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**GLOBAL  
HIGHER  
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# MANAGING UNIVERSITIES

POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL  
CHANGE FROM A WESTERN EUROPEAN  
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY  
IVAR BLEIKLIE, JÜRGEN ENDERS  
AND BENEDETTO LEPORI



# Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education

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# Managing Universities

Policy and Organizational Change from a Western  
European Comparative Perspective

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macmillan

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PART I

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# Theory and Approach

# Setting the Stage—Theory and Research Questions

*Ivar Bleiklie, Jürgen Enders and Benedetto Lepori*

**Abstract** The main research question of this book is the question of what has happened to European universities as organizations after several decades of university reform. To what extent are European public universities still decentralized, loosely coupled organizations as opposed to the centrally managed organizations controlled by a powerful central leadership that reformers have aimed to develop? What are the effects of higher education policies on individual university institutions? This chapter develops the conceptual approach for the book by discussing how leadership control of universities as professional organizations has changed, suggesting the concept of *penetrated hierarchies* as a new conceptual understanding of current universities as organizations. It also suggests how public European universities are shaped by national *political administrative regimes* as well

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as sectoral higher education *policy regimes*. The last part of this chapter outlines the content of the individual chapters of the book.

## INTRODUCTION

Universities have traditionally been considered as members of a specific species of organizations. Whether public bureaucracies or privately owned market actors it has been argued that they have certain peculiar organizational characteristics such as decentralized internal authority vested in subunits and individual professors, and a high degree of organizational autonomy from outside interests. In the 1960s and 1970s social scientists made important contributions to organization theory based on studies of universities and their organizational peculiarities (Cohen et al. 1972; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Weick 1976). Since then the growth and diversification of higher education have made it an institution of steadily growing political, social and economic importance. As an increasing proportion of the population enters higher education, more enterprises depend on university educated labor and research based products, and as higher education and research consume a larger share of society's resources and public budgets, it also receives the attention of politicians and the public at large (Bleiklie and Byrkjeflot 2002). Recognizing the growing social and economic importance of higher education, reform politicians have tried to remove or modify the traditional peculiarities of universities as they were depicted by organization theorists more than 40 years ago. The reform ambition has been to make universities more efficient and business like enterprises that are generally being regarded as more cost effective forms of organizing large scale production processes, in this case aiming at more efficient production of educated candidates and research. Given the growth and diversification of higher education and the reform efforts of the last decades, we ask:

1. What has happened to the traditional organizational characteristics of universities?
  - (a) To what extent have universities preserved their traditional characteristics of decentralized, loosely coupled structure of semi-independent disciplinary communities somehow held together under one organizational umbrella?



- (b) To what extent have they become more centrally managed under the control of a central leadership better capable of imposing top-down initiatives on underlying organizational units?
2. What are the effects of higher education policies on individual university institutions?
  - (a) To what extent can organization changes in universities be traced back to political reform activities?
  - (b) Do we have empirical evidence that introduction of managerialist principles in universities is stronger in countries with more New Public Management-oriented policies?
3. What are the implications for our understanding of how universities operate as research and educational institutions?

These questions are important for at least two reasons. Because of the growth and increasing social and economic impact of higher education, universities are more important than ever, and the question of how their organizational characteristics are related to their ability to fulfil their mission of providing high quality education and research effectively and efficiently is of great social and economic importance. Secondly, as research based knowledge is an increasingly important component of modern economies, the way in which research and higher education are organized has an impact that reaches far beyond the world of traditional higher education and research institutions, and is increasingly relevant for how we organize businesses, public administration and the voluntary sector.

This book outlines a conceptual framework designed to identify relevant organizational characteristics of universities and report the findings from the large scale European research project, Transforming Universities in Europe (TRUE),<sup>1</sup> where eight different research teams address different aspects of these research questions. The chapters in this book are based on unique data collected in connection with TRUE comprising a large scale survey of leaders and managers at 26 universities, interviews with leaders and managers at eight universities and representatives of national political and administrative authorities as well as information from available written sources.

Our aim is to contribute to the academic as well as the general debate on the transformation of universities in knowledge societies that provide higher education on a massive scale. We narrow down the general question of organizational characteristics by focusing on organizational control. We aim more specifically at investigating the association between

patterns of intraorganizational control within public universities and changes in the institutional and resource environment related to the diffusion of New Public Management (NPM) policies. In addition our ambition is that our analysis will make it possible to draw on insights that will shed light on organizational control in the wider setting of knowledge-intensive professional organizations more generally.

We take as our point of departure recent work on professional knowledge-intensive organizations and how they achieve organizational control while leaving room for autonomy and self-initiative of professionals. Models like ‘soft bureaucracy’ (Courpasson 2000) or ‘bureaucracy-lite’ (Hales 2002) have emerged in order to identify typical features of organizations that seek to overcome the rigidities of the hierarchical-rational model (Diefenbach and Sillince 2011). These studies highlight how different combinations of control instruments allow addressing the tension between central control and autonomy, while at the same time adopting some elements of hierarchical structure and rule systems.

In this perspective, universities are not just faced with the alternatives of adopting the corporate model promoted by NPM (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000) or keeping their traditionally loosely coupled model (Weick 1976), but may just as well resort to original combinations of control mechanisms introducing some level of hierarchy and formal rule systems, while at the same time maintaining decentralization and autonomy of professionals (Enders et al. 2013).

In order to explain the emergence of specific forms of organizational control, neo-institutional studies endorsed the view that organizations adopt legitimate field-level models for organizing their activities (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Ashworth et al. 2009). Later contributions provided a more balanced view of organizational responses, emphasizing that resource considerations also matter (Zajac and Westphal 2004), while organizational actors can be strategic in borrowing institutional models (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Studies of how public organizations respond to NPM support this view (Bovaird and Downe 2006; Lægveid et al. 2007).

Universities represent in this context a setting that allows highlighting the different facets of the environment-organization relationships. Most of them are public organizations, subject to regulatory interventions and they are highly dependent on the State for resources. At the same time, they are subject to global institutional pressures to adopt a corporate model (Meyer et al. 1997). Finally, universities are traditionally

very open organizations, characterized by a dense set of social ties to the policy layer, to other stakeholders and to academic disciplines. This justifies a specific focus on the influence of external social relationships of organizational members on patterns of intraorganizational control.

Within this context, the book focuses on the extent and means through which organizational leadership achieves central control and relationships that limit and even undermine central control. We investigate our research questions by comparing and analyzing systematically different aspects of the organization of the 26 universities in our sample based on a varied data set that will be described more closely in the next chapter.

Our contribution to the literature is threefold: first, we show variation in the combination of control instruments across organizations within the same field. Second, we associate these variations with differences in the policy environment, providing a richer understanding of the interplay between global scripts, and national specificities. Third, we contribute to the understanding of the importance of external relationships for the leadership and their implications for organizational control, a topic which has been rarely investigated in the control literature. We propose the term *penetrated hierarchies* to label this coupling of intraorganizational control with the multiple external relationships of organizational members.

### ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS—FROM ORGANIZED ANARCHIES TO PENETRATED HIERARCHIES

In specifying our conceptual point of departure, we will focus—as indicated—on two major theoretical themes and in doing so we will draw on various streams of literature. The first theme is addressed by initially raising the issue of organizational control in professional organizations in general as the topic has been addressed by organization theorists. Then we move on to the peculiar issue of control in university organizations as hierarchical control is faced by the challenges of autonomy of academic disciplines and collegial forms of governance. Here we draw on higher education studies literature. The second theme is addressed in a similar fashion. We firstly focus on leadership control of external resources in general, drawing on two traditions within organization theory, institutionalism and resource dependency theory. Secondly, we focus on external resources and control in universities particularly in relation to policy pressure, funding mechanisms, and evaluation as these topics have been addressed by students of higher education.

### *Control in Professional Organizations*

Organizational control refers to the mechanisms organizations adopt in order to secure predictable behavior of their members and alignment with organizational goals (Ouchi 1979). Control is associated with coordination of activities and represents a general issue for all types of organizations, including the most decentralized ones (Courpasson 2000). Nevertheless, control is a contested issue in organization studies.

Functionalist and managerial traditions consider central control a necessity related to the interdependencies between activities, to the risk that employees try to achieve their own personal goals (Ouchi 1980), and to the need of pursuing coherent strategies. Following Weber (1968), the standard assumption was that organizations address this issue by introducing formal hierarchy and rule systems, tailored to the characteristics of their activities. Accordingly, organizational control is achieved mostly through formal structure, and justified in terms of functional imperatives (Diefenbach and Sillince 2011). While this perspective was applied mostly to private organizations, since the 1980s NPM has promoted the view that public organizations should also follow the ‘corporate model’ (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000).

According to the critical tradition organizations are characterized by uncertainty in their tasks and environment. Consequently, they are best governed by informal arrangements and micro-level politics, where power accrues to actors that are able to control uncertainties (Crozier et al. 1980) and critical external resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). In this perspective, organizational control is achieved through informal and micro-level arrangements, social relationships, and the sharing of information among employees. In turn, formal structure is considered as a means to establishing a hierarchy and to accrue power and privileges to the organizational elite (Hardy and Clegg 2006). NPM recipes introducing hierarchy and rule systems in public organizations are consequently expected to have dysfunctional effects, like increasing bureaucratization and the demotivation of workers (Diefenbach 2009).

This debate was intensified by changes in economic activities: the growth of knowledge-intensive activities led scholars to question the suitability of the hierarchical-bureaucratic model for advanced economies (Clegg 2012). The development of information technology led to suggestions that decentralized models (Powell 1990), characterized by distributed assignments and flat hierarchies, become a widespread form of organization (Oberge and Walgenbach 2008).

Yet, empirical studies demonstrate that the network model hardly corresponds to the reality of contemporary knowledge-intensive organizations, like financial companies, consultancies, and health care organizations. Rather, empirical evidence points to variations in the combination and enactment of control instruments. Control is achieved through flexible means, the number of hierarchical layers tends to be reduced ('bureaucracy-lite': Hales 2002), while more indirect mechanisms are preferred to the overt use of hierarchical power ('soft bureaucracy': Courpasson 2000) and bureaucracy can integrate legitimate resistance ('polyarchic bureaucracy'; Courpasson and Clegg 2012). These organizations reshape formal control instruments in a softer way: formal hierarchy is combined with informal control through social relationships, exploiting the hierarchical structure to construct social authority (Diefenbach and Sillince 2011). A balance is sought between vertical structure and horizontal peer coordination (Lundholm et al. 2012). Finally, bureaucracy is interpreted in an enabling way, where rule systems are co-designed with the workers (Adler and Borys 1996).

This discussion suggests that it is more relevant to investigate the combination and implementation of control instruments rather than the question of whether control is possible at all. Further, the discussion points to control as a delicate act of balancing central coordination and participation of professionals, respective the use of formal and informal means of control, that is subject to change and variation related to environmental conditions (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013).

### *Universities Between Loose Coupling and Tightening*

Universities have traditionally been portrayed as adhocracies, professional bureaucracies (Cohen et al. 1972; Mintzberg 1979), a specific kind of organization, loosely coupled (Weick 1976) and fragmented with decentralized structures and weak leadership capacities. This was considered functional given their environment and activities, characterized by conflicting claims and distributed resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974), by high levels of uncertainty, and low interdependencies between activities (Musselin 2007). It was also assumed that professional norms and values made central control illegitimate by emphasizing collegial peer-to-peer decision making against top-down hierarchy, by legitimizing a social hierarchy based on professional seniority rather than formal structure and by defending autonomy of professionals against managerial control (Townley 1997).

Some scholars argued that professional autonomy and collegiality were not necessarily incompatible with forms of central control (Musselin 2007). It has been argued that today's universities cannot function like garbage can organizations, and some elements of tighter coupling are required in order to manage processes efficiently (Lutz 1982). Thus, in 'garbage can hierarchies' control is achieved through softer and less visible means than overt use of hierarchical power (Padgett 1980). Models of professional bureaucracies also emerged in order to accommodate settings within an organization where autonomy and decentralization are granted to professionals in specific areas ('pigeonholing'), while the organization as a whole is managed through bureaucratic instruments (Blau 1973; Mintzberg 1979).

Empirical studies also provide evidence of differences between individual universities (Hardy 1991) and between countries (Clark 1983). Strong central leadership and managerial control were introduced in American universities as early as in the 1960s (Keller 1983). In most European countries, on the other hand, central control was exercised by the State through bureaucratic means (Clark 1983). Universities were considered part of the civil service, subject to a vertical chain of control from state authorities. The tension between central control and professional autonomy was by and large resolved through compartmentalization, i.e. by demarcating the realm of bureaucratic control (budget, salaries, infrastructure) from the one of professional autonomy (research, teaching, academic careers).

The introduction of NPM policies in many European countries (Ferlie et al. 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) significantly modified the context in which universities function, representing a natural experiment in which the issue of control in knowledge-intensive professional organizations have been addressed. NPM policies aimed to loosen universities from direct State control by providing them with autonomy and reducing regulatory constraints. NPM policies also attempted to transform universities into organizations characterized by hierarchy and rule-setting (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). Policies were implemented for the introduction of market arrangements in funding (Teixeira et al. 2004) and the diffusion of evaluation systems (Whitley and Gläser 2007). Accordingly, institutional pressures have become more forceful, albeit with significant differences across countries with regard to the extent and depth of reforms (Paradeise et al. 2009).

To what extent these reforms succeeded in transforming universities is debated. Most scholars would agree that change has been more gradual and limited than intended (Musselin 2007), and some argue that universities cannot be managed through the corporate model (Whitley 2008). Evidence indicates that universities are transforming towards managed organizations with stronger central leadership and strategic capability (Amaral et al. 2003), introducing hierarchy and formal rule systems (de Boer et al. 2007). Variation is related to national contexts, indicating that national reform policies are likely to reflect broader agendas than a move towards NPM forms of governance (Bleiklie et al. 2011; Paradeise et al. 2009) as well as to characteristics of individual universities (Sahlin 2012). The latter is supported e.g. by the observation that world class universities by and large have maintained their traditional forms of governance and introduced forms of shared governance between management and academics, whereas ‘wannabee universities’ are centralizing governance in order to catch up with world leaders (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013).

### *Institutional Pressures, Resources and Control*

Since the 1970s, neo-institutionalists have argued that organizational behavior is driven by conformity and adherence to legitimate institutional models rather than by interests or technical requirements (Greenwood et al. 2008).

Earlier neo-institutionalist research focused largely on isomorphism, assuming that organizations tend to become similar irrespective of local conditions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Boxenbaum and Jonsson 2008). Further work provided a more balanced view, highlighting the importance of resource dependencies (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Kraatz and Zajac 1996) as well as of agency and interests of organizational actors (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Thus, it was recognized that many organizational fields are characterized by pluralism, i.e. the presence of alternative logics for how organizations should function (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton et al. 2012). In this perspective, the institutional environment provides a set of templates stipulating how organizations should be managed (Greenwood and Hinings 1993). This clearly applies to universities, which are confronted by an academic template promoted by the profession and a corporate template promoted by the policy environment. Actors are selective and prone to enforcing

those models that best correspond to their norms and interests (Fligstein 1987). Since competing logics are often connected to specific groups of actors, institutional pluralism easily translates into internal conflict.

In its attempt to achieve central control, leadership might leverage the legitimacy of the corporate model, but the introduction of hierarchy and formal rules will likely be met with resistance by academics (Townley 1997). While the strength of institutional pressures will matter, the outcome of this conflict is likely to be influenced by the power balance between parties, and accordingly, to depend on the level of leadership control of external resources (Greenwood and Hinings 1996).

Importantly, control of external resources might be achieved also through social ties that connect organizational actors—and specifically organizational leaders—with external constituencies controlling resources critical for the organization.

The central importance of the position occupied by individuals in the network was highlighted by social network analysis (Rivera et al. 2010). Many social networks are characterized by distinct social spaces with dense relationships among actors internally and weak external connections to other networks. Individuals belonging to several networks may find themselves situated in a brokering position and accrue advantages and power through different mechanisms (Burt 1992). Such mechanisms may involve privileged access to resources and information not available to other members of the same realm and the possibility of forging alliances and exploiting role ambiguity strategically (Padgett and Ansell 1993). The existence of a small group of individuals, which is closely connected across organizations representing an elite with privileged relationships and access to information, demonstrates the small world character of organizational control (Kogut 2012). Importantly, not just strong structural ties, like the one between the State and the university, but also weaker ties matter, as these might convey relevant information, allow the construction of new alliances and facilitate acquisition of resources that are not directly associated with the organization's core relationships (Granovetter 1973).

Accordingly, we expect that control of external resources is not only associated with market relationships, as foreseen by resource dependency, but also with the structure of social relationships between organizational actors and external audiences.



### *Control of External Resources in University Systems*

External resources have traditionally been considered as sources of loose coupling in universities, since such resources are usually generated by attracting students and acquiring external funds, which are activities controlled by departments (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974). In the European context, we suggest that the situation is different when taking into account the ambiguous impact of NPM on external organizational control and social relationships.

The academic world is traditionally characterized by a dense web of social relationships, which deeply impact on its activities, but tend to be compartmentalized across disciplines, hence generating a potential for brokering. Higher education policies are also traditionally characterized by a dense set of relationships between the political and organizational level, with the creation of intermediary spaces for networking and mediation. The emergence of “network governance” (Rhodes 1996; Ferlie et al. 2008), where policy functions have been delegated to a decentralized network of actors, including ministries, funding agencies, and quality assessment agencies, strengthens these characteristics, albeit with differences among countries. We generally expect the leadership to invest strategically in social relationships with the policy layer and to leverage the associated control of resources in order to reinforce internal control, but we foresee that national systems come with different predispositions in this respect.

In most European countries, the largest part of the university budget is composed by the core allocation from the State, which was traditionally under tight bureaucratic control. The impact of NPM funding reforms in terms of control depends on their instrumentation (Jongbloed 2007). If lump sum budgets based on performance agreements have been introduced, the leadership is in the position to brokering internal resource demands with the State and thus its internal power is likely to increase. To the contrary, when formulas based on standardized indicators are adopted, while the share of third-party funds is increased, the leadership loses control over the budget.

There are also deep differences as to how national evaluation systems have been introduced with NPM reforms. These might be described by contrasting two extreme models (Whitley and Gläser 2007). On the one hand, so-called “intrusive” systems produce in-depth information about strengths and weaknesses of individual universities, which are translated

into normative and coercive pressures for change from the State and thus are likely to decrease strategic autonomy and disempower university leadership. On the other hand, “competitive” evaluation systems provide information generating competition between universities, but do not imply direct intervention in their management; accordingly, they might be leveraged to empower university leadership, as it can rely on (national) evaluation outcomes to justify internal restructuring.

Considering organizational control, we highlight the ambiguous character of these NPM policies. When leadership is put in a brokering position between the State and the university, this is likely to increase its power and strengthen organizational control. When leading academics are able to interact directly with the policy layer (Musselin 2013; Musselin and Vilkas 1994) or are co-opted in leading positions inside funding and evaluation agencies, this might create a potential for loose coupling.

Power acquired through the control of external resources is expected to provide additional opportunities to resolve the tension between control and autonomy, beyond complying with the hierarchical-bureaucratic model when NPM pressure is strong. Personal power is a legitimate means of control in the academic logic, and leadership can control the organization through informal means, especially when NPM pressures are weak. When NPM pressures are strong and the State uses hierarchical-rational control coercively, the leadership is expected to introduce related instruments, but might also soften them through participatory and co-decision mechanisms reducing the opposition of academics without endangering their central position.

## HIGHER EDUCATION POLITICS AND POLICY

In a recent article, Bleiklie and Michelsen (2013: 114) pointed out that the study of higher education reform policy since the 1990s has been characterized by two tendencies. The first is to start out from the assumption that policies have primarily turned on attempts to make the sector more efficient and market oriented in accordance with NPM as a public reform ideology (Pollitt 1993). The second tendency is to take existing policies as a given point of departure. Questions about policy making, such as by whom and how higher education policies are made and designed, have with few exceptions (e.g. Bleiklie 2006; Bleiklie et al. 2000; Kogan and Hanney 2000) been left out. The research questions

have tended to focus on the extent to which and how declared policies are implemented and have affected universities and HE systems.

Thereby two important sets of explanatory variables are left out: structural characteristics of political-administrative systems and characteristics of policy processes. Drawing on contributions by Lijphart (1999), Painter and Peters (2010), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011), and Verhoest et al. (2010), Bleiklie and Michelsen (2013) developed a conceptual framework for studying the relationship between structural characteristics of political-administrative systems and higher education policies. The structural approach turned out to be helpful for making sense of some of the variation that was observed among the eight countries of the TRUE project in terms of the degree of reform activity. The main finding was that structural characteristics offer varying conditions of action that may limit or be exploited by actors who may want to promote, to slow down or prevent reforms from being introduced. Thus there are different paths to high reform activity, one based on the ability of actors to implement swift and sweeping reform (England, Netherlands) and another on the ability to keep up a relatively steady incremental process over a broad range of issues (France, Norway). Similarly there seems to be two main paths to low reform activity, one characterized by federal structures and many veto points (Germany, Switzerland), the second based on decentralized structures with a reform focus on legal and procedural issues and a relatively strong separation between formal procedures and informal practice (Italy).

Furthermore, it makes sense to keep in mind a broader notion of reform policies than the rather simplistic one of a move from traditional towards NPM forms of state steering and control. Paradeise et al. (2009) argue that a number of reform policies may be better understood when interpreted within alternative frameworks such as Network Governance and Neo-Weberianism. Bleiklie et al. (2011) demonstrate how NPM reforms may strengthen horizontal structures based on network power rather than stronger hierarchical structures. Both kinds of observations bear out the argument that it makes sense to include alternative perspectives to the NPM-assumption in studies of higher education reform policies.

The second research question in this book implies that we should not limit ourselves to considering policies just from the vantage point of individual higher education institutions. Policies should not be reduced to the different policy pressures we can observe at the organizational level. Policies comprise firstly the totality of measures consciously designed

by actors at the policy level intending to affect higher education institutions and the higher education system. Policies comprise furthermore the structures within which policy measures are formulated and through which they are brought to bear on the higher education system.

A further implication that may be drawn from these two observations is that we should pay closer attention to process dynamics. The literature demonstrates how reform proposals interact with power structures and actor constellations with varying outcomes: sometimes producing results rather efficiently and effectively (Paradeise et al. 2009), sometimes with unexpected and even counterintuitive outcomes (Musselin 2004), sometimes with policy pressure slowly building up over time to produce profound change after initially having had little effect (Bleiklie 2009), and sometimes with formal decisions and legislation as the definite ending point of a policy process that is effectively sealed off from the institutions and individuals whose behavior they were designed to change (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013).

The way in which organizational change in universities is affected by their relationship to public authorities thus depends on: (a) how political-administrative structures provide conditions for political action defining the space of action for political actors, (b) the specific policies they pursue (e.g. NPM policies, policies promoting network structures or policies designed to strengthen state steering) and (c) process dynamics that may both be shaped by the playing field on which policies unfold and itself cause the field to change profoundly.

### *Implications for the Comparative Analysis of University Governance and University Policy*

Based on the conceptual discussion above, the main focus of the ensuing analyses is first on the internal organizational control in universities as knowledge-intensive professional organizations and the role of environmental conditions in shaping internal control (Chaps. 3–7). As public institutions and part of public higher education systems, public policies for funding, governing and evaluating universities constitute a major part of the environment and we then focus on policy structures and processes in Chaps. 8–10.

We suggest that while hierarchical structures have been strengthened in European universities during the last decades, their increasing dependence on a wide range of external relationships for vital resources

like funding and prestige means that external actors and decision arenas penetrate universities and affect their internal power distribution and leadership control. Thus, we find that university governance systems adequately can be characterized as ‘penetrated hierarchies’.

Yet penetrated hierarchies vary. Based on our review of the literature, we have identified a number of potential sources of variation as to how university organizations and university systems are likely to be shaped by these two sets of variables. Thus we expect to find a variety of local orders shaped by global scripts, institutional specificities, national characteristics and public policies that render a more nuanced understanding of organizational responses, beyond simple assumptions about e.g. isomorphic adoptions of a globally dominant institutional template or the opposite pattern of locked in national and institutional models impervious to change.

## CONTENT

The chapters that follow will explore this issue from different vantage points, but first the methods and data used in the study will be described in Chap. 2, giving an overview of the comparative research design and the datasets used, ranging from a large scale survey, via interviews to available documents.

The next six chapters go to the very core of the matter addressing various aspects of contemporary university organizations and governance arrangements.

In Chap. 3, *Working in the Shadow of Hierarchy: Organisational Autonomy and Venues of External Influence in European Universities*, Jürgen Enders, Harry de Boer and Elke Weyer address the issue of institutional autonomy. The concept of autonomy has changed according to several previous studies and the chapter will focus on autonomy-in-use, asking three questions: (1) why is autonomy-in-use not (necessarily) a copy of formal autonomy, (2) how can one map autonomy-in-use, and (3) what is the current state of the new organizational autonomy in a number of European higher education systems? The issue of organizational/institutional autonomy has increasingly been separated from the issue of individual academic freedom due to the strengthening of internal managerial structures in universities. In that sense, one might be led to believe that university autonomy these days would mean something like the freedom of institutional leaders to make strategic choices on behalf

of their universities. This means that the organizational implications of autonomy in the traditional academic sense (decentralization of decision making authority) are radically different from autonomy in the more recent managerial sense (hierarchization or centralization of decision making authority). However, public academic institutions are situated within national regulatory regimes that shape and delimit the scope of institutional autonomy in specific ways. These regimes are characterized by increasing complexity involving a growing number of roles and variety of actors in regulatory activities. In addition to an increasing number of governmental bodies, current regulatory regimes may thus involve various stakeholders as well as academics who may be influential in several ways on multiple arenas related to policy making, funding and evaluation activities.

Budgeting is one of the functions that should be well positioned to shed more light on the tension between attempts to strengthen hierarchical control and the multiple external dependencies that follow from dependency on a variety of external funding sources. Budgeting is the topic addressed by Marco Seeber and Benedetto Lepori in Chap. 4, *Budgeting Practices in European Universities*. Here they discuss how budgeting—decisions on the level of resources spent and their repartition among subunits—has become an increasingly important steering instrument. The analysis demonstrates commonalities among budgeting systems within European universities as regards the role of organizational actors in the allocation process with rectors and central administrators as the major actors. Second, two main groups of universities emerge, namely the bureaucratic and managerial-oriented ones; while national policies largely influence this division, subject specialization also matters. Government influence over internal budgeting processes is relatively strong in Portugal and lower in England and the Netherlands.

*The Transformative Power of Evaluation in University Governance* is analyzed by Emanuela Reale and Giulio Marini in Chap. 5. Evaluation as a steering instrument is ostensibly geared toward maximizing or securing a certain level of quality of teaching and research. Improvement of quality is often however, not an activity that easily lends itself to exclusive top-down steering, but rather represents some kind of balance between top-down and bottom-up influence that resemble ‘soft’ forms of power. Although the time and purpose of evaluation exercises may be defined by public authorities outside of academia, academics may exercise considerable influence on the outcome of evaluation processes and the recommendations

that are given, either through the role they play in academic government, or as members of evaluation panels. Different evaluation regimes emerge, depending on type of evaluation (research evaluation, teaching evaluation and other assessment activities), on national traditions and on how the transformative power of evaluation on organizational control is likely to be influenced by its use (distributive use, improvement use, controlling use of the evaluation outcome).

The objective of Chap. 6, *University Governance—Organizational Centralization and Engagement in European Universities* is to shed light on three questions: (1) Through what forms of organizational activity do universities make decisions? (2) To what extent do such forms vary across European universities? (3) How can the observed variation (or lack thereof) be explained? In this chapter Ivar Bleiklie, Svein Michelsen, Georg Krücken and Nicoline Frølich develop a comparative organizational perspective and apply it to an analysis of decision making structures in 26 European universities in eight different countries. The authors question that the standard assumption according to which university governance has moved from a ‘traditional collegial’ governance model to a ‘modern managerial’ model tells the whole story, and argue that current universities display a variety of complex and hybrid forms. They then ask whether characteristics of political-administrative regimes and administrative traditions generate path dependencies that open up for and constrain internal governance and engagement processes in universities. Here they question the standard assumption that variation across countries depends on the extent to which the ‘modern’ model has replaced the ‘traditional’ model and argue that the political-administrative environment of universities is likely to affect the mix and characteristics of actual university governance arrangements. They develop two dimensions—engagement and decentralization in organizational decision making—along which decision making in university organizations may be compared and related to concepts of university autonomy. In order to understand the organizational and systemic changes in expanding public higher education systems, it is also necessary to understand the public policies and policy environments that affect and shape them.

An important aspect of the growth and diversification of higher education is the formalization and integration of higher education systems (Ramirez and Christensen 2013). This brings institutions that previously did not have any contact into view of one another and often into competition for resources like public money, research grants, and the best students and faculty. Nicoline Frølich, Jeroen Huisman and Bjørn

Stensaker address this development in Chap. 7, *Understanding Strategy Practices in Universities*. Their contribution draws on institutional theory and addresses the question of how individual higher education institutions deal with institutional pluralism. They develop an analytical framework inspired by institutional theory, ‘the sense making perspective’ in organization theory and ‘strategy-as-practice’ to connect the macro-transformation processes of the organizational field and the micro-processes of organizational strategizing. Thus, this chapter addresses the topic of how individual institutions and their leaders relate to other institutions and what this relation means in terms of influence on their leaders. The next four chapters focus on three aspects of how political systems generate higher education policies and how policies in turn affect higher education institutions and their governance.

First António Magalhães and Amélia Veiga address the interaction between European Union policies and national higher education sectors in individual countries in Chap. 8, *Four ‘I’s Configuring European Higher Education Governance*. They discuss the role of ideas, interests, instruments and institutions in shaping European governance in practice, with an empirical focus on evaluation and funding policies. They argue that European governance is reflected in how institutions are developed through discursive processes, reconfiguring the environment within which European higher education systems and institutions are developing. The discursive institutional approach conceptualizes how a common understanding of challenges and adequate ways of addressing them constitutes a force to be reckoned with for European universities although it is still an open question what specific effects these processes may have on individual institutions. However important the European level, national governments and national policies are still the main engine for higher education policy making and implementation.

In their contribution *Political-Administrative Structures and University Policies* (Chap. 9), Ivar Bleiklie and Svein Michelsen develop a conceptual framework that makes it possible to investigate the explanatory power of structural characteristics of political-administrative systems focusing on higher education policy trends in the eight countries. Using the same typology of political-administrative regimes used in Chap. 6, they formulate assumptions about structural conditions for policy making and policy change and test the assumptions using available data on higher education reform policies. The test demonstrated that there are more than one set of structural conditions that lead to high reform



activity and several sets of conditions that limit reform activities. Finally, they use interview data in order to illustrate how policy processes unfold under the varying conditions indicated above.

In Chap. 10, *Actor Constellation and Policy Making* Ivar Bleiklie, Svein Michelsen, Mary Henkel and Emanuela Reale take on the question of structures and processes of the HE policy sectors, and the way in which policy sector regimes shape HE policies. We start from two different perspectives: First, we emphasize how characteristics of higher education policies are shaped by the organizational arrangements of the higher education sector. Based on this perspective we focus on characteristics of the political-administrative apparatus and develop a comparative analysis of three countries—England, Italy and Norway. We develop a set of dimensions on which the comparison is based, and we identify patterns that may demonstrate whether we can make a reasonable case in favor of the assumption that there is a relationship between the organizational structure of the HE sectors and policy content. The second perspective focuses on the HE sector as an arena in which organized actors pursue certain goals and values, define identities, collaborate on common projects, struggle for power and compete for resources. Here we go into more detailed analysis of characteristics of policy processes in the three cases. We suggest a possible way of conceptualizing the relationship between the organizational setup of the HE sector, its policy processes, and HE policy. Our aim is to identify higher education policy regimes as a set of conditions that shape policies in terms of structural arrangements and actors in pursuit of particular policy goals.

One important set of conditions has to do with the policy instruments with which policies are sought implemented. This is the topic of Chap. 11, *Policy Instruments in European Universities: Implementation of Higher Education Policies*, by Gigliola Mathisen Nyhagen, Ivar Bleiklie and Kristin Hope. This chapter focuses on the implementation of higher education policies in four European universities in respectively Italy, Germany, Netherlands and Norway, and explain how it varies across countries. The aim is to analyze two aspects of policy implementation. One is the substantive policies that are put in place in terms of policy instruments such as legislation, financial incentives and organizational arrangements, and the second is the process of implementation understood as patterns of participation and trust among the actors involved. Basically they ask what instruments are put in place and how it is done. They ask how universities as implementers respond to government

policies, and given their response, how they go about transforming these policies into institutional practices. Thus, we focus on the relationship between government and individual university institutions and on the relationship between leadership and rank and file academic units within individual universities. They seek to explain cross-national variation focusing on the relationship between political-administrative structures, implementation processes, policy instruments and substantive outcomes as described by those who manage them at the institutional level. By analyzing variation in the use of policy instruments as well as characteristics of the implementation processes, their approach goes beyond simplistic generalizations categorizing countries globally as respectively high or low implementation performers.

The ambition of Ivar Bleiklie, Jürgen Enders and Benedetto Lepori in the concluding chapter is to bring together and synthesize the theoretical approach and the empirical lessons that can be drawn from the TRUE project. Thus the first goal of Chap. 12, *Organizational Configurations of Modern Universities, Institutional Logics and Public Policies - Towards an Integrative Framework*, is to review this evidence along a set of common dimensions concerning (1) variations in organizational configurations among European universities and (2) their linkages to higher education policies and related environmental pressures. The TRUE project provides systematic view of these processes, covering eight countries and a reasonably large number of universities; the subprojects also addressed these questions using a variety of theoretical lenses applied to different dimensions of organizational and political processes. The review underscores, however, the need for a more refined analytical framework to accommodate the diversity of empirical observations and provide a more nuanced approach on how environmental contingencies impact organizations. Such a framework should also be able to propose underlying sociological and behavioral mechanisms accounting for the observed patterns and, therefore, move from descriptive analyses towards explanatory (or even predictive) accounts. Therefore, in the last section of the chapter, they propose a framework that builds on recent developments in neo-institutional theory and, particularly, in institutional logics and argue that concepts like institutional pluralism and organizational hybridity provide useful analytical lenses for understanding changes in contemporary university organizations, whose potential remains largely unexplored.

## NOTE

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# A Sociological Experiment on Methodological Design—Strengths and Limits of a Pragmatist Approach to Research Methods in the TRUE Project

*Benedetto Lepori*

**Abstract** This chapter revisits the TRUE project from the perspective of the methodological choices made and, particularly, of the debate between qualitative and interpretive methodologies on the one hand, and quantitative and formalized methodologies on the other hand. By doing this, we highlight the deeper rationales of methodological choices, the practical goals and implementation and, finally, their outcomes in terms of analysis, as well as limitations that emerged. We show how the confrontation between methodological approaches was not resolved through a unifying solution, but led rather to a pragmatic approach where different methods have been adopted depending on the research goals. In this perspective, the project largely followed a general tendency in social science methodology towards using mixed methods.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the early phases of the TRUE project, a controversy broke out concerning scientific methods. At first glance, it concerned mostly practical issues turning on the most efficient way of collecting comparable data on universities across a large number of countries, an issue which was central to the program “Higher Education and Social Change” (Bleiklie 2014; Kosmützky and Nokkala 2014). However, behind this discussion loomed deeper differences within the research team concerning epistemological and methodological foundations of social sciences research, which are well known in the general debate on scientific methods (Creswell 2013). These concerned for example knowledge claims about how scientific knowledge should be developed (positivist vs. constructivist), strategies of inquiry (quantitative vs. qualitative) and research methods.

The overall frame of the TRUE project was in this respect particularly challenging. The project articulated a general goal of providing comparative evidence across countries with a distinct multilevel understanding of higher education, where interactions between field-level governance (policies; Paradeise et al. 2009), population-level dynamics (diversity; Huisman et al. 2007) and university-level governance (de Boer et al. 2007) should be taken into account in order to explain the organizational transformation of universities. This also generated a wide range of subtopics, from policy governance to organizational governance and management, from human resources to finances, evaluation and strategy, each research tradition bringing its own epistemological and methodological approaches.

Appreciating this diversity, while at the same time developing federating methods across countries and topics, was therefore a central challenge. As I shall describe in this chapter, it led to a distinctive mixed methods approach (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010), where the emphasis has been on combining and integrating different types of data rather than on developing a unitary methodological strategy for the whole project. Further, methods were adapted to the specific TRUE context in an original way, like in the case of the TRUE survey (Seeber et al. 2014), while innovative methods were adopted in some instances, like recourse to self-ethnography (Alvesson 2003).

The aim of this chapter is therefore to revisit the TRUE experience from the perspective of the methodological choices that were made, by highlighting their (sometimes hidden) deeper rationales, the practical

goals and implementation and, finally, their outcomes in terms of analysis, as well as limitations that emerged. Besides documenting this experience and providing background information to the other book chapters, my goal is also to contribute to self-reflection on methods in higher education from two perspectives: the broader methodological debate in social sciences on the one hand and the specific practical issues for our field on the other hand.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, I introduce concepts and distinctions from sociological theories of scientific methods, which are useful to interpreting the TRUE experience in a deeper way. Second, I revisit the TRUE methodological choices from three perspectives, namely the general methodological debate, the working of the selected methods and, finally, the use of data for analytical purposes and the publishing output. I conclude with some reflections on methodological development in higher education studies and its necessary link with theoretical development.

## METHODS, EPISTEMOLOGIES AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Many discussions on methods in social sciences follow a clear-cut opposition between quantitative and qualitative methods, considered as distinct and incompatible ways of performing research (Snow 1998; Neuman and Neuman 2006). Following this perspective, two (or more) alternative paradigms for doing research can be identified (Lincoln et al. 2011), which can be distinguished in terms of their ontology (assumptions concerning the nature of reality), epistemology (assumptions on how knowledge is generated), methodology (stipulations on how to do research) and methods (approaches to collect information).

In this perspective, quantitative and qualitative methods would not differ only concerning practical ways of collecting and handling data, but imply incompatible ways of seeing the world and how knowledge is produced (Creswell 2013). A quantitative approach would be rooted in a realist ontology and positivist epistemology: the nature is characterized by the existence of general laws and, therefore, the process of inquiry should be oriented towards discovering regularities and causal explanations; hence, a focus on generalizability of research results and led to the widespread usage of quantitative data which are comparable across contexts. Comparability and controlling for diversity of the contexts are therefore key issues for a quantitative approach (Reale 2014).

On the contrary, qualitative methods would be rooted in a subjectivist ontology and a constructivist conception of science, where reality can be accessed only through the lenses of the observer and his/her subjectivity. Since knowledge is socially constructed, it is situated in specific spatial and temporal contexts and, therefore, there is little scope to inquire for general laws, while generalization is seen as methodologically problematic (Knorr Cetina 1995). Therefore, the goal of scientific inquiry should be to ascertain diversity and to develop thick descriptions of local contexts, by using a rich set of qualitative information closely associated with the views of the involved actors.

Following Kuhn (1962), social studies of science have mostly associated methodological paradigms with the social structure of science, arguing that scientific communities tend to develop an internally coherent methodological paradigm to which their members adhere and which provide these communities with identity and distinction. In this sociological perspective, methodological debates would reflect struggles for power and legitimacy between competing scientific communities and, while individual researchers would have little leeway to adapt their method to a specific research question, as this would imply a loss of recognition and legitimacy by their colleagues.

