

France: Initiatives for Excellence

Emmanuel Boudard and Don F. Westerheijden

INTRODUCTION

France's higher education institutions hardly appeared in the first global university ranking, the 2003 Shanghai Ranking. This 'Shanghai shock', a term apparently coined by Dobbins (2012), was a prime occasion for the reforms in this case study, as it came at a time when the Bologna Process was already leading to changes. The aim of the chapter is to study the structural reforms in France with relevant conclusions regarding their design, implementation and evaluation, from the point of view of changing principles of governance: why and how did actors adopt new principles of action?

France may have been a prime example of a state applying the rule of law ever since the republic stabilised on the principle of *égalité*, that is, at least since the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1959 and in some sense as far

E. Boudard (✉)
La Rochelle Consult, La Rochelle, France
e-mail: emmanuel.boudard@larochelleconsult.fr

D.F. Westerheijden
Center for Hr Education Policy Studies, University of Twente, Enschede,
The Netherlands
e-mail: d.f.westerheijden@utwente.nl

back as the 1789 Révolution. In the area of higher education, Neave (1994, 1995) applied the term of ‘legal homogeneity’ to the higher education policies in many European countries, France definitely included among them, that characterised the welfare state: equal treatment of all higher education institutions each in their own legally defined classes of universities, *grandes écoles*, etc., mitigating or even denying differences in qualities among them. Access to ever larger percentages of age cohorts and regional equality of higher education provision were associated characteristics of such policies. In the view of Neave and Van Vught (1991), legal homogeneity was associated with the state control model of governing the higher education sector – another characteristic of France higher education until the turn of the millennium. In that respect, France maintained a governance model that was being replaced by diverse versions of ‘new public management’ approaches as in many other European countries, following the British and US examples of the neo-liberal turn in the late 1970s (Paradeise et al., 2009; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). This is not to say that higher education in France was not modernised in the decades before 2000, but the main regulatory framework remained that of the Loi Faure of 1968, that is, a law in the *étatist* French tradition, although it introduced more democratic governance within the higher education institutions following the events of May 1968.

According to Neave (2012), with advent of the new type of system governance, that is, the evaluative state, the principle of legal homogeneity was replaced by a new principle, *evaluative homogeneity*. Evaluative homogeneity relinquishes the idea of equality among universities but reinforces the idea of equal treatment especially regarding the ways in which institutions are evaluated for quality. Translating the global neo-liberal trend prevalent at the time, *égalité* of outcomes is replaced by *égalité* of opportunity (Bleiklie, 1998; Espinoza, 2007; Ferlie et al., 2008). Equally applied procedures of evaluation of the merit (ex ante of plans and ex post of performances) supersede previous equality of universities by definition. As usual (at least in France), however, old policy principles were not discarded, but a new sedimentary layer overlays the old one, changing the look of the landscape. Thus, in France, competition for funds under the new regime complements the centralised blueprint distribution models of funding. The roles of actors in the higher education system nevertheless changed significantly through the addition of the new policy principles; the national ministry no longer controls everything beforehand from a Foucaultian *panopticon*, but leaves more room for initiative to local managers (Gane, 2012) – indeed,

the spreading use of the term ‘manager’ symbolises the changed roles and attitudes of university presidents from hardly more than academic figureheads to organisational leaders. Their use of the increased institutional autonomy (*liberté*) is, however, centrally controlled through evaluation because ‘[i]n neoliberalism the patterning of power is established on contract, which in turn is premised upon a need for compliance, monitoring, and accountability’ (Olssen and Peters, 2005).

Intermingling some French terms into the previous paragraphs was meant to show that modern political developments hark back to French traditions. Therefore, France might have adopted New Public Management principles and evaluative homogeneity at an early stage. Central questions in this chapter then become how and why the ministry and local institutional leadership changed their behavioural principle from legal homogeneity to evaluative homogeneity only after the turn of the century?

After the introduction of the context and background of the French reforms, Section ‘The Shanghai Shock’ will address the design process for the reform. Then, it will present the two strands of reforms, the one focusing on inter-institutional cooperation and merger (*pôles de recherche et d’enseignement supérieur* abbreviated as PRES, later *Communautés inter-académique d’universités et d’établissements* [COMUE]) in Section ‘Policy Responses’, and the other focusing on investments (Plan Campus and later Plan d’Investissements pour l’avenir [PIA]/Initiative d’Excellence [IDEX]) in Section ‘Design Process for the Reform.’ Section ‘Concentration of Higher Education and Research Institutions in PRES and COMUE’ presents the monitoring instruments. The chapter concludes with a Section on discussion and conclusion.

The chapter, following a case study design, is based on multiple data sources; our review of previous research is coupled with primary sources in the form of policy documentation in reports and on websites, published in French and English. More primary material was collected through expert interviews, guided by the structure applied to all the case studies in this volume, with a number of national actors as well as with representatives of universities involved in the reforms.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF FRENCH REFORMS

At the turn of the century, higher education in France was offered in a mainly public system, with historically grown differentiation among types of institutions and with many different degrees. Within each formal

category of institutions, all were treated equally; there were no officially recognised differences in status or quality.

