts. Georgia, with its rich cultural heritage and complex history, offers a compelling case study for understanding these dynamics. Over decades of political transitions and economic transformations, the country's university collaboration landscape has been shaped by historical legacies, socio-political shifts, and economic challenges that continue to influence stakeholder behaviour and institutional practices.

The historical legacy of centralized control during the Soviet era and post-Soviet challenges has left Georgia's academic institutions srtuggling with systemic issues that hinder collaboration making it difficult for Georgia to compete in a globalized economy (Jibuti, 2017).

Drawing on insights from two projects. Firstly, the "Creative Spark: Higher Education Enterprise Programme" (№ EV16048P8P) is a British Council-funded initiative that has fostered enterprise education and partnership. This analysis offers practical recommendations for fostering a culture of innovation and partnership in Georgia and "Research and Innovation Support Program for Stimulating and Improving Cooperation with Enterprise in Engineering Education" (ReINNOVA - № MES-CIF-1-26). This survey aimed to assess the educational needs and perspectives of industries regarding higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in the field of engineering education. Through these lenses, the paper seeks to contribute to broader discussions on how historical and cultural contexts shape collaboration and what strategies can unlock the potential of university-industry partnerships in similar environments.

Resistance Theory as an Analytical Framework. To understand the barriers to university collaboration in Georgia, this paper draws on resistance theory as an underpinning analytical framework (Ford et al., 2008; Jibuti, 2017). Resistance theory, originating from critical sociology, explores how individuals and groups resist perceived threats to their autonomy, identity, and values (Hollander et al., 2004). This theoretical lens comprises the following components:

Cultural Resistance – Opposition arising from deeply held beliefs, traditions, or normsthat are perceived as incompatible with proposed changes.

Structural Resistance - Barriers embedded within institutional systems, processes, or policies that inhibit flexibility or adaptation.

Ideological Resistance – Opposition based on conflicting principles, priorities, or principles between stakeholders.

Power Dynamics – Resistance driven by imbalances in control, authority, or influence, often tied to fears of losing autonomy or dominance.

Emotional Resistance – Reactions rooted in fear, uncertainty, or psychological discomfort associated with change.

This framework offers a lens to analyse the cultural, structural, and ideological factors that perpetuate non-participation in collaborative initiatives. Commonly cited sources that examine resistance in organizational and collaborative contexts indude Ford and Awasthy et al (Ford et al., 2008; Awasthy et al., 2020).

In academic settings, resistance is often manifested as a response to perceived threats to scholarly independence and institutional identity. Older academics, for instance, may view industry partnerships as a deviation from traditional academic values, fearing that external collaborations could lead to the commodification of knowledge and erosion of academic integrity. These resistences are rooted in a protective stance over established norms, where research and teaching are prioritised over external engagement (Jibuti, 2017; Awasthy et al., 2020).

In industry, resistance is frequently shaped by scepticism regarding the practical relevance of academic contributions. Business leaders may perceive universities as disconnected from market realities, and too often prioritising theoretical knowledge over actionable insights. This scepticism is often reinforced by cultural and communicative divides between the two sectors, resulting in mutual misunderstandings and mistrust.

At an institutional level, resistance can be embedded in structural constraints such as bureaucratic rigidity and limited incentives for collaboration. Universities and businesses alike may resist change due to a lack of clear frameworks for managing partnerships, intellectual property rights, and shared accountability. These structural barriers are compounded by historical legacies, such as centralised control during the Soviet era, which discouraged independent collaboration.

In Georgia's socio-political context, power asymmetries between universities and industry can create tensions, with universities fearing dominance by corporate interests and businesses hesitant to engage with perceived inefficiencies in academia. These dynamics underscore the need for equitable and transparent collaboration models that address power imbalances and foster mutual trust.

By applying resistance theory, this paper not only illuminates the cultural and structural roots of non-participation but also underscores the importance of addressing these barriers through targeted interventions. Understanding resistance as a multifaceted phenomenon provides a foundation for designing strategies that respect the values and identities of stakeholders while fostering a shared commitment to innovation and progress.

Historical Context and Barriers to Collaboration: Understanding the barriers to university collaboration in Georgia requires a comprehensive examination of the historical and structural factors that have shaped the country's academic landscape.