Interestingly, the initial debate within TRUE largely followed these lines. Some of the researchers argued for a comparative approach based on national and university case studies, mostly relying on interviews, as this would allow understanding country and organizational specificities. Others argued that, in most cases, these approaches led only to the juxtaposition of case studies, without a real comparative approach (Bleiklie 2014; Kosmützky and Nokkala 2014), and, therefore, argued for more quantitative (survey-based) methods, which would allow for systematic comparisons. Retrospectively, I would consider that the debate concerned less the way data should be collected (the method) and more questions concerning the overall goals of the research and the most suitable methodological approach to reach them.

The methodological discussion within TRUE was not however stuck in this confrontation, leading for example to one paradigm dominating the whole project. On the contrary, the project attempted to combine methods and approaches from different traditions, taking stock of their

respective strengths. This follows a general move in social sciences methodology towards more flexible mixed methods approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2010; Small 2011).

In this perspective, the project largely followed a pragmatist epistemological tradition (Maxwell and Mittapalli 2010), where methods of inquiry are considered as set of tools the selection of which largely obeys pragmatic considerations related to the characteristics of the research questions and to practical considerations concerning data and resources.

Two insights of the current research on scientific methods are relevant in this respect. First, methods of inquiry are inherently multilevel constructions involving deeper ontological and methodological beliefs, more mundane aspects concerning data, methods and empirical design and, finally, issues concerning research purposes and practical aims of research (Biesta 2010). Incompatibilities at some levels are constitutive—it is not possible to combine within a research design a positivist and a constructivist epistemology—while others are not: it is not rare combining a positivist approach and the search for general laws with qualitative data and even qualitative methods of analysis, while interpretive approaches can also be applied to numbers. The two clear-cut scenarios of quantitative and qualitative methods might well be widespread research strategies, but other scenarios can be constructed by combining methods across levels, opening a wide space for the development of tailor-made methods adapted to specific research questions (Creswell 2013).

Second, studies of sciences provide evidence that research methods do not function as iron-cage paradigms, but in most instances as *heuristics*, i.e. templates for acceptable ways of performing research which are mobilized in a flexible way by individual researchers depending on the specific research conditions and research goals (Abbott 2004). With some exceptions, most scientific communities are characterized by some level of methodological pluralism, particularly in communities which are multidisciplinary by nature like higher education studies and therefore inherit very different methodological approaches from the parent disciplines.

Therefore, methodological debates are not necessarily stuck in disciplinary confrontations, but might also lead to the emergence of methodological innovation by recombining different approaches.

## THE TRUE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: A REVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCES

### *The Rationale for Methods and the Debate*

The goal of the TRUE project was to analyze, and possibly, explain, the transformation of European universities from collegial to managed organizations (Amaral et al. 2003; Bleiklie et al. 2011), as well as identifying differences between individual universities and countries in this process. The underlying theoretical assumption was that this change was driven by two processes, i.e. changes in the policy environment with the introduction of New Public Management approaches (Paradeise et al. 2009) and the behavior and strategy of individual universities, leading to internal diversity within national higher education systems (Huisman et al. 2007). The TRUE team was distinctly multidisciplinary, including scholars from public administration, organization studies, political sciences and sociology (Hope 2014).

The project had therefore a theoretical ambition to identifying causal mechanisms linking policy change with organizational change and a distinct focus on comparing universities across countries in order to identify differences and similarities. The multilevel design of the study led to methodological and practical issues, since a large number of cases in each country would have been required; the envisaged solution was to combine in-depth case studies of three higher education institutions (HEIs) in each of the eight participating countries with an overall survey of all HEIs included in the countries included in the study and the collection of general statistical data to analyze system diversity. A second methodological issue concerned the characterization of policies, since national political systems can be distinguished according to many different dimensions (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013) and, therefore, linking policies and transformation of universities would require strong theoretical assumptions concerning the underlying causal mechanisms.

When the project was approved, the choice of the methodologies in order to analyze the university case studies became rapidly debated. Some members of the research team argued that comparing 24 qualitative case studies based on interviews would hardly be possible and the result would have been the juxtaposition of loosely coupled cases current in higher education research (Kosmützky and Nokkala 2014).

Retrospectively, one should recognize that the issue was not the type of data or the data collection methods, as there are good examples of research combining case studies with systematic comparisons (Paradeise et al. 2009). Even within TRUE, a paper was published comparing universities through fully qualitative data (based on self-ethnography; Bleiklie et al. 2015). However, the key to this qualitative approach was a well-developed theorization to identify common categories and observation points across organizations and introducing a tighter project organization.

The alternative proposed was to use survey-based methods to collect systematically comparable information based on standard scales—to use statistical analyses to compare organizations and their variations. The critique was that, first, survey scores are only comparable at the surface, but hide systematic biases related to the context of respondents and, second, they can only grasp the formal side of organizational behavior, but not the deep social processes within an organization, a critique current in the so-called critical approach to organizations (Clegg et al. 2006). Again, the issue was less with the type of data—there are well-developed techniques to control for bias and to construct from surveys measures of latent concepts which are not directly observable (Nederhof 1985), but with the underlying epistemology. Retrospectively, a more interpretivist and constructivist epistemology would have been hardly compatible with project original goals and design.

The compromise found was to combine the two approaches, by, first, realizing a survey of members of the 24 universities selected and, then, a set of interviews with a smaller number of respondents in one of these universities per country to provide more in-depth interpretations of organizational behavior, focusing as well on specific topics. A price to be paid for this combined approach was to renounce the envisaged large-scale survey of all universities in the concerned countries.

### *Methods in Practice. Implementation and Limitations*

Table 2.1 summarizes the methods used in the TRUE project, highlighting its distinctive mixed methods approach and the attempt to combine different methods in order to provide complementary information.

In the following, I shortly present each method and highlight its value for TRUE and the limitations which emerged.



**Table 2.1** Summary of the TRUE empirical methods

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Unit of analysis</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Data format</i>
Institutional descriptions	Universities	26 universities in eight countries	Data collection from Websites	Word files based on common template
Formal autonomy questionnaire Survey	Universities/Policy Individual respondents inside universities	One university per country 687 respondents in 26 universities	Expert assessment by the participating teams Standardized questionnaire (mostly 5-point Likert scale) delivered online	SPSS data file and codebook SPSS data file and codebook
Interviews	Individuals inside the universities	10–15 people for each university, 8 university (one per participating country)	Semi-structured interviews, plus documentary sources	Case study monographs Summary excel sheets
Analysis of public policies	National political systems	8 countries About 10 interviews per country	Semi-structured interviews, plus documentary literature	Policy case studies Policy templates
Analysis of European policies	Members of European Parliament and officers of the European Commission	10 members of European Parliament and officers of European Commission	Semi-structured interviews	Interviews

### *Constructing the Sample*

Much attention was devoted to the selection of universities in the sample, based on the idea that it should broadly reflect the diversity of universities in Europe. Two main criteria were adopted: the subject specialization, distinguishing between generalist and specialist HEIs (Lepori et al. 2010) and the level of international reputation, as expressed for example by international rankings. Therefore, for each country the sample included: (a) one comprehensive research university; (b) one technical/specialized university; (c) one less prestigious university (e.g. a previous college turned into a university with a low score on research intensity). The final sample was composed of 26 universities, as Switzerland included five cases, Norway four, while France included just two.

This sample can be considered as representative of the (diversity of) European universities, since it includes universities which are rather different in terms of size (number of students between 2000 and 90,000), age (foundation year between late twelfth and late twentieth centuries), international reputation (some universities in the sample being among the first 100 in international rankings, others not included at all) and finally, discipline concentration, as the sample includes both generalist universities and specialized technical universities. Moreover, it covers countries that are very different in terms of their political-administrative systems (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013) as well as the strength and timing of NPM reforms (Paradeise et al. 2009; Bleiklie et al. 2011). Variation in NPM pressures by countries generated an interesting natural experiment, which could be exploited for hypotheses testing (Canhilar et al. 2015).

Therefore, sample construction was consistent with the project goal to observe variation in university characteristics both within and between countries, a very reasonable approach for a cross-sectional study.

### *Collecting Descriptive Information on the Sample*

As a first step, descriptive formal information for each university in the sample was collected in a standardized report. The report included general information on the university, basic statistical data, and information on funding, strategies, research and educational activities.

The reports were to some extent helpful to analyses at later stages, as they provided good comparative information; further, they demonstrated that since the advent of the WWW, a large amount of information on cases can be retrieved directly through desk work. Currently, most university websites provide rich information on university organization,

history, and statistical data. In many cases they also allow downloading important documents like strategic plans, budgetary reports and even minutes from the rectorate, board and academic senate meetings. The complementary use of Internet sources and interviews proved to be very useful for one case study made in TRUE concerning university budgeting (Lepori and Montauti 2015).

#### *The Formal Autonomy Questionnaire*

The formal autonomy questionnaire was a questionnaire comprising closed questions on the level of formal autonomy of universities based on the typology developed by Verhoest (Verhoest et al. 2004) and adapted for the higher education sector (Enders et al. 2013). It was developed by one team member and completed for one university for each participating country, as it should reflect mostly characteristics of the national policy environment. The questionnaire proved to be useful for comparative analysis and, as a matter of fact, is highly complementary to the survey of university members as it provides external expert assessment dealing mostly with formal dimensions of autonomy associated with national regulation. Retrospectively, the value of questionnaire would have been strongly enhanced by completing it for the whole sample for two reasons: the possibility with matching with the survey data and some more statistical power in drawing comparisons.

#### *The TRUE Survey of University Members*

The survey of university respondents was the main effort for data collection in TRUE. It was addressed to individuals holding some management responsibility within universities, with the rationale that they would know better how their university works. This included five organizational roles, i.e. the rector (or equivalent), the head of the administration, the faculty deans, the members of the university board and the members of the academic senate.

This sampling approach generated some complexities since the organizational structure differs by university and therefore, the sample composition varies (like some universities not having a board or a senate), generating a risk of systematic bias. Retrospectively, this was less of a problem, since for most questions there were no statistically significant differences in responses by group. The survey also did not include explicitly academics, but they are represented through specific roles (most faculty deans and senate members are academics). Again, there is little

evidence of systematic differences between academics and non-academics (for example external board members) in responses.

The major advantage of this approach was a more manageable population of respondents and less subject to potential knowledge bias. Systematic follow-up and reminders resulted in a very good response rate: in the end 687 valid questionnaires were collected from a population of 1420 potential respondents (response rate 48%). At the university level, the number of respondents ranged from 7 to 55. In terms of roles, the composition of respondents is rather similar to the original population: we collected 246 questionnaires from senate members (response rate 45%), 235 from middle managers (48%), 162 from board members (50%), 20 from central administrators (74%), and 24 from rectors (89%). Retrospectively, a slightly larger sample, including for example a subset of academics, would have been useful in order to increase statistical power.

The survey included only closed questions, mostly standardized 5-point Likert scales, in a few cases single-choice questions. The preparation of the questionnaires was a complex process, as it had to take into account the different interests within the TRUE research teams. In the end, the survey included following groups of questions:

- The organizational role of the respondent and his/her overall perception of the university.
- University policy and funding environment, as well as resource acquisition.
- University governance and management.
- University strategies.
- University internal allocation process for resources and evaluation.
- The relationships between university bodies and the distribution of power within the university.

This broad coverage of topics has to be considered as a strength of the TRUE survey, as it permits combining different items in more robust constructs and makes investigation of a wide range of different research questions possible (see below section “[Comparing Universities](#)”). It led however to the rather unfortunate decision to include some questions only in the questionnaire for a specific role—for example focusing the rector’s questionnaire on evaluation issues and the administrator’s one on budgeting issues in order to reduce the number of questions. While understandable in the context of TRUE, this choice reduced the

analytical power of the questionnaire—most analyses rely only on common questions to all questionnaires; moreover, it generated complexities in the management of the responses as five different questionnaires had to be merged together.

Much attention was devoted to standardizing questions and scales and adopting a wording as clear and as neutral as possible. Feedback from the respondents (in the remark section of the questionnaire) was overall positive in this respect. This effort proved to be important also for publishing, as a common critique against such questionnaires was bias induced by how questions are formulated; for instance, New Public Management, a major issue for the TRUE project, is never mentioned explicitly in the questionnaires.

Survey delivery was managed centrally through an online tool by one team member, while national participants took care of sending personalized reminders to potential respondents at their universities. The survey was anonymous; the contact e-mails of the respondents were stored solely for the purpose of recalling.

This approach worked well. The online tool allowed for translation to national languages whenever this was deemed necessary, as in the case of France. Online delivery is also desirable in order to reduce social desirability bias, i.e. respondents adapting their responses to what they perceive coincide with the preferences of the researchers. Finally, local contacts and reminders strongly contributed to the high response rate—in most universities the central management agreed to inform about the survey and motivate responding.

Once data had been collected, all questionnaires were merged in a single SPSS file including standard codes for respondents and universities, as well as contextual information on the university, like size, disciplinary specialization, and international reputation. The file is accompanied by a codebook explaining the methodology and all response codes.

The whole process of design, delivery (in two waves) and coding was performed during the year 2011 and took about nine months.

### *Interviews of University Members*

As a second step, interviews of university members were performed in one university per country. To limit case variation, it was decided to cover the traditional generalist universities in the sample. The interviews aimed at gaining more in-depth knowledge about the decision-making processes and accompanying factors impacting on the decisions made.

Again, a common template was developed focusing on decision-making processes and suggesting an in-depth investigation of a recent case of institutional restructuring, but the individual teams had some leeway to customize the interview guide to their specific research interests. A minimum of 12 individual interviews were requested, selected among those who responded to the survey.

While individual teams were of course free to exploiting their own case study interviews, two instruments were devised for comparative work. First, an excel template was provided, where summaries and excerpts of the interviews could be entered, organized by respondent and by topic. Second, the French team devised the structure for a case study monograph, providing excerpts from the interviews integrated with descriptive information and interpretations by the research teams. The case study monographs were meant as an intermediary product between the interview transcriptions and the final case study and should have helped realizing comparative analysis. However, the excel file proved to be difficult to use because it did not include in-depth information, whereas monographs still required extensive work in order to compare cases (Hope 2014). Furthermore, not all countries provided the monographs.

Retrospectively, the interview data collection suffered from being situated in a late stage of the project and of a less-tight management of the process. Exactly because of their depth and complexity, the possibility of using interviews for comparative analyses depends even more than for survey from extensive work on developing common concepts and frames of analysis.

### *Systematizing Information on Policies*

Finally, a distinct data collection concerned the organization of national higher education policies in a comparative perspective, what would have provided the “independent” variables for the comparative analysis of university transformation. This work was led by the Norwegian team (for national policies) and by the Portuguese team (for European policies).

Based on a theory-based typology of political-administrative systems (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013), an interview guide was developed for about respondents from relevant stakeholders such as parliament, minister, civil servant, funding agencies, evaluation agencies, association of universities, and unions. Together with information from reports and secondary literature, the interviews constituted the basis for national policy reports.

At the end, five of the eight TRUE countries have delivered the policy study template. The topics that were covered were supranational policies, structural characteristics of national political-administrative systems, as well as actors and decision-making processes.

As I will show later, these data led to a number of interesting comparative analyses; however, the goal of matching them with the university-level information, particularly from the survey, was hardly realized. Retrospectively, it would have been desirable to better integrate the policy-level and institutional-level data collection already in the design phase.

### METHODS AS A TOOL FOR KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT

In this section, I will analyze the use of the data collected within TRUE for scholarly publication, with a specific focus on how the data have been used, the analysis techniques adopted, and the extent to which specific characteristics of the TRUE data enabled new insights, respectively constrained the analysis and results achieved.

I will divide the presentation according to three main types of analyses, i.e. comparative analyses of higher education policies, comparative analysis of universities using most of the TRUE sample and case studies and small-sample analysis of individual universities.

This presentation is forcefully selective and does not aim to provide a full overview of TRUE scholarly impact. Cases have also been selected for methodological interest, not for the scholarly value as such. Importantly, the TRUE project did not focus solely on common products, like a book series from the whole project, but has purposefully encouraged team members to pursue their own lines of research and to publish in different outlets in order to achieve a broader impact. Complementarily, a few common products have been realized: a special issue of the journal *Higher Education* on the project's conceptual framing (3268 Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013), a common paper based on the survey (Seeber et al. 2014) and the current book.

#### *Comparing Universities*

The analysis reveals that the TRUE survey was widely used for comparative analyses concerning different topics and by most teams within TRUE; in this respect, despite some methodological shortcomings, the

survey proved to be a real federating dataset within the project, which, thanks to its broad design in terms of topics, allowed for the use by different teams.

Most analyses were comparative in nature and combined existing conceptual frameworks in higher education with the new data; the major innovation was therefore seen in a more systematic comparison across a reasonably large number of cases. Survey data were used to compare the governance models of universities (Bleiklie, Frøhlich and Michelsen, Chap. 6). They were also used to analyze topics like university strategy (Frølich et al. 2014), evaluation (Reale and Marini, Chap. 5), accountability (Marini and Reale 2012) and budgeting (Lepori and Seeber, Chap. 4). Data from the formal autonomy questionnaire were also combined with survey data to provide an interesting contrast between university formal and real autonomy (de Boer and Enders, Chap. 3).

In most cases, the methodological approach adopted was to compute the respondents' means within each university for different questions and to compare them across questions and universities. The results are interesting in two respects: first, they document systematic differences by university and country and, second, they show that patterns differ by characteristics and that, e.g. organizational engagement and decentralization are not correlated (Frølich et al. 2014). A useful method for this kind of analysis proved to be Factor Analysis, as it allows combining different items in more robust constructs and identify latent variables of theoretical interest; unfortunately, the fact that questions have different groups of respondents somewhat limited its use for the TRUE survey data.

These results highlight the complexity of the organizational model of European universities, which cannot be simply reduced to the opposition between a collegial and a corporate model (Bleiklie et al. 2015). A general methodological critique of these studies is that they don't allow controlling for differences between universities in the number and composition of respondents.

In the same vein, a collective paper has been published analyzing the introduction of hierarchy and rationality (Seeber et al. 2014), as key features of the new corporate model of public organizations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). The main innovation was to develop a measure of the strength of NPM policy pressures as a quantitative scale constructed from policy analysis (based on Paradeise et al. 2009), which could be used as an independent variable in order to predict the



introduction of managerialism in European universities. This approach represents an interesting case of exploiting qualitative policy analysis to develop quantitative measures to be used in regressions.

Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC), i.e. the ratio of between and within universities variance, have also been used in order to identify for which characteristics differences between universities are statistically significant (as compared with differences between respondents; Frolich et al. forthcoming). ICCs represent a step towards more refined analytical methods, which employ statistical techniques to take into account the multi-level structure of the data (respondents nested within universities). Multilevel regressions (Snijders and Bosker 2004) were adopted by Marini and Reale to test associations between the extent a university was considered as managerial or collegial by respondents and the extent of accountability within the university (Marini and Reale 2012). A main methodological problem with this kind of analyses is endogeneity, i.e. that it is impossible to identify causality (except when this is suggested by a strong theoretical argument).

Finally, Canhilal and Lepori investigated through a multilevel regression whether stronger NPM pressures have differential impacts on university characteristics, therefore combining the multilevel approach with the (exogenous) NPM pressures variable (Canhilal et al. 2015). Results conform to institutional logics theory, whereby universities are hybrid organizations subject to contrasting pressures from a managerial and academic logic and tend to adopt selectively those managerial practices which do not conflict with core stipulation of the academic logics, like autonomy of academics concerning the conduct of research and academic careers (Lepori and Canhilal 2015).

This discussion reveals the challenging character of the TRUE survey and that its exploitation required researchers to introduce novel analytical methods, rarely used previously in the higher education field. The complexity of the data and its multilevel structure faced the researchers with a number of methodological problems and, even within the project itself, some critique was advanced regarding the robustness of results. From the original descriptive approach, the analysis is moving towards theoretically better informed methodological approaches, like multi-level models and to a more explicit link with theory to develop hypotheses to be tested with the data. The integration of the survey with other data sources, like in the case of the NPM measure, proved also fruitful and represents a major avenue for further exploitation. At the same time, two

structural limitations have to be acknowledged: the limitations in combining different items given the survey structure and the small number of universities, implying that it becomes difficult to test complex hypotheses and to control for all confounding factors.

### *Comparative Analysis of Policies*

The comparative analysis of policies emerged in TRUE as a distinct stream of research, which was based on the policy case studies, on secondary literature and on exchanges between the members of the team. Rather than collecting original data, the major outcome of TRUE was to foster exchange and collaboration between research teams to provide small-scale comparative analyses—most studies include 3–4 countries. These studies largely share a common theoretical framework which foresees that the structure of political-administrative systems strongly influence country’ reform capacity and trajectories (Pollitt and Geert 2000). Studies in this direction include a comparison of funding policies reforms in three TRUE countries (Mathisen Nyhagen 2015), a broader comparative study of political-administrative reforms in all eight TRUE countries (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013 and Bleiklie, Henkel and Michelsen, Chap. 10) and an analysis of European governance in higher education (Veiga and Magalhaes, Chap. 8).

Some multilevel studies have also been performed, which attempt at linking changes at the policy level with the organizational transformation of universities using descriptive information from country research teams (Bleiklie et al. 2011) and comparing reforms with the level of university autonomy from the autonomy template (Mathisen, Bleiklie and Hope, Chap. 11). These works represent an important attempt to address a critical link within the TRUE project.

### *Individual and Small-Group Analyses*

University case studies using interview materials are relatively less represented in the TRUE publications. This might be expected for different reasons: the explicit focus of the project on cross-country comparative analyses; the major effort undertaken in collecting the survey data; finally, the fact that interview materials have become available at later stage and, therefore, much work is still ongoing.

Nevertheless, they point to some important directions and potential complementarities with other data sources. This book includes a comparative chapter on university strategy practices within universities based on the exploitation of the institutional monographs (Frøhlich, Stensaker and Huisman, Chap. 7); this analysis might probably be further extended by matching the qualitative information with the responses to the survey, which includes a number of questions on strategy, moving towards a true mixed methods approach.

A combination of documentary analysis, survey data, statistical data and interviews is the method adopted for an in-depth analysis of budgeting in European universities, based on the notion of hybridity (Lepori and Montauti 2015). Interestingly, this paper comes from a group who largely promoted the survey, showing how disciplinary boundaries have become blurred in the course of the project.

Another paper from TRUE is exceptional in methodological terms, since to provide a comparative analysis of the association between environmental characteristics and organizational control, the authors decided to have recourse to self-ethnography, i.e. the analysis of their own universities based on information acquired during their own career (Alvesson 2003). The paper was published in a good organizational journal (Bleiklie et al. 2015), displaying the potential for methodological innovation in connection with qualitative methods.

## DISCUSSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

After this review, I would like to suggest some remarks and directions for future debate.

First, I highlight the diversity of methods adopted in TRUE, ranging from statistical analysis of survey data, to comparative analysis of policy information to interviews and self-ethnography. The original confrontation between methods, largely an outcome of the project design and the composition of the team, was not resolved through a unifying solution, but led rather to a pragmatic approach where different methods have been adopted depending on the competences of the research team and on the research goals. In this perspective, the project largely followed a general tendency in social science methodology towards using mixed methods and bridging the quantitative and qualitative research traditions.

Second, it is possible to identify some disadvantages, but also advantages of this approach. The process of methodology development

was rather complex and difficult to structure in a proper way. In some instances, the ambition for innovative methods faced the researchers with new implementation challenges, resulting in a number of limitations in the exploitation (as is apparent in the case of the survey). There are certainly costs implied in methodological innovation and lessons to be learned for the future implementation of the same methods. One of them stands above all: the need of carefully planning the matching of the different steps of data collection, in order to avoid incompatibilities which limit their combined usage, as in the case of the formal autonomy questionnaire that would have been much more useful when applied to all universities included in the survey.

Yet the effort was fruitful in terms of the diversity of outputs—it would hardly be conceivable to cover all TRUE topics with a single methodological approach—but also in terms of innovation. Particularly, the TRUE survey allowed to providing novel results on the responses of public organizations to New Public Management, which are being published in journals and presented in mainstream conferences in Management and Organization studies like EGOS and the Academy of Management.

Third, while most of the initial debate within TRUE focused on data collection methods, other issues emerged as soon as TRUE members started exploiting the collected data. The debate from then on focused on analytical methods and the need for a proper theoretical framing that could drive the identification of observation points and variables. The fact that this reorientation was not just limited to quantitative analyses is revealed by the paper by Bleiklie et al. (2015), where the adoption of a potentially problematic method like self-ethnography was acceptable only because it allowed a tight coupling between theory and empirics (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). This also shows how complex innovation in research can be. Against positivist accounts to the effect that good research always starts from a theoretical frame, our research demonstrated how innovation also could be born from methods and data collection. Again we may draw the lesson that the mutual interplay between data, methods and theory is indispensable and overshadows the more barren controversy about the relative merits of deductive and inductive approaches as conditions for good and innovative research.

The general lesson from the TRUE project resonates the one driven by Teichler a few years ago that the value of comparative project is not in the possibility of collecting data across different countries—this is even

less needed in the age of the Internet—but lies in the possibility of disrupting established ways of thinking, thanks to confrontation between teams with different objectives, perspectives, histories and disciplinary rooting (Teichler 1996). This process might well have been difficult and conflictual in some instances and might have given the impression that much time was lost in discussions. Retrospectively, it is easy to suggest how better choices and more careful implementation processes might have been undertaken. However, if we believe that the core of scientific inquiry lies in innovation and learning and that this is not possible without taking risk, the TRUE project was certainly an interesting experiment well worth the attempted the outcomes of which cannot be fully assessed until a few years from now.

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PART II

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Modern Universities as Organizations

# Working in the Shadow of Hierarchy: Organisational Autonomy and Venues of External Influence in European Universities

*Harry de Boer and Jürgen Enders*

**Abstract** Over recent decades, ‘autonomy’ has become a buzz word in higher education reform and universities were thought to be empowered to determine their own destiny. This chapter examines the organisational autonomy of universities in Europe. The multidimensional analyses of autonomy show that universities in practice experience considerable decision-making space, which in many cases is even more than expected, given their formal, legal autonomy situation. At the same time, the autonomy of universities is strongly circumscribed by their lasting financial dependence on the public purse, by contractual performance agreements, multiple accountability requirements, and by working in the shadow of governmental rules and expectations. Granting universities

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more autonomy does not reflect a weakening influence of government but new ways of controlling and influencing organisational behaviour.

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we examine the organisational autonomy of universities in Europe. In higher education, ‘organisational autonomy’ is one of the golden words of our time. It is an abiding policy issue in the relationships between the state, higher education and society, subject to many higher education reforms. In continental Europe over the last three decades a central tendency in policy discourses was the intention to enhance the organisational autonomy of universities (see de Boer and File 2009; Estermann and Nokkala 2009). Fuelled by neo-liberal ideas the general perception in public sector policies, including higher education, was that state micro-management was not the most effective and efficient way to coordinate and steer these sectors. The traditional steering model with strong state control and weak organisational control<sup>1</sup> (state control model) was intended to be replaced with a model in which the state was steering from a distance and organisations were ‘empowered’ in several ways to determine their own destiny (state supervisory model) (van Vught 1989). In many countries, reforms were initiated to devolve authorities and decision-making capacities from the state to the higher education institutions. Obviously this wholesale redistribution of authority between the state and the universities has consequences for the power balances between them as well as for power balances within the universities (Neave 1998).

The awareness of the significance of organisational autonomy is echoed in national and international higher education policies. Europe’s modernisation agenda for higher education is just one example of the policy belief that organisational autonomy is one of the key aspects in ‘good governance systems’. These policies assume that higher education systems that have universities with significant autonomy will perform better than systems where university autonomy is seriously constrained (Aghion et al. 2009). Research in higher education on the relationship between organisational autonomy and performance is however thin, and the sparse outcomes are controversial (Enders et al. 2013).

To further our understanding, this chapter will analytically and empirically explore the concept of organisational autonomy. First, we will look at the relationship between formal autonomy and *de facto* autonomy or

autonomy-in-use. Based on our definition of autonomy, presented in the next section, we argue that the use of formal autonomy as the space universities have to decide upon their actions is not necessarily equal to autonomy-in-use (see also, Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008; Fumasoli et al. 2014). Second, organisational autonomy is a relational concept, which implies that external influences, or venues of influence, affect the decision-making space universities have. Therefore, in exploring the organisational autonomy of universities in Europe we are also interested to explore these ‘venues of influence’.

In this chapter we will thus address the following sets of questions. How does the formal autonomy of European universities look like? And what is de facto the organisational autonomy of these universities? Who are the stakeholders that influence universities and how is this influence exerted? Are universities that experience more organisational autonomy influenced less and differently by external actors than universities with less organisational autonomy? In answering these sets of questions we will start with our interpretation of the organisational autonomy concept.

## AUTONOMY, INFLUENCE AND CONTROL: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Autonomy as a Situational and Multidimensional Concept*

In its classical meaning autonomy refers to ‘auto’ (self) and ‘nomos’ (rule or law) and ‘autonomia’ refers to the right to self-government, a state free to determine the rules and norms by which it wants to live (Ostwald 1982, in Ballou 1998, 103). It is the capacity or will for independent thought and action (Pizanti and Lerner 2003, 136). Key for our understanding is thus that autonomy refers to both the actor’s self (having ability, will or capacity) and the actor’s relationship to its environment (independence or freedom from external control). These two elements in the autonomy definition are well-expressed by Lindley (1986, 6): “To be autonomous requires, first of all, that one has a developed self, to which one’s actions can be ascribed. (...) The other dimension of autonomy requires a freedom from external constraints. An autonomous person has a will of her or his own, and is able to act in pursuit of self-chosen goals.” Organisational autonomy is thus a relational concept, in which the interaction process between the self and the others must be considered.

Autonomy is not only contextually defined (Enders et al. 2013), but is also a multidimensional concept. Berdahl (1990) for instance distinguishes a substantive and procedural dimension of autonomy, referring on the one hand to the powers of universities to determine their own goals and programmes (substantive autonomy: the *what* dimension) and on the other hand to the university powers to determine the means by which goals will be pursued (procedural autonomy: the *how* dimension). Christensen (2001, 120) distinguishes three dimensions of formal bureaucratic autonomy: structural autonomy (dealing with leadership selection and accountability), financial autonomy (dealing with budgetary space and constraints) and legal autonomy (dealing with constraints, or tightness, of making decisions). To typify forms of autonomy, Peeters et al. (2009) discern three dimensions: *distribution of tasks, discretion in executing tasks, and nature of the assigned task*. The combination of these dimensions constitutes different forms of autonomy, ranging from low organisational autonomy (the central level decides on the distribution of tasks, sets detailed regulations, and demands full compliance in implementation) to high levels of organisational autonomy (local level involvement in task distribution, broad guidelines and implementation is not mandatory).

Another multidimensional approach on organisational autonomy is developed by Verhoest et al. (2004). Their conceptual map of autonomy consists of two basic dimensions, which fits our definition of autonomy. These two basic dimensions consist in turn on a number of subdimensions. The first basic dimension concerns the organisation's decision-making competencies (ability or capacity to act) and the second one is the exemption of constraints on the actual use of such competencies (freedom from external interference).

As regards the organisational decision-making competencies, the first basic autonomy dimension, they distinguish managerial and policy autonomy (Verhoest et al. 2004, 105). Managerial autonomy means that an organisation has powers in choice and use of inputs and concerns financial and human resources management and management of other production factors (logistics, housing, and organisation). Policy autonomy indicates the extent to which an organisation can take decisions about policy processes and procedures in order to produce goods and services, policy instrument choice, the quantity and quality of the goods and services to be produced, and the target groups it wants to reach.

The second basic dimension in Verhoest's et al. conceptual autonomy map refers to the absence of constraints on the organisation's actual use of its decision-making powers. Even if an organisation has significant managerial and policy autonomy, venues of influence may affect the organisation's decision-making powers ((Yesilkagit and van Thiel 2008). External stakeholders may have means to constrain the organisation's capacity or ability to act. The four subdimensions related to this second basic autonomy dimension are (Verhoest et al. 2004, p. 105) (i) structural autonomy (e.g. the government's involvement in selecting organisational leadership), (ii) financial autonomy (the organisation's dependency on governmental funding, alternative sources of income and to what extent an organisation is responsible for its own financial results), (iii) legal autonomy (the legal status of the organisation (e.g. public or private), and (iv) interventional autonomy (the organisation's freedom from ex post reporting requirements, evaluation and audit provisions and possible threats of external sanctions or interventions). When constraints related to structural, financial, legal and interventional autonomy are weak or absent, the organisation can use its decision-making competencies to pursue its own objectives (Verhoest et al. 2004, p. 106).

Verhoest's et al. conceptual map thus addresses the situational as well as the multidimensional character of organisational autonomy. Moreover, it explicitly addresses the distinction between formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use. The latter has hardly been researched in higher education (Fumasoli et al. 2014). The distinction between 'formal autonomy' (as prescribed by regulatory frameworks, rules, and funding regimes) and 'autonomy-in-use' (as the perceived capacity to take independent organisational decisions without external control and influence) will be discussed in the next section.

### *Formal Autonomy and Autonomy-in-Use*

Formal autonomy, usually drawn up from constitutions, laws or decrees, prescribes which organisational actions are required, prohibited or permitted. It defines the powers and competencies to take decisions. Usually such decisions are not exempt from external interference and control. Organisations do not function in a context-free world and are dependent to a greater or lesser extent on other organisations. Resource dependence as well as normative pressures (legitimacy) enforces organisations

to take external stakeholder views and actions into consideration. In other words, external venues of influence affect the use of the formally determined decision-making space. Even when such venues of influence would be rather limited, suggesting a high level of organisational autonomy in practice, there are good reasons to assume that autonomy-in-use is not (necessarily) a copy of formal autonomy. Formal rules leave by definition space for local decision-making, as they cannot prescribe action in every single detail, as Lipsky's seminal study on street-level bureaucrats has demonstrated convincingly (Lipsky 1980). Also, one of the key assumptions of principal agency theory deals with the impossibility of full control over agency behaviour.

Take the following as an example of the difference between formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use. In the past earmarked or line-item budgeting were the common way to subsidise public universities. In contemporary higher education lump sum funding models are usual. This change suggests that universities have been awarded more formal organisational autonomy. If universities use this discretion to implement their own tailor-made allocation mechanisms, then autonomy-in-use equals formal autonomy. But if they just copy the formula and parameters that the state used in the past to allocate funds, then this implies that *de facto* there has been no change. High level formal autonomy does not case high levels of autonomy-in-use. There are several of such situations to illustrate the differences between formal autonomy and the way it plays out in reality. Thus, to better understand organisational autonomy we have to understand both formal autonomy and the use of autonomy.

Hypothetically, there are four combinations possible of formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use (see Table 3.1). Intuitively, cell 1 and 4 make sense in a context-free state of the art. If organisations have much capacity and ability to take their own decisions—in terms of the conceptual map this entails high levels of managerial and policy competencies—and there is no external interference, then they can actually maximise their capacity to take decisions independently from others (cell 1). Arguably,

**Table 3.1** The autonomy quadrant: formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use

	<i>Formal autonomy</i>	
	<i>High (+)</i>	<i>Low (-)</i>
Autonomy-in-use	Cell 1 (++)	Cell 2 (-+)
	Cell 3 (+-)	Cell 4 (-)

this approximates perfect markets where organisations autonomously take decisions on service delivery.<sup>2</sup> Organisations in cell 4 formally have hardly any capacity whatsoever to take decisions and see no opportunity but full compliance (see Peeters et al. (2009) description of low autonomy: the principal decides on the distribution of tasks, sets detailed regulations, and demands full compliance in task execution). This approximates organisations that are part of a traditional hierarchy. Dant and Gundlach (1999) refer in this discussion to Williamson's (1975) classical distinction between markets and hierarchies as different modes of governance.

As we have argued, organisations do not use their autonomy in a context-free world and this implies that in an inter-organisational context autonomy-in-use can deviate from formal autonomy. Cell 3—coexistence of high formal autonomy and low autonomy-in-use—stems directly from a resource dependence perspective. Because organisations are to a lesser or greater extent dependent on others for (critical) resources, these others can exert influence on the organisations. The organisation has to take into account various venues of interest, which frames its decision-making space. This by definition infringes on the organisation's autonomy. In fact, it refers to the second basic dimension in our definition of autonomy. An example from cell 3 is a government agency that has significant control over its managerial and policy competencies (and these competencies are for example safeguarded by special laws), but is completely subsidised by the state (resource dependency) that has the opportunity to make such subsidies conditional (decreasing the use of autonomy).

Cell 2—low formal autonomy but high autonomy-in-use—may look odd at face value, but is certainly imaginable. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that resource dependency relationships are usually not unilateral dependency relationships, meaning that mutual resource dependence, or interdependence, can exist as well. In such an exchange relationship is the organisation not just dependent on the other, but is the other dependent on the organisation as well. The balance between various sorts of perceived dependence affects the autonomy-in-use. The exact nature of the mutual dependencies (the type and need of multiple resources at issue) may cause situations where organisations in practice exert more autonomy than would be expected when based on the formal autonomy situation. Several studies have provided evidence for such situations (Dant and Gundlach 1999, p. 37). Take for example a government that perceives knowledge as the competitive edge for economic



prosperity and it does not see an alternative other than publicly subsidised universities to provide such knowledge, then universities can use their resource ‘knowledge’, critical for the achievement of government goals, to enlarge their practical decision-making space.

Another possibility for the coexistence of low formal autonomy and high autonomy-in-use can exist when the ‘principle’ (e.g. a government) does not hold, or exercise, the proper infrastructure for control of the organisational agents. Agents’ anticipation of a ‘low control’ situation (low-risk perception concerning self-willed organisational action) can cause more autonomy-in-use than expected. Take for instance Verhoest’s et al. (2004) subdimension of structural autonomy that concerns the selection of (public) organisational leadership. Assume that formally the minister decides on this matter; s/he nominates, selects and appoints without any consultation the organisational head (thus, low formal autonomy for the organisation). This can be the practice (cell 4—the hierarchy with strict rule compliance in practice). The minister might as well ask the organisation to propose a candidate and rubberstamps the nominee (cell 2—while the formal space for taking the decision is low, the organisation decides in practice on their leadership position).

As regards universities all four combinations of formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use are conceivable. In the ‘low-low’ combination universities are part of the ‘state machinery’. They are state-owned organisations, clear in line and executing policies and rules as prescribed. The government rules the university, formally as well as in practice, and universities are an (bureaucratic) instrument for national political agendas (Olsen 2005). The ‘high-high’ combination comes close to a New Public Management ideal, where universities have and use the full capacity to determine and implement their teaching and research agenda without too much external interference. Universities are deploying strategic actorhood in a market driven higher education system. They can be regarded as strategic service enterprises embedded in competitive markets (Olsen 2005). Universities in cell 3 have sincere managerial and policy powers, for instance to determine the quantity and quality of service delivery, but face venues of influence they cannot deny. Their formal authorities are conditioned in such a way that in practice their hands are tied by external stakeholders. In higher education one might think of what Maassen and van Vught (1988) labelled as an intriguing Janus-Head: the two faces of the government towards higher education; one encouraging institutional autonomy and the other demanding more accountability. Intensified

(external) quality control for teaching and research alongside more space for strategic decision-making and internal managerial control. In cell 2, universities have formally limited abilities to take their own decisions, but because external stakeholder control is limited as well (lack of resources, disinterestedness), or because external demands are heterogeneous, universities experience in practice hardly any limitations in their actions.