Reforms of higher education in France over the decades have often taken the form of adding new types of degrees or new institutional units next to maintaining previously existing ones, making the system hard for outsiders to understand. With the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations (1998 and 1999), the degree structure was modernised to focus on the three cycles, abbreviated in French as the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) degrees.

The university sector was the open-access part of the higher education system, while (elite) professional training took place in the ‘Grandes Écoles’ which selected their enrolling students. There were about two dozen very prestigious Grandes Écoles and in total around 200 of them. After 1968, universities had been split into separate universities, especially in metropolitan areas, often along disciplinary lines, and partly in reaction to their growing size. Thus, Paris came to have 13 universities, while in total France counted at least 81 universities in 2005 (Kaiser, 2007). In total, there are more than 300 institutions under the guardianship of several ministries (Cour des comptes, 2011).

Another characteristic of the French higher education system was the separation of education and research, where research was largely concentrated in laboratories under the national research organisation *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS), while for universities and Grandes Écoles, education was the primary mission. Since 1995, cooperation between CNRS and universities has been increasingly institutionalised (Kaiser, 2007).

Regional cooperation (and regional public co-funding), rationalisation of the higher education institutions and in general emulating the success of Silicon Valley had been themes of French policy since the 1980s, when the ‘Universités 2000’ plan was launched, but had never gained high priority until the Bologna Process reforms after 2000 (Filâtre, 2004; Sursock, 2015). Reforms from 2008 onwards, especially IDEX, should be viewed in the context of tighter economic conditions.

The Shanghai Shock

France’s higher education institutions did not appear in large numbers in the first global university ranking, the 2003 Shanghai Ranking. ‘[W]hen the Shanghai Ranking appeared . . . [in 2003], it had the effect of a bomb-shell: only three French universities were in the Top 100 and the “grandes écoles” or the research organisations did not feature in the Top 100’

(Sursock, 2015, p. 21). The ‘Shanghai shock’ showed that the fragmented higher education system was not fit for global competition (Harfi and Mathieu, 2006). Fitness for global competition had been an issue for French policymakers since many years, and a motivation to initiate the Sorbonne Declaration – witness the Plan-Attali (Attali, 1998) – which led to the pan-European Bologna Process.

The fragmentation of the French higher education and research systems into many institutions, each primarily focused on either education or research, was generally seen as a major cause for France’s invisibility in international rankings, with university rankings seen as an exponent of increasing globalisation, which was prominent around the turn of the century. The structural reforms focused on integration into larger units of higher education *and* research. A second focus was the long-term underfunding of institutions, especially universities. Third, it was felt that a well-functioning knowledge economy needed tight relations between higher education and its local or regional environment, while the institutional logic of the higher education and research systems had been oriented to the nation state as a whole for previous centuries through centralised planning and control.

Policy Responses

The 2008/2009 financial crisis triggered the government’s PIA (‘Plan d’Investissements pour l’avenir’ or ‘Plan for Investments in the Future’), including a programme for higher education, IDEX. This implied stepping up earlier policies for investments in selected higher education institutions.

To clarify developments, we distinguish two lines of policy initiatives in response to the contextual impetus: Line A focuses on the concentration of higher education and research institutions to overcome fragmentation; Line B on investing money in selected facilities and projects to create world-class institutions. At the strategic level, the government intends the structural reforms to achieve:

- Higher education and research institutions that are excellent at a global level (highly visible in the international university rankings)
- Innovations and economic growth in France
- Modernisation of the national higher education and research system

The operational goals of Line A included the following steps:

- Step 1: Creating a small number of large higher education and research institutions (known as ‘Pôles’ or centres of research and higher education, in French abbreviation PRES).
- Intermediate step: Further integration within PRES or combination of several PRES.
- Step 2: Bringing *all* universities into inter-academic communities of universities and institutions (COMUE). COMUE are similar to PRES, but in contrast to the voluntariness of PRES, universities are obliged to become part of a COMUE. A COMUE comes closer to a being a single university than the more federal PRES; it implies more educational and research cooperation.

The operational goals of Line B are:

- Step 1: Provides funds for a limited number of institutions to renovate their buildings and facilities to the best level available internationally (Plan Campus). Grants were made available competitively.
- Step 2: Provides incentives for some institutions to become competitive internationally for attracting the best researchers, teachers and students (IDEX).

The different policy instruments were clear in their operational goals. Plan Campus and IDEX had a detailed (and largely similar) procedure for submission and further handling of proposals, which made the goals and deadlines explicit. Similarly, the procedures and conditions for how PRES, and later COMUE, were to be composed were clear, although both had intentionally flexible elements so that there were no blueprints as to who should cooperate with whom.

DESIGN PROCESS FOR THE REFORM

The initiative for the policy came largely from the ministry responsible for higher education and research, though the need for reform was widely acknowledged in the academic community around 2004. There was also a consensus on the need for reform among politicians. However, a single solution was not in sight at that time. Following several attempts since the 1980s to modernise the system that were not accepted or that were not

given high priority in most regions, in 2004, a large consultation of researchers (including an ad hoc group ‘Sauvons la Recherche’) reached a consensus in a meeting in Grenoble on pulling together institutions. The ministry also felt the need to put the university in the centre and to permit specialisation. Building on the broad consensus, the PRES were designed first (concentration = Line A, step 1), then came Plan Campus (funding = Line B, step 1).