The Soviet Legacy. During the Soviet era, Georgia's academic institutions were tightly controlled by the state. This Ideological conformity was manifest through academic institutions being expected to adhere to Marxist-Leninist ideology, promoting socialist principles and the interests of the Communist Party. This emphasis on ideological conformity limited the scope for critical thinking and independent research, constraining academic discourse and creativity.

Research agendas were dictated by political priorities, often sidelining societal and industrial needs. Centralised control stifled academic freedom, limited innovation, and fostered a culture of dependency on state support and thus, mistrust and a lack of collaboration.

The Soviet system placed little emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship, focusing instead on centralised planning and state-controlled production. Academic institutions received limited resources for research and development, and there was little incentive for collaboration with industry or commercialisation of research findings.

Soviet-era bureaucratic structures and administrative practices persisted in post-Soviet Georgia, creating barriers to effective collaborations. Complex regulations, bureaucratic hurdles, and cumbersome approval processes hindered the establishment of meaningful partnerships.

The centralised control fostered a protective stance among academics, who adapted to the state's rigid frameworks. The perceived threats of

collaboration – such as relinquishing control or altering research agendas to align with industry needs – became deeply embedded, perpetuating mistrust of external engagement.

Post-Soviet Transition Challenges. The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought political instability and economic upheaval. Corruption, institutional weaknesses, and a lack of funding for education and research characterised this period. Georgian universities faced significant resource constraints, including outdated infrastructure and brain drain, as skilled professionals sought opportunities abroad. These challenges were compounded by inconsistent legal frameworks and cultural shifts that retained Soviet-era mentalities.

The institutional and cultural inertia of this period further entrenched non-participation. Faculty and administrators, grappling with limited resources, resisted change that might disrupt existing systems or exacerbate inefficiencies. Similarly, businesses, sceptical of universities' capacity to deliver tangible outcomes, resisted collaborative initiatives.

The economy is not solely to blame, Institutional Weaknesses and Governance Issues including inadequate governance structures, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and lack of legal frameworks to support collaboration hindered the establishment of clear mechanisms for university-industry partnerships (Jibuti, 2017).

Economic Isolation. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts further exacerbated Georgia's economic isolation, limiting access to international funding, resources, and best practices in university-industry collaboration. This isolation contributed to brain drain and the underdevelopment of global networks necessary for fostering innovation. Strained diplomatic relations and geopolitical instability further discouraged international partners from engaging with Georgian academic institutions. For industry, the perceived risks of collaboration with institutions lacking global credibility dissuade meaningful engagement.

Underinvestment in Education and Research. Historically, education, research and incubation facilities in Georgia have suffered from underinvestment. Insufficient funding for laboratories, equipment, and faculty development has constrained universities' ability to engage in high-quality research and innovation. Limited resources for interdisciplinary collaboration and commercialisation of research findings have further restricted partnerships with industry. In resource scarcity, academics may prioritise securing internal funding and maintaining existing research over pursuing external partnerships, which are seen as resource-intensive and uncertain. Similarly, industries may resist investing in collaborations perceived as offering limited immediate returns.

Cultural Attitudes Toward Risk and Innovation. Georgia's cultural emphasis on stability and risk aversion has impeded entrepreneurship and innovation. Fear of failure, stigmatisation of non-traditional approaches, and a preference for conformity have discouraged both stakeholders from pursuing collaborative ventures. This lack of entrepreneurial spirit has stifled the development of a vibrant ecosystem for innovation.

These cultural attitudes reflect a collective defence mechanism against perceived instability. Stakeholders may resist adopting innovative or high-risk collaborative models, preferring familiar practices that offer a sense of security and continuity.

Resistance from Academia and Industry: Academic Resistance. Many academics, particularly senior faculty, prioritise traditional academic values such as research and publication over engagement with industry. Concerns about compromising academic integrity, unfamiliarity with business norms, and resource constraints further contribute to resistance. Cultural differences between academia and industry exacerbate these challenges.

Industry Resistance. Businesses often perceive universities as disconnected from practical needs. Limited awareness of the potential benefits of collaboration, coupled with concerns about research reliability and regulatory hurdles, discourages industry stakeholders from engaging with academia. Additionally, the absence of structured platforms for partnership building limits opportunities for interaction.