## OUR APPROACH AND DATA

Our approach to map formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use builds on the conceptual map of autonomy developed by Verhoest et al. (2004). We have adapted their organisational autonomy concept for public sector organisations to the world of higher education. Following Verhoest et al. (2004), we focus on the two basic dimensions of organisational autonomy and their subdimensions. Firstly, we distinguish autonomy as the level of the universities' decision-making competencies, focusing on managerial, policy and structural autonomy. We see formal autonomy as the university's decision-making space for being 'in control' on matters of personnel, finance, goods and services, and internal organisational structure. Secondly, we look at autonomy as 'being free from constraints' on the actual use of such competencies, including the influence others have on university decision-making. Here we take two subdimensions: financial and interventional autonomy. Financial autonomy refers to the dependency of universities on public funding or other sources of income. The higher the level of dependency, the more constraint the actual use of autonomy is. Interventional autonomy concerns (i) the degree to which universities are subject to accountability requirements (such as evaluations and audits) and (ii) the impact of external influences such as external policies and instruments on university decision-making. The higher the degree of interventions, the lower is the autonomy in practice. Thus, we argue that universities have more autonomy if they have more decision-making capacities (condition one) and are exempt from external influences in taking their decisions (condition two). The indicators and variables that have been used to determine the formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use are depicted in Table 3.2.

For each country at the national level the higher education system and its reform over the last decades have been studied ('national case studies'). To describe the formal autonomy situation of universities in the eight countries we explored the research literature and policy documents,

and country expert opinions were gathered with respect to the dimensions of the taxonomy. The country experts answered a survey with questions related to the formal autonomy dimensions that reflect the situation in 2011. For the managerial autonomy dimension we constructed an index variable that contained nine items, each ranging from no managerial autonomy (universities do not have the ability to decide) to high managerial autonomy (meaning universities formally have the opportunity to decide themselves). Data for the other formal autonomy dimensions have been collected and analysed in the same fashion.

For autonomy-in-use we made use of the TRUE-survey data (see Chap. 2 in this volume). With respect to autonomy-in-use members of several university governing bodies have been asked about their perception of some of the 'formal autonomy indicators' as well as their assessment of external influences on university decision-making (see Table 3.2). The TRUE survey contained closed questions only; the scales for the various items varied from dichotomous scales ('yes/no') to three- and five-point Likert scales as well as scales with statements formulated by the research team. Moreover, the financial dependency of the universities on public budgets was taken into account for the assessment of autonomy-in-use. If a university is not mentioned in one of the tables below it means that no data were available.

With respect to the actual use of managerial autonomy we have selected five indicators such as: who decides in practice on the type and number of senior academic posts, who appoints in practice senior academics, and is there in practice any government interference regarding the internal budgetary rules of universities. To indicate the level of policy autonomy in practice two indicators have been used: (i) the authority of universities to determine the number of study places in bachelors and masters programmes, and (ii) the perception of the actual decision-making power of universities on the establishment of new teaching and research programmes.<sup>3</sup> Three indicators were used to assess the structural autonomy dimension. All three concern the decision-making competencies of universities to select persons for leadership positions in the university (university leaders such as rectors, deans and governing board members).

To indicate accountability requirements as an intervention into university autonomy, which may constrain its autonomy, we selected five indicators such as: accountability relationships of university governing bodies towards the national government or national agencies, number of

**Table 3.2** Dimensions, descriptions and variables of formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Variables<sup>a</sup></i>
Managerial autonomy	Discretion over financial and human resources matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Appointing full-time senior academic staff</u></li> <li>• Determination of academic staff salaries</li> <li>• Determination of procedures for individual academic staff assessment</li> <li>• Determination of procedures for promoting academic staff</li> <li>• Method to spend the public operational grant</li> <li>• Charging tuition fees for bachelor and masters students</li> <li>• Setting tariffs for contract activities</li> <li>• Borrowing funds on the capital market</li> <li>• Building up reserves and/or carry over unspent resources</li> <li>• <i>Role and impact of government with respect to internal university budgeting</i></li> <li>• <i>Deciding on the number and type of academic posts</i></li> <li>• <i>Actual decision-making power in establishing the profile of a new position), new chair, setting labour conditions</i></li> <li>• <i>Influence of university leadership on properties and assets, staff selection</i></li> </ul>
Policy autonomy	Discretion over the quantity and quality of goods, services and target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Deciding on the number of study places</u></li> <li>• <u>Deciding on research programmes and major research themes</u></li> <li>• <u>Starting new bachelors and masters programmes</u></li> <li>• Selection of bachelors and masters students</li> <li>• <i>Influence of university leadership on teaching</i></li> </ul>
Structural autonomy	Discretion over internal organisational structure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointing members of the governing board</li> <li>• Composition of the governing board</li> <li>• Selection of the executive head</li> <li>• Determination of internal governance procedure</li> <li>• <i>Appointing and actual decision-making power in selecting university leaders and leaders of academic units</i></li> </ul>

(continued)

**Table 3.2** (continued)

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Variables<sup>a</sup></i>
Financial autonomy	Dependency on public funding or alternative sources of income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of public resources</li> <li>• <i>Existence of performance targets</i></li> </ul>
Interventional autonomy (Accountability requirements and external influences)	Subject to reporting, evaluations or audits  Influence of external actors on organisational decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Obligation to set up and take part in quality evaluations for teaching and for research</u></li> <li>• <u>Number of reporting requirements and obligation to establish multi-year contracts and accountability reports</u></li> <li>• <u>Accountability of university actors towards external actors</u></li> <li>• <i>Existence of strict guidelines for accounting and reporting</i></li> <li>• <i>Existence of budgeting rules to demonstrate the efficient use of resources</i></li> <li>• <i>Influence of external actors on university strategies</i></li> <li>• <i>Influence of government and other external stakeholders expectations and policies on university policy and strategy</i></li> <li>• <i>Use of steering instruments by the government to implement its policies</i></li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>*Legend* Variables in ‘italics’ refer to autonomy-in-use. Underlined variables refer to formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use. Other variables refer to formal autonomy. For data gathering method see below

reporting requirements, and participation in teaching and research evaluations. The second type of ‘intervention’ that we distinguished concerns the external ‘venues of influence’ on organisational decision-making. With respect to this type of intervention we selected a number of indicators related to *who* is exerting influence, *what* type of influence is exerted and *how* influence is exercised.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### *Formal Autonomy*

Table 3.3 provides the indications of the formal autonomy for universities in eight countries, based on a literature review and country expert assessments. The outcomes justify the use of a multidimensional

**Table 3.3** The formal autonomy situation in eight countries

	<i>Formal autonomy</i>					
	<i>Managerial</i>	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Structural</i>	<i>Financial<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Interventional</i>	<i>Total</i>
England	High	High	High	High	Medium	High
France	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low
Germany <sup>b</sup>	Low	Medium	Low	–	Medium	Low
Italy	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Medium
Netherlands	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Norway	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Portugal	Low	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Switzerland <sup>c</sup>	Low	Medium	Low	Low	High	Low

<sup>a</sup>*Financial autonomy* (1 – average proportion of operational public grant of total university revenues)/100)

<sup>b</sup>Germany concerns Free state Bavaria

<sup>c</sup>Switzerland concerns the Federal Institutes of Technology

approach of formal autonomy. The decomposition of formal autonomy in three subdimensions displays variety among the countries.

In general, the English universities are formally the most autonomous universities in our sample. Almost all autonomy dimensions score the highest in our sample. They have for example much discretion on HR matters such as the appointments and promotions of staff and enjoy much financial autonomy even when tuition fee levels are capped by the government. Also their policy and structural autonomy is high, formal constraints on decision-making on access, research and teaching programming and organizational arrangements are limited (exceptions are the number of study places that must be negotiated and there are guidelines for the size and composition of governing bodies).

By contrast, the formal decision-making competencies of the Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, the Bavarian, and the French universities are far more restricted. The French universities have for example discretion over some HR matters, but particularly their financial autonomy is restricted. They are allowed to use their operational public grant flexibly and to set tariffs for contract activities, but other financial matters are constrained or prohibited (e.g. they must charge a government set tuition fee). Other autonomy dimensions are limited as well. The government decides on several issues regarding access, accreditation of new teaching programmes and organisational arrangements, although with some exceptions (universities can establish organisational by laws within

the national regulations and elect their president). The Swiss technology institutes hardly have decision-making abilities on HR matters and structural arrangements. The governance structure of the six institutes of technology is for instance legally prescribed in detail and the federal government appoints the president (based on a proposal from the ETH board whose members are appointed by the federal government). At the same time, the interventional autonomy is high. The managerial autonomy of the Bavarian universities is limited, particularly concerning financial matters. Also their decision-making space on policy and structural matters is constrained, although several policy and governance matters are decided upon in consultation with the state (e.g. within the state's legal framework universities set up their organisational statute, which needs consent from the ministry).

In general terms, the Dutch, Italian, Norwegian and Portuguese universities take a middle position on formal autonomy. The differences between the countries are however substantial. The Portuguese universities have considerable space to decide upon structural matters, while their managerial and policy autonomy is more restricted. Particularly on HR matters their hands are tied. They cannot decide on number of type of (senior) academic posts, salaries are set by the minister, and there are national rules and procedures for academic promotions. The Dutch and Norwegian universities have substantial managerial and policy autonomy, but their possibilities to take decisions on the organisational structure are to some extent curtailed by government regulation. In both countries universities decision-making capacities on personnel and financial matters is substantial. Norwegian universities enjoy more autonomy on access and study programming, but are not allowed to charge tuition fees, while the Dutch have to charge such fees at a rate determined by the state. The managerial and policy autonomy of the Italian universities is low, while their interventional autonomy is high. They have for example 'only' to take part in external research assessments; it is not formally required to have internal quality assessment systems for teaching and research or to have external quality assessments for teaching.

## AUTONOMY-IN-USE AND FORMAL AUTONOMY

### *Managerial Autonomy*

As regards managerial autonomy, in all universities the personnel issues are perceived as a matter of the university itself. As regards the potential

**Table 3.4** Managerial autonomy: formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Autonomy-in-use	High	uk2, uk3	no1, nl2, nl3	ch2, fr1
	Medium	uk1	no2, no3, no4, nl1	it1, it2, it3, pt1, pt2, pt3, ch1, ch4, ch5, fr2
	Low			

governmental impact on internal budgeting about half of the universities report that there is no interference and the other half report that universities are in charge but there is some governance influence, e.g. through consultation processes. Nonetheless the universities from our sample by and large experience significant managerial autonomy, as depicted in Table 3.4 (except the Bavarian universities due to lack of data).

When looking at our autonomy quadrant, the English universities de facto experience high managerial autonomy as would be expected regarding their formal autonomy situation. The Swiss and the South European universities experience in practice more autonomy than would be expected from the formal autonomy situation. Also the perception of the respondents from the Dutch and Norwegian universities is that they have in practice more autonomy than expected from their formal autonomy situation, albeit less ‘extreme’ as in the Swiss and South European universities.

### *Policy Autonomy*

As can be seen in Table 3.5 all universities perceive to have in practice considerable decision-making powers in the policy domain, also the Italian and French universities where the formal policy autonomy is relatively low. As regards the English and Norwegian universities high levels of policy autonomy-in-use reflect a situation where they have formally much policy autonomy. The situation is different for the Dutch universities and two Swiss institutions: while formally their autonomy is medium, in practice they perceive high levels of autonomy.



**Table 3.5** Policy autonomy: formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Autonomy-in-use	High	no3, no4, uk1	nl1, nl3, ch4, ch5, nl2,	it1, it2, it3, fr1, fr2
	Medium	no1, uk2, uk3	pt1, pt2, ch1, ch2	
	Low			

**Table 3.6** Structural autonomy: formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use<sup>a</sup>

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Autonomy-in-use	High	it1, it2, it3, pt2, uk1, uk2, uk3	no1, no3, no4, nl1, nl2, fr1, fr2	ch1, ch4
	Medium	pt1		ch2, ch5
	Low		nl3	

<sup>a</sup>High autonomy means that the university selects its executive head. Medium autonomy means that the university selects its executive head but the selection rules are set by the government. Low autonomy means that the government/ministry plays a part in selecting the executive head of the university

### *Structural Autonomy*

Table 3.6 displays the formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use of one of the indicators for structural autonomy, namely the authority to select the executive head (rector, VC or president). As regards the selection of this executive head, by means of appointments or elections, almost all the universities report that in practice they are autonomous, including the Swiss institutes that formally do not have much authority on this issue.

With respect to the selection of board members we see that in Norway, Portugal, and the Netherlands both the university and the ministry are involved, while in England, France and Italy this is a university matter to decide upon. The Swiss institutes face significant influence of the federal government in board member selection. This outcome looks surprising in the sense that formally the structural autonomy is low or medium in several countries. As with the selection of the executive head this most likely means that governments ‘use’ their powers mainly

symbolically (rubberstamping university proposals) and it is actually the universities that decide. While autonomy-in-use is in most cases larger than one might expect from their formal autonomy position on leadership selection, one should bear in mind that in some countries (for example Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland) there are legal prescriptions for the university governing structure. The latter constrains the autonomy of the universities.

A preliminary conclusion, based on the comparison of formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use on three autonomy dimensions (managerial, policy and structural), is that in practice universities have considerable decision-making competencies, in many cases even more than we would expect when compared to their formal autonomy situation. Particularly the South European universities in our sample seem to enjoy in practice more decision-making competencies than we might expect based on their formal autonomy situation.

The three autonomy dimensions discussed in this section so far cover only one part of our autonomy concept, as we have argued earlier in this chapter. The actual use of decision-making competencies can be constrained by financial dependencies (financial autonomy dimension) and by accountability requirements and external influences. The latter has been labelled as interventional autonomy.

### *Financial Autonomy*

With the exception of the English universities, the share of the public operational grant in universities income lies somewhere between 60 and 90% (in England this is about 38%). The universities are highly dependent on this income source, as also indicated by the respondents of the survey. For the Swiss and English universities the dependency on public funding has, according to the respondents, increased over the last five years. Particularly, the relative size of the public research grants has increased. In some countries such as the Netherlands the relative size of the university's public basic grant has decreased, but nevertheless also these universities remain seriously dependent on the public purse.

From the adagio 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' university dependency provides a power base for the government to exercise influence. One way of using this power base is through target or performance contracts. In 2010, sixteen of the twenty<sup>4</sup> universities had such a contract with the government. The nature of these contracts vary: in three

cases the contracts contain specified mutual expectations and obligations, in other cases it concerns less specific expectations and intentions. In principle performance contracts limit the decision-making space for universities as it obliges them to focus upon agreed policy targets instead of focusing on targets of their own choice. The extent to which this university decision-making space is reduced depends on how the targets are set. If the targets are determined by the government the decision-making space is sincerely reduced. If universities can negotiate such targets then they have more decision-making opportunity (but still less than in the case of lump sum budgeting).

### *Interventional Autonomy*

With respect to interventional autonomy we selected two subdimensions. Interventions can relate to things universities have to do; rules imposed to them by the government such as accountability requirements as well as the influence of external actors and instruments in organisational decision-making, referred to as venues of influences.

Accountability relationships, the first indicator, are hard to assess because the university governance systems are very different from each other. Moreover, accountability itself is a complex concept that easily lends itself for multiple interpretations. However, in all universities there is at least one governing body highly accountable to the government or to national agencies. This can be the executive head (rector, president or vice-chancellor), the governing body, or both. Senates do not have an accountability relationship with the government.

All universities in our sample face multiple accountability requirements (the second indicator); they have to produce annual reports and audited financial statements, have to provide information for national data bases, provide information demonstrating compliance with national policies and publish the outcomes of teaching and research. For most of the universities there are strict national guidelines and they have to report on how resources have being used. Only two Italian universities say that they report on the use of resources in an internal university process without government control (but they are still required to publish several documents such as annual reports). Therefore, in general we conclude that in practice there are substantial reporting requirements for the universities in our sample.

With respect to quality evaluations of the primary processes of universities, the third indicator, we distinguished internal and external evaluations as well as evaluations concerning the quality of teaching and of research. It turns out that at nearly all universities external evaluations for teaching and research take place and a vast majority also has internal teaching and research evaluations. In about half of the cases the external evaluations on teaching and research are conducted because national regulations require it. Internal evaluations by contrast are typically a university matter (with a few exceptions). Table 3.7 shows the variety of external evaluation requirements, with on the one hand the mandatory evaluations (prescribed by government) and on the other hand ‘no evaluations’ as well as ‘university decided evaluations’.

Table 3.7 demonstrates that for the Swiss (with one exception), Italian and French universities the perception of autonomy-in-use matches the formal interventional autonomy situation. Formally there are not many requirements for the Swiss and Italian universities and this is also how it is perceived—they are relatively exempt from accountability requirements (in terms of evaluations). By contrast, for the French universities there is no escape. Many universities—the Dutch, English, Norwegians and Portuguese—formally take a medium position (there are formally some accountability requirements to be met), but in practice it seems to feel like a serious constraint on their autonomy. English universities for example formally must set up internal and external evaluation systems for their teaching, but it is up to the university if it wants to do so for research. In practice however, universities are heavily engaged in research evaluation exercise because it is linked to funding.

**Table 3.7** Accountability: autonomy-in-use and formal interventional autonomy

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Autonomy-in-use <sup>a</sup>	High	ch1, ch3, ch4, ch5, it1, it3	nl1	
	Medium	it2	pt1, d1, d2, d3	
	Low	ch2	pt2, pt3, nl2, nl3, n01, no2, no3, uk1, uk3	fr1, fr2

<sup>a</sup>High autonomy means that external evaluations are entirely a university matter. Medium autonomy means that either for teaching or for research universities external evaluations are obligatory. Low autonomy means that both for teaching and research external evaluations are mandatory

The second type of ‘intervention’ that we distinguished concerns the external ‘venues of influence’. In finding out how autonomy is used in practice it is relevant to see to what degree universities are affected by, or take into account, the policies of external actors. First, we looked at the extent of perceived influence of various external stakeholders together. We selected a number of actors who may or may not exercise influence over university strategies such as the ministry, national agencies, other governments (local and supranational), private funders and other competing universities. The outcomes are depicted in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 reveals a scattered picture. The Dutch, one English and the French universities report high levels of influence of external actors, but their formal autonomy position differs. Two English universities with high formal autonomy do perceive far less external influence. The Swiss institutions are in an interesting position: having low formal autonomy all of them report that external actors do not influence university strategies too much.

The assessments in Table 3.8 reflect the influence of all stakeholders together. However, there is a clear distinction in influence among the stakeholders. Private funders, local governments, and to a lesser extent the European Union and other competing universities do not substantially influence university strategies (with a few exceptions). The ministry and national agencies on the other hand have according to the respondents influence on university strategies, although there are differences among the universities, as presented in Table 3.9.

The outcomes presented in Table 3.9 reveal that the ministry and the national agencies are, not surprisingly, the most influential external actors

**Table 3.8** Influence of external actors on university strategies and formal autonomy

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Influence of external actors	High	uk2	nl1, nl2, nl3, pt1, it3, pt3	fr1, fr2
	Medium		n01, no2, no3, no4, pt2, it1, it2	d1, d2,
	Low	uk1, uk3		d3, ch1, ch2, ch3, ch4, ch5

**Table 3.9** Influence of the ministry and national agencies on university strategies and formal autonomy

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Influence of ministry and national agencies	High	uk1, uk2	nl1, nl2, nl3, n01, no2, no3, no4, pt1, pt2, pt3, it1, it2, it3	d2
	Medium	uk3		d1, d3, ch3, ch5, fr1, fr2
	Low			ch1, ch2, ch4

concerning university strategies: many universities have ‘moved up’ in the table; except the French universities, which implies that besides the ministry and the national agencies also the other external stakeholder are exercising influence on the university. Furthermore it is interesting to notice that ‘independent’ from the level of formal autonomy, ministries and national agencies are perceived as being influential, for example, the two English universities are formally autonomous but in practice they are seriously influenced by the ministry and national agencies.

What then drives university decisions? We selected a number of factors ranging from student demand and expectations from regional industry to governmental higher education and research policies. In line with the outcomes on who is influencing university strategies (discussed above) governmental higher education and research policies as well as national funding models turned out to be the key external drivers for university decision-making. Expectations, demands and policies of other external stakeholders such as students, industry, local and supranational governments and other universities were to a far lesser extent taken into account—which does not mean that they are not taken into account at all.

In Table 3.10 we present the extent to which governmental higher education and research policies are perceived as drivers for university decision-making, related to the degree of formal autonomy they hold. It is obvious that governmental policies are taken very seriously in university decision-making. There are only a limited number of universities that report governmental policies as a medium input factor in their

**Table 3.10** Governmental higher education and research policies as drivers for university decision-making and formal autonomy

		<i>Formal autonomy</i>		
		<i>High</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Low</i>
Governmental policies as drivers for decision-making	Strong	uk1, uk2, uk3	n01, no3, no4, nl2, nl3, pt1, pt2, pt3, it1, it2, it3	d2, fr1, fr2, ch4
	Medium		nl1, no2	d1, d3, ch3, ch1, ch5
	Low			ch2

decision-making. Again, even the English universities that have a strong formal autonomy see governmental policies as important drivers for their decision-making.

Given these outcomes it is interesting to see how the governments exercise their influence over universities. What are the steering tools that the governments use to effectuate their policies? Four types of governmental steering instruments have been distinguished: funding tools (adopting funding rules closely related to policy statements and goals), regulation (regulations on budgeting and accounting principles inside universities), evaluation and audit tools (assessing how universities use their obtained resources), and normative pressures (policy statements, communication and moral persuasion). In general, all these instruments are being used by the government and according to the university respondents they are influential on the decisions made within the university.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the last decades across Europe, strengthening the organisational autonomy of universities has been one of the mantras of public policy in higher education. In many countries, governments made attempts to withdraw from the old tools of state micro-management and to empower the universities' strategic actorhood and decision-making capabilities. The timing, breadth and depth of such political reform have not been uniform across Europe but many countries have introduced measures to change the formal autonomy situation (as prescribed in rules and regulations) of their universities. As we have argued, autonomy is, however, a

multidimensional concept and universities might act more or less autonomous in various spheres of organisational life. Autonomy-in-use within the focal organisations is also not necessarily a copy of prescriptions of formal autonomy. While some rules and regulations might provide more leeway for self-determined organisational behaviour other rules and regulations might restrict them again. External resource dependencies and institutional pressures may enforce organisations to take external actors views, priorities and actions in their intra-organisational decision-making into consideration.

This chapter has examined the relationship between formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use in European higher education, the levels and tools of influence of external actors, and the relationship between organisational autonomy and these venues of influence. We have been using a review of the research literature and of policy documents as well as expert opinions to provide a taxonomy of the formal autonomy situation of universities in eight countries. We used survey data from the TRUE project to explore autonomy-in-use in universities as well as the influence of external actors on intra-organisational decision-making.

Our analyses confirm, firstly, that the relationship between formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use is not necessarily linear as our autonomy quadrant (Table 3.1) assumed. Cell 1 and cell 4 present the linear relationship between formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use, but cell 2 and cell 3 assume a situation where formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use do not match. As regards the dimensions of managerial autonomy, policy autonomy and structural autonomy, universities report in practice considerable decision-making space, in many cases even more than we would expect from their formal autonomy situation (cell 2). Such situations of low formal autonomy and high autonomy-in-use point at constellations where the focal organisations can either exploit mutual dependencies with the government to maximise their decision-making space and/or the weakness/disinterestedness of the principal to control and enforce formal rules and regulations. Situations of high formal autonomy and low autonomy-in-use (cell 3) can also be found: situations where universities formally have substantial autonomy, in practice this autonomy is constrained by financial dependencies and subject to external influences.

Secondly, the autonomy of universities is in many cases strongly circumscribed by their lasting financial dependence on the public purse as the most dominant funding source (except UK universities) and many governments use this power base to contractually bind their universities



in target agreements or performance agreements. For many universities, high managerial, policy and structural autonomy is also accompanied by multiple accountability requirements to the government or its agencies. Such accountability requirements are softer or absent in countries with low formal decision-making space as regards managerial, policy and structural autonomy of universities but high autonomy-in-use for these dimensions. Universities under the old regime (low formal autonomy/low accountability requirements) thus experience the same high level of (management, policy, and structural) autonomy as their counterparts under the new regime (high formal autonomy/high accountability requirements).

Thirdly, most universities experience strong to medium levels of influence of external actors on their internal decision-making irrespective of their formal autonomy situation and acknowledge that such actors are more influential than many of their internal stakeholders. Organisational responsiveness is most strongly towards the government and its agencies while other external stakeholders play a much weaker role (except for the influence of students in the UK reflecting their universities' dependence on tuition fees). Such working in the 'shadow of hierarchy' (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995) reflects various tools of government: funding, regulation, audit, as well as normative pressures.

In sum, and as regards our four combinations of formal autonomy and autonomy-in-use, few of our universities is lined up as part of the state machinery (where they are not just an instrument for national policy agendas but formally and informally ruled by the government) or operating as a strategic market enterprise (deploying strategic actorhood in a market driven higher education system without much external influence). In practice, many universities in our European sample either assume higher levels of autonomy than formally granted or exercise the higher levels of autonomy granted. In both cases, universities are (still) working in the shadow of government due to resource dependencies and institutional pressures. Granting universities more autonomy thus does not reflect a weakening influence of government but reflects new ways and tools of government for controlling and influencing organisational behaviour.

## NOTES

1. Weak organisational control refers to the institution as a whole. In continental Europe institutional leadership and management was weak, as compared to other organisations, while the academic oligarchy was strong (Clark 1983).
2. One could argue that markets are not context-free spaces. Organisations have to take the rules of this institution into account. In this respect, autonomy is always conditional.
3. Respondents have been asked to assess the actual decision-making power of different governing levels in the university (central, faculty and shop floor level) on a number of issues (such as the establishment of teaching and research programmes) on a scale ranging from high to low decision-making powers. For the analysis in this chapter we have taken the average score of the three different levels.
4. For six universities, including the three Bavarian ones, we do not have the data on this issue.

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## Budgeting Practices in European Universities

*Marco Seeber and Benedetto Lepori*

**Abstract** This chapter aims to provide empirical evidence on budgeting practices in European universities through a cross-country universities analysis. We investigate what is the diffusion of given processes, allocation criteria and what actors have more the influence on budgeting, to what extent are budgeting practices related to the level of competition for funding and whether budgeting models with distinct practices can be identified. To this aim, we exploit evidence from the TRUE survey, which allows for the first time a systematic quantitative comparison of budgeting in European universities. The analysis reveals the complexity and multiplicity of budgeting practices, which contrasts with the taken-for-granted assumption that NPM reforms are leading to convergence towards a managerial model of resource allocation within universities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Budgeting decisions regard the level of expenditures and the repartition of resources among organizational subunits, representing one of the most critical organizational processes in higher education institutions (Lepori et al. 2013). Budgeting is closely related to key choices concerning strategic priorities (Jarzabkowski 2002), resource acquisition strategies (Covaleski and Dirsmith 1988) setting incentives and norms for subunits and individual academics by linking resources to performance or acquisition of external resources (Laudel 2006).

Despite its relevance, there is no theoretical agreement on the nature of universities' budgeting and scarce empirical investigation. Universities' budgeting has been variably conceived as: (i) a *technical device*, i.e. as an intendedly rational but behaviourally constrained process to implement strategies and reach organizational goals, (ii) a *bargaining process* among internal organizational actors competing for resources and power, as well as a (iii) *cultural and symbolic act* to enact social norms and values through money allocation (Wildavsky 2002). These conceptualizations are related to alternative representations of universities' decision-making—such as the rational versus the garbage can models, the coalitional versus the institutionalized models—which differ in their accounts of the driving forces of decisions and of how universities respond to environmental changes (Musselin 2007). Empirical studies have so far focused on individual cases and have been designed to test a specific organizational theory, like resource-dependency (Pfeffer and Moore 1980) or institutional theory (Ezzamel 1994), rather than taking into consideration several perspectives at once. In turn, there is a lack of comparative analysis focusing on sources of variations in budgeting practices among individual universities. Hence, this chapter aims to provide empirical evidence on budgeting practices in European universities through a cross-country analysis. We investigate what is the diffusion of given budgeting processes, allocation criteria? What actors have more influence? To what extent are the budgeting practices related to the level of competition for funding? Can we identify budgeting models with distinct characteristics?

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section describes the main budgeting dimensions and discusses how the characteristics of the resource environment are expected to affect the budgeting process. The third section presents the data and the methods. The analysis is developed in the fourth section. The main findings are discussed in the conclusions.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAME

### *Budgeting Dimensions*

Budgeting practices can be described along three main dimensions, namely (i) processes, (ii) allocation criteria and (iii) actors involved (Lepori et al. 2013).

#### *Processes*

Universities' budgeting has been conceived for long as a bargaining process among competing coalitions, characterized by a fair degree of stability of allocation between units—high incrementalism (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974; Covaleski and Dirsmith 1988). In recent decades, however, reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) principles have promoted a transformation of universities towards formal organizations, the establishment of internal systems of rules and procedures, and spurred universities' strategic behaviour and orientation towards the efficient allocation of resources, even at the expenses of stability (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Paradeise et al. 2009; Seeber et al. 2015). In turn, where the influence of NPM has been stronger, universities are expected to have shifted from a budgeting system characterized by a formal bureaucratic frame with much room for informal bargaining between parties and a high degree of incrementalism (Wildavsky and Caiden 2004), to a budgeting system where the leadership defines the strategy and set the goals, while using budgeting rules and incentives to pursue them, possibly with significant reallocation between units (Amaral and Meek 2003).

#### *Actors*

This dimension considers which actors are involved in the budgeting process and how, together, they take decisions concerning the repartition of resources. In the past, budgeting was dominated by bargaining between *coalitions* of departments (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974). NPM policies, though, have strengthened the role of the central management—e.g. rectors and central administration (Amaral and Meek 2003). As a result, some scholars have argued that universities' budgeting now combines elements of both the coalitional and the centralized models (Jarzabkowski 2002).

Two different sets of criteria can be identified that drive internal allocation of resources. First, allocation can be driven by criteria that are particularly relevant for external stakeholders, i.e. *externally driven criteria* that are related to the volume of activities produced by the unit in terms of the number of students, the number of graduates and the amount of third-party funds attracted. Alternatively, allocation can be driven by criteria that are more relevant to internal stakeholders, i.e. *internally driven criteria* such as the reputation of the unit, the coherence with the university strategy and the quality of the relationships of the units' leaders with the central management.

### *The Influence of Competition for Funding on Budgeting Practices*

The characteristics of the resource environment, and in particular the extent to which universities *compete for funding*, are expected to affect universities' budgeting practices (Lepori et al. 2007). Several studies indicate that the level of competition for funding in the higher education sector is stronger than in the past. First, the share of funds from the private sector on total universities revenues has grown (Auranen and Nieminen 2010). Moreover, the allocation of public funds to universities has become increasingly competitive, in the form of contracts and formulas that link resources to performance and volume of activity (Jongbloed 2008; Reale and Seeber 2013). More *competition* is expected to spur budgeting practices that link funding to a unit's capability to attract students, third-party funds, and 'produce' graduates; to legitimize the emergence of a stronger leadership that can enact strategic decisions; and to reduce the level of incrementalism. Table 4.1 resumes the main expectations regarding the effect of competition on universities' internal budgeting practices.

**Table 4.1** Competition for funding: expected influence on universities' budgeting practices

		<i>University level</i>			
		<i>Formula vs bargaining</i>	<i>Incrementalism</i>	<i>Empowered actors</i>	<i>External criteria</i>
System level	Competition	Weak	+	Academics	-
		Strong	-	Leaders	+



## DATA AND METHODS

Data on budgeting practices were collected through a survey undertaken as part of the ‘Transforming Universities in Europe’ project (TRUE). The survey addressed the current characteristics and practices of universities, and was administered in spring 2011 to five groups of internal actors, namely rectors, central administrators, board and senate members and deans. Twenty-six public universities were considered which are fairly representative of the variety of European universities in terms of size, age, quality level and discipline profile. The considered universities are located in eight European countries, reasonably representative of the European Higher Education landscape: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and France. 687 completed questionnaires were collected, with a 48% response rate, which is rather high for similar types of inquiries (Baruch 1999). Responses were employed to construct quantitative measures and indicators of the dimensions of interest.

The budgeting practices are analysed considering processes, actors’ influence and allocation criteria.

### *Budgeting Processes*

To analyse the *process* dimension, we first consider whether internal budgeting allocation relies primarily on a *formula* or occurs via *bargaining* between the parties involved. This issue was addressed by a specific question in the survey, where respondents should indicate the university allocation procedure among three possible options: (a) essentially based on rules and quantitative formulas, (b) to some extent based on rules and quantitative formulas, as well as on some bargaining, and (c) essentially based on bargaining. The individual responses are weighted in order to obtain a university value ranging from 1, when all respondents agreeing on ‘rules and quantitative formulas’, to 0, when all respondents selected ‘essentially based on bargaining’, as expressed by the following indicator:

$$F\_B_x = \Sigma_{1 \rightarrow n} = (n_a * 1 + n_b * 0.5 + n_c * 0)/n$$

- F<sub>B<sub>x</sub></sub> Importance of formula vs bargaining for allocation of resources in university x
- n Number respondents in university x
- n<sub>a</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response a
- n<sub>b</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response b
- n<sub>c</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response c

The degree of *incrementalism* is measured from responses to the survey question addressing ‘the extent to which the current allocation will influence future allocations to the unit in five years’ time’. Respondents could choose from: (a) ‘essentially based on current budget’, (b) ‘may be significantly redistributed between units depending on strategic priorities and unit performance, but there is a mechanism to avoid too strong changes’, to (c) ‘may be significantly redistributed between units depending on strategic priorities and unit performance’. The individual responses were weighted in order to obtain a university value, ranging from 1 for strong incrementalism to 0 for no incremental allocation, according to the following indicator:

$$I_X = \sum_{1 \rightarrow n} = (n_a * 1 + n_b * 0.5 + n_c * 0)/n$$

- I<sub>x</sub> Level of incrementalism in budgeting in university x
- n Number respondents in university x
- n<sub>a</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response a
- n<sub>b</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response b
- n<sub>c</sub> Number respondents in university x selecting response c

### *Actors*

The analysis of *actors* is based on a question regarding how funding is allocated to units. Respondents could choose between four main budgeting models conceived in the literature (Table 4.2).

The responses were converted into two university indexes measuring respectively the relative influence of the central and the departmental levels on budgeting:

**Table 4.2** Government, central and department influence, four models

	<i>Weak departmental power</i>	<i>Strong departmental power</i>
Strong central power	<p><i>Central model</i></p> <p>Centralized budgeting. <u>Item A</u>: “Rectorate and central administration make decisions and set rules based on their objectives.”</p>	<p><i>Political model</i></p> <p>Bargaining is important due to both parties having significant power. <u>Item B</u>: “Allocation is bilaterally negotiated between central administration and faculty/institutes/departments”</p>
Weak central power	<p><i>State-led model</i></p> <p>Allocation dictated external actors (e.g. the State). <u>Item D</u>: “The internal repartition of resources is an outcome of government decisions and there is little influence of institutional actors”</p>	<p><i>Garbage can model</i></p> <p>Chaotic interaction of strong subunits without centralized control. <u>Item C</u>: “There is collective bargaining between deans/heads of institutes/departments with limited intervention of central administration”</p>

Source Adapted from Lepori et al. (2013)

$$\text{Influence central university level} = [(N_A + N_B) - (N_C + N_D)]/N_{\text{total}}$$

$$\text{Influence departmental level} = [(N_B + N_C) - (N_A + N_D)]/N_{\text{total}}$$

where  $N_{\text{total}}$  is the total number of respondents in university  $x$  and  $N_A$ ,  $N_B$ ,  $N_C$ ,  $N_D$  are the number of respondents for each response type in university  $x$ .

A second question specifically addressed the influence of the: (i) university board, (ii) rector/president, (iii) central administration, (iv) middle management (deans), (v) faculty councils and (vi) influential academics.

### *Allocation Criteria*

Different criteria can drive the distribution of resources between units. Six criteria were considered in the survey, and respondents had indicate their importance in a 5-point Likert scale, namely: the (i) number of students, (ii) number of graduates, (iii) acquisition of third-party funding,

(iv) reputation of the unit, (v) compliance with university strategic priorities, and the (vi) relationships between the heads of units and the central management.

### *Statistical Properties of the Data*

Table 4.3 provides information on the selected questions, regarding their type (nominal or ordinal), the number of respondents, the mean value and the standard deviation. The table also displays values of intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC), which measures variation in responses between universities, and the degree of inter-rater agreement (Rwg), which measures the concordance of responses from the same institution (James et al. 1984; van Mierlo et al. 2009).<sup>1</sup> Survey data rely on individual perceptions, and they are particularly useful when an objective measure of a given phenomenon—such as influence and power of actors—is not available or difficult to retrieve. At the same time, survey data require analysing issues of validity—e.g. the extent to which they are close to the real value—as well as reliability—e.g. the extent to which responses are homogeneous. Regarding validity, there is no evidence of a systematic bias that shifts responses to TRUE questionnaire in a particular direction (Seeber et al. 2015). We assess reliability by considering the level of agreement of respondents from the same university as measured by the Rwg index of inter-rater agreement. Agreement is rather low regarding the influence of the board and of influential academics, whereas agreement is stronger regarding the influence of the other actors, and particularly on the strong importance of the university Rector (Rwg = 0.75). Agreement on the importance of each criterion is rather low, with the exception of the number of students, which is also the most important one. Uncertainty on this topic may derive from the fact that knowledge of allocation criteria is a rather technical issue. On the other hand, if the ranked importance of the different criteria is taken into consideration—rather than absolute scores—then responses are highly consistent across respondents from the same university. In turn, reliability seems acceptable, since it is higher for the most important items.

The indicator measuring the *competition for funding* combines: (i) the share of non-core grant fund on the total revenues for universities in the eight countries considered (normalized on the highest country value—range from 0.8 to 4) (source: European Commission 2011; Aghion et al.

2008) and (ii) the level of incrementalism of the core grant allocation from public authorities (range 1–4) (Jongbloed 2008) (Table 4.4).

As control variables, organizational size, age, disciplinary concentration and research quality are taken into consideration.