The Plan Campus was prepared by a bipartisan committee led by two former prime ministers, Rocard (leftist) and Juppé (centrist). This committee chaired by two former prime ministers was symbolic of the importance of the issue as well as the broad support for it. The fact that the president of the republic himself, Sarkozy, signed the final decision also symbolised its importance.

Consultations for the reforms took place with representatives of the higher education institutions, especially the ‘Conférence des Présidents d’Université’ (CPU). The CPU played a marked role and managed to steer the policy into a more autonomy respecting direction than the original, more centrally oriented direction. The universities leaned towards policy instruments that would leave more room for them to engage in competitions for funding, or to continue as they were. Additionally, we concluded from our interviews that the actors’ aims around 2004 were largely convergent, although there was some resistance among academics, labour unions of university teachers, students and their unions against change (see later). Interactions between governmental actors and the higher education institutions appear to have not been very frequent, however, for most of the period of the development of policies.

Design and implementation cannot be completely separated because second step took place in each line after a couple of years of experience. Thus, in step 2 of Line A, the concentration dimension, the COMUE was introduced (a conceptually simpler further development of PRES), while before that the IDEX funds as part of the PIA made up Line B, step 2, functioning in parallel with Plan Campus.

For the actors involved, all these intermingling reforms constituted a complex environment due to the variety of funds coming through different channels. At the same time, actors were supported also through training organised nationally to become competitive. Not all of higher education institutions were participating, but more and more did. The Ministry of Higher Education and Research (in French abbreviated to MESR) was attentive to actors with interesting initiatives, even if they

were not selected in the main policies. For example, 12 additional institutions were retained in Plan Campus above the original 10 (interview MESR). Noteworthy too is that the government in 2016 is continuing a policy launched by the previous government. This is uncommon in French higher education politics (interview MESR). It underlines once more the feeling of urgency and importance of making the French system more globally competitive.

CONCENTRATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS IN PRES AND COMUE

In 2006, Line A of concentrating institutions started with the PRES to establish virtual and physical campuses of cooperating higher education and research institutions. PRES were collaborations of various (types of) higher education institutions (e.g. Grands Établissements Public or Grandes Écoles and universities) and research institutions¹; they mostly focused on doctoral training and concentration of research strengths.

PRES were implemented in the 2006 law for research n° 2006-450.² PRES replaced earlier types of loose and thematic institutional groupings (such as RTRA and RTRS³). Contrary to previous policies, always focusing on harmonious development of all regions, selectivity was to be the hallmark, and the government envisaged 10 PRES in the country; by 2012, the uptake by the system was greater than expected and there were 26 PRES (Sursock, 2015).

From 2014 onwards, these PRES further grouped into COMUE (inter-academic communities of universities and institutions). COMUE are legislated by the 2013 law n° 2013-660 ('Loi Fioraso', Legisfrance, 2013). COMUEs are made up of one or more previously existing PRES. The extent of cooperation (from coordination in specific areas up to merger) is a free choice for the partners in the various COMUEs. Institutions themselves must decide to pull together, mostly universities but often in conglomerates with other institutions for higher education and research laboratories. For small universities, there is hardly any other choice to prosper in the future than to join a COMUE. On 1 January 2015, 25 groups of universities (COMUE) covering most universities⁴ had been officially recognised⁵; others were being developed at that time. Other universities have merged completely, such as the University of Strasbourg

(2009), the Universities of Aix-Marseille and of Lorraine (2012), the University of Bordeaux (2014), the University of Montpellier (2015) or the University of Grenoble Alpes (2016).

COMUE as a whole, rather than their constituent universities, are in charge of their projects, showing increasing integration. Teams of specialists have been formed to manage locally each 'Plan Campus' at the level of a COMUE. A question is how to integrate these teams into the composing universities' staff in charge of real estate management. For example, in the region Aix-Marseille, all universities are merging into one, so for them, the locus of integration is clear. Other COMUEs, comprising institutions located in different cities, were to find other organisational solutions.

For Line A, concentration of higher education institutions into larger constellations mostly within a geographical region, regulation is the major policy instrument. However, the regulation left much room for various levels of intensity of cooperation (up to merger).

Obviously, Line A also needed funding. For instance, there were additional financial means and additional personnel posts to make participation in a PRES attractive to universities. Information played an auxiliary role: to make the opportunities known in the system and to persuade a sufficient number of universities to take part in them. The PRES policy was further encouraged in 2007 by a law on university autonomy providing more decision power at the level of the institution in exchange for greater autonomy of management.

The COMUE reform is obligatory. As a consequence, renewed quadrennial contracts between the government/MESR and institutions are now made with the COMUE, no longer with individual institutions. Annual funding and every 4 years extensive negotiations occur between the ministry and about 25 COMUE (the number may still change) instead of it having to negotiate with about 81 universities.

The implementation of Line A, the concentration strand, although it depended on the regulation by the MESR, was driven by initiatives of universities, other higher education institutions and research organisations to join each other in PRES or later in COMUE. There had to be a local platform willing to submit proposals (the Lorraine case is described extensively in Finance et al., 2015). Institutional leaders' willingness to engage in such rapid and deep change was unexpectedly high (Mignot-Gérard, 2012).