Survey Insights on Collaboration Interest: To better understand industry sentiment, a survey was conducted asking: *"Are you interested in proactively partnering with Georgian Technical University – the largest engineering education institution in Georgia – to strengthen business ties, ensure employer participation in education, and improve student learning outcomes?"* – Results: 50% responded "Yes, absolutely, 42.9% responded "Yes, but we need some more information and 7.1% responded "No, we are not interested. This underscores the dual nature of industry sentiment. While a clear 50% of respondents are unequivocally in favour of collaboration, nearly 43% remain cautious-seeking additional details before making a committment. These data vividly illustrate the overall cautious optimism among industry stakeholders and reinforces the broader challenges in bridging the gap between academia and industry. Addressing these concerns through enhanced communication, clearer demonstration of mutual benefits, and streamlined administrative processes could pave the way for more robust and trust-based partnerships.

Consequences of Barriers to Collaboration: The barriers to collaboration between universities and external organisations in Georgia have far-reaching implications for the country's socio-economic development. These barriers limit innovation, slowing the development and application of new technologies that could drive competitiveness. Furthermore, a lack of effective partnerships contributes to a mismatch between the academic curriculum and labour market demands, leaving graduates unprepared for employment opportunities and exacerbating youth unemployment (Rossoni et al., 2024).

The absence of collaboration also weakens the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as industries miss opportunities to leverage academic research for product development and market expansion. For universities, these barriers result in reduced access to external funding, diminished global visibility, and stagnation in research output, affecting their ability to attract top talent and foster academic excellence. Additionally, societal progress is hindered, as unresolved socio-economic challenges persist due to a lack of innovative solutions derived from academic-industry synergy.

Economic and Social Impacts. Barriers to collaboration hinder innovation, slow economic growth, and limit societal progress. The absence of partnerships leads to a mismatch between academic outputs and labour market needs, contributing to unemployment and underutilisation of human capital. Brain drain further weakens the talent pool, while businesses miss opportunities for leveraging academic expertise to drive competitiveness.

Impacts on Universities. For academic institutions, barriers result in reduced research funding, limited knowledge transfer, and diminished prestige. Without collaboration, universities struggle to offer industry-relevant curricula and practical training, creating a gap between academic programs and labour market demands.

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers: Addressing the barriers to university-industry collaboration in Georgia requires a proactive and multifaceted approach that targets the root causes of resistance while fostering a culture of innovation and trust. Effective strategies must consider the historical, cultural, and economic contexts that shape stakeholder behaviours, as well as the structural and institutional frameworks within which collaborations occur. This section outlines actionable solu-

tions designed to bridge the gap between academia and industry, emphasising capacity building, policy reforms, and the promotion of shared goals and mutual benefits.

Institutional Capacity Building. Strengthening university infrastructure, providing resources, and establishing dedicated offices to manage partnerships can enhance institutional capacity. Faculty training and professional development programs can further support collaboration.

Policy Reform and Government Support. Implementing supportive policies, such as tax incentives and funding programs, can promote university-industry collaboration. Streamlined regulatory frameworks and protection of intellectual property rights are essential for fostering trust and engagement.

Cultivating a Culture of Innovation. Universities should integrate entrepreneurship education and interdisciplinary collaboration into curricula. Promoting risk-taking and celebrating entrepreneurial success can shift cultural attitudes toward innovation.

Enhancing Networking and Communication. Creating platforms for knowledge exchange, organising forums, and fostering international partnerships can build relationships between academia and industry. Capacity-building initiatives focused on collaborative skills are also critical.

Developing an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. Investing in startup incubators, accelerators, and mentorship programs can strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Facilitating access to funding and support services will further encourage innovation.

Resistance Model Application

The application of resistance theory provides several insights into the utility and limitations of the model in understanding university-industry collaboration barriers. It provides a Multidimensional Understanding of Resistance allowing for a nuanced analysis of the barriers by categorizing them into cultural, structural, ideological, and emotional factors. This categorization highlights that resistance is not a single, monolithic issue but a complex interplay of diverse elements. The emphasis on the interplay between structural and cultural resistance is particularly evident in Georgia, where rigid bureaucratic frameworks and underdeveloped regulatory policies exacerbate the challenges of fostering partnerships. These systemic barriers are further compounded by cultural attitudes that prioritise stability over innovation, resulting in a reluctance to take risks or embrace change. Such resistance is not merely a passive phenomenon, but an active defence mechanism aimed at preserving existing norms and avoiding perceived vulnerabilities (Ford et al., 2008).