**Table 4.3** Data and indicators

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>ICC</i>	<i>Rwg</i>
<b>Processes</b>	Formula vs bargaining	Nominal (3)*	220	0.72	0.28	0.20	
	Level of incrementalism	Nominal (3)*	218	0.61	0.33	0.25	
<b>Actors</b>	Type of allocation: centralized vs decentralized	Nominal (4)	365	47% response A; 40% B; 6% C; 7% D			
	University board	Scale (5); range 1–5	302	2.78	1.22	0.23	0.46
	Rector, president, vice chancellor		355	1.59	0.82	0.06	0.75
	Central administration		352	2.25	1.07	0.05	0.58
	Middle management (deans, heads)		354	2.83	1.06	0.18	0.59
	Faculty governing bodies		321	3.41	1.08	0.08	0.58
Influential individual academics		326	3.85	0.97	0.08	0.46	
<b>Criteria</b>	No. of students enrolled in unit's curricula	Scale (5); range 1–5	417	2.29	1.02	0.14	0.64
	No. of graduates		412	2.71	1.13	0.16	0.49
	External funds acquired by the unit		424	2.77	1.10	0.17	0.53
	Overall scientific reputation of the unit		425	2.72	1.11	0.12	0.47
	Compliance with strategic university priorities		420	2.81	1.05	0.06	0.53
	Relationship between the heads of subunits and central management		411	3.45	1.12	0.04	0.42

\*Converted into scale 1, 0.5, 0 (see paragraph 3.1)

Note: (i) Mean and standard deviation computed at respondents level; (ii) Rwg is not appropriate for scales below five; (iii) In this table the scales replicate those employed in the questionnaire: a value of 1 points out a high importance and a value of 5 indicates no importance at all. Instead, in the next paragraphs, the scales of tables and graphs have been changed to improve readability, using '1' as a value for high influence and '0' for no influence

**Table 4.4** Competition for funding index

	<i>% non-core grant funds on total revenues*</i>	<i>A: % non-core-grants funds on total revenues-normalized</i>	<i>B: incremental core funding</i>	<i>Competition for funding Index**</i>
CH	24	1,5	1	1,3
DE	27	1,7	2	1,9
FR	13	0,8	4	2,4
IT	35	2,3	2	2,1
NL	34	2,2	4	3,1
NO	25	1,6	2	1,8
PT	40	2,6	4	3,3
UK	62	4,0	4	4,0

\* Sources European Commission (2011) and Aghion et al. (2008) for Germany

\*\*Average A and B

### *Methods*

The empirical analysis is structured in three parts. First, each dimension is analysed as to: (i) process, in terms of the relationship between incrementalism and formula; (ii) allocation criteria and (iii) actors. Factor analyses allow identifying the major components and exploring their meaning and relationships. Second, the link between the level of competition for resources and the internal budgeting practices is explored. Finally, we investigate the existence of clusters of universities according to their budgeting practices in terms of processes, actors and criteria. To identify the clusters, a Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is employed, which is the proper statistical method to identify subtypes of related cases (latent classes) from multivariate categorical data (Collins and Lanza 2013).

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### *Processes*

#### *Formula vs. bargaining*

Overall, the formula is more important for funding allocation than bargaining (mean value of 0.72, where '1' is full formula and '0' full bargaining), although a high variation is observed across universities in our sample (ICC 0.20) (Table 4.3). The formula always plays a significant

role, while budgeting never occur only through bargaining. The formula is by large the main way of allocating resources in eight universities, while the other 18 universities combine formula and bargaining.

The level of *incrementalism* is high (mean 0.63), yet also in this case we observe a high variability between universities (ICC 0.23) (Table 4.3). Fourteen universities combine incrementalism and prudent change, while eight universities display a clear preference for prudent change, and only four universities are characterized by strong redistribution.

Figure 4.1 juxtaposes the importance of formula versus bargaining (y-axis) with the level of incrementalism (x-axis), showing no clear-cut relationship between formula and incrementalism. A high level of incrementalism (right side of the diagram) can be observed both with a moderate and a strong formula, suggesting that budgeting models do not shift simply from high bargaining and incrementalism towards formula and strategic approach.

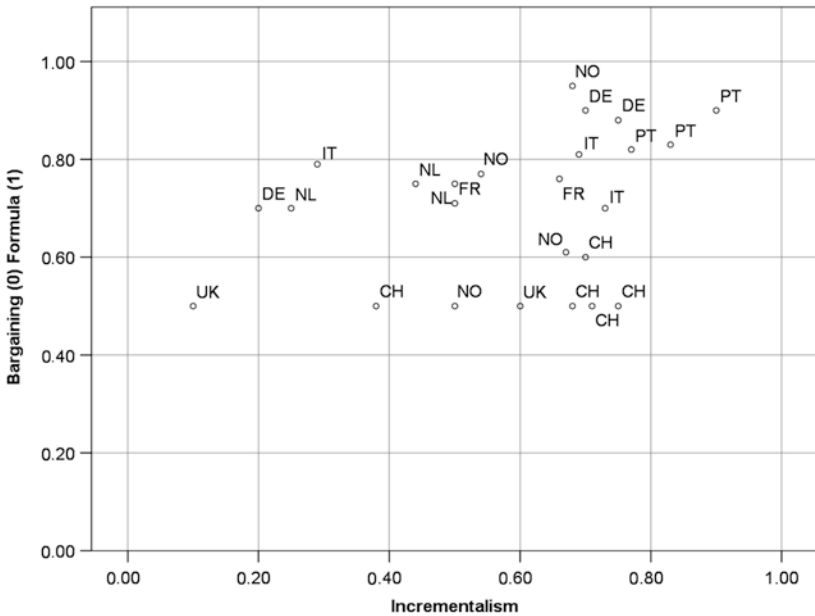


Fig. 4.1 Budgeting process: incrementalism and the use of formula/bargaining. Labels point out the country code

As to national variations, Swiss and UK universities are characterized by relatively lower influence of the formula; Norwegian, Dutch and French universities are characterized by medium level of incrementalism; Italian and German universities by strong formulas, while Portuguese universities are rather homogeneous in terms of strong formula and strong incrementalism.

### Actors

Figure 4.2 compares the influence of university leadership (y-axis) and departments (x-axis) on budgeting. Nowhere is budgeting simply the outcome of the government' will, with state-led quadrant on the bottom left being empty. Neither can budgeting be described in terms of a garbage can process, e.g. centred on bargaining between powerful departments, with garbage can quadrant also being empty. In fact, the central level is influential everywhere, in 10 cases together with departments (political model- grey area), in 13 cases with an overwhelming role (central model), whereas in three universities respondents equally divide between the two.

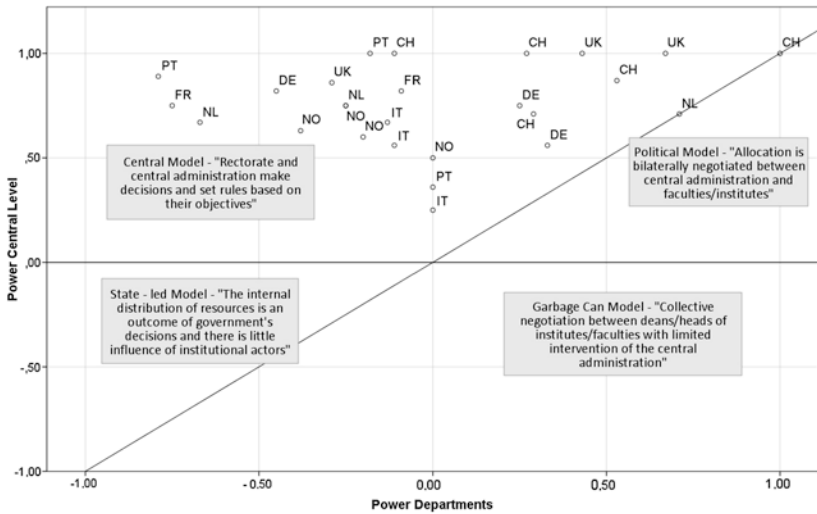


Fig. 4.2 Budgeting actors and influence



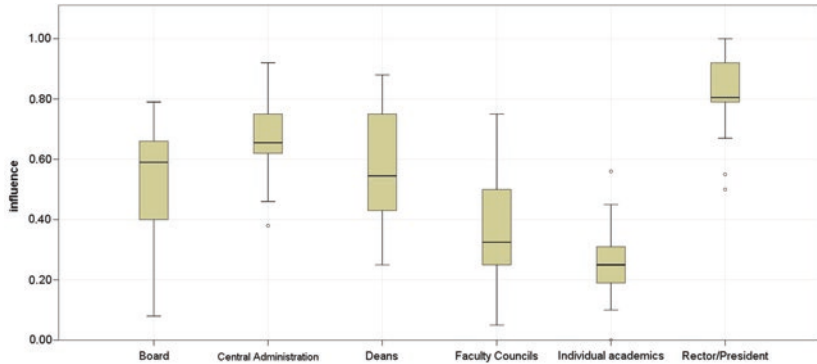


Fig. 4.3 Actors and their influence on budgeting

There is little variation between universities regarding the actors' level of influence on budgeting (ICC below 0.10), with the exception of the boards (ICC 0.23) and middle managers (ICC 0.18) (Table 4.3). Rectors and central administrators are by far the most important internal actors influencing budgeting practices, followed by the middle management (Fig. 4.3). Ranks of actors are quite consistent: in 22 out of 26 universities the rector is the most influential actor. Differences between universities are larger concerning the board (owing to the different functions of this body in universities), and the middle management. The influence of middle management is stronger in UK and Dutch universities, which can be related to the influence of NPM policies in these two countries (Paradeise et al. 2009; Seeber et al. 2015).

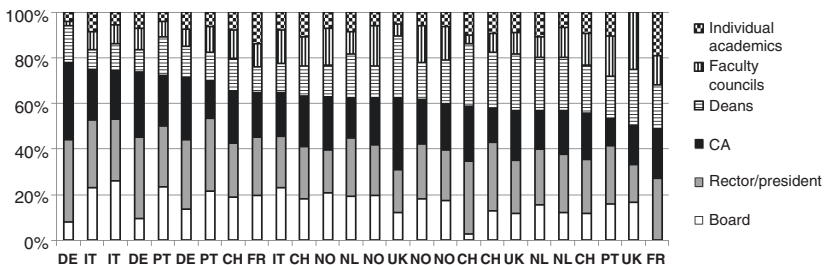
A factor analysis on the actors' share of influence identifies three main components.<sup>2</sup> The first component is related to the influence of central actors, namely the rector and the central administration, and weaker influence of the collegial bodies, like the faculty councils. The second and third components are related to a stronger influence of deans and weaker influence of the board (component 2), and stronger influence of individual academics (component 3). Figure 4.4 illustrates the share of influence of each category of actor, while universities are ordered from left to right according to the importance of central versus decentralized actors.<sup>3</sup> German and Italian universities are characterized by the strongest influence of the central roles. In fact, the influence of academics in these two countries mostly pertains to academic issues (Canhilar et al.

2016), while coherently with *Rechtsstaat* and *Napoleonic* administrative traditions, the central administration is traditionally in charge of budgeting. Deans are particularly strong in Dutch, British and three of the five Swiss universities.

### Allocation Criteria

A clear hierarchy emerges between allocation criteria. The (i) number of students and the (ii) number of graduates are by far the most important, followed by the (iii) amount of third-party funding attracted, the (iv) reputation of the unit and the (v) alignment with the university strategic priorities, whereas (vi) good relationships with the central administration are considered as clearly less important. Overall, externally driven criteria appear more important than internally driven criteria, although more variation exists for the first (Table 4.3; Fig. 4.5). The number of students and/or the number of graduates are the main allocation criterion in 19 universities, in five universities the most important criterion is either third-party funding or reputation, and strategic priorities is the most important criterion only in two universities.

Based on a factor analysis, two main components of allocation criteria can be identified.<sup>4</sup> The first component includes externally driven criteria, i.e. the number of students, the number of graduates and attractiveness of third-party funding, whereas the second component includes internally oriented criteria, i.e. the unit's scientific reputation, the compliance with the university strategy and the relationships with the central administration. Figure 4.6 maps universities according to the scores on



**Fig. 4.4** Influence of different groups of actors on the budgeting process. Central players correspond to *solid-colour* fills and decentralized players to *pat-terned* fills

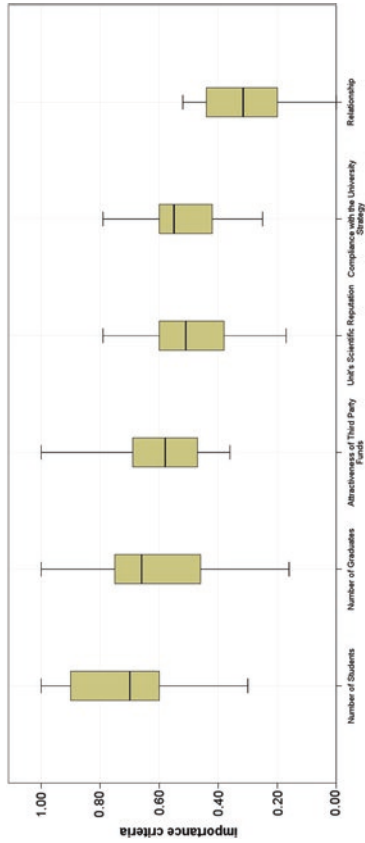


Fig. 4.5 Importance of different allocation criteria

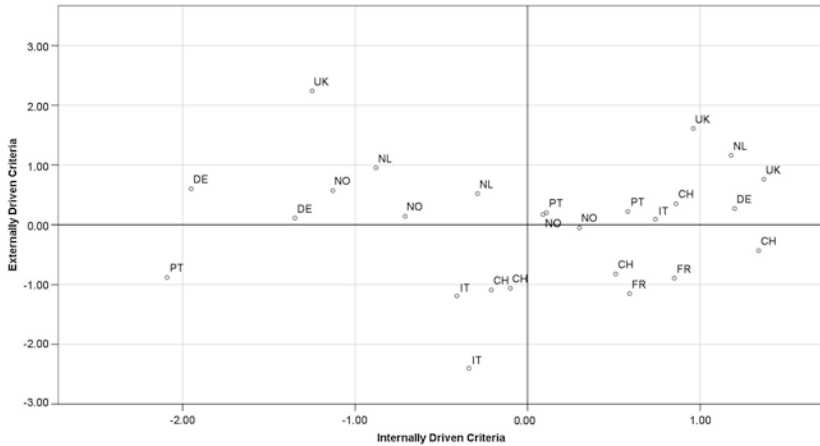


Fig. 4.6 Importance of allocation criteria and components

external criteria (Y-axis) and internal criteria (X-axis). Patterns by country can hardly be identified.

### *The Competition for Funding and the Budgeting Practices*

The level of competition for funding is clearly associated with criteria related to the attractiveness of external resources (0,54,  $p$ -value 0.005), whereas there is no relationship with the other budgeting dimensions (Table 4.5).

### *University Budgeting Models*

A latent class analysis identifies three clusters (classes) of universities according to their budgeting practices in terms of the use of formula, the level of incrementalism, the importance of central or decentralized actors, and external versus internally driven criteria.<sup>5</sup> Table 4.6 resumes the main characteristics of the three budgeting clusters.

The budgeting of universities in cluster 1 is characterized by a strong influence of the central level, relatively low level of formula, weak incrementalism and prevalence of externally driven criteria. This budgeting model characterizes Dutch universities and most Norwegian and

**Table 4.5** Funding competition and universities' budgeting practices

<i>Resource environment</i>	<i>University budgeting</i>			
	<i>Formula vs bargaining</i>	<i>Incrementalism</i>	<i>Empowered actors</i>	<i>External criteria</i>
Competition for funding	no link	no link	no link	+0.54***

\**p*-value < 0.05; \*\**p*-value < 0.01; \*\*\**p*-value < 0.001

**Table 4.6** Budgeting practices: clusters of universities

	<i>Formula</i>		<i>Incrementalism</i>		<i>Actors</i>	<i>Criteria</i>		
	+(%)	++(%)	+(%)	++(%)	<i>Political</i> (%)	<i>Central</i> (%)	<i>Mix</i> (%)	<i>External</i> (%)
Cluster 1	80	20	<b>100</b>	0	32	68	38	62
Cluster 2	92	8	17	83	<b>68</b>	32	<b>100</b>	0
Cluster 3	0	<b>100</b>	0	100	35	65	19	81

UK universities (see Table 4.6), which are countries where the influence of NPM has been rather strong (Seeber et al. 2015; Canhilal et al. 2016). Hence, NPM has been effective in granting the university leadership more decision-making power, allowing substantial reallocation of resources.

The budgeting of universities in cluster 2 reflects the characteristics of a traditional 'academic' budgeting approach, with low impact of the formula, strong incrementalism, a political allocation that balances the influence of central and decentralized actors as well as prevalence of internally driven criteria. This budgeting model is common among universities in Switzerland and to some extent Italian universities, which are systems where the influence of NPM has been relatively modest.

The budgeting of universities in cluster 3 is characterized by a strong formula, a dominance of externally driven criteria, coupled with a high level of incrementalism and relatively more influence of central actors. This model is seemingly the most bureaucratic of the three, dominated by the use of rules through the application of a formula. It is the prevailing model among Portuguese and German universities.

## CONCLUSIONS

University budgeting is a major topic of interest among higher education scholars, and studies of universities budgeting have inspired some of the most renowned models of organizational decision-making. So far, empirical explorations have been of limited scale and they have been rare in recent decades, whereas in meanwhile reforms inspired by NPM principles may have profoundly changed the nature of budgeting. Therefore, this chapter investigated the current nature of European universities' budgeting practices, the influence of the resource environment and the existence of distinct budgeting models.

A main finding of our analysis is that there are few strong associations between the considered budgeting dimensions. This finding contrasts with some of the taken-for-granted assumption on the effects of NPM reforms, such as that centralization of powers reduces the level of incrementalism. As a matter of fact, NPM does not entail a consistent and well-defined set of practices, but rather it provided management principles that have been adapted and implemented in very different ways.

At the same time, some regularities can indeed be identified. First, empirical findings show that all universities are characterized by a considerable influence of the central level, alone or in coexistence with departments' representatives. Budgeting is never the outcome only of the government's will, neither of the mere interaction between departments. Second, the level of competition for funding is clearly associated with higher salience of externally driven criteria than internally driven criteria. Moreover, three models of budgeting emerge from our data. These models appear to be related, to some extent, to the varying influence of NPM principles in different national higher education systems. A *managerial* model is the most common among universities from systems strongly affected by NPM. This model is characterized by a strong influence of the rector and central administration, which are able to reallocate resources considerably in the short run and mostly according to externally driven criteria, whereas the formula plays a less important role. The universities located in countries weakly affected by NPM mostly display an *academic* model of budgeting, which entails high influence of both central and decentralized actors, relevance of both internal and external criteria of allocation and a high level of incrementalism. In Portugal and Germany, i.e. medium NPM countries, the budgeting model is centred on the use of formula, allocation is driven by externally oriented criteria,

and incrementalism is strong. We believe that future research can be oriented to explore more in depth the characteristics of the three budgeting models, their pros and cons, and their diffusion across systems and types of higher education institutions.

## NOTES

1. In this table the scales replicate those employed in the questionnaire: a value of 1 points out a high importance and a value of 5 indicates no importance at all. Instead, in the next paragraphs, the scales of tables and graphs have been changed to improve readability, using '1' as a value for high influence and '0' for no influence.
2. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 3 iterations. The two components account for 83% of the variance.
3. Influence on internal budgeting can be conceived as a zero-sum game. Thus, the share of influence was considered instead of the absolute values.
4. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 3 iterations. The two components accounts for 73% of the variance.
5. Goodness of fit indicators for the solution at 3 classes outperforms the solution with 2 classes. Given the small number of universities considered, solution above 4 classes are not acceptable as the degrees of freedom go below zero. The level of incrementalism has been dichotomized between strong and non-strong. Attribution of universities to clusters is very clear in 22 cases (probability of belonging to a given cluster  $x$  between 87 and 100%), while for three universities two clusters were relevant (probability between 43 and 57%, and 48 and 52%). One UK university could not be included in the LCA because missing the information on formula; it was ex-post attributed to clusters 2 and 3 as sharing two of the three characterizing elements respectively.

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## The Transformative Power of Evaluation on University Governance

*Emanuela Reale and Giulio Marini*

**Abstract** This chapter investigates how external evaluation affects university governance. The two research questions are: What makes evaluation a powerful instrument affecting the governance of universities? Do different evaluation instruments have different strengths in affecting governance? We assume that evaluation has several areas of potential effect on universities related to transformation of: hierarchical relationships between actors; the academic profession; management and performance. The chapter surveys relevant literature, followed by an outline of the conceptual framework, a presentation of the data used and the tests developed, and data analysis. We attempt to identify homogenous clusters of higher education institutions (HEIs) in terms of the extent to

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which evaluation influences their governance, before our concluding discussion of the analytical results and the conclusions.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how external evaluation contributes to the transformation of universities through effects on their internal governance. The inquiry is driven by two research questions: What makes evaluation a powerful instrument affecting the governance of universities? Do different evaluation instruments (evaluation of research, evaluation of teaching, quality assurance) have different strengths in affecting governance?

In the current study, we consider evaluation as having several areas of potential effect in the transformation of universities: (i) changes in the hierarchical relationships between actors, with possibilities of verticalization in the distribution of power, and reinforcement of the central power through the definition of strategies, and the use resource allocation and performance assessments; (ii) contributions to the reconfiguration of the academic profession and the formation of new elites; (iii) improvement in management and performance, through the rationalization of the use of available resources and the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness.

The study investigates the first of the above three effects of transformation, arguing that evaluation does not bring about a concentration of power in the hands of the university's central governing bodies. Rather it is expected that an observable division of competences and influences between the actors involved, meaning between the top and middle managers, is linked to the type of evaluation used. Furthermore, we argue that research evaluation is likely to produce a deeper impact on university governance than other forms of evaluation, particularly the assessment of teaching.

The chapter is organized as follows. The first section presents the relevant literature on the effects of evaluation on university governance. The second section describes the conceptual framework, the third section data used and the tests developed. The fourth section provides the data analysis. The fifth section attempts to identify homogenous clusters of higher education institutions (HEIs) in terms of the extent to which evaluation influences their governance. The last section provides a discussion of the analytical results and the conclusions.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE

Governance is the ways in which decision-makers ‘combine to solve collective problems’ (Capano 2011; Kooiman 2003), and the steering of this process; thus decisions are formulated and implemented as a result of the interactions of the various actors involved in the organization (Capano 2011, 1625).

The study deals with the internal governance of universities, and in particular with the area of how universities are currently changing the organization and distribution of internal power. These changes are the result of a combination of three influences: (i) the governments pushing forward reforms, redesigning systemic governance; (ii) the increasing numbers of internal and external actors involved in the steering, and (iii) the use of new internal systematizations and instruments designed to govern university organizational and academic behaviors. All three of these influences should be considered for a full understanding of the transformation of internal university governance. In this study the intention is not to provide a general description of how the introduction of evaluation as a steering tool has impacted universities. Our particular focus is instead on how the actors within the universities perceive the advent of evaluation and of the ‘Evaluative State’ (Neave 1998, 2012). From this, we also arrive at what kinds of effects this generates in terms of the distribution of decision-making power among the different levels of university government, specifically the central government (top) and middle levels.

The literature offers several elements contributing to this work. First, we refer to the extensive investigation of the unique nature of universities as organizations. Apart from certain differences in interpretation, there is substantial consensus that universities, at least in part, still remain as loosely coupled entities, ‘incomplete organizations’ or ‘organized anarchies’ (Weick 1976; Musselin 2007; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Whitley 2012).

Second, we recognize that this distinctive character does not imply that the transformation of universities into tighter organizations has failed. Although the state reforms have achieved different levels of effect, and the processes are implemented through different steps and rates, all the European countries show a trend towards strengthening universities as organizations (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007; Paradeise et al. 2009). Recently, Seeber and colleagues (2014), using the same TRUE dataset

as the current work, investigated the form of European universities in the dimensions of identity, hierarchy and rationality, which are the basic characteristics of complete organizations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Birnbaum 2004). The results show that although 'managerial' universities can be distinguished from traditional ones, these still cannot be considered 'completely complete' organizations, and probably cannot ever become such.

Third, evaluation is one of several instruments intended to enhance the command and control capabilities of government, meaning both the capabilities of the state government concerning universities and those of the internal governments themselves (Stame 2006). Evaluation is one component of a new steering-at-a-distance approach, featuring the redistribution of powers within the universities, the emergence of new actors influencing the universities' choices, and the increasing capability of the institutions themselves to plan, control and measure achievements. Nevertheless, some authors indicate that evaluation can have greater effects in terms of legitimization and establishing prestige among actors, than the desired ones as a tool for coordination and steering. Such counter-effects occur because of the complexities in assessing the academic profession, and the limited possibilities of influencing the research agendas of individuals (Whitley 2007).

Fourth, we observe that originally, evaluation developed as an independent steering instrument, mostly in the form of quality assessment (QA) and as *ex-post* research assessment. However in the European university context, the origin and drivers of change were different. Here, the Europe-wide Bologna Process played a leading role in the growth of quality assessment, while research evaluation exercises have descended primarily from national political initiatives, with implementation by external agencies. The development of the evaluation and assessment instruments is often inspired by New Public Management principles, which aim at simultaneously incrementing the steering capabilities of the policy-maker and the autonomous responsibilities of the universities (Reale and Seeber 2013). Given this context, the implementation of the evaluation instrument is related to levels of autonomy granted to the institutions, and to the types of competitive funding systems in the different countries (Whitley 2007).

Furthermore, external evaluation impacts on governance through changing the behavior of the academics. In particular, empirical evidence has shown that middle managers tend to criticize the rules of

competitive funding and evaluation, yet at the same time be attentive to them, ‘reacting according to the requirements of the process’ (Musselin 2013).

Fifth, Hansson (2006) outlines the passage from research evaluation as an ‘anonymous and autonomous process of qualitative control based on peer review to a complex process involving several methods and tools’, responding to a number of objectives and goals. The methods and approaches that have been introduced to research evaluation attempt ‘to accommodate at least two, often contradictory, policy goals: the demonstration of accountability and productivity of the researchers and the research organization’ (Hansson 2006). The changes in research evaluation have mainly been intended to achieve performance management in universities, without considering the social context or organization of the scientific work, simply pushing the organizations to exert controls on the individual researchers through ‘constant monitoring of productivity’ (Hansson 2006, 167).

A final stream of important literature concerns the organizational responses to internal and external evaluation, which have been explored from different institutional perspectives (Paradeise et al. 2009). However, the current study is not intended to examine how universities react to the reforms introducing evaluation as a steering instrument, or to internal reorganizations intended to implement evaluation as a means of governance. Our interest is to investigate the transformative effect of evaluation through the redistribution or concentration of power within the universities, at the different levels of internal governance, namely at the top and middle levels of management.

The distinction between external and internal evaluation is significant in our investigation. The former is a process of review carried out by a body not directly involved in the organization being evaluated, generally a government department or evaluation agency. This type of evaluation is generally considered as having advantages of objectivity, avoidance of influence from vested internal interests, and outside perspectives on organizational issues. Internal evaluation is a process of review carried out by someone from the organization itself, for the organization’s own ends, with or without the involvement of external peers. The advantage of this type of evaluation is that it is fully focused on the organization’s internal priorities and purposes. The process of internal evaluation can serve as a step in preparation for an external evaluation, or can complement an external assessment in some other way. In spite of the

distinction, both types of evaluation activities bring pressures to bear on the organization. External evaluation is directed at the different levels of the organization's internal government, and sets standards and performance objectives to be addressed. Internal evaluation anticipates, supports and prepares for the pressure deriving from external evaluation, thus concurring in producing the intended effects on the organization. Although the pressures exerted by the two types of evaluation can be analyzed separately, it is difficult to distinguish their relative contributions to the effects produced on the organization.

Finally, it is useful to point out that evaluation can be used for two different but quite interconnected aims: *summative* and *formative* (Scriven 1967; Taras 2005). Evaluation for summative aims is intended judge to what extent a specific goal or performance has been achieved. Evaluation for formative aims is devoted to learning lessons from the past, for future improvement. The literature generally describes summative and formative evaluation in terms of a dichotomy (Scriven 1967), but some authors point out the linkages between the two, since formative evaluation is a necessary step in preparing a good summative assessment (Taras 2005; Molas-Gallart 2012). The current study deals with evaluation primarily from the summative perspective. The different types of evaluation are seen as steering tools, linked to the emerging neo-liberal approach, although some formative purposes can also be considered to occur.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

Proceeding from the literature, we require a conceptual framework to explain the way evaluation, and research evaluation in particular, are likely to affect the governance of universities.

One of our considerations is that the transformative power of evaluation is related to its specific uses. For this, we draw on the classification proposed by Molas-Gallart (2012), categorizing the uses of evaluation in the policy process. The starting point is the identification of the main activities linked to the policy process: resource allocation, activities for the pursuit of institutional tasks, and control over the correct use of resources allocated for the activities. Examining the linkages and potential contributions of evaluation to the policy process, the author suggests three main potential purposes or uses:

- *Distributive* uses, mainly referring to the allocation of the available resources to different beneficiaries, on the basis of the performance assessment or the merit of the individuals and groups;
- *Improvement* uses, where the focus is on the lessons that can be learned from past experience, using evaluation to disentangle the reasons and explanations for certain effects;
- *Controlling* uses, to scrutinize how individuals, organizations or groups have used the resources for carrying out the planned activities, and the extent to which they have achieved the expected results.

Distributive and controlling uses are primarily related to *summative* evaluation, while improvement purposes imply a *formative* approach to evaluation.

We assume that universities could apply external evaluation for all three uses in their internal decision-making processes, or could limit themselves to the two areas of summative purposes, leaving out the formative one. Given the definitions offered by Molas-Gallart, the current study is particularly interested in the use of external evaluation in a summative approach, for distributive and controlling purposes. The uses of external evaluation can thus affect the relevance of the internal actors in governance and management (rector, board, senate, central or ‘top’ administrators, middle managers) differently, depending on the type of evaluation, affecting the power they own, and create various impacts with either positive or negative values.

The relevant dimensions for the investigation are:

- How the central administrative bodies perceive the influence of the external evaluation, carried out by the government or a specialized evaluation agency, on the specific uses of the evaluation. The distinction is *distributive uses* (effects on financial allocations, thus determining the budgets of institutions and academic units) and *controlling uses* (effects on persons, such as on the careers of academics, content of their teaching programs or research priorities).
- How central government bodies perceive the impact of the different types of evaluation (evaluation of research, of teaching; quality assessment) on the decisions made within the university. Indeed, the literature suggests that that evaluation can have several purposes



and impacts in the case of universities (Dahler-Larsen 2012; Reale and Seeber 2013). The intention of is thus to deepen the extent to which the actors consider evaluation to be an instrument driving university decisions.

- How the university's central government bodies on the one hand, and middle managers on the other, perceive the impact of evaluation on universities, distinguishing between *negative effects* (conflicts, bureaucracy, individual opportunistic behaviors) and *positive effects* (improving quality in teaching and research, transparency).
- How the university's central government bodies on the one hand, and middle managers on the other, perceive the distribution of the decision-making power between the central government and middle management levels. The issues analyzed are those related to the distributive use of evaluation (setting the rules and procedures for the evaluation of faculties, institutes and other internal units) and the controlling use of evaluation (assessing the individual academic performance).

Given the assumptions and the dimensions for investigation, we elaborate three propositions. We can expect that:

1. The more that external evaluation is applied for distributive purposes about vital resources (e.g. funding; assignment of positions through recruitment or career advancement) the more the academics perceive negative effects;
2. The more that the university concentrates on the decision-making power at the internal government level (versus with middle managers), the stronger is the use of external evaluation for controlling purposes;
3. The more that research evaluation influences the activities carried out by the university or empowers the steering capacities of the central government bodies, the more it is likely to produce significant effects on governance, compared to other types of evaluation.

The three propositions will be also tested against other dimensions related to the characteristics of the universities involved in the TRUE survey and to the characteristics of the national higher education systems, searching for different effects might be linked to institutional and/or national factors.

We expect to confirm the first proposition. Our reasoning is that the use of external evaluation for the allocation of resources is likely to produce perceptions of negative effects in all the academics involved in university governance, both at the central government and middle levels. This is in spite of the fact that different organizational responses to university evaluation have been observed at the level of the research groups (Reale and Seeber 2010).

However, we expect differentiated outcomes to the second proposition, depending on the university characteristics and ultimately on country factors. When the central governments of universities use evaluation for individual assessments or to achieve effects on research priorities or the content of teaching, the distribution of the decision-making power on issues related to the evaluation ‘control tool’ can be perceived differently by the central government and the middle managers, with the former adopting a steering-at-a-distance behavior and the latter adopting attitudes closer to ‘shop-floor’ preoccupations.

We expect to confirm the third proposition for all universities, concerning the effects of research evaluation on governance, regardless of institutional and national characteristics. Research determines the individual prestige and reputation lying at the very core of the academic world. Thus, when the central government perceives research evaluation as an important steering instrument with a strong influence on the university activities, the enactment of evaluation is also likely to influence the centralization of the decision-making power over the use of evaluation for control purposes.

The analysis acknowledges several limitations. The TRUE survey is a cross-sectional study, in which causal inference is highly problematic except when external measures are used. Thus we cannot establish strict causal relationships between the use of evaluation at the institutional level and the effects that it produces on the distribution of decision-making power, or on other positive or negative results. Moreover, the literature on both research evaluation and quality assurance indicates that a variety of factors, acting at both the institutional and national levels, can influence the results descending from evaluation, (Dahler-Larsen 2012: 20; Hammarfelt and de Rijcke 2015; Huisman et al. 2007). The direction of influence between the phenomena under investigation can also be questioned: does evaluation influence the concentration of decision-making power, or vice versa? The intention of the current study is to use the data obtained from the TRUE survey to test for the existence

of statistical associations (Pearson correlations) between the degrees of impact of several types of evaluation and the holding of true decision-making power in evaluation-related issues (whether by central or middle management). Such correlations could confirm the likelihood of the ongoing partition of decision-making power inside universities, although not informing about causalities. Further, the correlations can serve in assessing the use of evaluation for summative aims, indicating the degree of influence of evaluation on the governance of universities. In short, the aim of our investigation is not to identify dependencies between the different factors, but rather discuss how evaluation enters into the configuration of the universities and how the use of external evaluation for summative aims is likely to transform them.

### EMPIRICAL PARAMETERS

The study uses the dataset developed under the ‘ESF EUROCORE-TRUE Project - Transforming Universities in Europe’. The data are from a survey directed at different organizational levels within a sample of 26 universities in eight European countries (Germany, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, United Kingdom; 696 answers, with a response rate of 48% overall, with no particular differences in terms of response rate by role, university and country). The sampling strategy provided for balanced representation by age and size and between general and specialized-technical universities. For each country, one highly reputed research university and one less reputed university were included. The survey used five different questionnaires for respondents in different positions: central government of the university (four questionnaires for rector/president, board member, senate member, central administrator), and middle managers (one questionnaire for deans and department heads). A number of the questions were repeated identically in the different questionnaires. ‘Shop-floor’ staff, meaning academics not active in government roles, was not asked to participate. In spite of this limitation, the dataset offers a large database on how academics involved in decision-making power perceive their roles and judge the influence of evaluation on university strategies and activities.

Many questions elicit perceptions and opinions, and we assume that these are valid. We use Cronbach’s alpha to estimate the reliability of the Likert scales used in the questionnaires. Table 5.1 presents the list of

**Table 5.1** List of variables used in the analysis

<i>Label</i>	<i>Question wording</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Items analysed</i>
DMP	Please indicate the extent to which actors within your university have actual decision-making power for the listed issues	Central government and middle managers	Setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units (faculties, institutes, etc.) Evaluating academic individual performance
EV-QA	How do you rate the effects of evaluation and quality assessment as regard to the following issues?	Central government and middle managers	Positive effects (Improving teaching quality, improving research quality, Increasing transparency, Improving strategic decision-making) Negative effects (Conflicts between managers and academics, Conflicts among academics, Academic activity subjected to more norms and rules, Opportunistic behaviors in teaching and research, Constraints on academic freedom)
EXTEVA	How would you rate the influence of external evaluation and quality assessment on your university in terms of ...	Central government	Control impact = Personal impacts (e.g. career of individual academics), Teaching programs (content impact), Research priorities Distributive impact = Financial impacts (e.g. budgets of institution and academic units)
INFITEM	How would you rate the influence of the following items on the activities carried out by your university?	Central government	Evaluation of research quality/excellence Evaluation of teaching quality Accreditation

TRUE survey variables used for the current study and the items considered in the analysis.

We enlarge the information set by adding some further variables intended to help reveal more about the universities' activities and the use of external evaluation in internal affairs.

A first group of variables concerns the universities themselves:

- Age of the university—The variable is dummied as 'old' (before 1900), 'middle' (between 1900 and 1960) and 'recent' (1961 onward). The cluster analysis considers the logarithm of the age.
- Size—This is measured by number of students enrolled and considers the following categories: 'small' (up to 10,000), 'medium' (10,000–24,999), 'large' (25,000 and more). The cluster analysis again considers the logarithm of the absolute numbers.
- The level of disciplinary specialization—The variable is expressed as a continuous index of disciplinary concentration from 0 = low specialization to 1 = high specialization.
- Managerialism and Collegialism - These two variables are constructed based on the perceptions of the TRUE survey respondents, who responded to questions asking them to rate the managerial culture and the collegial culture of their home universities, using a Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high).<sup>1</sup>

Another group of variables characterizes the country contexts of the universities (see Table 5.2). This information is useful in understanding what circumstances and specific policies concerning universities enable similar or different uses of evaluation in general, and even of particular types of evaluation.

The dimensions considered are:

- Higher education research and development (HERD)—Public investment in higher education as a percentage of GDP (source: EUROSTAT).
- New Public Management orientation of the country—The level of managerial orientation for the country university system. The categories are 'low', 'medium' and 'high', based on the scoring of national information derived from the literature (national charts in Paradeise et al. 2009).

**Table 5.2** Country contexts for universities: degree of formal autonomy concerning evaluation; degree of general institutional autonomy; levels of NPM and HERD (% of GDP)

	<i>Internal evaluation systems for teaching*</i>	<i>Internal evaluation systems for research*</i>	<i>Take part in external quality assessment for teaching*</i>	<i>Take part in external quality assessment for research*</i>	<i>Mean of institutional autonomy (70 issues)*</i>	<i>NPM**</i>	<i>***HERD</i>
UK	1	3	0	3	0.635	3	0.44
FR	2	3	0	0	0.367	1	0.47
IT	3	3	3	0	0.457	1	0.35
NL	1	2	0	1	0.409	3	0.62
NO	2	3	0	3	0.547	2	0.51
PT	1	3	0	0	0.498	2	0.50
CH	3	3	3	3	0.439	1	0.83
DE	3	1	2	1	0.452	1	0.51

*Sources* \*Formal autonomy—own elaboration from TRUE project ‘Formal Autonomy’ dataset; \*\*NPM—own elaboration from Paradeise et al. 2009; \*\*\*HERD—EUROSTAT (2011)

- Formal autonomy (general institutional autonomy)—The level of formal institutional autonomy for universities, as granted under national laws and regulations;
- Formal autonomy concerning evaluation—The level of formal institutional autonomy in terms of freedom to take part in external evaluations - of teaching, of research; the level of institutional autonomy in terms of freedom to establish internal evaluation systems—for teaching, for research.

The level of formal autonomy on the specific area of evaluation is derived from a TRUE descriptive dataset, completed in 2011. It covers four issues: (i) the freedom of the universities to set up internal evaluation systems for teaching and (ii) to set up internal evaluation systems for research; (iii) the freedom of the universities to take part in external quality assessment for teaching, and (iv) to take part in external assessments for research.<sup>2</sup>

The data from the TRUE survey do not permit consideration of different disciplines, of gender differences, or of the age or seniority of the respondents, and do not cover the opinions of academics at the

‘shop-floor’ level (with no governing responsibilities). Thus, the survey results can supply information on how the academics entitled to formal internal power perceive the role of the different forms of evaluation (research evaluation, teaching evaluation; quality assurance), but they do permit consideration of the influences that personal and professional characteristics are likely to produce.