PRES and even more so COMUE implied intense cooperation in which not all university presidents and other leading officers could maintain their

local leadership: ‘the university presidents who were most successful at promoting a PRES had a similar professional profile: for the most part, they were scientists who led scientific universities and whose professional trajectory included an advisory or expert role to the ministry in Paris, their regional authorities and the European institutions’ (Sursock, 2015, p. 23, quoting Aust and Crespy, 2009). Sursock continued to comment that ‘[i]n the process of driving their change agenda, these promoters adopted a top-down approach and excluded from the initial discussions important sections of the university community and the decision-making bodies, including the staff and student unions and the faculty deans . . .’. The lack of consultation and consensus-seeking within universities was (partly?) caused by short return times for project proposals (Mignot-Gérard, 2012). However, the exclusion of some actors ‘would come back to haunt them a few years later’ (Sursock, 2015) in the form of resistance by academics and students (similar in: Finance et al., 2015; Mignot-Gérard, 2012).

The willingness of local leaders to engage in such rapid and deep change goes against conceived ideas of change remaining superficial in higher education (Mignot-Gérard, 2012), although some admit that there is an element of imitation in the university mergers and similar cooperative developments (Finance et al., 2015). A major motivation to engage genuinely in the opportunities of the policies may have been the anxiety, even – or perhaps especially? – among less prestigious universities, to avoid becoming a ‘loser’ (Mignot-Gérard, 2012).

Leaving leeway for local initiative implied a major cultural shift in the ministry’s traditional steering approach. From being the central actor steering the higher education system directly, it became a process manager (Aust et al., 2008).

The implementation process of both reform processes went fairly smoothly, without serious adaptations within each of the steps. The implementation largely went according to plan. Yet, the fact that there were two different steps in itself implies significant adaptation of the concentration stream (Line A: more intense cooperation, affecting more universities) as well as of the funding stream (Line B: higher ambitions, more money).

Actors continued to learn; in the ministry’s experience, universities and COMUE were presenting ever-better project proposals. However, the multitude of initiatives led to confusing situations in some cases. In Paris, for example, a single Plan Campus site included parts of universities belonging to different PRES (Sursock, 2015).

Resistance against all these changes and competitions built up among ‘shop floor’ academics, students and their respective unions. This was due in part to inadequate intra-institutional communication resulting from the speed of the process, and in part for other (including ideological) reasons. The internal atmosphere may have prevented some institutional leaders from ensuring that their higher education institutions took part in the grant competitions. However, precise information on this is not available.

IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES: PLAN CAMPUS AND IDEX

In Line B, *Plan Campus* dedicated €5 billion in 2008⁶ to renovate university buildings and facilities. Universities were invited to present a plan in a competition for the funds; the ministry did not present – as had been its wont – a national plan. The intention was to bring a limited number of French universities to the level of the international playing field. Twelve universities (original plan: 10) were selected (in addition 12 others were nominated for limited funding of about €400 million). Winners in Plan Campus were either excellent campuses (12), promising (5) or innovative (4) (Mignot-Gérard, 2012). At the time of writing in 2015, Plan Campus is still ongoing.

Partly in parallel, *IDEX* was announced in 2009 and implemented since 2010. It aimed to establish physical campuses of excellent higher education and research institutions, focusing on particularly ambitious scientific projects, while partnering with their ‘economic environment’. *IDEX* are funded by the PIA for a total of €35 billion to respond to the 2008 international financial crisis. Eight initiatives were to be selected in *IDEX* (Sursock, 2015), concentrating on institutions facing the highest level of international competition, namely, research universities. The initiative induced differentiation across institutions. The excellence initiatives aim to ensure the scientific reputation of France abroad and attract the best teachers, the best researchers and the best students. Further *IDEX* are under selection with the second PIA call in 2016.

For Line B, stimulating rejuvenated teaching and research facilities, the relationship between instruments was the reverse from Line A: the focus was on *funding* for specific projects, while *regulation* played an auxiliary role. For instance, competition rules for Line B had to be designed and agencies authorised to select proposals in the competitions.

Organisation also was an instrument. As setting up new agencies was largely avoided, existing agencies were given additional roles, for example, the national research funding agency ‘Agence National de Recherche’ (ANR). ANR is the operator in charge of selecting,⁷ contracting, funding and monitoring part of the PIA, including IDEX.

In more detail, the mechanisms of the Line B policies were as follows. In *Plan Campus*, universities were invited to submit plans arguing the need for investments and showing how investments in real estate would contribute to educational and scientific objectives considered in the light of international standards, as well as the structuring effect of the renewed campus on the region.⁸ The renovation of university buildings and facilities was designed to be selective, to create emulation, and regional, requiring cooperation of higher education and research institutions in the area. Besides, the results should be attractive, with new campuses designed by architects, etc.

On the university side, Plan Campus increased professionalism and expertise to university staff: capacity to question, to prepare large projects, to submit and defend projects, etc. The Plan Campus is disseminating some of its good practices to the management of the other buildings of universities through an improved procedure called ‘dossier of expertise’ when planning construction of a new building or modification above €3 million. The ‘dossier of expertise’ improves institutional decision-making as it helps the university board to obtain consensus and to make sure the building plan corresponds to the institution’s needs, focusing on the sustainability of the project and its governance.