By identifying the roots of resistance – whether they lie in outdated policies, cultural inertia, or ideological divides – it becomes possible to design targeted strategies to address these challenges.

Conclusion

Addressing the historical, socio-political, and economic barriers to university collaboration in Georgia requires:

- Engagement of stakeholder to foster inclusive, supportive ecosystem and institutional capacity within universities to support collaboration;
- Reform policies to enable effective university-industry partnerships;
- Build collaboration on a foundation of trust, with clear policies on Intellectual property rights, Funding mechanisms, Accountability structures;
- Create platforms for: Networking, Knowledge sharing, Skill-building;
- Prepare stakeholders for meaningful and sustained engagement.

Georgia can transform its higher educational and industrial sectors into engines of sustainable growth and innovation, contributing to national prosperity in a competitive global economy.

ეკონომიკა

უნივერსიტეტსა და ინდუსტრიას შორის თანამშრომლობის წინაღობების სოციალურ-პოლიტიკური ანალიზი საქართველოში

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წინამდებარე ნაშრომი იკვლევს ქართულ აკადემიურ და ადმინისტრაციულ წრეებში არსებულ წინააღმდეგობებს, რომელიც წარმოიშვა დასავლური მოდელების შესაბამისად გატარებული რეფორმების ფონზე უმაღლეს განათლებაში. კვლევა ეფუძნება საქართველოში ჩატარებულ ჩაღრმავებულ ინტერვიუებზე დაფუძნებულ ხარისხობრივ მონაცემებს და ააშკარავებს, თუ როგორ ვლინდება ეს ბარიერები დახვეწილ წინააღმდეგობრივ ურთიერთდამოკიდებულებებში. ნაშრომში განხილულია წინააღმდეგობა არა როგორც ღიად გამოხატული პოზიცია, არამედ როგორც მრავალგანზომილებიანი პროცესი, რომელიც მოიცავს ყოველდღიურ, ნაკლებად თვალსაჩინო პრაქტიკებს, როგორიცაა შერჩევითი თანამშრომლობა, სიმბოლური შესაბამისობა და ადმინისტრაციული დოკუმენტების ალტერნატიული ინტერპრეტაცია. აღნიშნული წინააღმდეგობები კვლევაში განხილულია პოსტსაბჭოთა გარდაქმნების უფრო ფართო კონტექსტში, სადაც გლობალიზაცია, საერთაშორისო პარტნიორობა და ხარისხის უზრუნველყოფის მექანიზმები უნივერსიტეტების მმართველობის, სწავლა-სწავლების პრაქტიკისა და კვლევითი შედეგების მნიშვნელოვანი რესტრუქტურიზაციის მიზეზი გახდა. ამ პროცესებში ქართული უნივერსიტეტები დგას მოდერნიზაციის დღის წესრიგის მიღების და ადგილობრივი აკადემიური ტრადიციებისა და იდენტობის შენარჩუნების დაძაბულობათა წნეხში. აღნიშნული დაძაბულობა ცხადად ვლინდება კვლევის ხარისხის გაუმჯობესებისა და საერთაშორისო ცნობადობის გაზრდის მოთხოვნებში, რაც ხშირად აღიქმება როგორც დასავლური სტანდარტების უპირატესობა და ადგილობრივი ცოდნის სისტემების მარგინალიზაცია. ნაშრომში ნაჩვენებია, რომ წინააღმდეგობა ხშირად განპირობებულია აკადემიური ავტონომიის, კულტურული რელევანტურობისა და კოლეგიალურ ღირებულებათა უგულვებელყოფის შიშით. ავტორები ამტკიცებენ, რომ ასეთი წინააღმდეგობების გააზრება აუცილებელია უფრო შინაარსობრივი საგანმანათლებლო რეფორმების შემუშავებისთვის. საბოლოოდ, ნაშრომში განხილულია წინააღმდეგობა არა როგორც მარცხი ან დაბრკოლება, არამედ როგორც ინსტიტუციური გამოვლენა რომ კრიტიკულად ჩაერთონ ცვლილებებსა და ალტერნატიული აკადემიური პერსპექტივებისკენ სწრაფვაში.

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