## DESCRIPTIVE AND CORRELATION ANALYSES

This section presents the analyses of the data using descriptive statistics and correlations, illustrating the general characteristics of the sample of universities surveyed and providing empirical evidence of the positive and negative correlations between variables.

### *Descriptive Analysis*

Table 5.3 shows the descriptive statistics of the respondents’ perceptions—both the top management (Top-M) and middle management (MM)—about the strength of effects produced by evaluation on central and middle management level.

A high percentage (about 61%) of respondents consider that the effect produced by external evaluation for distributive purposes is very high, and the same holds true concerning the effects of external evaluation impacting on control uses, although the percentage of respondents rating ‘high’ is not so large as in the former case. However, if we examine the different items that compose ‘control use’ we find that the influence of external evaluation on the specific area of setting research priorities is perceived as high and very high by 78% of the respondents.

Accreditation, evaluation of teaching quality, and evaluation of research quality and excellence are all considered as having a high influence on the activities carried out by the university. However, compared to the other two types of assessment, research evaluation achieves an exceptionally high status in the percentage of respondents’ perceptions. As to the effects produced by evaluation, it is interesting to note that top and middle management have largely the same positive perceptions about the capacity of evaluation and QA to improve efficiency and effectiveness. On the other hand, they show more diversified opinions about the capacity for generating negative effects. Still, for both management levels, the large parts consider that evaluation and QA have low impact in generating conflicts within the universities.

**Table 5.3** Descriptive statistics of evaluation perceived by respondents

<i>Perceptions on evaluation</i>	<i>Level impacted by evaluation</i>	<i>Low* %</i>	<i>Some* %</i>	<i>High* %</i>	<i>Total %</i>
Effect and impact of evaluation: on Control	Top-M	23.2	26.7	50.1	100.0
Effect and impact of evaluation: on Distribution	Top-M	12.6	23.0	64.4	100.0
Influence of: Accreditation	Top-M	14.2	31.3	54.5	100.0
Influence of: Evaluation of teaching quality	Top-M	12.1	28.9	58.9	100.0
Influence of: Evaluation of research quality/excellence	Top-M	4.9	13.4	81.7	100.0
Evaluation - generating efficiency and efficacy	Top-M	23.6	13.7	62.7	100.0
Evaluation - generating conflicts	MM	25.6	9.7	64.6	100.0
Actual decision-making power  about evaluating academic individual performance  perceived by Central level	Top-M	42.3	24.4	33.2	100.0
	MM	44.3	22.9	32.8	100.0
Actual decision-making power  about setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units  perceived by Central level	Top-M	43.3	34.1	22.6	100.0
	MM	38.8	40.0	21.2	100.0
Actual decision-making power  about evaluating academic individual performance  perceived by Middle level	Top-M	9.5	30.9	59.6	100.0
	MM	10.2	32.8	57.0	100.0
Actual decision-making power  about setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units  perceived by Middle level	Top-M	10.2	48.9	40.9	100.0
	MM	24.7	48.3	27.0	100.0
Actual decision-making power  about setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units  perceived by Middle level	Top-M	13.7	36.2	50.1	100.0
	MM	18.9	42.9	38.3	100.0

\* 'Low' recodes 'very low' and 'low' of the Likert scale; 'high' recodes 'very high' and 'high' of Likert scale

Source Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

Top management consider that both the central and middle levels hold high decision-making power (59.6 and 57.0% respectively) over setting the rules and procedures for the evaluation of the university units. Thus the central government does recognize that it holds strong



power over this issue, although they share it with middle management. Concerning the evaluation of individual performance, top management do not indicate a concentration of decision-making power at either the central or middle management level, although a higher number of respondents perceive the power held by the central government as lower than the one in the hands of the faculties.

Middle managers perceive that they hold a role of ‘some’ importance in both the decision-making processes about evaluation (for evaluation of units and individual performance), although more than 50% consider the decision-making power on setting the rules and procedures for the evaluation of units as highly concentrated at the central level.

Summing up, the central government and middle managers show a convergence in their perceptions of the concentration of decision-making power in the universities, as far as concerns the assessment of the units. This observation conforms with their perceptions of a high effect of external evaluation on distributive uses, and with their consideration that research evaluation produces higher effects on university activities than do other types of evaluation.

### *Correlations*

Table 5.4 presents the main significant correlations, observed at the university level. The figures shown are the actual values from the correlation matrix, therefore a positive value always means a ‘the more, the more’ association while a negative value means a ‘the more, the less’ association. The average values presented are the scores assigned by the respondents within the universities (both the respondents from central government bodies and faculty/department levels).

We can make three preliminary observations. First, it is interesting that the three variables representing the characteristics of the respondent’s university (size, age, disciplinary specialization) are not correlated with the answers on evaluation issues, as observed in this study.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that the perceptions of the respondents, involved in the university central government and middle management levels, are not influenced by certain key characteristics of the organizations where they work.

Second, one of the country-level features, the NPM orientation of the national university system and one institutional-level characteristic of universities, namely their managerial culture, are frequently associated in a significant way to the distribution of decision-making power and the

Table 5.4 Correlation matrix with level of statistical significance (italic)

4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
1														
5	0.192	1												
	<i>0.348</i>													
6	0.037	0.049	1											
	<i>0.859</i>	<i>0.810</i>												
7	-0.260	0.151	0.262	1										
	<i>0.200</i>	<i>0.460</i>	<i>0.196</i>											
8	-0.582**	0.246	0.122	0.693**	1									
	<i>0.002</i>	<i>0.226</i>	<i>0.554</i>	<i>0.000</i>										
9	0.620**	0.301	0.081	-0.222	-0.377	1								
	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.135</i>	<i>0.692</i>	<i>0.275</i>	<i>0.058</i>									
10	0.670**	0.586**	0.208	0.068	-0.236	0.607**	1							
	<i>0.000</i>	<i>0.002</i>	<i>0.307</i>	<i>0.743</i>	<i>0.246</i>	<i>0.001</i>								
11	0.166	0.390*	0.079	-0.086	0.049	0.004	0.334	1						
	<i>0.419</i>	<i>0.049</i>	<i>0.701</i>	<i>0.676</i>	<i>0.811</i>	<i>0.986</i>	<i>0.096</i>							
12	0.417*	0.307	0.111	0.004	0.049	0.236	0.415*	0.638**	1					
	<i>0.034</i>	<i>0.127</i>	<i>0.589</i>	<i>0.985</i>	<i>0.814</i>	<i>0.246</i>	<i>0.035</i>	<i>0.000</i>						
13	0.591**	-0.081	-0.189	-0.302	-0.356	0.134	0.298	0.138	0.494*	1				
	<i>0.001</i>	<i>0.696</i>	<i>0.354</i>	<i>0.134</i>	<i>0.074</i>	<i>0.512</i>	<i>0.139</i>	<i>0.502</i>	<i>0.010</i>					
14	0.207	-0.014	-0.437*	-0.233	-0.019	0.015	0.011	0.030	0.037	0.413*	1			
	<i>0.311</i>	<i>0.948</i>	<i>0.026</i>	<i>0.252</i>	<i>0.927</i>	<i>0.943</i>	<i>0.958</i>	<i>0.884</i>	<i>0.859</i>	<i>0.036</i>				
15	0.414*	0.354	0.025	-0.249	-0.226	0.506**	0.388	0.175	0.124	0.108	0.062	1		
	<i>0.035</i>	<i>0.076</i>	<i>0.904</i>	<i>0.220</i>	<i>0.267</i>	<i>0.008</i>	<i>0.050</i>	<i>0.394</i>	<i>0.547</i>	<i>0.601</i>	<i>0.762</i>			
16	0.210	0.452*	0.045	0.042	0.200	-0.044	0.232	0.486*	0.352	0.224	0.250	-0.005	1	
	<i>0.303</i>	<i>0.020</i>	<i>0.827</i>	<i>0.838</i>	<i>0.326</i>	<i>0.832</i>	<i>0.254</i>	<i>0.012</i>	<i>0.078</i>	<i>0.272</i>	<i>0.217</i>	<i>0.981</i>		
17	0.481*	0.480*	0.083	0.038	0.018	0.168	0.554**	0.655**	0.646**	0.445*	0.063	0.027	0.700**	1
	<i>0.013</i>	<i>0.013</i>	<i>0.688</i>	<i>0.853</i>	<i>0.930</i>	<i>0.411</i>	<i>0.003</i>	<i>0.000</i>	<i>0.000</i>	<i>0.023</i>	<i>0.759</i>	<i>0.896</i>	<i>0.000</i>	

(continued)

Table 5.4 (continued)

<i>Legend of variables</i>	
1	Institutional size (continuous) <sup>§</sup>
2	Institutional concentration (continuous) <sup>§</sup>
3	Institutional age (continuous) <sup>§</sup>
4	Country_NPM
5	Managerial culture
6	Collegial culture
7	Decision-making power (DMP)  about setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units  Top-M
8	DMP  about evaluating academic individual performance  Top-M
9	DMP  about setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units  MM
10	DMP  about evaluating academic individual performance  MM
11	Influence of: Evaluation of research quality/excellence
12	Influence of: Evaluation of teaching quality
13	Influence of: Accreditation
14	Evaluation generating conflicts
15	Evaluation generating efficiency and efficacy
16	External evaluation impacting distributive uses
17	External evaluation impacting controlling uses

<sup>§</sup> The variable is omitted from the table

\* =  $p < 0.05$

\*\* =  $p < 0.01$

Source: Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

use of evaluation. This indicates that evaluation from a summative perspective is linked to the strength of the managerial paradigm at both the national and the institutional levels, when other structural factors such as the size, heterogeneity of disciplinary fields and the age of the institutions are held equal. This observation is consistent with what is often suggested in the literature (Neave 1998, 2012).

Third, the likelihood of negative effects on university activities arising from evaluation (conflicts, bureaucratic load, opportunistic behaviors, constrains on academic freedom) is positively correlated to the implementation of accreditation (0.413\*). At the same time, the negative effects resulting from evaluation are less likely to be perceived where there is a collegial culture, whereas where a managerial culture is present, there is more likelihood of the declaration that evaluation generates both controlling (0.480\*) and distributive (0.452\*) effects.

A further result concerns the self-reinforcing mechanisms that evaluation could produce. These emerge in the linkages between the different types of evaluation (research and teaching evaluation) on the activities of the universities. Both the distributive and the controlling functions of evaluation are significant and positively correlated (respectively 0.486\* and 0.655\*) with 'influence of evaluation of research quality/excellence'. Again, evaluation under a summative orientation shows a tendency to affect the allocation of financial resources and the performance of individual academics, as well as the content of teaching programs and the research priorities, thus becoming a policy instruments to steer the organization. The controlling use of evaluation is particularly correlated to all of these influences of evaluation, even in the area of teaching (0.646\*) and accreditation (0.445\*).

Data show that the distributive use of evaluation has a high and significant association with a managerial culture of the university (0.452\*). Interestingly enough, no specific correlations emerge between the mentioned use and the distribution of the decision-making power within the universities.

A different picture emerges when the use of external evaluation for control purposes is concerned. The more external evaluation is used for controlling purposes, the more research evaluation and teaching evaluation have a strong influence on the activities of the universities. Further, the more a country has an NPM orientation in the university system, the more universities tend to allocate the decision-making power over both the assessment of individual performance and the evaluation of

units to faculties and departments (0.670\*\* and 0.620\*\* respectively). Interestingly, a strong negative correlation is found between the national degree of NPM and the decision-making power held by top management over evaluation of individual performance ( $-0.582^{**}$ ). Therefore, one can expect that the more the managerial orientation of the country, the less the universities centralize the power on decisions related to individual assessment.

These results suggest that the division of decision-making power inside the university follows very specific paths, with the concentration at the middle management level (as opposed to top management) being more clearly and strongly related to obtaining effects from evaluation. At the same time, a managerial orientation in university culture is likely to covariate with stronger decision-making power for the faculties, in the assessment of individual performance.

In other words, evaluation can serve as an instrument to be used by the university central government and the faculties, but the traditional weak hierarchy, which is characteristic of universities, means that when the specific use of external evaluation is present it could also serve in the redistribution of power between the different decision-making levels of the internal government. The hierarchical development of universities is probably fated to become stronger than in the past,<sup>4</sup> but the internal organization of the university will not necessarily assume a truly 'vertical' configuration in the form of the assumption of further levels of power at the upper levels of internal government. These results are consistent with the observations that in more managerial universities, collegial culture increases above all when middle managers believe that evaluation has positive impacts (Marini and Reale 2015).

#### COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL FEATURES

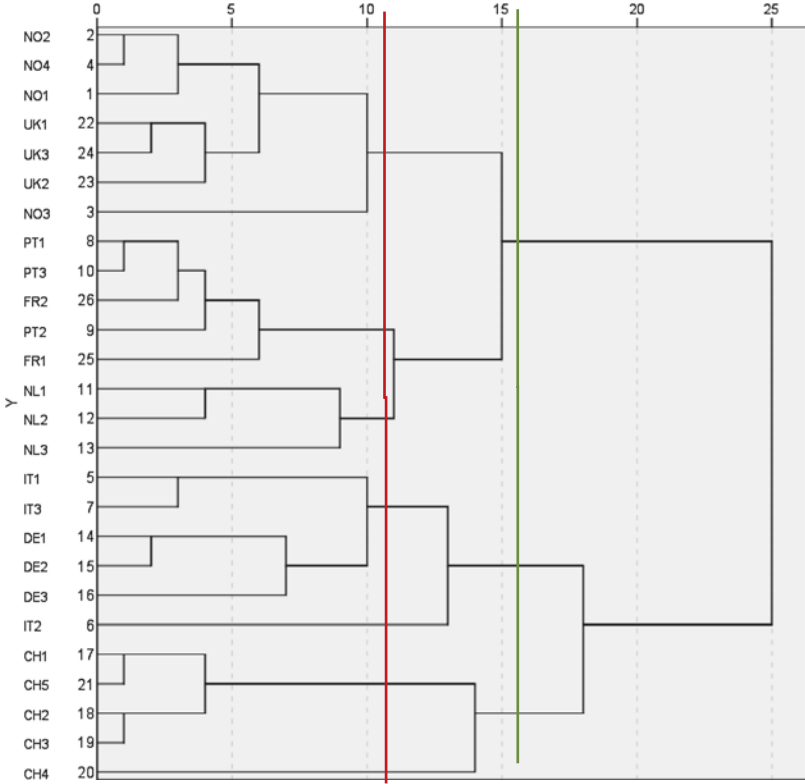
The final step of the analysis investigates whether either the national dimension or institutional features emerge as important factors in influencing how external evaluation is likely to affect the governance of the universities. The statistical procedure is that of stage-by-stage hierarchical clustering, which, at any stage, is particularly suitable to understanding what cases (HEIs) appear to be more similar to each other.

We use the means at the institutional level from the original dataset of 697 respondents to identify the 26 cases. The aim is to observe how the universities group in clusters on the basis of: (i) national features; (ii) the characteristics of the individual organizations; and (iii) the variables regarding the way top- and middle-management academic personnel perceive the impact of external evaluation on their own higher education institutions. The cluster analysis serves to test three possibilities:

- i) The effect of external evaluation on governance of universities is mainly influenced by the national awarding of general institutional autonomy (AU\_tot), and the degree of specific autonomy in evaluation issues (the four variables of autonomy in internal teaching and research evaluation, participation in teaching and research quality assessment). This first possibility would prove that European universities are still influenced by their nation-states in terms of the ways they might enact a more ‘up-to-date’ organizational aspect.
- ii) The governance of universities is influenced above all by their institutional features. This result would demonstrate that some organizational aspects of governance, particularly the distribution of decision-making power between the central and middle management levels, and the influence evaluation could have in the universities, can be explained primarily by the characteristics of the HEI itself (more established, larger, greater disciplinary specialization).
- iii) None of these two sets of constraints explain the governance of universities. This result could be understood as the capacity of European HEIs to change their governance models in response to evaluation, accepting greater or lesser extent of influences according to other variables not examined in the current study, such as the specific leadership.

At this stage of the analysis the aim is to see which universities are more similar in governance, based on the means of the perceptions at the institutional level (cfr. Annex 1). If on the contrary there are differences in opinions between the universities<sup>5</sup> we wish to assess which forces might give rise to these observed institutional differences.

Reading Fig. 5.1 from left to the right, it is possible to see for each university, which is its most similar. The ‘red line’ in the figure results in



**Fig. 5.1** Dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis of all the variables introduced in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. *Source* Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

the identification of four clusters, determined by some main discriminating variables. Table 5.5 lists only those six variables whose means by cluster show a substantial spread, meaning those primarily responsible for the formation of the four clusters.

The first group of universities is based in UK and Norway. In this cluster, the strength of top management’s decision-making power is low in the areas of evaluation aimed at both distributive and control uses, probably due to the fact that in national systems offering high autonomy

**Table 5.5** Characteristics of the hierarchical : descriptors for four groups (selection of discriminating variables in constructing the clusters)

<i>Cluster<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Country of HEIs	NO, UK	FR, PT, NL	DE, IT	CH
AU (institutional autonomy)_total	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
AU_teaching_internal	Low	Very Low	High	High
AU_research_external	Very High	Low	Medium	Very High
DMP at Top-M level (evaluation of individuals)	Low	Very Low	High	High
Influence of accreditation	High	Very High	High	Low
Evaluation producing efficiency and efficacy	High	High	Low	Low

<sup>a</sup>The list of variables presented in the table is less than the full set used in the analysis, concentrating on those that are mainly responsible for the clustering. For a larger display, see Annex I  
*Source* Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

in research, the evaluation is also developed at the individual university level. Evaluation has highly positive influences in producing efficiency and effectiveness; furthermore this is the only cluster to reveal a substantial distinction from the others in the sense of disciplinary concentration. Nevertheless, this might be due to the selection of the seven specific universities in Norway and the UK, since none of this sample is particularly specialized in terms of disciplines. In other words, although it is empirically true, the evidence does not seem sufficient to deduce that this institutional feature of disciplinary concentration plays a more important role than the national systemic features.

The universities in the second cluster (situated in France, Portugal, and the Netherlands) are characterized by very low formal autonomy in the area of internal teaching evaluation and a very low degree of top management decision-making power over individual evaluation. However, the universities in the cluster are very highly concerned with the importance of accreditation, probably due to nationally led evaluation of the curricula, as well as implementation of quality assurance. In these systems, evaluation of research appears to be less predominant in shaping the governance of the institutions.



Universities in the third cluster (German, Italian HEIs) have high institutional autonomy in internal teaching issues and, coherent with this, accreditation has a high importance. In contrast, evaluation is generally seen as creating less positive outcomes. In these two countries, the top management of universities holds a high decision-making power in evaluation of individuals, an effect that can be linked to the low autonomy in regards to external evaluation of research.

The fourth cluster, consisting only of Swiss universities, has a pattern of high autonomy in regards to external evaluation of research and of teaching, but a medium level of institutional autonomy (AU\_total), while the top management hierarchies have high decision-making power on individual evaluation issues. Still these various characteristics for the cluster 4 universities do not seem to lead to any particular influence from accreditation, or even any positive consequences from evaluation.

Interestingly, there are no differences between the clusters either in terms of perception of managerial and collegial cultures, or in terms of distributive and controlling uses of the evaluation; none of the clustering can be explained by substantial differences in the variables that describe the individual universities, such as their age, size or disciplinary concentration.

To sum up, although there is a tightening process on European universities, intended to strengthen them as robust organizations, it is actually the national system that is foremost in driving the degree of effectiveness of the changing governance induced by external evaluation. In other words, the 'Evaluative State' (Neave 1998, 2012) is the most influential actor in triggering or dictating the pace of the change in internal governance due to evaluation, while the features of the individual universities appear to be less important. Thus, the transformation of governance towards the state of a 'complete organization' is detected in rough accordance with the degree and types of formal autonomy that each nation affords to its universities.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter investigates the extent to which external evaluation of universities is likely to transform the governance of the institutions impacting the distribution of the decision-making power. The study adopts a comparative perspective concerning 26 universities in eight European

countries. The analysis uses the results of the TRUE survey on the perceptions that those academics involved in the decision-making levels have about the impact of the evaluations on their universities' activities and governance. It also investigates these perceived effects in relation to several institutional characteristics of the universities covered by the survey, as well as to two key policy features of the national university systems, namely the level of formal autonomy granted and the NPM orientation in regards to universities.

The paper tested three propositions, of which the first is not confirmed by the data. This is the particular proposition that the academics active at the central government and middle management levels will perceive greater negative effects, as external evaluation increasingly impacts on decisions regarding the distribution of vital resources. The data instead confirm the second proposition, which is that when evaluation is used for controlling purposes, it has differing transformative effects on the levels of internal government (central, middle managers), distributing the decision-making power so as to mitigate the concentration in the hands of the central bodies. In other words, the data show that regardless the managerial or collegial orientation in the university, both hierarchical levels can have strong decision-making power over evaluation, a finding that is consistent with the literature on universities as 'non-complete' organizations.

As to the third proposition, research and teaching evaluation exert different influences between universities, contributing to shape their institutional configurations; the strength of the types of evaluation can be explained by the formal autonomy granted to the universities (at national level) over the types of evaluation themselves.

Turning back to the original research questions, the formal institutional autonomy granted to universities under the European country systems, as well as the NPM orientation of the country itself, emerge as characteristics shaping the way in which external evaluation is likely to transform the governance of universities, rather than any features at the institutional level.

Evaluation as a steering instrument is ostensibly geared toward maximizing or securing a minimum level of teaching and research quality. However, improvement of quality is not an activity that lends itself to the exclusive use of top-down steering. Instead, it responds better to some

kind of balance between top-down and middle-level influences, resembling 'soft' forms of power. Although the time and the purposes of external evaluation exercises are set by public authorities outside the higher education institutions, academics can influence the intended uses of evaluation through the roles they play in institutional government. Different evaluation 'regimes' also emerge depending on: (i) the types of evaluation employed (research evaluation, teaching evaluation, other forms of assessment), (ii) the national traditions (i.e. degree of New Public Management implementation in the different countries, and degrees of formal autonomy), and (iii) the ultimate use of the evaluation outcomes (both distributive and controlling uses). In these respects, universities in Europe resemble more a constellation of national configurations having certain levels of similarities than a unitary system, a fact that indicates the importance of research questions aimed at investigating if and how policies at supra-national level are able to transform universities, moving them toward integration.

## NOTES

1. The respondents were asked: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements as regards this university: My university has a strong managerial culture; My university has a strong collegial culture.'
2. In response to the questions concerning the universities' freedom regarding the four evaluation issues, the case of no autonomy is indicated by the answer: 'No: this is required and government prescribes the process'; Low autonomy is indicated by 'No: this is required but university decides on methods that will be evaluated by government'; Some autonomy with limitations corresponds to the answer 'No: this is required but university decides on the methods'; High autonomy corresponds to the answer, 'Yes'.
3. For simplicity of presentation, these crosses are omitted from Table 4.
4. The data from the TRUE survey are insufficient for conclusive comparison to the characteristics of any preceding governance systems of the universities.
5. For instance the mean about the influence of accreditation on governance in university NO1 can result as different from the mean opinion in NL2.

ANNEX: MEANS AT INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL USED FOR THE CLUSTER  
ANALYSIS AND RESPECTIVE MEANS OF THE FOUR CLUSTERS

HEI	INST CONCENTRATION	COUNTRY_NPM	Influence_ev_Research	Influence_Ev_Teaching	Influence_Accreditation	Managerial culture	Collegial culture	Distributive Power	Controlling Power	DMP_ev_ind_held by TopM according to_TopM	Ev_effs_TopM	DMP_ev_ind_held by TopM according to MM	Log_age	Log_size
PT1	0.21	2	2.70	2.35	2.50	3.54	3.29	2.45	2.65	2.18	2.65	3.00	3.47	8.63
PT2	0.19	2	2.60	2.29	2.71	3.44	3.44	2.58	2.48	1.50	2.46	1.67	4.61	10.13
PT3	0.21	2	3.00	2.71	2.86	3.21	3.47	2.86	2.71	1.71	2.86	2.27	3.64	9.32
NL1	0.49	3	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.93	2.50	3.00	1.50	2.67	1.00	3.56	9.47
NL2	0.99	3	2.82	2.73	2.82	3.10	3.70	2.09	2.64	1.43	2.44	1.86	4.01	8.86
NL3	0.27	3	3.00	2.62	2.85	3.74	3.44	2.77	2.92	1.21	2.50	1.50	5.93	10.28
FR1	0.41	1	3.00	2.63	2.71	2.93	3.25	2.75	2.75	2.00	2.38	2.14	3.69	10.34
FR2	*	1	2.78	2.78	2.67	2.64	3.36	2.33	2.50	1.70	2.13	1.82	3.66	9.39
NO1	0.25	2	2.50	2.25	2.25	2.79	3.68	2.50	2.50	1.67	2.75	1.29	5.30	10.22
NO2	0.28	2	2.67	2.22	2.00	2.76	3.62	2.00	2.22	1.29	2.44	1.13	4.17	9.56
NO3	0.16	2	2.57	2.57	2.71	3.30	3.30	2.00	2.14	1.50	2.86	1.00	2.83	8.97
NO4	0.22	2	2.83	2.33	2.33	3.59	3.46	2.20	2.20	1.14	2.50	1.00	4.62	9.91
UK1	0.18	3	3.00	2.65	2.50	3.70	3.71	2.89	2.96	1.53	2.16	1.25	4.91	9.67
UK2	0.18	3	2.77	2.85	2.77	4.00	3.38	2.75	2.67	1.70	2.70	1.50	3.74	10.34
UK3	0.18	3	2.89	3.00	2.70	4.08	3.77	3.00	3.00	1.88	2.50	1.48	4.98	9.78

(continued)

HEI	INST CONCENTRATION	COUNTRY_NPM	Influence_ev_Research	Influence_Ev_Teaching	Influence_Accreditation	Managerial culture	Collegial culture	Distributive Power	Controlling Power	DMP_ev_ind_held by TopM according to_TopM	Evs_effs_TopM	DMP_ev_ind_held by MM	Log_age	Log_size
IT1	0.19	1	2.72	2.16	2.11	3.51	3.55	2.50	2.25	1.74	2.73	1.80	3.50	9.75
IT2	0.21	1	2.94	2.63	2.38	3.30	3.83	2.31	2.31	2.00	2.63	2.14	6.83	11.40
IT3	0.99	1	2.86	2.38	2.35	3.60	3.77	2.71	2.52	2.13	2.45	2.00	4.65	10.08
DE1	0.30	1	3.00	2.63	1.57	4.00	3.39	2.57	2.57	2.20	2.43	2.25	4.96	10.03
DE2	0.22	1	3.00	2.65	2.38	3.22	3.50	2.59	2.64	1.92	2.31	2.00	6.32	9.83
DE3	0.18	1	2.47	2.40	2.40	3.06	3.60	2.43	2.14	2.25	1.79	2.25	3.71	9.77
CH1	0.22	1	2.47	2.02	2.33	3.13	3.51	2.33	2.26	1.81	2.16	1.80	6.31	9.12
CH2	0.36	1	2.81	2.43	1.63	3.49	3.85	2.40	2.26	2.00	2.24	2.44	5.05	9.25
CH3	0.49	1	2.89	2.67	2.38	4.33	3.33	2.44	2.89	2.00	1.75	2.50	4.95	8.47
CH4	0.49	1	2.83	2.50	2.17	3.90	4.00	2.67	2.83	2.50	2.17	2.00	2.71	7.68
CH5	0.33	1	2.73	2.65	2.29	3.32	3.88	2.29	2.35	1.91	2.26	2.00	6.16	9.16
CLUSTER 4	0.38	1.00	2.75	2.45	2.16	3.63	3.71	2.43	2.52	2.04	2.12	2.15	5.04	8.74
CLUSTER 3	0.40	2.13	2.86	2.64	2.76	3.26	3.49	2.54	2.71	1.65	2.51	1.91	4.07	9.55
CLUSTER 2	0.40	2.13	2.86	2.64	2.76	3.26	3.49	2.54	2.71	1.65	2.51	1.91	4.07	9.55
CLUSTER 1	0.21	2.43	2.75	2.55	2.47	3.46	3.56	2.48	2.53	1.53	2.56	1.23	4.36	9.78

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# University Governance—Organisational Centralisation and Engagement in European Universities

*Ivar Bleiklie, Svein Michelsen, Georg Krücken  
and Nicoline Frølich*

**Abstract** Few systematic comparative studies of European university organisations have been done so far. The chapter seeks to shed light on three questions: (1) Through what forms of organisational structures do universities make decisions? (2) To what extent do such forms vary across European universities? (3) How can the observed variation (or lack thereof) be explained? It develops a comparative organisational perspective and applies it in an analysis of decision-making structures in

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26 European universities in eight countries focusing on two dimensions of decision-making in universities—engagement and decentralisation. The chapter investigates how pressures for reform in university governance are mediated by path dependencies created by political-administrative regimes and traditions which open up for and constrain internal governance and engagement processes.

## INTRODUCTION

The literature on higher education governance is large, and the field has produced a lot of insights into changing governance structures all over Europe (Frølich and Caspersen 2015). However, few systematic comparative studies of European university organisations have been done so far. There is a comparative literature that has focused on policy instruments and governance structures in higher education in selected countries (e.g. Kogan et al. 2006; Paradeise et al. 2009), but, although several excellent case studies have been undertaken internationally, few if any systematic comparisons of forms of decision-making in universities have been done until now (Clark 1983; Paradeise and Thoenig 2015).

Furthermore what seems to be lacking is a clear distinction between higher education discourse as it is expressed in policy documents and statements by politicians, administrators, academics and other stakeholders, policy-making, and decision-making within universities. Though our knowledge about the rise of broader new public management ideas and related governance mechanisms across Europe has increased considerably, we lack systematic knowledge on how such transnational European changes materialise at the university level and how university decision-making is related to national political-administrative systems. Even ambitious typologies of university governance lack a clear distinction between the different levels of discourse, policy-making, and decision-making within universities and eschew concrete measurement (e.g. de Boer et al. 2007). Against this backdrop, we suggest a typology of university decision-making that allows for measurement based on quantitative, survey-based data, and we distinguish between different levels of analysis, in particular university decision-making and the national political-administrative environment.

Based on this, the objective of this chapter is to shed light on the following questions:

1. Through what forms of organisational structures do universities make decisions?
2. To what extent do such forms vary across European universities?
3. How can the observed variation (or lack thereof) be explained?

This chapter develops a comparative organisational perspective and applies it in an analysis of decision-making structures in 26 European universities in eight different countries (see Chap. 2). We first develop a theoretical perspective on decision-making in universities. We look briefly into the literature on different models of university governance that have been formulated during the last decades. We question the standard assumption that university governance has moved from a ‘traditional’ or ‘collegial’ governance model to a ‘modern’ or ‘managerial’ model (see Chap. 1) and argue that current universities display a variety of complex and hybrid forms. Second, we look into the literature on political-administrative regimes and administrative traditions. We distinguish between four different regime types: *Public interest*, *Rechtsstaat*, *Social democratic* and *Napoleonic*. This literature suggests that pressures for reform in university governance are mediated by different political-administrative regimes and administrative traditions and path dependencies which open up for and constrain internal governance and engagement processes. Here we question the standard assumption that variation across countries depends on the extent to which the ‘modern’ model has replaced the ‘traditional’ model. To the contrary, we argue that the political-administrative environment of universities is likely to affect the mix and characteristics of actual university governance arrangements (see also Seeber et al. 2015). We develop two dimensions—*engagement* and *decentralisation* in organisational decision-making—along which decision-making in university organisations may be compared and related to concepts of university autonomy.

The main contribution of the chapter is thus to shed new light on university organisations by linking universities’ organisational characteristics to characteristics of political-administrative systems. We do so by drawing on literature on higher education governance, on political-administrative regimes, as well as organisational studies of universities.

## DECISION-MAKING IN UNIVERSITIES

*Two Classical Models*

The last decades assumptions about the forms of decision-making one finds in European universities have been shaped by two distinct ideal typical models, the ‘collegial model’ and the ‘corporate model’ (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007).

According to the *collegial model*—in the literature also referred to as ‘republic of scholars’ (Brubacher 1967) or ‘republic of science’ (Polanyi 1962)—universities are likely to make decisions in a decentralised manner because they are ‘loosely coupled organisations’ (Weick 1976), which are pluralistic and hard to manage in a top-down fashion by their very nature. Historically, universities were built around disciplines, based on specific disciplinary norms and values that still may be loosely connected to each other. Furthermore, universities are multi-task organisations, characterised by poorly understood relationships between objectives and outcomes, partly because the core technologies of teaching and research are unclear and ambiguous. According to this model leaders at all levels are given authority by their academic peers who elect them and hold them accountable to elected assemblies. Accordingly, decisions tend to be made in a bottom-up process where binding decisions are made by the basic organisational units (departments and centres) and aggregated at the division (faculty) and institution level. The implication is that major decisions by academic institutions tend to be the aggregate outcome of the preferences of its basic units. Leaders thus represent the preferences of their organisation members.

During the last decades university reformers have tried to remove these characteristics and turn universities into more efficient organisations by developing the characteristics embodied in the *corporate model*. Thus they may become what Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) call ‘complete organisations’ with capacity for strategic action and top-down management. This has been done by providing institutional leaders with increased authority, strengthening managerial structures and limiting the role of elected assemblies at the level of divisions and basic units. Leaders at each level are appointed by their superiors and have their authority delegated from above.

Recent contributions within general organisation theory as well as the more specific field of comparative studies of university organisations

demonstrate that universities in practice combine characteristics from several models, illustrated by concepts like ‘professional bureaucracies’ (Mintzberg 1979) and ‘garbage can hierarchies’ (Padgett 1980) and empirically corroborated by comparative studies of universities in Europe (Paradeise et al. 2009). It is therefore likely that concrete universities are hybrid organisations combining elements from different organisational forms [e.g. classic bureaucracies, collegial organisations and corporate enterprises (Bleiklie 1998; Hatch and Cunliffe 2006)].

### *Political-Administrative Tradition and Organisational Decision-Making*

Characteristics of political-administrative regimes and administrative traditions, and their impact on administrative reform trajectories have come into increasing prominence in the public administration field (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). Basically it is argued that political-administrative systems have the potential to shape administrative reform trajectories (Knill 1998; Christensen and Læg Reid 2003; Verhoest et al. 2010; Painter and Peters 2010). As such they do not only constrain or enable political choice, but also that of administrators and leaders and their actions. The normative pressures that come from the New Public Management (NPM) literature on appropriate ways of organising is acknowledged in most analyses of public management in general and in higher education reforms throughout Europe (Christensen and Læg Reid 2011; Paradeise et al. 2009; Bleiklie et al. 2015). But such doctrines are modified when they meet state-specific environments, actor constellations, polities, administrative structures and legal traditions, leading to different responses in the form of reform programmes, which in turn produces different implementation habitats for (university) leaders as well as constraints and opportunities.

The first generation of such comparative studies of administrative reform made distinctions between the forerunners and the policy laggards, closing in on significant differences between Anglo-Saxon countries and Scandinavian and continental European countries. Two different trajectories of administrative reform were identified, that of the Anglo-Saxon ‘marketisers’ and the continental European ‘modernisers’. The modernisation trajectory reaffirmed the position of the state as public service provider, working under administrative law, a turn towards the integration of external stakeholders as well as a new quality culture in public service, while the marketisation trajectory

affirmed the use of market instruments. These reform trajectories were related to two different administrative traditions embodied in different political-administrative regimes which were identified; each with their own set of values and assumptions—that of the ‘*Rechtsstaat*’ and the ‘*Public interest*’. A more fine-grained picture has been explored through the literature of administrative traditions (Peters 2008; Painter and Peters 2010: 20). Painter and Peters (2010) group administrative traditions into four families: Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian. Here the *Rechtsstaat* category has been divided into three different traditions: Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian; each with a different combination of features.

The notion of *Scandinavian traditions* combines the German orientation towards the law with a strong universal welfare orientation (Painter and Peters 2010). In the Pollitt and Bouckaert scheme the Scandinavian countries have been presented as a mixture of the *Rechtsstaat* and Public Interest models, gravitating in the direction of the latter (Verhoest et al. 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). They are unitary states, centralised but also decentralised (Baldersheim and Rose 2010). In addition, state-society relations are characterised by corporatism as well as the significance of extensive participatory networks and a strong welfare orientation with extensive commitments to equity and equality (Painter and Peters 2010; Peters 2001). A separate *Napoleonic* tradition was also suggested (Ongaro 2010; Ongaro and Valotti 2008). Napoleonic traditions share the *Rechtsstaat* focus on law as a state instrument for intervening in society rather than serving as a means of conflict resolution. Administration is closely related to laws, and the complex relations between constitutional law, statutes, regulations, administrative notes and circulars define the scope and content of administration. Interests are not usually incorporated into public administration and there is considerable selectivity about participation. Still, the situation is complex, as clientelist relationships are well rooted, but only selected interests have secured direct access to public decision-making (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). Newer studies of university autonomy in Europe display considerable variation across national states (Estermann et al. 2010). We assume that different structural characteristics constitute sets of conditions that affect discretion in university decision-making in the form of formal organisational autonomy as well as de facto autonomy or perceived autonomy. Although we expect political-administrative regime characteristics to affect decision-making in universities, what we know so far about

the way in which they are likely to affect policies and reform content in specific policy sectors, is by no means clear and unequivocal (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013).

### *Dimensions of Decision-Making*

The implication of these observations is that it remains an open question how preferences are aggregated and decisions are made in contemporary European universities. We know that universities are affected by modernisation pressure from national governments to varying extent (Paradeise et al. 2009; Seeber et al. 2015) and that universities and their academics may be able to resist or avoid these pressures to varying degrees (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013; Hüther and Krücken 2013). In addition, policies ostensibly promoting the corporate model and justified in terms of modernisation ambitions make use of different instruments that vary in terms of efficiency and consistency with the policy objectives they ostensibly promote (Kogan et al. 2006; Musselin 2007; Whitley and Gläser 2007).

The difference between the collegiate and corporate models of decision-making and the distribution of decision-making authority within universities implied by them has mainly been analysed along the following dimensions.

Firstly the difference may turn on the relationship among *actor groups*. The focus of analyses according to an actor perspective tends to be on academics as opposed to organisational leaders, administrators and other stakeholders (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007; Neave 2002). The relationship among actor groups and the preferences and values they represent have been at the core of the development of various models of university governance (Bleiklie 1998; Bleiklie et al. 2013; Olsen 2005). They may be based on differentiated set of groups such as bureaucrats, professors, other teaching faculty, technical and administrative staff and students in addition to top leadership. Thus Bleiklie et al. (2013) distinguish between models of the university as an academic community, a representative democracy, a public agency or an enterprise of stakeholders depending on whether decision-making should be left in the hands of respectively senior scholars, all university employees and students, civil servants or institutional top leadership. There is a fundamental distinction between the two first and the two last models mentioned here. While the models of the university as an academic community and

as a representative democracy both represent decision models in which internal groups, preferences and values have the upper hand, the models of the university as a public agency and as an enterprise of stakeholders represent models where external groups, their preferences and values loom larger.