Innovative aspects of the policy included:

- Universities’ submit projects based on their own needs and strategies rather than based on a national plan developed centrally.
- Management of projects was stimulated in the form of public–private partnerships rather than maintain the traditional strict separation of public and private spheres.
- Funded as an endowment: The €5 billion capital is not usable but the interest, about €200 million per year, is used for actual expenditures.
- It is not a one-off investment in building facilities but will run for 25 years, thus ensuring professional long-term maintenance of the new facilities.

Additional funds for university investments come from the contracts between regional governments and the national government (so-called *Contrat de Plan État-Région* (CPER)⁹) that follow a logic of regional planning. CPER are separate from Plan Campus, from IDEX and from other funds in the PIA.

IDEX was part of the first PIA (2010–2013) of €35 billion.¹⁰ A second PIA of €12 billion ran from 2013 to 2015,¹¹ and at closure of this chapter, a third PIA was under discussion of about €10 billion.¹² Before beginning the third PIA, the government intended to commission an evaluation of all investments so far. Under IDEX 1, eight projects¹³ were selected for a total of €7.7 billion, and IDEX 2 aimed at a budget of €3.1 billion (*Légifrance*, 2010, 2014). PIA concentrates on institutions facing the highest level of international competition, that is, research universities. The initiative aims for vertical differentiation among institutions. IDEX must contribute significantly to raising the growth potential of the country (in contrast with the regional focus of Plan Campus), as well as accelerate innovation and technology transfer to companies. PIA projects are to play a leading role in the transformation and modernization of France's educational and scientific landscape, through ever closer partnerships between universities, grandes écoles and research organizations.

The PIA and especially IDEX are not managed similar to other ANR calls, which are individual research projects.¹⁴ In the PIA/IDEX procedure, 99 % of the evaluators were non-French (even the jury's president, Jean-Marc Rapp, was Swiss), and many were not university researchers (ANR's main mission is funding research projects) but managers of research (IDEX is not only about research but also innovative training, visibility of research and training offer, restructuring of existing organisations, etc.) and researchers from the private sector (IDEX aims to include higher education's economic environment), etc. While projects achieving goals remain the norm, ANR accepts risk of non-achievement or failure for IDEX projects. The IDEX projects are much larger than ANR's normal research projects, both in euro volume and in time (funded for 10 years); this implies there are fewer projects, though IDEX is even more competitive than usual for ANR.

Further innovative elements about the policy process include an assessment of the status of the institution's research competitiveness at the start, annual monitoring, and an evaluation after 4 years (deciding whether the capital will definitively be awarded to the institution). The follow-up, in case a funded IDEX is not doing well, is mostly handled by

the government based on the regular annual monitoring. Experienced difficulties have been due to various reasons: lack of agreement between institutions even though they agreed the submission of the project, change of environment, legal issues or lack of expertise (mainly expertise regarding large-scale project management, as this was not a university competence in the past). The committee monitoring IDEX implementation is led by the minister in charge of higher education and research (though the minister may delegate this to ministry staff) and mainly comprises high-level staff from the ministry, ANR and ‘Commissariat Général à l’Investissement’ (CGI).

The CGI, a new agency to distribute and monitor investments, was created by bipartisan agreement in 2009. It was to administer the PIA funding programme in response to the economic crisis across a plethora of areas: higher education, research and innovation; small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) and key economic sectors (life sciences, carbon energy and efficiency in resource management, the city of tomorrow, the future of mobility and the digital society). To maintain focus on longer term goals rather than get enmeshed in the ministerial and political routines with their short-term goals, the CGI is located within the office of the prime minister. Through this role and position, the CGI developed to become the main agency involved in the IDEX.

The step up from Plan Campus to IDEX was instigated mainly through a change in the environment, that is, the economic crisis of 2008/2009 and the general increase in size of response of the French government to the crisis through the PIA. As mentioned, however, it changed the character of Line B from regional development to national competition globally.

MONITORING INSTRUMENTS

Until 2016, there were few formal evaluation and feedback processes about the higher education reforms, apart from an early evaluation (in the first year of their existence) of the formation of PRES (Aust et al., 2008). However, just before closure of this chapter, PIA (as a whole, across all areas involved, not just the IDEX) was evaluated by foreign experts.¹⁵ The evaluation fell out largely positive with pervasive effects of the PIA such as changing previous structures (in particular for universities based outside Paris) and greater collaboration among actors to reach excellence. The method of implementation of the PIA including its monitoring was also commended

and could be extended to other domains than research and education. The experts recommended to increase learning from evaluation in particular by looking at less successful actions such as the discontinued IDEX projects (see below).

At the foundation of the PIA in 2010, the information base included a recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) review of the French higher education system, while for the 13 prospective partners in IDEX, the Science and Engineering Observatory (OST: Observatoire des Sciences et Technique) analysed the bibliometric performance.¹⁶ Besides, public higher education institutions already reported annually to the MESR for their annual funding and every 4 years extensive negotiations occur between higher education institutions and the ministry about quadrennial funding contracts (Kaiser, 2007).

In IDEX, annual monitoring through indicators was included from the start and acceptance of cost statements of annual expanses, an assessment of the status at the start (with nationally collected bibliometric indicators) and an evaluation after 4 years are conditions for the final promise of capital (though kept by ANR for 6 more years). However, income is well-nigh certain indefinitely, since the capital remains in the institution's possession.

Annual monitoring of IDEX projects is based on predefined indicators¹⁷ and a briefing session between the government and each IDEX. The evaluation results are confidential. Annual evaluations are not made public, because if targets are not achieved, publicity of evaluations would create pressure and make the jury's task even more difficult. In case of large difficulties, projects may be adjusted. For example, one consortium was amended and another partner left a PIA project. Early 2016, the jury that had selected IDEX compared progress with initial contracts. Consequently, the jury allowed three IDEX are to continue, three continued under scrutiny for 18 or 24 months and two would be terminated.¹⁸

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this account, we have detailed how the French policy changes caught on and reformed the landscape as well as the political principles of higher education.

The different policy instruments were clear in their instrumental goals. Plan Campus and IDEX each have a detailed procedure for proposals, which makes the goals explicit. Deadlines were stated explicitly, as well.

Similarly, how PRES, and later COMUE, were to be composed was clear, although there were intentionally flexible elements (no centrally defined blueprint). The introduction of PRES was a major innovation, although some smaller-scale cooperation instruments among higher education and research institutions had existed previously. Also Plan Campus was a major policy innovation. Common characteristics included the local or regional drive instead of a predefined national plan.

Actors continue to learn: universities and COMUE are presenting ever better project proposals. However, while university central staff is increasingly involved in the policy, professors and researchers' unions remain less in favour, and can be heard complaining of the project-based funds instead of stable, recurrent budgets. The tensions in the academic community experienced in many countries are, therefore, also visible in France. Yet the broad movement of academics demanding increased investment and change around 2004 (*Sauvons la recherche*) indicated that even for the 'rank and file' changes were welcome. Such a moment of willingness to change was not to be wasted when the 'Shanghai shock' provided an externally induced feeling of crisis. Together, this made up a 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 1984) that was used well. Once the reform was in movement, its progress was not hindered significantly when (other?) academics and students in later stages were less willing to adapt.

Accordingly, we showed that the *operational goals* were achieved: regional concentration of higher education institutions took place, in various constellations, some more engaged in the international prestige race than others, and with differentiated levels of investment in upgraded facilities. Moreover, at the *strategic* level, the higher education landscape has changed remarkably, indicating a successful reform. The number of higher education institutions has been reduced from several hundreds to a few dozen major players and is bound to drop even further with current plans for a single COMUE in every large region of France. In 2015, 25 groups of universities (COMUE) including most universities were given official status.¹⁹ Still, some higher education institutions continued to operate independently, especially among specialised institutions such as business or engineering schools.

Some *subsidiary goals*, operationalized in selection criteria, had to be softened or eliminated due to reactions from the university sector. For example, the goal of large-scale restructuring of institutional internal governance structures to resemble US structures was abandoned following reactions by the CPU. Additionally, narrow international excellence criteria

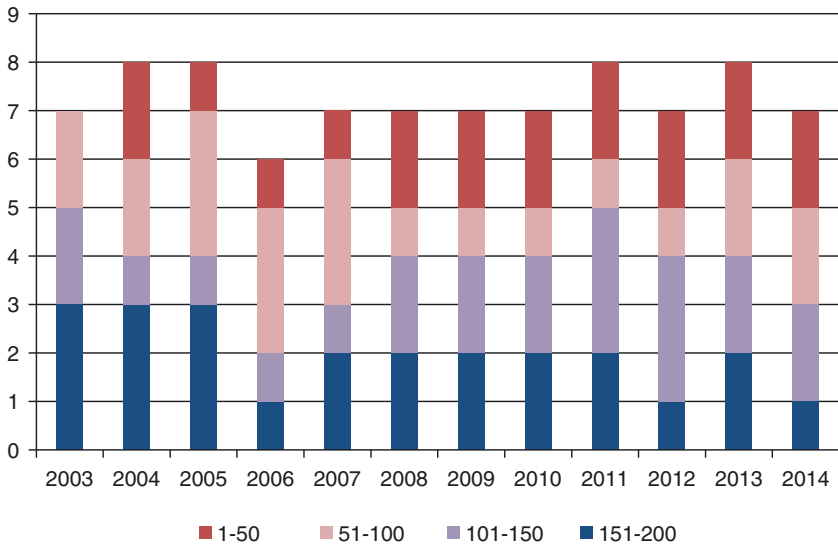


Fig. 1 French universities in ARWU (‘Shanghai ranking’) 2003–2014

in PIA were broadened to allow more proposals to qualify as excellent (Mignot-Gérard, 2012).

The number of French universities prominent in the international rankings has, however, not changed much since 2003. The only element of the ‘Shanghai shock’ that was overcome is that in every year since 2008 there have been two French universities in the top 50 compared to between zero and two from 2003 to 2007 (see Fig. 1). Obviously, the competition from universities in other countries to gain a place, or retain their place, in this ranking, has intensified, so a ‘red queen effect’ may be visible here.²⁰ Among other things, *side effects* included:

- The university is at the centre of this vast reorganisation, whereas research centres and business or engineering schools had been more favoured in the recent past.
- Spreading of modernisation to areas other than research and doctoral training, such as better undergraduate education and better curricula.
- More university mergers, which were not directly intended by the different policies.