Secondly the difference between the models may be defined as a question of structural characteristics, measured by the degree of *centralisation versus decentralisation* of decision-making within the organisation. The difference between models in organisation theory of organisations as rational systems (Scott 1981), as political coalitions (Cyert and March 1963) and as loosely coupled systems (Weick 1976) or organised anarchies (Cohen et al. 1972) may serve as examples and may in turn be illustrated more specifically by the assumptions the various models are likely to make about decision-making in universities. While the rational model would lead to the assumption that decisions are left with the top leadership, the coalition model is likely to emphasise how organisational decisions emerge based on compromises resulting from negotiations between subgroups such as academics, administrators and students or different faculties and disciplinary groups. Finally the loosely coupled model assumes an even stronger decentralisation and less coordination, making decisions from a formal point of view less predictable and more difficult to control from a leadership perspective as decision-making power would rest with departments, research centres or groups or individuals within them. More recent contributions are, in turn, more inclined to point to the complex mix of models and hybrid forms that emerge (Mintzberg 1979; Padgett 1980) and how variations among forms are conditioned by different institutional (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013) and national settings (Paradeise et al. 2009; Seeber et al. 2015).

### *European University Governance*

Based on our discussion of decision-making models in universities we will focus our comparison of internal decision-making in European universities on two dimensions: degree of organisational *engagement* and degree of organisational *decentralisation*.

*Engagement* turns on the total importance of decision-making activity at all organisational levels. We consider organisational engagement as a multidimensional concept, comprising different *areas of decision-making*



such as financial and human resource matters as well as the management of other production factors, policy decisions comprising the quantity and quality of the services which are being delivered as well as the delimitation of the target group, and finally, governance decisions regarding internal structures and processes. We could also make a distinction on the basis of which *actors who are engaged*; between participative engagement, involving elected bodies and their representatives, and managerial engagement, involving mainly managers.

In engaged organisations all or some levels are perceived as important for organisational decision-making across the whole range of decision-making areas, while in a disengaged organisation no level is of importance. In the latter case we assume that important decisions are made outside the universities and in turn penetrate the organisation depending on its relations with external actors such as government authorities or external stakeholders. In practice we assume that the level of engagement will be systematically related to formal national governance arrangements regulating university autonomy and the character of political-administrative regimes within which the universities are embedded.

*Decentralisation* turns on the extent to which power is spread across organisational levels or concentrated at the central (institutional) level. In centralised organisations decision-making activity is concentrated at the institutional level, while it is decentralised if it is located at the faculty and/or basic shop-floor levels. Furthermore engagement at each level may in addition vary according to decision making area.

Combining the two dimensions renders in principle four ideal patterns of decision-making: centralised—engaged, centralised—disengaged, decentralised—engaged and decentralised—disengaged. Engagement in actual decision-making structures may be associated with any of the four patterns mentioned. We will however discuss them as continuous dimensions rather than as tools for developing ideal typical decision-making patterns.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, we assume that engagement would make adoption of reforms easier, based on the notion that engagement makes it easier to accept and even embrace reforms introduced by the government at the national level, while decentralisation opens up both for internal variation and variation across institutions.

## DATA, METHODS AND MEASUREMENT

As mentioned above *Organisational engagement* measures the overall importance of decision-making activity at three organisational levels. The TRUE project have constructed a total of 13 different indicators covering a variety of different decision-making tasks, see Table 6.1.

These indicators cover the types of engagement in decision-making suggested in the public administration literature on autonomy and control (Verhoest et al. 2010). Both human resources as well as financial matters are covered. We also ask who defines policies for the management of academic staff, as well as setting governance structures and monitoring of performance.

In order to measure decentralisation and engagement we use the above-mentioned set of indicators where respondents answered questions about the importance of decision-making bodies or positions at three levels in their universities (central level, faculty level and shop-floor level). We measured organisational *engagement* by adding the respondents saying that the various levels have high decision-making power on the 13 indicators at the three levels (central, faculty and shop-floor). In principle, engagement can vary between respondents reporting that all levels have high decision-making power on all thirteen indicators (i.e. 39), and that no level have high decision-making power on any indicator (i.e. 0). In order to calculate actual engagement we aggregated the actual numbers to the university level, calculating the mean for each university.

**Table 6.1** Tasks in actual decision-making

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Selecting leadership
Selecting the heads of units
Establishing the new profile of a new position
Selecting a candidate for a new chair in a unit
Setting employment conditions for a new chair
Setting the rules and procedures for evaluations of units
Setting goals that units must achieve
Defining the budget of units
Establishing new teaching programmes
Setting number of study places for each curriculum
Evaluating academic individual performance
Establishing research programmes and major research themes for research units
Defining policies for the management of academic staff

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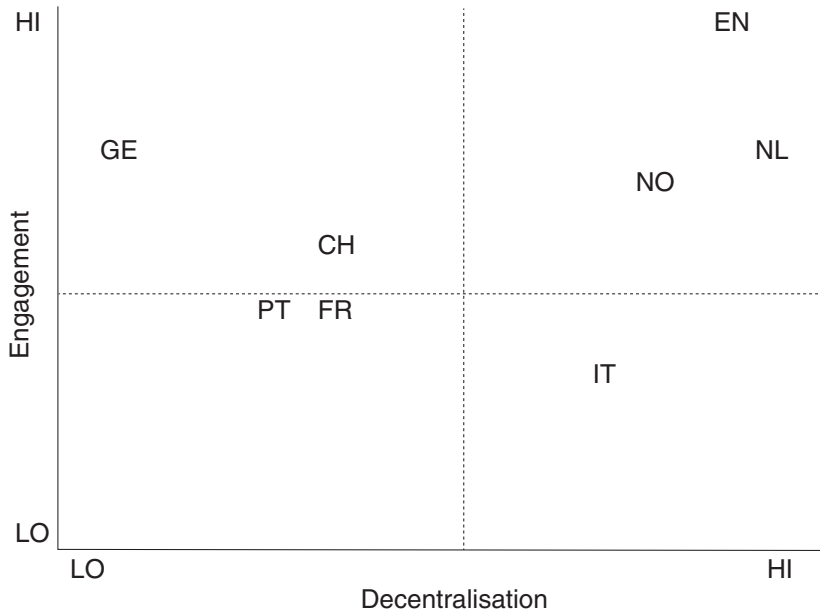
In order to measure organisational *decentralisation* [i.e. the extent to which power is concentrated at the central (institution) level], we consequently used the responses to the same indicators as above, by subtracting the mean combined scores on indicators of decision-making power at the faculty and shop-floor levels from the mean scores on the indicators of central level power at each university. In centralised organisations decision-making activity is concentrated at the institutional level, while it is decentralised if it is concentrated at the faculty and/or basic shop-floor levels. Furthermore, engagement at each level may in addition vary according to type of engagement.

Then we calculated median scores for national groups of universities. Although the spread among the universities in each country is considerable in some cases, they tend to cluster tightly enough to make national comparisons meaningful. This latter observation is also corroborated by another analysis of the TRUE survey data suggesting that nationality is the variable that offers the strongest explanation of variation in organisational characteristics and governance structures across the 26 universities in our sample (cf. Seeber et al. 2015).

#### POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE REGIMES, FORMAL AUTONOMY AND ENGAGEMENT

The main results are illustrated in Fig. 6.1. They indicate first that with regard to human resources and financial matters the Southern European universities (Portuguese, French and Italian) engage organisational decision-makers less than the universities in the northern part of Europe. Portuguese and French universities, together with Swiss and particularly German universities appear to be more centralised than English, Dutch, Norwegian and Italian universities.

These findings firstly suggest that organisational power and steering is not a zero sum game according to our survey data. While universities in some countries (England) on average score high on decision-making power at all organisational levels, those in other countries score relatively low at all levels (Italy and to lesser degree Portugal and France). Universities in some countries are relatively centralised, combining high scores on central level power with low scores at faculty and basic unit levels (Portugal and Germany). Other countries have decentralised universities combining relatively high scores at basic unit (Norway) or faculty



**Fig. 6.1** Decentralisation and engagement in decision processes—26 universities in eight European countries. *CH* Switzerland, *EN* England, *FR* France, *GE* Germany, *IT* Italy, *NL* Netherlands, *NO* Norway, *PT* Portugal

levels (UK, the Netherlands) with medium to high scores on central decision-making power.

Until now we have just discussed the question of the involvement of actors in decision-making at different levels of the university organisation without emphasising on what kind of actors we are dealing with. There are potentially important differences among universities as to what groups they involve, such as external stakeholders (through participation on institutional boards), administrators and/or academics. Some of these differences are shown in Table 6.2 regarding internal allocation processes. The table indicates that rectors and central administrators are perceived to be highly involved in all countries. The involvement of institutional boards varies considerably with German and English universities in the low involvement category, whereas Italian boards are perceived as quite involved. There is more variation in (perceived)

**Table 6.2** Ratio of respondents saying actor is very or extremely involved in the internal allocation process

	<i>University board</i>	<i>Rector, president, VC</i>	<i>Central administrator</i>	<i>Specific budgeting internal committee</i>	<i>Middle management (deans)</i>	<i>Faculty governing bodies (faculty council)</i>	<i>Influential individual academics</i>
England	19	74	78	59	70	15	7
France	29	87	55	38	22	11	38
Germany	10	86	80	17	13	3	0
Italy	69	89	52	39	23	24	6
Netherlands	33	91	48	5	67	10	10
Norway	50	91	76	10	36	35	4
Portugal	44	93	56	25	33	11	7
Switzerland	32	91	68	28	49	9	1

involvement when we look at the lower levels. Furthermore, there are differences regarding the division of labour among management and elected leaders and bodies. Middle management is more involved in English and Dutch universities than others. Norwegian universities stand out by involving the governing bodies at the faculty level relatively more than other countries. Finally French universities involve influential individuals more than others.

### *Managerialism and Autonomy*

In the narrative on university autonomy, promoted by the New Public Management discourse, universities have become a focus of attention, not just as a specific species of organisations. They are also presented as ‘complete organisations’, i.e. organisations with central control and capacity for strategic decision-making (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). The implication is that they are intended to act as entities with a certain amount of autonomy (Enders et al. 2013; de Boer 2012). In newer contributions, autonomy has been represented as a multidimensional concept (Verhoest et al. 2010).

The dimensions investigated in the multidimensional autonomy concept bear out considerable similarities to our operationalisation of engagement. Two main types of autonomy are considered (de Boer 2012; Enders et al. 2013). The first type is about *decision-making*

*competencies*, or the extent to which a university itself can decide in matters it considers important (Verhoest et al. 2010). This definition may furthermore be broken down into three different dimensions, two types of *managerial autonomy*, i.e. discretion as regards *financial management* and *human resource management (HRM)* and finally, *policy autonomy* which refers to the extent to which a university can make decisions about the quantity and quality of the services which are being delivered as well as its target groups) (Verhoest et al. 2010).

The second type of autonomy refers to *absence of constraints* on the organisation's actual use of its decision-making powers: *governance (structural) autonomy* refers to the extent to which universities are shielded from government influence through hierarchy and accountability lines; *financial autonomy* deals with the university's dependency on governmental funding, as well as alternative sources of income; *legal autonomy* deals with the legal status of the university and its implications; *interventionist autonomy* refers to the extent which the university is free from reporting obligations.

Based on this very useful template de Boer (2012) has provided the following results for the TRUE countries on the various aspects of formal autonomy (Tables 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5). The reader should also be aware of the fact that the selection of German and Swiss universities is not identical with the main TRUE sample (cf. Chap. 2 in this book).

**Table 6.3** Formal autonomy dimensions, indicators, and scores

	<i>HRM</i>	<i>FM</i>	<i>POL</i>	<i>GOV</i>	<i>FIN<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>LEG</i>	<i>INT</i>
England	1.00	0.83	0.88	0.78	0.62	0.50	0.67
France	0.33	0.50	0.25	0.42	0.13	0.25	0.33
Italy	0.38	0.78	0.25	0.89	0.35	0.75	0.75
Netherlands	0.67	0.83	0.50	0.28	0.34	0.50	0.42
Norway	0.83	0.67	1.00	0.56	0.25	0.50	0.58
Portugal	0.29	0.89	0.50	0.78	0.40	0.75	0.42
Switzerland <sup>b</sup>	0.25	0.67	0.46	0	0.24	0	0.63
Germany <sup>c</sup>	0.63	0.25	0.75	0.28	–	0.25	0.56

<sup>a</sup>Financial autonomy = (1 – average proportion of operational public grant of total university revenues)/100

<sup>b</sup>Switzerland concerns the Federal Institutes of Technology

<sup>c</sup>Germany concerns the state of Bavaria; *HRM* Human resources managerial autonomy; *FM* Financial managerial autonomy; *POL* Political autonomy; *GOV* Governance autonomy; *FIN* Financial independence; *LEG* Legal autonomy; *INT* Interventional autonomy

**Table 6.4** Formal autonomy aggregate score

<i>Country/Formal autonomy</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Average</i>
England	5.28	0.75
France	2.21	0.32
Italy	4.15	0.59
Netherlands	3.54	0.51
Norway	4.39	0.63
Portugal	4.03	0.58
Switzerland	2.25	0.32
Germany	2.72	0.39
Average	3.96	0.50

### *Autonomy, Engagement and National Variation*

There is no space here to comment systematically on each of the autonomy dimensions mentioned above (Tables 6.3 and 6.5). In order to simplify and align the information to the analysis of internal organisational engagement, we have constructed two condensed variables on formal organisational autonomy based on total and average score (Table 6.4).

In general results demonstrate systematic variation among the countries along the various dimensions. In some countries older and stricter financial regulations and compliance requirements apply, while others have adopted more ‘modern’ regulations that provide more space for discretionary decisions by the university institutions. This also applies to HRM, governance and matters that belong to the realm of policy autonomy. Clearly, English universities have the highest aggregate score (average score: 0.75.), while French, Swiss and German universities are located at the lower end (average scores from 0.32 to 0.39). The middle group consists of Norwegian, Italian, Portuguese and Dutch institutions (average scores from 0.51 to 0.63).

It seems, based on our data, that English universities enjoy considerable formal autonomy in decision-making on all dimensions. The analysis indicates that they exercise a high level of discretion over staff management as well as over general salary levels of their academic employees. These universities can decide on procedures for performance assessments or appraisals as well as on procedures for promotions. English universities also happen to have high levels of financial managerial autonomy. They are allowed to select their own Bachelor’s and Master’s students, and they can start new Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes. They can

**Table 6.5** Autonomy dimensions

<i>University's decision-making competencies</i>		
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Human resources managerial autonomy	• Appointing full-time senior academic staff	Three-point scale from 0 ('universities require permission from the ministry') to 2 ('universities are free to appoint')
	• Determination of academic staff salaries	Four-point scale from 0 ('salaries are set by the ministry') to 3 ('up to the university')
	• Determination of procedures for individual academic staff assessment	Four-point scale from 0 ('national rules and procedures determined by the state') to 3 ('up to the individual university')
	• Determination of procedures for promoting academic staff	Four-point scale from 0 ('national rules and procedures determined by the state') to 3 ('up to the individual university')
Financial managerial autonomy	• Method to spend the public operational grant	Three-point scale from 0 ('public grant allocated under expenditure headings that have to be strictly complied with') to 2 ('university can use public grant flexibly')
	• Charging tuition fees for Bachelor's and Master's students	Two four-point scales rescaled to one four-point scale from 0 ('not allowed to charge fees or must charge fee set by the government') to 3 ('up to the university')
	• Setting tariffs for contract activities	Three-point scale from 0 ('not possible to sell services') to 2 ('up to the university')
	• Borrowing funds on the capital market	Three-point scale from 0 ('not possible') to 2 ('possible without restrictions')
	• Building up reserves and/or carry over unspent resources from one year to the next	Three-point scale from 0 ('not possible') to 2 ('possible without restrictions')
	• Number of categories for generating private funds <sup>2</sup>	Three-point scale from 0 ('no or hardly a category') to 2 ('many categories')

(continued)



**Table 6.5** (continued)

<i>University's decision-making competencies</i>		
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Policy autonomy	• Selection of Bachelor's and Master students	Two two-point scales rescaled into one three-point scale from 0 ('universities cannot select students') to 2 ('selection criteria are set by the university')
	• Deciding on the number of study places for Bachelor's and Master's programmes	Two four-point scales rescaled into one four-point scale from 0 ('the number of study places is set by the ministry') to 3 ('the university decides on the number of study places')
	• Deciding on research programmes and major research themes	Four-point scale from 0 ('programmes largely determined by government or national agencies') to 3 ('internal university matter')
	• Starting new Bachelor's and Master's programmes	Two two-point scales rescaled to one three-point scale from 0 ('subject to accreditation or ministerial approval') to 2 ('up to the university')
Governance autonomy	• Appointing the members of governing board	Three-point scale from 0 ('ministry appoints all members') to 2 ('university appoints all members')
	• Composition of the governing board	0 = external members, 1 = internal and external members, 2 = internal members only
	• Selection of the executive head	Three-point scale from 0 ('ministry plays part in selecting the executive head') to 2 ('up to the university')
	• Determination of internal governance structure	Four-point scale from 0 ('prescribed by detail regulations by ministry') to 3 ('up to the university')
<i>External dependence</i>		
Financial autonomy	• Average proportion of university revenue from public operational grant	(1 – average proportion public grant)/100

(continued)

**Table 6.5** (continued)

<i>University's decision-making competencies</i>		
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Scale</i>
Legal autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deciding on legal status</li> </ul>	Three-point scale from 0 ('legal status prescribed by law') to 2 ('university formally free to decide')
Interventional autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership of buildings and property</li> </ul>	Three-point scale from 0 ('no') to 2 ('yes')
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obligation to set up and take part in quality evaluations for teaching</li> </ul>	Two four-point scales rescaled into one four-point scale from 0 ('evaluations are required and specified by the ministry') to 3 ('up the university to decide upon')
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obligation to set up and take part in quality evaluations for research</li> </ul>	Two four-point scales rescaled into one four-point scale from 0 ('evaluations are required and specified by the ministry') to 3 ('up the university to decide upon')
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of reporting requirements<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	Six two-point scales rescaled into one three-point scale from 0 ('no or hardly any requirements') to 2 ('many requirements')
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obligation to establish multi-year contract</li> </ul>	Three-point scale from 0 (no contract obligations) to 2 (obligation to establish contract with fixed/pre-scribed format)

appoint their Vice-Chancellor and they can appoint members of the governing body. The constraints on English universities regarding the actual use of their decision-making privileges are relatively limited.

Compared to English universities, French, German and Swiss universities are in a different position as far as formal autonomy is concerned. Their capacity to make their own decisions is limited, clearly circumscribing their financial and governance autonomy. The policy autonomy of these universities varies somewhat.

As far as Italy, Norway, Portugal and the Netherlands are concerned, the picture is more mixed. In these countries universities obtain high as well as low values on the various formal autonomy dimensions. In general formal autonomy in terms of human resources and policies is low, as

salaries and human resource management agreements for the most part are made at the national level.

Italian universities cannot themselves decide the number of academic positions. They are neither entitled to select their own Bachelor's and Master's students, nor entitled to control the number of study places. Governance autonomy is somewhat higher. Dutch universities on the other hand enjoy considerable financial managerial autonomy, but governance autonomy is low or moderate. Dutch universities have to accept all qualified Bachelor's students (with exceptions for some disciplines). Norwegian universities seem to have a substantial degree of autonomy on several dimensions. Autonomy in human resource management is high. They can decide on the number and type of academic posts they want to have and can select the persons of their choice. Policy autonomy is high, as the universities can select their Bachelor's and Master's students as well [in practice delegated to The Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS)] and formally decide themselves on the number of study places. But financial and governance autonomy is much more moderate (de Boer 2012). Last but not least, Portuguese universities demonstrate high levels of formal autonomy in financial management and governance. Policy autonomy and managerial autonomy on human resources is considerably lower, and they cannot select their own Bachelor's students.

Comparing results on formal organisational autonomy, engagement and decentralisation profiles reveal an interesting pattern. English universities seem to enjoy high scores on formal autonomy as well as high levels of organisational engagement and decentralisation. From the upper middle strata, Norway and the Netherlands combine medium to higher organisational autonomy with relatively high levels of engagement and decentralisation. While Dutch and English universities primarily seem to engage middle management, Norwegian institutions also engage elected bodies at the faculty level more than others. Since faculty councils typically consist of elected representatives of major employee groups and students this may possibly reflect a traditionally strong corporatist industrial democracy tradition.

According to our data, German and Swiss universities combine low levels of formal autonomy with medium levels of organisational engagement and centralisation—but this result has to be treated with particular caution as these countries have decentralised federal higher education

systems, where levels of autonomy may vary from state to state. We know from another case study of leadership control comparing a Dutch, a Norwegian and a Swiss university that the differences we have found to some extent corroborate the patterns observed in this study: the strength of middle management in the Dutch case, the corporatist participative arrangements at faculty and department level in the Norwegian case and the centralised pattern in the Swiss case. In addition it is interesting to note that the centralised form of decision-making in the latter case was based on informal internal relations among academics. Thus an academically elected rector managed the university through informal relations and contacts with important senior academics within the university (Bleiklie et al. 2015).

Portuguese and French universities combine relatively low levels of engagement and high degree of centralisation, but vary significantly as far as levels of formal autonomy are concerned, while Portuguese and Italian universities seem to enjoy considerably more formal autonomy than their French counterparts. Italian universities are the only universities in this sample which combine low levels of organisational engagement with high levels of decentralisation.

### *Political-Administrative Regimes, Engagement and Decentralisation*

In addition to the differences among the nations it is clear that the four political-administrative regime types—the Social democratic/Scandinavian (Norway), Public interest (England), Rechtsstaat (Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands) and Napoleonic regimes (France, Italy and Portugal)—seem to be clustered together to some extent as far as patterns of organisational engagement is concerned. Measured by the traditional ‘trailblazer’ versus ‘laggard’ dichotomy the public interest regime (England) displays high scores and assume the role of the trailblazer, while the others more look like laggards. However, the variation in the ‘laggard’ category is considerable. Here we can distinguish between the ‘Rechtsstaat’, the northern European social democratic regime and the Napoleonic regimes. All the three ‘Rechtsstaat’ regimes (Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) were located in the medium end as far as engagement is concerned. Two of them (Germany and Switzerland) combined medium levels of engagement with centralisation, while the Netherlands and Norway combined relatively high engagement with decentralisation.

With relatively centralised and medium engaged institutions Germany and Switzerland are in a peculiar situation where the political-administrative structural characteristics (federal states) probably explain quite a lot. The federal nature of the two states and the veto points that come with it are furthermore related to the character of reform, which tend to be procedural opening easily up for symbolic adoption. Also Portugal, France and Italy are located at the medium/lower end of the engagement scale, Italy lower and more decentralised than the other two.

One important feature often associated with the Napoleonic traditions is the problem of ‘implementation gaps’. Such gaps are often related to the distance between what is prescribed by reform legislation and the actual existence of management tools on the one hand and the distance between the mere presence and the actual utilisation of management tools on the other. The assumption of the existence of such a gap in the implementation of reforms in Italy is widely shared. Although such gaps or ‘black holes’ exist in all countries, they appear to be larger in Napoleonic countries than those experienced in northern Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

## CONCLUSION

Our analyses have revealed that universities display complex and varied forms of governance. Institutional autonomy differs along several dimensions in ways that have implications for the extent to which and how internal actors are engaged in organisational decision-making. Engagement varies across different types of decisions as well as across organisational levels, displaying different degrees of engagement as well as centralised and decentralised patterns of governance. We relate such differences to characteristics of national political-administrative systems and find that they vary in ways which are systematically associated with them. National systems in turn are to some extent clustered together in political-administrative regimes types. However, we would be the first to open up for a critical discussion of the method and the results. Although compelling, our analysis is only a first attempt to interrelate quantitatively huge phenomena like how national regimes of higher education governance interrelate with internal decision-making powers of universities. The number of universities in each country is limited and the results need to be tested on a larger scale.

This chapter adds to current knowledge about universities in three important ways.

First, governance arrangements are multidimensional and complex phenomena. We demonstrate that actual forms of university governance arrangements vary in ways that makes it difficult to distinguish between collegial and managerial universities in clear and unequivocal ways. We tried to advance knowledge on different forms of governance arrangements by focusing on modes of university decision-making, hence relating these modes to the political-administrative environment in which universities are embedded, and allowing for quantitative measurement.

Second, the question of power, considered as decision-making authority, is not a zero sum game. An increasingly complex structure of old and new, formal and informal, central and decentral procedures is shaping current university decision-making. Governance arrangements in universities may vary from types in which few if any internal actors appear to enjoy a high degree of authority, to arrangements in which all major actor groups are involved and seem (at least in principle) to be able to affect important decisions.

Third, intended institutional change creates a lot of unintended consequences with regard to university decision-making. The formalisation of decision-making processes has hardly led to clear-cut authority structures. Instead, a variety of informal structures have emerged in order to counterbalance new structures that do not match easily with the historically entrenched norm of professorial collegial decision-making privileges. Likewise, decentralisation efforts are accompanied by increased accountability that could lead to bureaucratisation and the setting up of control structures at the central level.

In order to draw more robust conclusions there are several ways in which one may proceed. One is to develop more fine-grained analyses. Such analyses relate to more differentiated accounts on the countries and the university systems we have dealt with and the survey data we have used here. Also further material from the TRUE project like interview data and available documents on policy processes should be taken into account. In addition, one needs to complement survey data on university decision-making by non-reactive research methods (e.g. participant observation) and data (e.g. statistical data gathered for other purposes).

Another interesting perspective relates to the effects of university decision-making as analysed by us. The focus on different dimensions of university autonomy raises important questions. What are, for example,

the effects on efficiency and democracy of decision-making? How are the academic profession and their core activities—teaching and research—affected by organisational autonomy in the fields of management, finance and human resources? What effects can be observed at the interface of the academic profession, university leadership and university administration?

A further important lacuna in our analysis is the absence of data on higher education policy sectors. Traditionally the policy sector of higher education has been perceived as relatively isolated from other policy sectors with peculiar characteristics that reflect specific higher education traditions rather than national administrative traditions. Although our data indicate that general political system characteristics affect higher education policies and institutions, it is still an empirical question of the extent to which and how these characteristics are reflected within the higher education policy sectors in our sample. However, our analysis of the policy sectors in England, Italy and Norway in Chap. 10, represents a first step to filling in this gap.

Finally, and based on our analysis, we also need a perspective that allows for comparative organisational analysis of cross-national subgroups of universities, whose specificities transcend national boundaries as, for example, in some European technical universities. The hitherto state-centred perspective which we expanded by clustering national systems into regime types needs to be complemented by a perspective, in which also global, European, and regional influences on universities are specified. Our focus on university decision-making and the attempt at measurement also shed new light on how such influences may be elaborated.

## NOTES

1. We expect these dimensions to be useful for understanding both different organisational models and combinations of models that are used to conceptualise characteristics of university organisations. We may for instance ask how actual combinations of values on the two dimensions can help us identify the extent to which universities are organised like corporate enterprises, collegial organisations, public bureaucracies or representative democracies (Bleiklie 1998). Furthermore we may ask whether values on the two dimensions vary across different types of university organisations (e.g. specialised and comprehensive universities). Finally we may ask whether there are systematic variations across universities in different national settings. However, these are options we will pursue at a later stage.

2. The distinguished categories for generating private funding are income from contract research, from contract teaching, from patenting and licensing, from sales of assets, from commercial activities such as hotels, catering and sport facilities, from donations, gifts and endowments, from holding and selling shares, from interest and financial investments, and from establishing private companies.
3. The distinguished reporting requirements are producing a strategic plan, an annual report, audited financial statements, information demonstrating compliance with other national policies, outcomes of evaluations for teaching and research, and data provision for national databases.

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## Understanding Strategy Practices in Universities

*Nicoline Frølich, Bjørn Stensaker and Jeroen Huisman*

**Abstract** The key questions in this chapter are: What strategy practices are actually in place at contemporary European universities? Is strategic action largely top-down, with much emphasis on design and execution of strategic plans? Or is strategic action much more characterized by an organic (bottom up) flow of events in which emergent strategies are key? In this chapter, we explore strategy practices by analysing six case studies compiled by the TRUE team. The discussion of the cases is structured in light of two perspectives on organisational strategy as respectively, planning and design, and as sense making. The major source of data consists

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of interviews with key persons from six different higher education institutions in six different countries.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the central questions of this book is to what extent university reformers have succeeded in creating more tightly coupled university organisations with stronger managerial structures that strengthen organisational hierarchies and enable university leaders to act strategically. Strategic action is assumed a necessity, for contemporary higher education institutions compete with one another for students, research funds and prestige. At the same time, strategic action is warranted for it is a tool for forging external relations—how the institutions relate to the state/regional governance, to funders, to evaluators, and to representatives of external stakeholders (see Chap. 1).

In the European higher education context, analysing universities strategies becomes more and more important. Over the last few decades national policies have aimed at empowering universities as more autonomous actors, while at the same the policies include changes in the way the universities are submitted to control (Amaral et al. 2002, 2003, 2009; Huisman 2009; Paradeise et al. 2009). In this shifting context, to look more closely at how universities handle their formal autonomy will give insights into how the policies affect the inner workings of the higher education institutions, in particular their strategic actions. The above may suggest that a top-down strategic planning process would be the answer to the current challenges. Indeed, some research suggests that higher education institutions follow such an approach in developing a strategic plan. Lillis and Lynch (forthcoming) analysed strategy developments at Institutes of Technology in Ireland and conclude that the top-down design model was predominant, emphasising a relatively stable and predictive environment accompanied by the institutions' focus on longer-term vision, objectives and targets. Likewise, Elwood and Rainnie (2012)—in their analysis of four Institutes of Technology—stress the emphasis on a central planning model. In this model, according to the academic respondents, institutional leaders rolled out the strategy, in which academics were hardly involved. It must be stressed, however, that the development of strategy documents in the Irish context is largely driven by governmental imperatives to plan, i.e. the Irish government requires their institutions to develop strategic planning documents (see

also Maassen and Potman 1990, for a comparable analysis of strategic planning in the Netherlands). Irrespective of the driver for the strategy developments, it appears that much of the strategic thinking is infused by a rational logic, in which scenarios, environmental scanning, institutional dashboards and SWOT analyses dominate (see also Giroto and Llinàs-Audet 2013). Also Buckland (2009) stresses the bureaucratic and rational interpretation of strategy in UK higher education, partly due to requirements of the government and the funding councils.

The stress on the top-down approach is understandable. During the last decades, European universities have been subject to massive reforms aiming at enhancing their functioning as “formal” organisations (Whitley 2008). In general, this implies a strengthening of the central decision-making level, not least when it comes to identifying and deciding on the institutional strategy (see also Amaral et al. 2003). That a strategy is developed and decided upon by the central administration fits well with a perspective on strategy as mainly a rationalistic process, where a plan is developed and where implementation is mostly seen as a technical issue such as allocating resources and aligning the organisation to the specific objectives set.

At the same time, the stress on top-down approaches is striking, not least because previous research has highlighted that higher education institutions are far from rational or even averse of rationalistic approaches. This literature stresses traditional organisational particularities of higher education institutions with reference to their institutional robustness as in Selznick’s (1957) old institutionalist perspective, their degree of decoupling as in Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) view, and their goal ambiguity as per Cohen et al. (1972) perspective. These perspectives lead to a much more “messier” comprehension of university strategies due to the inherent characteristics of higher education: Its poorly understood technologies, the bottom-heaviness with considerable discretion of the academic professionals and its multiple objectives with respect to teaching, research and third missions. This leads us to the key question: What strategy practices are actually in place at contemporary European universities? Is strategic action largely top-down, with much emphasis on design and execution of strategic plans? Or is strategic action much more characterized by an organic (bottom-up) flow of events in which emergent strategies are key? In this chapter, we explore strategy practices by analysing six case studies compiled by the TRUE team.<sup>1</sup> We structure the discussion in light of two perspectives on organisational strategy, which will be set out in the next section. We then set out the methodology—with a focus on interviews with key persons from

the higher education institutions—and present the findings. In the last section, we formulate our conclusions.

## CONCEPTUALISING ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the broadest sense, organisational strategies can be defined as an interrelation of organisational environments and organisational characteristics, referring to “a mediating force or a match between the organisation and its environments” (Mintzberg 1987: 11). But there are alternative conceptualisations. Strategy can also refer to “an organisation’s choice of niche and the primary decision rules to cope with that niche” (Mintzberg 1987: 11), but also imply the organisation’s position in the market. Importantly this does not imply that the position is only the result of an intended plan, it might as well be the result that emerges from a series of decisions. Defining strategy as a series of decisions suggests nevertheless decisional to some extent consistency—e.g. showing some kind of “pattern in a stream of actions” (Mintzberg 1987: 8). Last but not least, strategy may refer more broadly to “a perspective shared by the members of the organisation, through their intentions and/or their actions”—strategy as perspective (Mintzberg 1987: 13).

Extending the discussion on the concept of strategy, Mintzberg et al. (2009) present a comprehensive overview of the most important schools of thought (but see also Whittington 2001, for an alternative presentation), distinguishing ten schools. The initial reflections on strategy in higher education in our introduction seem to tie in with the design and planning schools. Although these schools stem from the 1960s, they apparently still figure largely in higher education in the twenty-first century. One explanation is—as set out above—that the demands from government to develop strategic plans, which suggest strategy development to be a rational and somewhat technical exercise. Another explanation is that neoliberalism and the New Public Management discourses have left their traces in the field of higher education, with a much greater emphasis than hitherto on competition, strengths and opportunities, accountability, and measurable objectives and performance indicators. Whatever the drivers, in the classical sense organisational strategy is about how to align the overall goals of the organisation with resources and the structuring of the organisation (Chandler 1962). Strategy is about steering

the organisation—in this case a professional bureaucracy—and to be able to steer an organisation, one must carefully analyse the environment, try to discover opportunities and threats, based on the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. The analysis of past and current performance is part and parcel of the planning exercise, as well as formulating the objectives for the medium term in measurable terms. Key performance indicators may figure as targets. Particularly the longer-term nature of the planning process must be emphasized, with monitoring and evaluation of the developments over time. Also, a logical order is inherent to the planning and design school: first an environmental analysis followed by an internal analysis and subsequently completed with a strategic action plan that is to be implemented in stages. Last but not least, strategies are set in motion by the leadership of the organisation and hence more likely top-down than bottom-up (Hardy 1991).

A rather different conceptualisation of strategy is offered by representatives of the cognitive, learning and configuration schools. From these perspectives on strategy, there is much more scope for multiple interpretations from various internal stakeholders of the environment instead of a stress on objectification. Sense-making and sense-giving processes are key to understand external and internal processes (Kezar and Eckel 2002). Not so much a longer-term view dominates the process, but there is considerable attention to continuous transformation and space for emerging issues affecting the generic strategy. Strategy—or strategising—becomes an organisational activity, in which various actors across the organisation interact through various phases of strategy formulation and implementation, which is in sharp contrast with the rational order of stages in the planning and design school. To quote one of the leading scholars in the strategising school: strategy is “a situated, socially accomplished flow of organisational activity” (Jarzabkowski 2004: 11). Organisations not so much have a strategy, but a strategy is something an organisation does, with strategy development and implementation often being intertwined. This view resonates with Mintzberg's view on strategy as patterns of activity, which implies that patterns can be intended, but also as the unintended pattern of activities. This view emphasises that those implementing the strategy have many possibilities of adding to, editing, and translating the strategy during the implementation process. In this perspective, the divide between strategic planning and strategic implementation is not seen as so important due to the possibilities for



re-interpretations of what a given strategy might mean in specific settings (Jarzabkowski 2004). Taken together, this leads to a focus on strategic activities. In fact, strategising conceptually comes close to organising and may even be difficult to distinguish from organising (see also Whittington and Melin 2003). In light of this alternative view on strategy, recent studies of organisational strategies have addressed how public deliberation is used as an organisational strategy by professional consultants to organisations facing retrenchment, redevelopment and reorganisation (Lee and Romano 2013); how organisational communication and narratives can contribute to understanding the practices of strategy (Fenton and Langley 2011); and how the concept of ritualisation can throw light on the behavioural dynamics and achievement of purpose of strategy workshops (Johnson et al. 2010). Despite the variety of how organisational strategy is studied, these studies share an interest in the constructed and symbolic aspects of organisational strategy. There seems to be scope for arguing that the strategy-as-practice perspective provides new perspectives on the sense-making process embedded in strategy-making (Frølich and Stensaker 2012); and how sense-making, strategy-as-practice and institutional theory can be combined to throw light on strategising in higher education.

The two views on strategy outlined above can be portrayed as a classical dichotomy, in which adherence to one of the views rule out the other. However, it can be argued that the two views are not mutually exclusive, but should be seen as complementary explanations, especially if we include issues concerning goals and power. Scott and Davis (2007: 183–186) have pointed out that organisational goals are “one of the most slippery and treacherous concepts of all” in organisational analysis (Scott and Davis 2007: 183), not least due to the multiple uses of the organisational goals: cognitive, cathectic, symbolic, justificatory and evaluative. These uses can be related to both views of strategies. For example, rational theories of organisations emphasise the cognitive functions of goals as they provide directions for action. Those who emphasize the cathectic aspect of goals argue that goals serve as sources of identification and motivation for organisational members. Moreover, institutional theorists put weight on the symbolic function of goals. In this perspective, goals have important effects on the organisations ability to acquire legitimacy, allies, resources and personnel. Others have challenged the

dominant view that goals precede actions and put weight on the fact that goals also may serve as justifications for actions already taken. Finally, goals serve as basis for evaluating performance. Hence, the different uses of the concept of goals in organisations and organisational analysis provide ample evidence of the built-in tensions and outcomes of discussions of organisational goals and hence organisational strategies.

The loaded meaning of organisational goals (which inevitably are addressed in organisational strategising) point also in the direction of power, power balance, power challenges and power games embedded in strategising as strategising is conducted in pluralistic organisations like higher education institutions. Scott and Davis (2007: 186) argue that Cyert and March's (1963) conceptualisation of the goal-setting process as a negotiation among members of 'the dominant coalition' is the most satisfactory basis for addressing the question of how and by whom organisational goals are set. In this perspective, a number of potential *goal-setters* may come into play: owners, managers, workers, people in boundary roles (connecting with critical resources, mediating demands from regulatory agencies, professional groups with a high degree of social validity) and external actors like regulative agencies and employee associations. Importantly, the internal distribution of power relates to the shifting importance of the external actors.

These insights regarding the multiple meanings of organisational goals, and the shifting composition of the dominant coalition, point to a more nuanced understanding of how strategising might be conducted in the setting of a university organisation. First, the dominant coalition may apply goals in several meanings: cognitive, cathectic, symbolic, justificatory and evaluative. The challenges the organisational members experience during strategising may relate to the fact that different groups of organisational members use the concept of organisational goals or strategy in different meanings. Second, as the importance of specific parts of environments of the university changes, the composition of dominant coalition may change leading to revised organisational goals and strategies. Third, these revised goals and strategies may be conceived not only as different from the previous dominant coalition's perspective, but in addition, the change in the dominant coalition may imply a change in how the concept of goal is perceived and made sense of.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to explore how universities deal with the challenges of strategy development key actors that have been involved in strategy development within the case institutions were interviewed about their experiences and asked for their reflections. Interviews with these actors revolved around the following set of questions, all relating to a key strategic event that lead to an important decision within the organisation:

- What were the reasons for the decision?
- What were the origins of the decision (when and how it started, how did actors perceive the problem) + actors involved at the beginning and reactions?
- Which actors were involved in the different steps (resistance, problems, and negotiations)?
- Which steps were taken to implement the decision?
- What was their personal involvement?
- How did they feel about the decision and how it developed?

Note that the focus on “an important decision” allowed the interviewees to speak more broadly about the processes of decision-making. In other words, the template for the interviews helped us not to fall in the trap of imposing a rationalistic structure upon the interviewees (e.g. when was the last strategic plan developed? Who was involved? How was it structured? Who was responsible for the implementation?).

In the perspective of strategy as design and planning, the function of scanning the environment is undertaken to search for *information*, i.e. trends and/or competitors that is of importance for identifying niches in the market. In the perspective of strategy-as-practice the function of environmental scanning is perceived different, as a search for *meaning*, i.e. arguments that can be used to mobilise action and create a sense of urgency.

We analysed the case studies searching for ways to interpret and assess the strategies as largely rational with much emphasis on design and execution of strategic plans or as largely characterized by an organic flow of events in which emergent strategies are key. Moreover, we looked for how the organisational actors used the concept of organisational goals

and strategies—be it in a cognitive, cathectic, symbolic, justificatory or evaluative way. In the following section, we review the case studies addressing the initial phases of the strategising process as the story is told by the informants. Hence, we structure the presentation of the six case studies according to how goals were used in the process, and how power structures and coalitions were developed and formed during the process.

## ORGANISATIONAL GOALS WITH MULTIPLE MEANINGS

### *The German Case*

The German strategic process was related to the establishment of a central university unit for promoting international, interdisciplinary teaching. The unit works in parallel to the faculties focusing on innovative approaches to teaching and instructional design. It is the home of high profile projects of the university, most notably a new interdisciplinary program (NIP). In the German case the concrete strategic decision came about through strategic work done by university board members.

Formally, the process of establishing the central unit started in the first half of 2011 after the project got strong support from everyone at the university. Strong arguments in favour of the project were the immediate support by the State Ministry of Education, and the necessity to implement such a project prior to the next phase of the Excellence Initiative project at the federal level.

The German case can be interpreted as a case of developing a strategy *avant la lettre*. The story conveyed by the case material shows strong signs of an entrepreneurial institution in which the key actors create a sense of urgency to be acted upon—in the words of the vice-rector: “there was a great opportunity in 2008”. In addition, the case can be interpreted as an example of a cathectic use of organisational goals; the NIP is described as an inspiring possibility, “a great opportunity” and a possibility to set up “innovative study programs”. Yet, the case can also be read as applying goals in the cognitive and rational sense: The underlying rationale is that it was seen as “necessary to implement such a project prior to the next Excellence initiative”, and one main argument was the “immediate support by the Ministry”—which hints at taking signals from the environment as a support for internal action.

### *The French Case*

While the German case seemingly relies on a combination of cathectic and cognitive goals, the French case resembles a case of cognitive use of organisational goals clearly driven by environmental changes. That said, the case is not easy to interpret. In the French case the main external focus was directed at one other competing university in the region, and the relationship with the Ministry, which set up the policy for poles of research and higher education (PRES). The French university is located in a region in which the biggest metropolis is home to different universities. These universities have regrouped themselves into a PRES, and have furthermore decided to merge with each other (except for one that still resists this idea). The case university seeks to be included in the PRES which would allow the university to remain autonomous and fully accredited and the university would not need to merge with the universities of the regional metropolis. The strategic decision regards the establishment of research federations, which organise research units of the university by research topic. The creation of research federations is aimed at preventing the merger and also aimed at keeping the balance between disciplines, so that the university management can show that the whole university and not only science departments have specificity in research.

We read the French case as a case of carefully trying to negotiate the position of the university vis-à-vis other universities. In this case strategy is about what the university wants, and not the least about what it does not want. Yet there is a clear sense of a cognitive use of organisational goals, in the sense that the university “has to do something” to protect itself against environmental changes.

### *The Dutch Case*

This is in contrast to the story of the Dutch case, which is more or less a case of classical planning, about how the university responds to an environmental challenge. The environmental challenge in the Dutch case is different from the French case in that the Dutch case responded to a formal change instigated by the government. According to the Dutch case study the profiling process of the university was initiated by the university management in response to the Dutch Government’s call for more focus and mass in (university) research as specified “Research budget

2004". The argument put forth was that the Dutch research landscape was lacking focus and concentration, and in the white paper expectations in terms of strategic priorities were formulated. It was suggested that special support should be given to the research groups working in these priority areas. The policy was a strong external signal for internal actions, it would allow the case institution to reclaim its strengths through the combination of poles of expertise and to reorganise its portfolio in such a way that it would make a vital contribution to the Dutch knowledge economy. Nevertheless, the Dutch case also tells a story of seizing opportunities (somewhat like the German case). In the case study report it is stated that the internal debate on focus and mass was triggered off by the Executive Board which argued that the university would have to do something about the proliferation of research and create more focus. Drawing on the "focus and mass" rhetoric, it claimed that if a university wanted to maintain a strong position internationally, it had to channel resources into a number of clusters and disinvest from some areas if deemed necessary. Interestingly, in comparison to the cathetic and cognitive use of goals in the German and French case, in the Dutch case, organisational goals are used to evaluate performance. According to the case study, institutional profiling also seemed attractive from the perspective of improving research performance: Although the Dutch case university had a number of strong research groups, growing competition with other universities sharpened the university management's awareness of the necessity of bringing high performing groups together in a number of research profile areas. Doing so was expected to contribute to a stronger research profile that would make it easier to recognize the university's research both nationally as well as internationally.

### *The Portuguese Case*

In the Portuguese case, the establishment of a national quality assurance agency—the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) was the clearest driver supporting the decision to create a Doctoral School. The introduction of formal external accreditation criteria required that the universities had doctoral programmes associated with research centres. The university leadership responded to this in the sense that they "felt that the management of doctoral programs required specialized staff that could look for and get scholarships

for PhD students”. Hence the Doctoral School was set up in order to improve the funding of the required doctoral programmes. We read the Portuguese case as a case of responding to external requirements by internal reorganisation, clearly a case of cognitive and rational goals and a technical implementation.

### *The Norwegian Case*

Turning to the Norwegian case, we see this case as a classical approach to strategy in the sense that a strategic plan was developed based on an analysis of internal and external conditions. According to the Norwegian case study, the ambition to become a strong international research university was one of the main drivers of the new strategy plan. A self-evaluation published in 2002 had indicated the perceived need for a thorough revision of the university strategy. According to the self-evaluation the university was struggling with its reputation as a mass university. It regarded itself as a solid and rather large institution, slow to respond to steering signals but academically sound. The university ambition was to become a strong international research university among the best in Europe in teaching quality and in learning environments. Before starting the strategy process, the rector commissioned a report from a consulting agency with the goal to “identify drivers of quality at leading universities in the Nordic countries and globally”. In the report the importance of creating national (elite) universities with the ambition to be ranked at the international top level is clearly expressed, and the instrument to be used for this purpose is a clearer strategic agenda for the university. The formal decision adopting the strategy was made by the university board in 2010.

We see the Norwegian case as a clear case of sense-making in strategising, as the university made sense of how it was perceived and wanted to be perceived. The strategic process is clearly referred to as a way of gaining legitimacy and thus resonates with an institutional perspective highlighting the symbolic functions of organisational goals.

The classical case of Norway is aptly contrasted with the Swiss case which can be seen as a bottom-up mobilisation and strategy-as-practice case. In the Swiss case, the university leadership is attentive in phrasing strategy not as a managerial top-down instrument to distribute resources, but rather as a largely bottom-up process of mobilisation of ideas and initiatives from organisational sub-units.

### *The Swiss Case*

In the Swiss case it is noted that the strategic plan, which is notably a managerial tool, thus becomes the concrete locus for social interaction between different groups, around which sense is constructed, people are motivated and decisions are made. In this respect, the Swiss case can be read as a bottom-up process in which organisational goals are both cathectic in that goals are formulated in close relation to and cooperation with the organisational members but also justificatory in that they build closely on the activities that are already undertaken.

The examples show that although there are signs of rational planning (particularly in the Dutch and Norwegian case), there are many instances of rather spontaneous strategic action and strategy-in-progress, in which seizing opportunities and making continuous sense of external and internal triggers play an important role. Institutional leaders frequently make use of creating a sense of urgency, not only to launch another strategic plan, but mostly to stir an internal debate. Strategising in the university context is maybe not a question of planning *versus* emerging in a strategy processes. Rather, a more mixed pattern arises based on different applications of organisational goals both in planning processes and sense-making processes. The analysis indicates that while the Dutch and Norwegian cases can be seen as classical planning cases, the way organisational goals are interpreted is not necessarily cognitive. In the Dutch case organisational goals are applied to evaluate performance; in the Norwegian case they function more symbolically. In contrast, the French case is an example of sense-making and an emergent strategy, but also based on a cognitive perspective on goals. Moreover, the Portuguese case is also based on cognitive goals, but show signs of a rather technical implementation, perhaps an example of strategising on a small scale? Finally the Swiss case shows how strategy and budgeting is interrelated, which points to clearly rational and technical processes, but at the same time based on cathectic and justificatory functioning of goals.

### CREATING SHARED MEANINGS—ISSUES OF POWER AND THE WORKINGS OF THE DOMINANT COALITION

In this section we turn to issues of power and the workings of the dominant coalition in strategic processes. While traditional ways to understand strategic processes imply that implementation is more about “selling the



message” to the academic staff, one could argue that within a (de-coupled) university an even more important task is to “discipline” the decision-makers (especially if they have much leeway in interpreting strategic objectives anyway). If, as the strategy-as-practise perspective argues, there is much room for creative translations during the implementation stage, then a way to handle this is to reduce the creative room for leadership interpretations. So, how are power issues handled in the six case institutions?

In the German case, the informal inclusion of the deans in strategic decision-making processes was in general seen as key to strategy implementation. According to the German case study report this was a challenging but positive measure for improving communication within the university. According to the *Rectorate*, involving deans in informal discussions has been used in critical moments for discussing decisions concerning building the profile of the university. However, with respect to the specific strategic decision explored—the establishment of the central unit—the German case study showed limited if any involvement of bodies or individuals other than a very narrow group of people from the *Rectorate* with strong backing by the State Ministry. According to the German case study report, this situation, once it became public, created turmoil within the university governance structure. According to the rector, this was to be expected and consequently dealt with by inviting a partner university to explain their thinking and actions concerning how interdisciplinary programs could be developed and organised.

In the French case, the real power of running the university lies in the hands of a two men team (the rector and the research vice-president). In this case the implementation of decisions and the involvement of members of the university were characterized as a kind of “false democracy”. While much discussion took place in various councils, these bodies had no real influence on the process and the decisions to be taken. According to the French case study, the creation of research federations illustrates the way of decision-making in the university. The decision is centralized: It is made by the research vice-president. He sets up the decision by imposing it on the research unit director in informal ways, without discussing it in the university councils. The role of the Senate was only to register the decision after it has been set up by the research vice-president, with strong support of the research service on the technical aspects. But it has very few effects on the faculties and research units, where federations are considered as empty shells. According to the French case study

report, the university is characterised by strong decisions made by the centre, drawing a university strategy focused on research and oriented by external constraints such as the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) or the national agency for evaluation of research and higher education (AERES). According to the case study report, the impact of these decisions for the running of the faculties and research units is still quite limited. Hence, the case can be interpreted as a typical de-coupled strategic process.

According to the Dutch case study report, university management wanted institutional profiling to become an organisational success and therefore the design of the process was carefully chosen. Deans and vice-deans of research received the task of carrying out regular check-ups on the progress and accomplishments in the profiling areas. There were regular meetings with the leaders of the profile areas and interim assessments of all the projects took place. Furthermore, the Executive Board took stock of progress made in order to make further decisions on funding dependent on the success of the projects.

In the Portuguese case, the decision-making process took a while and after all—in the eyes of an external representative on the General Board—the worst part was the idea that after deciding on the constitution, the decision and the implementation did not occur as they should. In the Portuguese case report it is noted that the establishment of a Commission within the General Board to gather opinions about the doctoral school and the election process involved too much bureaucracy and too many bodies were perceived as leading to a fragmented decision-making process. The creation of the Commission to collect the views of those involved served to sustain the argument that the process was “quasi-democratic” in the sense that academic staff had ample opportunities to provide input to the process although their real influence was moderate. In this case, also the deans were largely excluded from the inner circle. The Commission had several meetings with the schools, but made no commitments to the faculties as to what the final decision would be.

In the Norwegian case, and according to rector, the role of the strategy is to provide direction and serve as a basis for further development of strategic processes. One example of the latter was the development of three-year plans with six indicators for the overall institutional governance. Another example was the development of annual cycles according to which fixed dates are given for decisions and matters to be dealt with,

thus developing a coordinated timetable for major decision processes. It was claimed that this approach generated transparency and stimulated a more democratic process.

According to the Norwegian case study report, the relationship between the central university level and faculty level has among other things been influenced by informal meetings with the deans (Dean Meetings). These meetings do not have the status of a formal decision-making body, but present an opportunity for deans to be informed about the financial situation and about issues and questions that will be raised at university board meetings. The report notes that these meetings can be a way of integrating the faculty level in central decisions but also a form of steering by fostering stronger coherence between governing levels. Future evaluation of the strategy is built into the annual cycle and therefore already scheduled. The university has also established an international advisory scientific board with the task of providing input to the strategic steering of the university as well as backing up university board decisions.

In the Norwegian report, the strategic plan is perceived as a tool for the rector, although there were features of the plan that indeed were received positively by the board. In this way the strategy can also be seen as a measure to establish stronger links between the board and the rector. Whether this means that the strategic plan is being noticed by the academic staff is another question. According to the Norwegian case report, this expresses a generally ambiguous perception of the function of strategic processes and documents. Hence, the purpose of strategic processes and documents are difficult to define, yet they are said to be an expression of goals, defining the organisation internally and for the outside world.

In the Swiss case, however, strategy also seemed to provide a tool and a rationale to the university leadership for filtering the requests for resources from the faculties. According to the case report, strategy was seen by the university as a process where consensus could be constructed and achieve endorsement by internal actors. However, strategy was also a tool providing the university leadership with some (rhetorical and practical) power in the internal repartition of resources.

These examples demonstrate different workings of the dominant coalition during strategy processes and also how these shift as environmental matters change and how power bases are perceived and evaluated. Not the least do these examples illustrate the difficulties in running

universities as strategic organisations. The dominant coalition engages in time- and energy-consuming efforts aimed at disciplining the key decision-makers, but loose coupling and political aspects of academic life seemingly still matters in the daily running of the kind of organisations universities are.

## CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

The aim of the chapter has been to discuss strategy practices in universities. We have framed organisational strategy as an essential link between the organisation and its environments and asked ourselves to what extent a rational planning model is evident in higher education or whether strategies are seen as emergent, in process, and largely driven by ongoing interpretation and sense-making. In other words, analytically we distinguished between strategy as a tool to govern the organisation and strategy as a sense-making process.

In line with some of the other analyses of the TRUE project (see e.g. Stensaker et al. forthcoming, which builds on the survey data), the empirical analysis suggests a rather diverse picture of how organisational strategies evolve in the contemporary university setting. On the one hand, the results confirm findings from previous studies indicating the emergence of a more managed university and the continuing importance of strategic plans and planning. That said, this formal strategy process is surrounded by numerous instances in which institutional leaders and other actors take far-reaching decisions that are of crucial importance for the future of the institutions investigated. These instances aptly can be seen as representing the strategising perspective, for many are pro-active, are based on sense-making, and are built around notions of urgency. It is too soon to tell and our data only show a glimpse of the current strategy realities, but our preliminary analysis sheds doubt on the universality and necessity of the rational planning model (see also Buckland 2009). This model may be imposed by governmental agencies (exemplified in many European countries), but in our case studies much of the “real” strategising takes place outside the spheres of the rational planning model.

Moreover, analytically our take on strategising—e.g., introducing a diverse set of conceptualisations of organisational goals as well as the concept of the dominant coalition—has enabled a nuanced illustration of how strategy processes are run in the higher education setting. Rational planning may rely, as expected, on cognitive organisational goals, but

goals in rational processes clearly also have evaluative and symbolic functions. Some rational processes seemingly rely more or less entirely on cathectic and justificatory interpretations of organisational goals. In addition, sense-making processes may rely on cognitive goals despite the emergent character.

The concept of the dominant coalition enables us to see how university managers engage in attempts of disciplining each other—reducing the creative room for the leadership’s interpretations—during strategy processes. Our argument is that in complex and loosely coupled organisations like universities, strategic planning as well as sense-making encompasses processes that require the key actors as a group to adhere to a certain collective organisational consistency. The empirical analysis aptly demonstrates that achieving or maintaining such a consistency is not without tension and challenges in contemporary European universities.

The analysis makes it possible to re-conceptualized strategy and strategising in the university context. At the core of the argument is the observation that strategising may not only be a question of planning versus emerging strategies. Rather we would argue that planning versus emerging represents a continuum. On the one hand of the continuum we find the dominant coalition applying goals as justifications for actions already taken. This dominant coalition could be the traditional dominant coalition in a university setting in which strategising was about formulating a consensus-based “umbrella plan” that would cover the ongoing academic processes. In one sense, these justifications embraced a cathectic use of goals in the way that the “real” goals of academics (sources of identification and motivation for organisational members) were expressed and guarded in the umbrella formulations and the consensus-oriented processes of the traditional university. However, over time managers have moved in and the dominant coalition changes. Rational theories of organisations emphasising the cognitive functions of goals as they provide directions for action come into play. Based on this perspective on organisational goals, the justificatory and cathectic use of goals in universities runs into trouble. In a cognitive sense goals provide directions of actions and old university goals became heavily criticised. The planning perspective on strategy moves to centre stage and criticises the emerging perspective on strategies of the past. However, as rational planning becomes more and more wide-spread, it becomes also evident that goals have symbolic aspects, to which one can either adhere or de-couple from and in doing so couple ones activities and justifications to emergent

practices. Finally, in this process of de-coupling and coupling to symbolic goals and/or “real” practices, the evaluative use of goals allows for combining the cognitive and the symbolic perspective by seeking to use goals as a basis for evaluating performance and by this “force” the symbolic goals to turn into cognitive goals. Therefore, the combination of the concept of the dominant coalition with the multiple uses of organisational goals provide a more nuanced and process-oriented perspective on university strategies. We would argue that this is a more fruitful way of analysing strategy in a university setting since it allows for a disclosure of the power structures influencing change in the sector, and thus a more realistic picture of university adaptation to changing environments.

## NOTE

1. The case study on Germany is authored by Žarko Dragšić and Georg Krücken, the case study on the French university by Christine Musselin and Aude Soubiron, the Portuguese case study by Amélia Veiga, António Magalhães, Sofia Sousa and Filipa Ribeiro, the Dutch case study is authored by Elke Weyer, the Norwegian case study is authored by Ivar Bleiklie, Nicoline Frølich, Kristin Lofthus Hope, Svein Michelsen and Gigliola Mathisen Nyhagen. Finally, the Swiss case study is authored by Benedetto Lepori and Martina Montauti.

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PART III

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Higher Education Politics and Policies

## Four ‘I’s Configuring European Higher Education Governance

*Amélia Veiga and António Magalhães*

**Abstract** European level institutions developed instruments with the aim of further involving member-states in common goals and objectives of higher education policies. This chapter analyses the role of ideas, interests, instruments and institutions in shaping European governance in practice. The power of ideas in politics and policy-making is underlined in legitimating and justifying the EU’s attempt to create an integrated higher education area. On the basis of interviews with European Commission (EC) officers and European Parliament (EP) members, the analysis shows the centrality of cognitive ideas in the political coordination process in higher education.

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## INTRODUCTION

Political coordination at the European level is an enduring issue of European integration. Compliance with European norms and values varies across political levels and sectors, at the same time the authority and legitimacy of nation-states has been fragmented and spread both upwards to the European level and downwards to the regions and local authorities and sideways to public/private networks (Hooghe and Marks 2001). This is particularly visible in education, in which the EU can only take action by means of incentive measures without having the power to enforce legal compliance, since European treaties have reserved education as a national remit. In spite this limitation “the establishment of [European] commission *administrative capacity* and, (...) establishment of *incentive programmes* (...) proved essential for the way the European level has gradually reached and connected to the national sector” (Gornitzka 2009: 126). The research question to be answered focuses on the role of ideas driving interests and instruments and shaping action within the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP).

In higher education the difficulties associated with the creation of a more politically integrated entity are of two kinds. The first relates to obstacles resulting from national specificities that from a European perspective, can be seen as “an illegitimate brake upon the drive by Europe towards a multinational system of higher education” (Neave and Amaral 2012: 15). The relationship between the EU and the national levels is key to understanding European governance. This relationship is being dealt with in a space where interests are reflected in two types of interaction—interplay and intervention (Kooiman 2003) shaping the EU and the national agendas. Interests are “social constructs that are open to redefinition through ideological contestation” (Blyth 2002: 271) and they drive ideas “that may encompass much more than strictly utilitarian concerns” (Schmidt 2008: 318). Interests are an enduring topic in European integration research (Moravcsik 1998) and take the form of special and common interests for those participating in the interaction (Kooiman 2003). As interactions express interests, they reflect the tensions at work within the interaction between the European and national levels.

The second difficulty is related to the definition of European political goals and the means for their achievement. The political coordination during the establishment of the European Higher Education Area

(EHEA) demonstrates that Bologna appears “to amount to nothing less than a ‘ends/means reversal’ in which Bologna is itself viewed as an end, rather than as a means with the EHEA as the end result” (Neave and Veiga 2013: 74). This difficulty is associated with the use of policy instruments that influence the nature and the course of action within European governance. These instruments organise the relationships between the EU and the national levels impacting on their political relationship according to the meanings the instruments carry. The importance of these ‘meanings’, as highlighted by Lascoumes and Galès (2007), depends on the relevance of ideas behind instruments in policy-making.

At the European level the need to develop incentive measures as instruments to promote and achieve common goals has been strengthening the EU steering capacity in ways that are visible, for instance, in the frequent attempts made by the EC to extend its powers, sometimes with the help of the European Court of Justice. In the case of the Bologna process, the EC has taken over a central role “that acquired a very particular consistency by associating Bologna with the Lisbon strategy” (Amaral and Neave 2009: 277). This is where the ideational repertoires assume importance. The ‘Europe of knowledge’ appears as central ideograph and powerful political driver as well as ideas such as ‘modernization’, ‘knowledge-based society’, ‘competitiveness’. In this perspective, the influence of European policies in the EU’s attempt to create an integrated political and social area depends on the power of ideas and discourses over EU policy action.

European governance brings to the fore the role played by ideas and discourses in politics and policy-making, as underlined by discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008). This newest version of the institutionalist approach provides a dynamic perspective on institutional change that contributes to explaining why policies develop in specific ways. Political action is driven by normative ideas (values legitimating policy action) and cognitive ideas (tools of public action justifying policies) that, by shaping interests and instruments, provide legitimacy and effectiveness to European governance aiming to coordinate national policies in the pursuit of European goals. Discursive institutionalism contributes to explaining the commitment of political actors to European education policies and provides perspective on the national policy enactments. While research has been underlining the EC’s creeping competences (Amaral and Neave 2009), the ideas and discourses of European level actors with formal power to influence remain unexplored. On the basis

of discursive institutionalism we assume that institutions are internal to actors (Schmidt 2008). This means that individual actors operating in EU bodies simultaneously promote and reflect their views and action bringing together individual and institutional agency.

In this chapter, the four ‘I’s’—ideas, interests, instruments and institutions—are applied to the analysis of European governance in practice. We shall return to these definitions later on in the chapter, but briefly put *ideas* are principles and values and taken-for-granted assumptions that permeate political action (Schmidt 2008); *interests* express ideas driving the interaction between the European and national levels of two kinds: interplay and intervention (Kooiman 2003); *instruments* structure the political process and its outcomes (Lascoumes and Galès 2007) and support the translation of policy into action; *institutions* are internal to the actors that structure and are structured by discourses and action (Schmidt 2008: 314).

In the first part of this chapter, the concept of European governance will be presented, emphasizing the setting of the governance framework for education based on ideas, interests, instruments and institutions. Next, the analysis of the interviews of members of the EP and officers of the EC focuses on the four ‘I’s’ for the analysis of the European governance of higher education.

### EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE: IDEAS, INTERESTS, INSTRUMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

The concept of European governance emphasizes rule systems, both formal and informal, that promote values and norms affecting behaviours and attitudes of actors (Hall and Taylor 1996; Kjaer 2010). In this sense, European governance is “the steering and coordination of the rules of the game, be they networks, markets or hierarchies” (Kjaer 2010: 114). This perspective assumes not only that the policy dynamics of the EU is broader than the dynamics of national governments, but also that it “does not take place without the governments” (Kjaer 2010: 114). European governance frames political action, by means of ideas, promoting discourses to ensure consistency between European and national policies (Magalhães et al. 2013). For instance, the promotion of a shared understanding of evaluation and funding in higher education turns on ideas providing legitimacy to discourses on accreditation and output-based funding.

### *Ideas*

Discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008: 306) emphasizes the role of the ideational dimension of European governance and identifies two types of ideas: normative and cognitive. Normative ideas “attach values to political action and legitimize the policies in a program through reference to their appropriateness (see March and Olsen 1989)” (Schmidt 2008: 307), and cognitive ideas “provide the recipes, guidelines, and maps for political action and serve to justify policies and programs” (Schmidt 2008: 306). While the former uses principles and values to *legitimize* social compliance with policies and programmes (e.g. Europe of knowledge), the latter provides taken-for-granted assumptions about political procedures that *justify* political action [e.g. Open Method of Coordination, (OMC)]. The extent to which EP members and EC officers express normative and cognitive ideas in accordance with what is regarded as the nature of these governance bodies remains to be seen.

The EC evolved from a technocratic institution to a ‘normalization’ of the EU executive and of its core executive relationships (Wille 2013: 195) on the basis of adjustments of institutional accountability. These adjustments drive and are driven by cognitive ideas that justify the establishment of corresponding organisational routines and practices. Along these lines, the EP was empowered “as the co-decision procedure became ‘ordinary legislative procedures’ of the EU and was extended to more than twice as many policy areas” (Yordanova 2013: 3). The EP Committees also attributed further relevance with regard to the functional needs of the EP (Yordanova 2013). Therefore, it is expected that normative and cognitive ideas are conflated in the perceptions of European level actors when they voice principles and values and taken-for-granted assumptions about higher education governance procedures.

### *Interests*

The interaction between the European and national levels is shaped by specific and common interests that play an important role in European governance. In the perspective of discursive institutionalism, one cannot distinguish objective interests, which encompass more than utilitarian concerns, from ideas. European and national interests are manifested in the two kinds of interaction: interplay and intervention (Kooiman 2003)

that as already indicated will be used to analyse how interests pervade the interaction between the European and national levels.

Interplay implies that “there is no formal authority, domination or subordination” (Kooiman 2003: 21) within and between the European, national and institutional levels. This type of interaction can be seen at work in the role the EC has been developing under the framework of the OMC by means of incentive measures. With a horizontal character, this form of interaction involves ‘technical governance’ (Balzer and Martens 2004) and one may add ‘proceduralism’, which “acts as the analytical handmaiden to ‘soft law’” (Neave 2012: 18). In Neave’s view, the efficiency of such governance is based on the fact that it is easier to build consensus around operational procedures and shared common administrative practices rather than to accommodate and converge on common visions and values about higher education. This variety of interaction is pervaded by cognitive ideas promoting utilitarian concerns and driving the technicality of European governance. This means that European and national interests, as they are driven by ideas, are made visible in the forms of interaction reflecting a pragmatic approach to policy action. With regard to European governance, the EC, organised according to the principle of sectoral specialization, enhances the role of policy communities (e.g. interest groups and civic associations) in European governance promoting their interaction on the basis of shared ideas (Chou and Gornitzka 2014).

Intervention “bind[s] those who explicitly agree to be bound by them, who thus accept this intervention in their behaviour either individually or as a collective” (Kooiman 2003: 22). This is the most formalised kind of interaction “aimed at directed exertion of formalised influence” (Kooiman 2003: 22) in the relationship between the European and the national levels, visible, for example, in the legislative and regulatory operation of European governance (see below section on instruments). Political coordination expressed by means of intervention addresses issues of, for instance, structural adaptations of higher education systems (e.g. the directive 2005/36/EC establishing the number of years of study required for professional practice). The interests expressed in this form of interaction are driven by cognitive ideas promoted within the EP as increasing specialization of committees highlights the need for legislative effectiveness. In turn, the EC proposes legislation and is also responsible for putting EU’s common policies into practice.



### *Instruments*

Instruments, their selection and use are mutually related and impinge on the nature of the policy they are part of. As argued, political instruments structure, at least partially, the political process and its outcomes (Lascoumes and Galès 2007, see also Chaps. 9–11). The development of incentive measures triggered at the European level stems from discourses legitimizing hierarchical relationships between goals and policy instruments as “the capacity of the EU to initiate and influence national discourses about educational issues” (Balzer and Martens 2004: 7) is limited. In this sense, the analysis of policy tools as motivational strategies for the actors involved (Schneider and Ingram 1990) are at the core of political action. Following Lascoumes and Galès’ argument, (2007) these instruments entail an ideational component stemming from the legitimacy of mandated representatives (e.g. ‘legislative and regulatory instruments’), of direct involvement of member-states (e.g. ‘agreement-based and incentive-based instruments’), of explanation of decisions and accountability of actors (e.g. ‘information-based and communication-based instruments’) and of scientific-technical, democratically negotiated instruments (e.g. ‘best practices’). The analysis of this type of instruments, focusing “on the procedural concept of policy, centred on the idea of establishing policy instruments that enable the actors involved to take responsibility for defining policy objectives” (Lascoumes and Galès 2007: 18), allows us to clarify how policy instruments promote shared representations of political issues.

In the political coordination of higher education this typology contributes to understanding the development of common core notions, policy principles and understandings of the linkages between goals and instruments in the development of European higher education policies. Political coordination shows a considerable degree of convergence, in the notions and jargon that nationally and internationally are used to ‘talk’ about higher education issues. Ideographs such as the ‘Europe of knowledge’ have emerged as discursive drivers acting to legitimate political choices and practices. The ideational component influences the structures of the policies and their outcomes as the political instruments “embodied in policy and the ideas upon which they rest are as important as the exercise of power and influence that produces policy” (Schneider and Ingram 1990: 510). In other words, ideas are part of decision-making inherent in policy action.

Underlining the importance of the political choice of instruments, it might be argued that the EP tends to choose legislative and regulatory, agreement-based and incentive-based instruments, while the EC's officers tend to bring forward information-based and communication-based and 'best practices' instruments. The appeal to common values embedded in decision-making and political practices is expected to be voiced differently by these European level actors as they play different political roles. Beyond their analytical role, the categories of the typology are not mutually exclusive as instruments bring together their ideational dimension on the basis of convergent discursive drivers (or shared symbols).

### *Institutions*

As institutions are internal to the actors they serve "both as structures that constrain actors and as constructs created and changed by those actors" (Schmidt 2008: 314). Ideational dynamics shaping political action provides legitimacy by promoting the dissemination of a political common understanding which drives core notions and policy principles. This dimension is important as the EP and the EC are *inter alia* being shaped by the ambition of increasing accountability. The EC's political accountability "has moved from being intergovernmental and relatively deficient towards a more complicated, multidimensional and supranational arrangement" (Wille 2013: 53). In turn, the EP has improved its capacity to hold the EC to account under the framework of significant administrative reforms that have been introduced since 2000. This shift has resulted in what has been characterized as "an overhaul of administrative systems and procedures to equip the institution with a modern, efficient, and effective European civil service" (Yordanova 2013: 27). The 2001 White Paper of the EC on governance underpinned principles such as openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence intended to reinforce subsidiarity. The expanded accountability procedures broadened the EP mandate "regarding the capacity to organize audits, reviews and the institutionalisation of offices (ombudsman, audit, anti-fraud) that function as forums for intense scrutiny" (Wille 2013: 53). By overseeing the EC, the power of the EP grew in tandem with the power of EC and it became a more demanding actor contributing to a more politically accountable Commission (Wille 2013).

The ideational dimension of the four 'I's' as constituent parts of European governance brings to the fore the role of actors involved in the

political process at the European level. The empirical analysis highlights the views of European level actors precisely to grasp their role in promoting the ideational component of European higher education governance.

## METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

The study was based on data from 10 semi-structured interviews conducted in November 2012 and January 2013 with EP members and EC policy officers and heads of unit (see Tables 8.1 and 8.2).

For reasons of anonymity, the interviewees are not identified by name. The interviews focused on the role of European level actors in coordinating the EHEA. The topics covered politics and policies of higher education, the influence of European institutions (e.g. agencies/commissions/committees/associations) in promoting higher education policies, the relationship between European actors and their concerns about higher

**Table 8.1** Members of the EP

	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Political affiliation</i>
EP1	Committee on Industry, Research and Energy	Group of the European People's Party
EP2	Former Member Committee on Culture and Education, Member of Committee on Legal Affairs	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP
EP3	Committee on Culture and Education	Group of the European People's Party
EP4	Former Member of the Committee on Culture and Education, Member of the Committee on International Trade	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP
EP5	Committee on Culture and Education	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP

**Table 8.2** Members of the EC

	<i>Directorate-general</i>	<i>Unit</i>
EC1	Education and culture	Higher education, innovation, entrepreneurship
EC2	Education and culture	Innovation in higher education—entrepreneurship
EC3	Education and culture	Higher education—modernization of higher education
EC4	Research	European research area
EC5	Research	Skills

education at the European level, and the instruments used to coordinate European higher education policies.

The interviews were held in Brussels, in the EP and in the Offices of the EC, and were validated by the interviewees for accuracy. The transcribed interviews were submitted to thematic content analysis focusing on the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees related to: (1) meanings of political principles and goals (ideas); (2) how interests shape the interaction between the European and national levels (interests); (3) the relationship between normative and cognitive dimensions of policy instruments (instruments); and (4) the role of European institutions (i.e. EP and EC) in structuring and being structured by actors' discourses (institutions).

As we dealt with elite interviews, the limitations related to the representativeness of the sample were taken into account. We are aware that the views of the interviewees reflect both their political affiliation and their individual perceptions and experiences. However, the interviews aimed to gather a kind of information and context that only these interviewees could provide about the process of political coordination driven by the Europe of knowledge. Additionally, given the exploratory nature of the study, the data gathered provided appropriate indications regarding issues emerging from the dynamics involved in European governance of higher education that are not usually addressed in the literature.

### IDEAS AS DRIVERS AND INSTRUMENTS OF THE POLICY PROCESS

To identify the normative and cognitive ideas attributed to the development of political principles and achievement of goals, the analysis focused on the perceptions of the actors about the major characteristics of EU higher education policies in the last decade and on the main problems and challenges those policies have dealt with. Attention was drawn to the views of European level actors regarding the influence of the governance reform on the political governance of higher education.

The interviewed actors expressed nuanced ideas combining normative as well as cognitive elements, as illustrated by one of the interview statements: "the difference between what is the legal framework and what is the policy framework is broadening" (EC1). The interaction between these types of ideas in the workings of the EC is visible when European level initiatives are seen as driven "not by ideology, but by very pragmatic reasons" (EC1).

As shown in Table 8.1, the interviewees act within two European institutions with basically different scopes of action. The EC is an

executive body, while the EP holds the legislative power. One might be tempted to assume that normative ideas would prevail in the latter, as they underpin the elaboration of rules and laws, and cognitive ideas would dominate the former as the institution where cognitive ideas are expected to be at the centre of attention.

One of the EC interviewees assumed that this might cause tensions, as “the Education Committee [of the EP] tends to have a more traditional view of thinking (...) rather linear” (EC1). Furthermore, EC1 underlines that “many people now in Europe are not stopped by pure ideological considerations” and emphasizes the “imperative to be efficient, an imperative to be more responsive to the needs of the students and the skills adapted to the needs of this century” (EC1). On the other hand, when EU policies are not considered duly implemented the interviewees, irrespective of their institutional affiliation, tend to return to normative ideas. For instance, EC4, when discussing the creation of the European Research Area, pointed out the drawbacks of relying on implementation at the national level as long as this level lacks a normative stance in support of ‘a policy of open recruitment’ of researchers, ‘gender policy’ and ‘open access for all the publications’. This justifies that the EU “need(s) to preach mobility, we need to preach open access, we need to preach equality policy” (EC4).

According to the interviewees, the normative idea of creating the EHEA faces its main obstacle in “conservatism and resistance (...) fear for change” (EC3) driven by national and local agendas. Member-states are not well aware of the “real social goals, institutional goals, an important part of the founders of the European Union” (EP2). This resistance should be handled by a pragmatic approach to policy development and securing the dominant position of cognitive ideas in the view of the interviewees.

The interviewed members of the EP mentioned that there is not a European higher education policy, but rather “partial education policies” (EP5) and that the members of the EP “do not have the total responsibility for the education issues. This is a policy that is in national governments’ hands” (EP4), hence “Education has only to do with what countries cannot do” (EP1). With this background, the pragmatic approach is presented as a way to deal with these difficulties in implementing the idea of the EHEA.

This pragmatic approach is underlined by EP5, arguing that as members of the EP “we can suggest, we can evaluate, we can study, we can do a lot of things, but we are not able to make decisions, a directive that the

governments have to apply” (EP5). The pragmatic attitude is also shared by two interviewees of the EC.

I think that it is perhaps a sense of pragmatism today that there was not that obvious even 5 years ago, when the first modernization agenda was adopted (EC1).

What we are encouraging more is to think about why, think about how, it means being pragmatic, in terms of what you are doing (EC3).

When asked about the impact of the governance reforms, its connection to funding is assumed, being seen as separate from ideological or normative assumptions about Europe:

Whenever we are touching things like governance and funding, because both are very clearly linked, we are talking about a managerial issue again, it's not ideological. I think it is very pragmatic (EC1).

Furthermore, the emphasis on this pragmatic perspective sheds light on what can be described as the merging of political goals and the means by which they are achieved. This is also how the interviewees consider the Bologna process:

I think that the Bologna process, higher education area, the European Area, and reform of the university are now the same thing. We do not have to find any differences, because we must have a European University. Step by step. I do not believe in any miracle (EP2).

I think Bologna has been really instrumental since the beginning in shaping changes in education, there should be no doubt about it (...) Bologna is seen as an intergovernmental process and has a rather particular decision-making process. We are simultaneously trying to develop this higher education area to be more EU but changes in the higher education area were only possible thanks to Bologna (EC3).

The Bologna process appears to be an obstacle against normative ideas such as the EHEA and the Europe of knowledge, as it is seen as a process of implementation based on tools and on the assumption that Bologna is purely persuasive (EP5) and not a European project

(...) it is a project of the governments of the European Union and others (...). Now the nations know, the governments know that a lot of things

have to be done together, but they do not want to allow us [European Parliament] to do it in a normal procedure, which means that we, the Parliament, are included. So, they made this Bologna Process and the result was not good (EP1).

By merging means and ends (Neave and Veiga 2013), the Europe of knowledge and the EHEA are diluted in the management of tools designed to implement the Bologna process. The implementation of the Bologna process apparently means that a blind eye is turned to the fact that “each of these tools has its own procedures, skill requirements, and delivery mechanism, indeed its own ‘political economy’” (Salamon 2002: 2). This affects the achievement of policy goals as the emphasis on procedural technicality plays a central role (Neave 2012), structuring policy development and its achievements.