- The PIA process has brought international standards into the French system for awarding project funds (until then, competitions in, for example, ANR were mostly about French peers awarding funds to each other);
- The PIA has strengthened the professional capacity of central university staff (institutions are increasingly in charge of their own strategy).
- While not subdued completely, there seems to be a lower level of resistance against modernisation among academics and students than in the past.

Most of these side effects can be considered beneficial from the policymakers' point of view.

There is also a logic of *specialisation* at work. To be competitive at an international level, institutions must choose a limited number of domains of excellence and niches (at least in their master, doctorate and research domains). It is noted, for example, by the MESR, that the Smart Specialisation Plans, as requested from the regions by the European Commission (EC), have also helped to prepare minds for specialisation. All these initiatives are putting university staff in motion. Specialisation is a mid- to long-term objective with strategic choices made, and human resources policy gradually adapting (recruitment or departure), the involvement of all staff and the presence of research centres within university research teams aligned to the strategic choices.

All these reforms can be seen as part of a super policy with the strategic aim to create the infrastructure for a globally excellent higher education and research system. The theme of regional cooperation with regional public co-funding, rationalisation of the higher education institutions and in general emulating the success of Silicon Valley had been a theme of French policy since the 1980s, starting with the 'Universities 2000' plan,²¹ but had never gained high priority until the Bologna Process reforms after 2000 (Filâtre, 2004; Sursock, 2015).

'The interested reader is warned that the legal saga is not finished' (Sursock, 2015, p. 18), as the forming of COMUE is still continuing and new policy initiatives may follow it. It seems clear, however, that the type of policy that may continue the saga will follow the lines indicated in this chapter: the principles of the evaluative state are now well-entrenched in the French higher education community.

NOTES

1. For a brief explanation of some of the different types of institutions, see the following section or Kaiser (2007).
2. <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000426953>
3. Les réseaux thématiques de recherche avancée (R.T.R.A.) et les réseaux thématiques de recherche et de soins (R.T.R.S.), see <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid56330/les-reseaux-thematiques-de-recherche-avancee-et-de-recherche-et-de-soins.html>. See also Sursock, 2015.
4. On 1/1/2015, there are 73 universities plus one polytechnic institute in France.
5. <http://www.cpu.fr/actualite/regroupements-universitaires-25-grands-ensembles-pour-viser-l'excellence/>
6. This sum was composed of € 1.3 billion from the PIA and € 3.7 billion from selling shares in electricity company Edf.
7. <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/investissementsdavenir/documents/2011/activite-jury-selection-index-2011.pdf>
8. <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid20924/operation-campus-renovation-de-10-projets-de-campus.html#criteres> and <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid24591/operation-campus.html> and <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid56024/l-operation-campus-plan-exceptionnel-en-faveur-de-l-immobilier-universitaire.html>
9. Seven-year investment plans agreed between national and regional government (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrat_de_plan_État-région).
10. <http://www.gouvernement.fr/les-investissements-d-avenir>
11. See 2nd IDEX/I-SITE: <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/investissements-d-avenir/appels-a-projets/2014/initiatives-d'excellence-index-initiatives-science-innovation-territoires-economie-i-site/>
12. <http://www.latribune.fr/economie/france/grand-emprunt-francois-hollande-a-la-recherche-d-une-rallonge-de-10-milliards-d-euros-460513.html>
13. <http://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid59263/5-projets-selectionnes-pour-la-deuxieme-vague-de-l-appel-a-projets-initiatives-d-excellence.html> or https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Initiative_d'excellence
14. Expressing its mission: 'ANR provides funding for project-based research' (<http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/en/project-based-funding-to-advance-french-research/>).
15. <http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/presse/communiqués-de-presse/programme-dinvestissements-davenir-pia-france-strategie-rend-rapport-dexamen-mi-parcours>
16. http://www.obs-ost.fr/fractivites/index_initiative_excellence

17. <http://www.agence-nationale-recherche.fr/fileadmin/aap/2014/ia-idex-site-2014.pdf>, pp. 16–19.
18. <http://www.letudiant.fr/educpros/actualite/la-competition-des-idex-a-l-universite-les-episodes-de-la-saison-1.html>
19. <http://www.cpu.fr/actualite/regroupements-universitaires-25-grands-ensembles-pour-viser-lexcellence/>
20. In *Behind the Looking-Glass*, the red queen warns Alice: ‘Now, *here*, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place’ (Carroll, 1981).
21. To illustrate: The case history of the University of Lorraine merger already started in 1985 (Finance et al., 2015).

REFERENCES

- Attali, J. (1998). *Pour un modèle européen d’enseignement supérieur*. s.l. [Paris]: Ministère de l’éducation nationale, de la recherche et de la technologie.
- Aust, J., Crespy, C., Manifet, C., Musselin, C., & Soldano, C. (2008). Rapprocher, intégrer, différencier. Éléments sur la mise en place des pôles de recherche et d’enseignement supérieur. Rapport à la Délégation interministérielle à l’aménagement et à la compétitivité des territoires. s.l.
- Bleiklie, I. (1998). Justifying the evaluative state: New public management ideals in higher education. *European Journal of Education*, 33(3), 299–316.
- Carroll, L. (1981). *The annotated alice*. (M. Gardner, Trans.) Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Cour des comptes. (2011). *Les pôles de recherche et d’enseignement supérieur (PRES): Un second souffle nécessaire*. Rapport public annuel 2011 305–333 Paris: Cour des Comptes Retrieved from <https://www.ccomptes.fr/Publications/Publications/Rapport-public-annuel-2011>.
- Dobbins, M. (2012). How market-oriented is French higher education? *French Politics*, 10, 134–159.
- Espinoza, O. (2007). Solving the equity-equality conceptual dilemma: A new model for analysis of the educational process. *Educational Research*, 49(4), 343–363.
- Ferlie, E., Musselin, C., & Andresani, G. (2008). The ‘steering’ of higher education systems: A public management perspective. *Higher Education*, 56, 324–348.
- Filâtre, D. (2004). Politiques publiques de recherche et gouvernance régionale. *Revue Française D’administration Publique*, 112(4), 719–730.
- Finance, J.-P., Coilland, H., & Mutzenhardt, P. (2015). The experience with creating University of Lorraine by merging four former Universities. In A. Curaj, L. Georghiou, J. C. Harper, & E. Egron-Polak (Eds.), *Mergers and alliances in higher education: International practice and emerging opportunities* (pp. 221–242). Dordrecht.: Springer.

- Gane, N. (2012). The governmentalities of neoliberalism: Panopticism, post-panopticism and beyond. *Sociological Review*, 60(4), 611–634.
- Harfi, M., & Mathieu, C. (2006). Classement de Shanghai et image internationale des universités: Quels Enjeux Pour La France? *Horizons Stratégiques*, 2, 100–115.
- Kaiser, F. (2007). *Higher education in France: Country report*. International Higher Education Monitor. Enschede: CHEPS, Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente.
- Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.
- Legifrance. (2010). Convention du 23 septembre 2010 entre l'Etat et l'ANR relative au programme d'investissements d'avenir (action « initiatives d'excellence »). Retrieved from <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022851283>.
- Legifrance. (2014). Convention du 23 juin 2014 entre l'Etat et l'ANR second programme d'investissements d'avenir (action IDEX/I-SITE), JORF n°0151 du 2 juillet 2014 page 10906, texte n° 9. Retrieved from <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000029175500>.
- Mignot-Gérard, S. (2012). Le gouvernement d'une université face aux « Initiatives d'Excellence »: Réactivité et micro-résistances. *Politiques Et Management Public*, 29(3), 519–539.
- Neave, G. (1994). The politics of quality: Developments in higher education in Western Europe 1992-1994. *European Journal of Education*, 29(2), 115–133.
- Neave, G. (1995). Homogenization, integration and convergence: The Cheshire cats of higher education analysis. In V. L. Meek, L. Goedegebuure, O. Kivinen, & R. Rinne (Eds.), *The mockers and mocked: Comparative perspectives on differentiation, convergence and diversity in higher education* (pp. 26–41). Oxford: Pergamon.
- Neave, G. (2012). *The evaluative State, institutional autonomy and re-engineering higher education in Western Europe: The Prince and his pleasure*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neave, G., & Van Vught, F. A. (1991). *Prometheus bound: The changing relationship between Government and higher education in Western Europe*. London: Pergamon Press.
- Olsen, M., & Peters, M. A. (2005). Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: From the free market to knowledge capitalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), 313–345.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis: New public management, governance, and the neo-Weberian state*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sursock, A. E. (2015). Mergers and alliances in France: incentives, success factors and obstacles. In A. Curaj, L. Georghiou, J. C. Harper, & E. Egron-Polak (Eds.), *Mergers and alliances in higher education: international practice and emerging opportunities* (pp. 17–31). Dordrecht.: Springer.

Emmanuel Boudard is a senior consultant. He has been an economist for the OECD, the UNDP and the European Commission. With more than 15 years of experience, Emmanuel has developed specific expertise in developing statistical data collection for policy purposes: first, as a statistical expert for the OECD, UNDP and the European Commission, and then as an independent expert. During his 5 years at the European Commission, Emmanuel gained strong knowledge of policies related to research, the career of researchers and the modernisation agenda of universities. As an economist for the Marie Curie Directorate of DG Research, he developed practical studies to exchange good practices on doctoral education with a special focus on the private sector needs. Since 2009, he is an independent expert. He has worked on different assignments for the European Commission, related mainly to the evaluation of EU research funds or the assessment of cross-country reforms for higher education.

Don F. Westerheijden is Senior Research Associate at CHEPS, University of Twente, where he coordinates research on quality management and is involved in the coordination and supervision of PhD students. He holds a PhD in Public Administration from the University of Twente. Don mostly studies quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in the Netherlands and Europe, its impacts as well as university rankings. Policy evaluation is another area of research interest. Since 1993 he codeveloped the CRE (Conference of European Rectors)/EUA (European University Association) Institutional Evaluation Programme. He led the independent assessment of the Bologna Process in 2009/2010. He was a member of the team that developed U-Multirank, the online, multidimensional worldwide university ranking. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Quality in Higher Education* and serves on international boards of quality assurance agencies in Portugal and Hong Kong.