In sum, the need to produce concrete results through policy implementation creates a pressure under which cognitive ideas appear to subsume normative ideas in European higher education governance processes. The use of normative and cognitive ideas as analytical categories allowed us to characterize the arguments mobilized by EP members and EC officers, but we did not find any clear pattern of interview responses according to the institutional membership. Thus in spite of the expectation that normative ideas would prevail in the perceptions of EP members, they expressed cognitive ideas as well when it was argued that strong forms of cooperation make European institutions more effective. Actually, as has been argued by Corbett (2005) that the EC “was genuinely not working for harmonisation but rather for strong forms of cooperation in which education actors had a bit role” (Corbett 2005: 190).

#### INTERESTS WITHIN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVELS

The purpose of the analysis in this part is to understand how European actors perceived the interaction between European and national agendas and the way in which it was shaped by interests. The analysis focuses on the actors’ views about the influence of European level institutions in promoting higher education policies.

The interaction between European and national (and local) levels, in the area of higher education, is based on the normative idea of ‘voluntariness’ of those involved in the process. As pointed out above, interplay

and intervention are grounded on this assumption. For instance, the political coordination of interests by means of intervention addresses structural adaptations (e.g. the directive 2005/36/EC establishing the number of years of study required for professional practice) that imply compliance at the national level.

According to the interviewees, the emphasis on open consultation and dialogue that feeds the development of cognitive ideas reflects the normative assumption that interaction between the European and the national levels must rely on openness and transparency. This is in line with Chou and Gornitzka's argument that the role of the EC "has been particularly instrumental in forging epistemic communities and disseminating, legitimizing ideas" (Chou and Gornitzka 2014: 6). A member of the EC asserted that the EC is not "to serve vested interests" (EC5) and, based on "transparent dialogue" it is expected to "represent the public interest". However, the emphasis on rules underlines the importance of cognitive ideas:

We stick to the rules; for budget execution, for instance, (...) there is not much discretion. You either play by the book or you do not play at all. (...) We try to design the policy (...) in such a way that it is, not only possible, but that it should help an institution to be able to embrace the principle, the overall direction without telling them exactly what is what they have to do (EC5).

The interplay based on a stronger mode of cooperation can lead to an interventionist type of interaction aiming at further harmonization. This contrasts with a normative idea promoting stronger forms of cooperation by the EC (Corbett 2005). The tension between European and national interests induced "tentative developments towards building up a European governance capacity for higher education in the 1990s through incentive programmes" (Chou and Gornitzka 2014: 10). However, this scenario has changed with the Bologna process and its intergovernmental features underlining cognitive ideas on cooperation.

The weight of this pragmatic approach reflects the vision of the Europe of Knowledge both "as an instrument for invigorating and increasing the competitiveness of European science; and as a tool for informed policy-making and implementation" (Chou and Gornitzka 2014: 8). The 'semester process' to review the EU 2020 strategy links directly the European and the national administrations, allowing the EC



(...) to be able to say something meaningful about education, not only to the education ministers but more importantly to the finance ministers (...) this is a very powerful way to influence policy-making at the national level (EC1).

To manage the interactions between the political levels, the EC assumes a privileged position:

There is nobody better placed to take that decision as the ones who are there. But what we do expect, and what we will try and push for is that they [the countries] follow a certain line, a certain direction because this can be an interest for all system (EC5).

This is the expression of the EC's 'competitive advantage' as "it connects permanent administrative capacity with trans-national actors, agencies and national administrations" (Gornitzka 2009: 124). However, there is awareness about the limited capacity of the EC to promote intervention-like political interaction, as

(...) the take-up of whatever kind of ideas, via the traditional members-states channel (...) is limited. So we are moving step by step in this field and it has a lot to do with the capacity of the country as well to incorporate certain recommendations of the European Union. It has something to do with the resources of the European Union itself in this field because we are currently building up national expertise (EC2).

Along the same lines, a member of the EP pointed out that the work of Parliamentarians is to "ask experts (and think-tanks) to help them to find the best solutions" (EP1). Thus, it appears that from the perspective of the interviewees, EU governance of higher education is to be developed by means of cognitive ideas such as those promoted by expertise and experts, based on the alleged legitimacy of scientific and technical approaches. Interestingly enough, the emphasis on cognitive ideas is brought to the fore by the EC's officers, as it could be expected from an executive body, and also pragmatically by the EP members when the matter is to stress the need for expertise to push forward EU policies. Actually, expert groups used by the Commission "help not only to acquire scientific and practical expertise, but also to substantiate political choices or to build consensus in the wider context of EU decision-making" (Hartlapp et al. 2014: 225).

**Table 8.3** Ideas expressing interests and driving interaction

Ideas		Common and specific interests	Type of interaction
Normative	Cognitive		
Voluntariness openness and transparency	Expertise	Vested ( <i>specific</i> ), Public ( <i>common</i> ), European ( <i>common</i> ) and national ( <i>specific</i> ), system ( <i>common</i> )	Interplay (cooperation)
	Partnership		Intervention (adaptation)

Table 8.3 illustrates the normative and cognitive ideas, the interests and types of interactions involved in the relationship between the European and the national levels.

Cognitive ideas justifying expertise and partnerships are assumptions underlying cooperation and adaptation respectively. As argued, the move towards a European interventionist approach depends on the extent to which nation-states accept and incorporate common European political goals. However, the participation of experts in the interplay is likely to favour the link between legislative drafting and subsequent negotiations (Hartlapp et al. 2014).

#### INSTRUMENTS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORMATIVE AND COGNITIVE IDEAS

The analysis also focuses on how interviewees characterized the EU coordination/governance methods and instruments. These instruments entail an ideational component stemming from the legitimacy of mandated representatives (e.g. ‘legislative and regulatory instruments’), of direct involvement of member-states (e.g. ‘agreement-based and incentive-based instruments’), of explanation of decisions and accountability of actors (e.g. ‘information-based and communication-based instruments’) and of scientific-technical, democratically negotiated instruments (e.g. ‘best practices’).

The analysis of the interviews made clear the assumption that agreement-based and incentive-based instruments are one of the tools at the core of the interpretation of the OMC. EC4 pointed out emphatically that “we want to use just soft power” (EC4) emphasizing that an objective defined at the EU level only becomes European when “it is accepted by all countries and it is there, in all countries”, for instance, in the case of the Erasmus programme (EP1).

The soft law approach is seen as an alternative to hard law. EC4, referring to the establishment of the European Research Area, stated:

So far we decided not to go for legislation for two main reasons: one because the member states said that they will only use legislation as a last resort; second because legislation takes a long time and we would not be speaking about any real measure until many years from now, because legislation has a very long process. We need to act right away (EC4).

As the attainment of policy objectives traced to the EU level depends on the willingness and 'voluntariness' of the member-states—"the problem is that all these policies are in the national governments' hands" (EP4)—incentives for their implementation are important: "We need to provide incentives for those who behave or change their mind into, or their behaviour into this (EU research) policy" (EC4). EC2, speaking about the establishment of Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs) in the context of the European Institute of Technology (EIT), referred to incentives as "a framework provided and it was a completely bottom-up approach that triggered the change at the national level" (EC2). This framework corresponds to the ideational component of KICs, which is an example of an 'agreement-based and an incentive-based' instrument. It promotes the cognitive idea that the Master School set up by EIT, involving 24 European universities, aimed to "keep the quality of the education and make this market becoming extremely competitive" (EC1).

However, the hard law approach is not discarded. In the perception of the EC: "in 2014 we will check whether we have achieved progress in these areas and if not we will propose to go to legislation" (EC4). Nevertheless, an EP member recognized that:

We can only make recommendations and the Commission is trying to make a recommendation, we are working on this, and this recommendation goes to the Council and the Council should accept it. Then the Council accepts, but if it is really implemented in the nations, we cannot audit it. We cannot oblige them. We ask them to do, because our EU is limited in the field of education and culture (EP1).

The subsidiarity principle, as reflected in the Treaties, appears in the interviewees' perceptions both as a taken-for-granted assumption (cognitive idea) and as a challenge to achieve further European integration (normative idea), in general, and in higher education, in particular. The

power and competencies of the member countries are to be tamed with changes of the Treaties:

We must change treaties (...) it is impossible to continue without a particular competence; not spoiling national competences, shared between two different levels, but there must be a European competence. This will give the opportunity to the European Union and Commission first, which means the government, the proper government, to be more aggressive, more determined to go on (EP2).

Hard law appears in the perceptions of EC officers as a last resort or instrument to enact European education policies. The argument in favour of avoiding the use of hard law is based on a cognitive and pragmatic approach to the fulfilment of European policies and goals. Yet, based on the very same pragmatism, EP members agree that hard law remains on the horizon as a potential means to overcome resistance and drawbacks of the subsidiarity principle.

Another interpretation of the OMC is grounded on information- and communication-based instruments. The legitimacy of these instruments relies on “explanation of decisions and accountability of actors”, linking the normative idea of doing what should be done in the light of “what one ought to do” (Schmidt 2008: 306), and the cognitive idea of doing things according to rational necessity:

(...) universities have a significant degree of autonomy but (...) should be capable of having a pretty good idea of where they spend their money on and when (...). So, what we have is an accounting system that actually helps to guard on that. In line with that, did we take in the EC this sort of budgetary planning and execution as such? No, one thing is to give the overall line and advice, another thing is to tell, or to try to legislate and tell universities that it is this or nothing. There is a huge gap in between (EC5).

When talking about the European Research Area, EC assumes that the publication of reports “where do we have a pretty good insight on the difference between member-states on how they are doing in respect to research” (EC5) contributes to developing the research system. Political action is justified on the basis of comparative information across countries. This cognitive approach to implementation instruments is based on

the assumption that “it makes sense for the EC (...) to confront the universities with it” (EC5). When referring to the establishment of EHEA another EC member underlined that the system allows for being:

(...) more precise in setting parameters against which we monitor and that (it), therefore, (provide) incentives (for) people to act in particular ways. If I am going to start monitoring your higher education attainment figures, drop-out figures, for example, then perhaps governments may pay more attention to those aspects in the definition of national strategies and then it has an impact. So, I think yes, in terms of setting the current array of governments’ instruments that we have, can be more effective in delivering on those specific priorities (EC3).

In the perspective of the EC officers interviewed this view interconnects information- and incentive-based instruments in feeding cognitive ideas to justify political action. In turn, the emphasis on information to promote accountability of actors and explanation of decisions is also voiced by a member of the EP assuming a normative stance: “The European Union money is the money from all of us. The EU is just the manager of the European money for all countries” (EP4).

‘Best practices’ are also presented as policy instruments supporting the OMC. These instruments are interpreted as based on a mix of normative and cognitive ideas. Scientific and technical approaches stem from negotiation and from market-based mechanisms and competition. The ideational components, both normative and cognitive, can be seen in the following statement of an EC member that brings together the political goal of competitiveness (normative idea) and the highest performance in leading national research systems (cognitive idea):

When you look at research, for instance, I think that it is fair to say that those countries that have a very high performing research system actually act more as a catalyst to facilitate change and to support what is going on at the level of the European Union. Why? Because it is about taking borders away, it’s about increasing competition, it’s about really playing in the big league, in the champions’ league of research (EC5).

In this vein, in order for Europe to assume a leading role in the ‘knowledge society’, countries should be able to be inspired by ‘best practices’. “Best practices means: is there anything in there for you? I mean there are more ideas that can inspire you to do things differently?” (EC5).

**Table 8.4** Ideas driving different types of instruments

<i>Ideas</i>		<i>Type of instrument</i>
<i>Normative</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	
Subsidiarity principle challenged by attempts of further EU integration	Last resort to the shortcomings of soft law	Legislative and regulatory
Soft power versus hard law	Level of acceptance by the members Incentives to join the policy goals	Agreement-based and incentive-based
European public interest	Comparative information across countries	Information-based and communication-based
Political goals	Success stories	Best practices

An EP member (EP5) adds that the EU provides the exchange of good practices allowing people to see the differences and endorsing ‘best practices’ through narratives of success stories. This approach is markedly cognitive-driven.

Table 8.4 identifies the ideas driving the instruments convened to develop the ideograph of Europe of knowledge.

The cognitive and normative dimensions of these instruments are mutually reinforcing illustrating what Lascoumes and le Galès (2007) have argued about instruments impinging on the nature and results of the policy.

#### INSTITUTIONS STRUCTURING AND BEING STRUCTURED BY ACTORS’ DISCOURSES AND AGENCY

With regard to the relationship between EU institutions, the analysis focused on the role that the EP and EC played in the building of the Europe of knowledge and their influence on higher education policies.

We argued above that the EP and the EC promote normative and cognitive ideas legitimizing higher education policies. The ideational component is driven by the pragmatic concern of coping with difficulties arising from the subsidiarity principle. EU bodies and actors are mutually involved focusing on “how ideas are conveyed, adopted, and adapted, let alone the actors who convey them to whom, how, where, and why” (Schmidt 2008: 309). The legitimating discourse convened by

institutions “serves not just to express one set of actors’ strategic interests or normative values but also to persuade others of the necessity and/or appropriateness of a given course of action” (Schmidt 2008: 312).

From the perspective of the EP members, the Council is the source of major drawbacks in promoting European goals:

The problem is that they (the ministers) go back and sometimes they forget what is really needed. So, we have all that to take care at home, to create an Europeanization of the thinking that is taking place. If people are always thinking, Europe would stand in the European Parliament, in the Commission, the Council Ministers, they should be backed by Europeans at home, because Europeans are not only here. If they are not at home, you can forget Europe. So, I think that this is a problem which we are facing all the time and it is sometimes created by the ministers themselves, because they go back and say ‘those in Brussels have decided’ (EP1).

This reflects awareness about the lack of involvement at the national level in European issues, as underlined by EP4 who stated that “The European Union did not exist, it is just a nation between the nations (...). I think that the European Union does not work, I think that we need to rethink (...) this European Union” (EP4).

Although they have different roles and powers, the Parliament and the Commission are expected to have a smooth relationship in the perceptions of the EC officers interviewed. The liaison is assumed to be based on openness and easy access and “it is a given, it is an absolute given” (EC5). In spite of the fact that there are different perspectives on education policies “there is a clear awareness that within the European skin we do things by interaction with one another, by communication with one another and looking at strengths and weaknesses of the arguments” (EC5). From the perspective of a member of the EP, tensions arising from this relationship can also be identified. It was stressed that the EC is represented in all the debates, but it “is not very flexible when they talk to the Parliament” (EP4). The same interviewee underlined that the EC members:

(...) are more specialized (...) it is not like this in all the Parliamentary commissions. For me it would be better that they appear with an open mind. Of course they have to study and they have to report, but I think that it could be nice if they could be a little bit more open. Trying to say: ‘let us think about it’... It would be better (EP4).

This tension can also be explained by the fact that the expansion of EP legislative and budgetary powers interferes with the legislative and executive powers of the EC (Wille 2013).

In turn, a member of the EC underlined that it “tends to have a more traditional way of thinking” (EC3) about education policies while valuing the role of the Committee on Culture and Education of the EP, as it “is certainly a very important one, not least for the negotiation of the Erasmus program”. Apparently, this is a further justification for a more pragmatic approach assumed by the EC with regard to education policies, as already argued. Actually as institutions are internal to individuals, the way in which actors express the ideas framing their thoughts and actions in the interactions generated between EP and EC is marked by the institutional contexts where they act. This challenges the explanation of policy outcomes as a result of the vision and action of individuals politically skilled in advancing policy ideas (Corbett 2005).

## CONCLUSION

This exploratory study contributes to filling the gap in the literature about the role of ideas and discourses in European governance. We used discursive institutionalism to categorize the ideas that pervaded the legitimation and justification of policy action and policy enactment at the European level. Additionally, the approach allows us to analyse how EP members and EC officers used normative and cognitive arguments to sustain the position of the institutions they represent. In spite of the fact that normative ideas tend to be expressed more clearly by members of the EP, cognitive ideas pervaded the perceptions of both. This might be explained, partly by the introduction of a New Public Management inspired set of administrative accountability mechanisms in the EC pushing towards a more efficient EU policy action (Wille 2013) and partly by pressures based on the enhancement of democratic responsiveness of the EP and the political accountability to which it is expected to hold the EC.

This study also contributed to understanding of normative and cognitive ideas mobilized to interpret themes of European governance, and the analysis of European level actors’ perceptions about ideas, interests, instruments and institutions allowed us to grasp important aspects of the workings of European governance. European governance, while underlining the steering and coordination of the rules of the game, brings forward voluntariness, openness and transparency as values permeating



the intended interaction between the European and the national levels. The ideational component of European governance focusing on the interaction between the European and the national levels emphasizes the weight of expertise and partnership legitimized by normative assumptions aimed at increasing accountability.

Additionally, as the rules of the game introduced by European governance influence policy action, they are also instruments impinging on the nature of the policy, which tends to be more cognitively oriented. This might be explained by the fact that in the area of education policy the principle of subsidiarity represents, from the perspective of European level actors, a major source of obstacles to European level education policy coordination.

In sum, cognitive ideas are fundamental to manage the rules of the game. The emphasis is put on a pragmatic endeavour as it pushes the political process forward. At the same time, a fine-grained analysis of the normative and cognitive ideas of European level actors allowed for the conclusion that while it could be expected that normative and cognitive ideas prevail in the EP and the EC, respectively, the analysis has shown that EP members and EC officers combine these ideas regarding EU policy action. This aspect demonstrated the importance of the choice of instruments and type of arguments (either normative or more cognitively orientated), promoted by relevant actors within European governance. At the same time, the tendency to inflate the capacity of the EC to act independently was nuanced by the EP members interviewed.

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## Political-Administrative Structures and University Policies

*Ivar Bleiklie and Svein Michelsen*

**Abstract** The chapter develops a conceptual framework for a comparative analysis of HE policies that enables us to investigate the explanatory power of structural characteristics of political-administrative systems. It compares HE political-administrative structures and university policies in eight countries. The chapter focuses on policy trends in the eight countries, and discusses how the literature on comparative political and administrative systems can help formulate assumptions about public policy-making and policy change. The ideas that are developed are then applied on public reform policies in general and in the area of higher education (HE) in particular. A test of the assumptions on data on reform outcomes indicates that the framework is a useful contribution to understanding cross-national variation in HE reform policies in Europe.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of higher education (HE) reform policy since the 1990s has been characterized by two tendencies. The first is to start out from what we may call the New Public Management (NPM) assumption that goes

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like this: Since the 1980s HE reform policies have primarily turned on attempts to make the sector and individual institutions more efficient and market oriented in accordance with characteristics of NPM as a public reform ideology (Pollitt 1993). The second tendency is that most studies of HE reforms have taken existing policies, as expressed in policy documents, legislation and regulations, as their point of departure. With few exceptions (e.g. Bleiklie 2006; Bleiklie et al. 2000; Kogan and Hanney 2000), questions about policy-making, such as how and by whom HE policies are made and designed, have been left out. The research questions have tended to focus on the extent to which and how declared policies are implemented and have affected universities and HE systems.

Thereby an important set of explanatory variables, structural characteristics of political-administrative systems, are left out. This is striking since policy studies in many other areas do in fact include this kind of variables, which is demonstrated by the literature that has emerged since the publication of Lijphardt's *Patterns of Democracy* (1999). A number of studies have also demonstrated that recent HE reform policies come in different shapes although they claim to do roughly the same and are justified in terms of near identical ideas. Thus there is a considerable cross-national variation both in terms of the policy instruments that are devised and how they are being implemented (Bleiklie et al. 2011; Kogan et al. 2006; Paradeise et al. 2009). Time and again structural explanations are invoked to explain such differences. The abrupt and forceful shift in English HE policy introduced by the Thatcher government in the 1980s is a unique and often cited example of an atypical case that tends to be explained in terms of the peculiar opportunities offered by the winner takes all nature of Whitehall parliamentarism (Kogan et al. 2006; Paradeise et al. 2009).

The fact that structural explanations at times seem to stand out as candidates that cannot be overlooked in studies of HE policies, but never seem to have been included systematically in any research design that have been applied until now, suggests that they deserve to be tested systematically. We also believe it makes sense to include a broader canvas of explanatory factors than policy decisions and policy implementation, in order to properly understand variations in HE policies.

Furthermore, it makes sense to keep in mind a broader notion of reform policies than the rather simplistic notion of a move from traditional towards NPM forms of state steering and control. Paradeise et al. (2009) argue that a number of reform policies may be better understood

when interpreted within alternative frameworks such as Network Governance and Neo-Weberianism. Bleiklie et al. (2011) demonstrate how NPM reforms may strengthen horizontal structures based on network power rather than stronger hierarchical structures. Both kinds of observations bear out the argument that it makes sense to include alternative perspectives to NPM in studies of reform policies.

The purpose of this chapter is, accordingly, to develop a conceptual framework for a comparative analysis of HE reform policies that enables us to investigate the explanatory power of structural characteristics of political-administrative systems. However, focusing on structural explanations it is important also to keep in mind that we are studying policies within a specific policy sector with its particular structural features and actor constellations (Cf. Chap. 10). At this level there are actually stronger traditions for structural explanations. This is evident when researchers apply typologies distinguishing between “university traditions” such as the “Humboldtian”, “Napoleonic” and “Anglo-Saxon” traditions. The implication is that if we want a full appreciation of the potential of structural explanations, we need to include sector-specific characteristics in the policy analysis. Our aim is that the framework can address limitations that follow from the two tendencies mentioned initially. The policies we will study aim at improving the efficiency and quality of institutional performance. The approach is clearly structural, and we will focus in particular on structural changes in decision-making, funding and evaluation, and on how and to what extent they have affected the organization of universities in Europe.

The main research question: *What implications does the organization of political systems have for policy content?*

The general question may be specified like this:

1. What are the structural factors (independent variables) that drive policy-making in the field of HE?
2. What changes (dependent variable) have taken place in HE policy in the selected areas the last decades? Apart from easily observable declared policy goals, we intend to explore the questions of policy content by focusing on policy instruments and policy implementation.

Although we follow a structural approach in this chapter, it is important to emphasize that the approach has its limitations. We do not believe

that policy outcomes can be deduced from structural characteristics of political-administrative systems, and like Kingdon (1995) we do not believe that the potential role of actors and process dynamics to affect policy outcomes can be overlooked. Given the absence of structural analysis in this field our aim is not to replace existing approaches, but to add the structural approach to the existing inventory of conceptual approaches in the study of HE policy. We want to clarify the possible impact of political-administrative structures in a more systematic way than the occasional ad hoc attribution of policy variation, which occasionally appears in the literature, to differences between majoritarian and consensual political systems or between federal and unitary states (Paradeise et al. 2009).

The following parts elaborate on these questions. In part 2, we focus on policy trends in HE in the eight countries in our study. In part 3, we discuss how the literature on comparative political and administrative systems can help us formulate assumptions about public policy-making and policy change. In part 4, these ideas are applied on public reform policies in general and in the area of HE in particular, followed by a test of these assumptions on available data on reform outcomes in seven countries.<sup>1</sup> The data indicate that a comparative political-administrative perspective is potentially useful with regard to explaining cross-national variation in HE reform policies in Europe.

## POLICY CHANGE

The first research question we need to clarify is what reform policies have been devised and implemented. Based on existing knowledge, our main assumption is that policies with similar objectives have been put in place in the eight countries in our study.

One consistent tendency has been to strengthen vertical forms of steering through a process of hierarchization. In the area of decision-making and leadership the tendency has been to develop NPM policies aiming at stronger leadership and managerial structures at the expense of elected bodies controlled by academic staff. Thus executive leadership has been strengthened at the expense of collegial power in deliberative, representative bodies, while the academic community has (to varying extent) been transformed into staff and submitted to human resource management. In the area of funding, budgetary constraints have been tightened through reduced funding or by the introduction of

new budgetary instruments based on indicators and output rather than on inputs. Thus budgetary reforms often implied heavier emphasis on performance and explicit performance measurement, assessment and monitoring in research and teaching while direct detailed regulation of funding decisions has been eased. Furthermore, there is a concentration of funds in the best-performing HE institutions and a broader vertical differentiation among HE institutions. Finally, evaluation of academic institutions and disciplines has been formalized and developed, partly in order to make decisions on accreditation and partly as an instrument to improve performance in management, research and teaching.

However, other ideas influenced HE reforms over the same period of time (Ferlie et al. 2008), and the vertical form of steering inspired by NPM has been complemented by forms of network governance. First, some policies encouraged the inclusion of stakeholders in academic affairs, on institutional boards and decision-making on research funding, thus widening the networks of actors involved in decision-making and opening up for the introduction of non-academic criteria, principles and preferences in such processes. Second, centralized ways of steering have been challenged by participation of inter- and supra-national actors in HE. As a result, most teaching or research projects mobilize a combination of resources from different sources and rely on multiple levels and actors. This has been conceptualized as multilevel governance. As shown by Paradeise et al. (2009), in order to understand recent HE and research reforms in one country, one has to look at the relative influence of NPM and network governance, their interplay and sometimes conflicting influence.

Finally, academic autonomy is often explicitly promoted in terms of institutional autonomy, while autonomy in turn is increasingly perceived as the competency given to institutional leaders to make strategic decisions on behalf of their institution (Chap. 3). Thus budgetary reforms imply less detailed regulation and more leeway for institutional leaders to allocate funding as they wish. However, increased autonomy also tends to be circumscribed by increasing standardization in terms of procedures and performance criteria that may severely limit the space for strategic decision-making.

We might claim, therefore, that three major trends characterize policy change: policy movements pushing for stronger institutional hierarchies, for stronger inter-institutional networks and for standardization and formalization. However, we also know that there is considerable variation



regarding the degree, and form of the actual changes that have taken place. Our point of departure is that these trends, and the extent to which they are implemented, may be better understood in terms of the structural characteristics through which policy processes take place.

### A TYPOLOGY OF POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE REGIMES

For our analysis of the impact of political-administrative structures on reform policies we have developed a typology that includes the following five dimensions: (1) state structure, (2) the nature of central level executive government, (3) actor constellations, (4) administrative traditions, (5) diversity of policy advice, i.e. the degree of diversity in the main political channels of political influence that fuel reforms. The combination of political system and central administration characteristics is based on the following considerations.

Firstly, our approach is based on a literature that focuses on whether variations in political systems and practices relate systematically to the products of government action (Hofferbert and Cingranelli 1996). Political systems provide distinct and relatively stable environments for policy-making in any particular policy field. While some systems may offer rich opportunities for actors to affect policy change, such opportunities may be less available in other systems that offer better opportunities (veto points) for actors to prevent change from taking place, modify reform proposals (consultation requirements) or at least delay decision and implementation processes (decentralized structures) for extended periods of time. For instance, what might be possible to accomplish in a unitary state like England, might be impossible in a federal state like Germany.

Secondly, an important point of departure is the Lijphart model of *majoritarian and consensual political systems* (Lijphardt 1999).<sup>2</sup> The two types of polities are associated with two different policy styles. Consensus politics is permeated by bargaining with many opportunities for a variety of actors to influence policies. Majoritarian polities are prone to more sweeping changes.

Thirdly, the Lijphartian approach is strongly focused on the relation between the legislature and the executive, and their proportional representation (PR) forms are at the centre of attention. Administrative systems are not. However, there are few indications that politicians usually

engage in and fight over policy alternatives during the policy design and decision-making processes (Paradeise et al. 2009), and political conflict being absent it is a reasonable assumption that administrative agencies are allowed a much more prominent role in developing the policy alternatives that they subsequently are obliged to implement. Thus HE policies tend to become more like administrative policy, and better performance rather than new policies are at the center of attention (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 8). Therefore, classical regime typologies, like the one of majoritarian and consensual systems, have to be supplemented by approaches that include the administrative apparatus of HE and its relations with the executive and other relevant actors.

Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) offer an approach that meets this requirement. It integrates elements from the Lijphart political system approach with dimensions from public administration in different types of *political-administrative regimes*. They identify five different dimensions of political-administrative systems, which are likely to affect the processes of management reform. The main argument is that reform capacity and reform trajectories are broadly determined by regime type. Thus two political system dimensions—state structures and executive government—act in combination with the way in which the central bureaucracy is involved in policy-making. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) have pointed out three such dimensions; minister-mandarin relations, cultures of governance and sources of political advice.<sup>3</sup> While the former two focus directly on relations between politics and administration, the latter one opens up for influence from external institutions. Furthermore, we follow Verhoest et al. (2010) who in their study of state agencies employ a slightly different and extended version of the minister-mandarin dimension through the broader notion of *actor constellations*. Finally, we believe the administrative culture dimension, which is developed further by Painter and Peters (2010a) into a more nuanced dimension called *administrative traditions*, will provide us with a better and more nuanced tool for comparative analysis.

### *State Structure*

Two basic dimensions of state structures are considered: The first is the *vertical dispersion of authority*, and how authority is shared between different levels (centralized versus decentralized). The second is the

*horizontal coordination* at central government level (coordinated versus fragmented).

Vertical dispersion tends to be, but is not necessarily, the greatest in federal systems, where powers are formally delegated to sub-national tiers of government and least in centralized, unitary states. On the vertical dimension reforms in decentralized states tend to be less broad in *scope* and less uniform than in centralized states. Centralized states will also have a narrower *focus* on service delivery outputs and results.

On the horizontal dimension the question turns on the degree of horizontal coordination within central government in the various states. This is a difficult variable to estimate, but Pollitt and Bouckaert still hold that significant differences between countries can be identified in terms of horizontal integration. Thus they argue that in France *the grand corps* serves as strong glue at the top of a fragmented system, whereas Germany is even more fragmented than France. In England the treasury constitutes an integrating force.

### *The Nature of Executive Government*

The nature of the executive is an important dimension in the structural analysis. Here Pollitt and Bouckaert adopt the main features of the Lijphart typology distinguishing between two main types of executive regimes:

- (a) *Majoritarian regimes* in which the power privileges of electoral majorities are emphasized, and accordingly relatively much power is vested in the executive
- (b) *Consensual regimes* where the importance of accommodating electoral minorities through negotiation and compromises are emphasized.

They then distinguish between four concrete categories of executive governments:

- *Single party, minimally winning or bare majority*: one party holds more than 50% of the seats in the legislature
- *Minimally winning coalitions*: two or more parties holds more than 50% of the seats in the legislature

- *Minority cabinets*: government is supported by party or coalitions that hold less than 50% of the seats in the legislature
- *Oversized executives*: additional parties are included beyond that of a minimally winning coalition

On the basis of these types of executive government characteristics, conventions are formed, which are regarded as fairly stable. They gravitate towards consultative practices the more one moves downwards in the direction of a minority or an oversized executive. The more one moves upwards the more practices tend to become majoritarian.

The two dimensions—state structure and nature of executive government—combine to exercise a significant influence on the formation of public policy.

1. Deep and rapid structural reform tends to be more difficult in *consensual* systems than in *majoritarian* systems. Majoritarian systems focus on political will, and generation of winners and losers. The more consensual the regime, the more likely is the opposite result. Consensual systems are less inclined to and less capable of radical reform.
2. *Centralized* countries find it less difficult to carry out radical reform than *decentralized* countries.

Abrupt policy changes produce winners and losers. The more consensual the regime, the more likely that losers will be represented in the executive leading to the proposition that policies will become diluted in the process. At the same time majoritarian policies may also fall victim to abrupt policy shifts. Reformers in more decentralized political systems will find it more difficult to carry out sweeping synoptic reforms than in centralized ones. All these features are well known. Pollitt and Bouckaert allow intermediary solutions, that is, the possibilities of hybrids combining very different or even contradictory elements.

These two dimensions seem well suited to explain the English HE reform experience of rapid and radical change of the 1980s and increase our understanding of why it was different. It also makes sense in terms of reform experiences that Switzerland is locked at the opposite extreme on both dimensions. The position of the remaining countries in our sample is consensual, but centralized regimes (Italy, the Netherlands) and arguably intermediate regimes are found on both dimensions (France,

Portugal, Norway and Germany). Over time there has been some movement, but none of the countries has changed position significantly (Lijphardt 1999).

### *Actor Constellation*

Relations between politicians and bureaucrats vary across countries and over time (Peters 2008; Painter and Peters 2010b; Olsen 1983; Jacobsen 1967). A crucial issue is whether civil service decision-making is dominated by “technical” or “political” criteria, and what impact this has on careers. At one extreme, political careers are sharply separated from administrative careers while at the other extreme they are not clearly distinguished or “intermingled”. There is no accepted scale or classification available like the majoritarian versus consensual distinction. Politician-bureaucrat relations are complex and often difficult to specify. The role of top civil servants is a case in point. These positions are inherently political, and some contributions underscore the increasing weight of politicization, even in countries with a strong merit system and strong norms of civil servant neutrality (Peters and Pierre 2002). Furthermore, actor constellations at state level that have a bearing on policy reform include not just the minister-senior civil servant relations, but also the division of roles and responsibilities; cooperative or adversarial relations; ministerial capacity for policymaking and reform; ministry capacity for control; number of central agencies, degree of institutional differentiation; and position of the different institutions and their problem structures and reform ideas (Verhoest et al. 2010: 70–71).

The question is whether the formulation of reform proposals can rely on shared understanding and perceptions of policy problems, appropriate normative orientations and particular problem definitions and solutions. Shared perceptions are likely to facilitate a good match between reform designs and political preferences. One of the implications for administrative reform is that we may assume that countries with intertwined civil servant/politician relations will experience fewer problems advancing radical reform proposals. However, integrated elites at the top of the bureaucracy might also create problems in the following implementation process, as political decisions made at the top might be impeded by administrative opposition at a lower level generating implementation problems and implementation gaps as reform proposals trickle down the

administrative ladder and reach the implementation stage (Lynn and Jay 1981).<sup>4</sup>

### *Administrative Tradition*

The question of administrative cultures turns on whether different cultures, each with their own specific values and assumptions, may be identified. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) distinguish between two main types—that of the “*Rechtsstaat*” and of the “*Public interest*”—based on how the role of the state is perceived. In the *Rechtsstaat* model the state is considered an integrating force, focused on the preparation and enforcement of law. Consequently, the bureaucracy emphasizes rule-following, correctness and legal control, its public servants will be trained in law, and a separate body of administrative law will be created. This type of administrative culture is often identified with the Weberian bureaucracy. The *Public interest* model on the other hand, envisages a less dominant role for the state. Government is a necessary evil, and ministers and officials have to be held accountable to the public through a variety of means. The law issue is not as dominant as in the *Rechtsstaat* model, and many civil servants will not have legal training. The process of governing and administration takes place in the context of competing interest groups, and the role of governing consists in being a fair and independent arbiter or *referee*, not that of a technical or legal expert.

The *Rechtsstaat*-public interest dichotomy is somewhat crude, since it leaves important dimensions out, as admitted by Pollitt and Bouckaert. Furthermore, it lumps a large number of countries into the *Rechtsstaat* category—in the TRUE sample we end up with one country (England) in the public interest category and the rest more or less clearly in the *Rechtsstaat* category. A more fine-grained picture of administrative cultures can be explored through the literature of administrative traditions (Peters 2008; Painter and Peters 2010a: 20). The notion of “administrative tradition”<sup>5</sup> is close to that of “administrative culture”, but contains elements of institutionalism as well. The premise here is that administrative structures are engaged in political processes, but still distinguishable from state traditions. The nature of public administration may be influenced by political system characteristics, but may also develop independently. The assumption here is that specific traditions might influence contemporary reform and privilege certain policies rather than others (Peters 2008).

Administrative traditions can be defined in various ways. Painter and Peters (2010a) group administrative traditions into four families: Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian. They follow the Pollitt and Bouckaert scheme to a considerable extent, but divide the *Rechtsstaat* category into three different traditions; Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian, each with a different combination of features (Table 9.1). One of the advantages is the specification of a separate *Napoleonic tradition*. In comparative administration the Napoleonic tradition is underrepresented (Ongaro 2010). But still the same question applies as to whether it is possible to identify one coherent tradition of cases classified as Napoleonic or whether they differ too widely along significant dimensions.

In the *Anglo-American tradition* boundaries between state and civil society are far from clear. There are close ties to the Common law tradition, an inductive and procedural approach through the accumulation of case law, in contrast to the Roman law tradition with its deductive approach. Furthermore, there is a tendency to elevate political rather than legal accountability mechanisms. The profession of public administration is about management and policy, not the law. Still the doctrine of separation of politics and administration is prevalent.

*Napoleonic* traditions share the *Rechtsstaat* focus on law as a state instrument for intervening in society rather than serving as a means of conflict resolution. A separate system of public law regulates relations between state and citizen. Administration is closely related to laws, and the complex relations between constitutional law, statutes, regulations, administrative notes and circulars, define the scope and content of administration. Within the Napoleonic tradition, Peters (2008) asserts that the role that societal actors and networks legitimately can play in countries characterized by this administrative tradition is rather small. In fact, interest group participation is considered almost illegitimate interventions into state autonomy. Therefore, interests are not usually incorporated into public administration and there is considerable selectivity about participation. State autonomy is crucial in these administrative traditions. Still, Peters acknowledges the need to study whether the development of network governance has enhanced the role of society in these countries.

The crucial question is if systematic propositions on the relation between administrative structures and the character of reforms could be formulated within Napoleonic traditions. One important feature often

**Table 9.1** Families of administrative traditions

	<i>Anglo-American</i>	<i>Napoleonic</i>	<i>Germanic</i>	<i>Scandinavian</i>
Legal basis for the state	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-society relations	Pluralist	Interventionist	Organic	Organic/welfareist “open government”
Organization of government	Limited, unitary government	Indivisible (Jacobin) republic Hierarchical, centralized	Integrated cooperative federalism, interlocking coordination	Decentralized through administrative or political decentralization
Civil service	High status, unified, neutral, generalist permanent	Very high status permanent, specialized, elite training, segmented corps	Very high status, permanent, legal training, upper ranks permanent, openly partisan	High status, professional, non-politicized

Source: Painter and Peters (2010a)



associated with the Napoleonic traditions is the problem of “implementation gaps”. Such gaps may be observed in two different ways: firstly, the distance between what is prescribed by reform legislation and the actual existence of management tools; and secondly the distance between the mere presence and the actual utilization of management tools. The assumption of the existence of such a gap in the implementation of reforms in Italy is widely shared in international political science and public administration literature. Still, the problem of explaining implementation gaps remains (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). Although such gaps exist all over the place, they appear to be larger in Napoleonic countries than those experienced in northern Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon countries thus opening up for cross-national comparison as one way of arriving at explanations, e.g. associated with differences in typical reform trajectories.

It has been argued that the changing Italian system may provide a more favorable environment for more radical, wide and rapid transformations (Ongaro and Valotti 2008; Ongaro 2010). The picture of the relations between executive politicians and top bureaucrats is complex, but the closer connection between the two components determined by the spoils system might reinforce the tendency to radical and sweeping reforms, as well as sudden interruption or reversals of them. By comparison data from France seem to suggest a different reform trajectory. Management reforms in France seem more fragmented as management tools have been domesticated (Rouban 2008). The main characteristic of administrative reform processes in France is the rather steady progress through incremental changes and not through major legislative overnight changes. On this basis it is also often contended that only a strong political commitment may alter this structure. This suggests that public management reforms also differ even within the category of Napoleonic traditions (Suleiman 2003; quoted in Rouban 2008).

German traditions differ from Napoleonic traditions in several ways. While *Rechtsstaat* traditions are embedded in a decentralized and federalist order, Napoleonic traditions focus on the unitary organization of the state, a “technocratic” orientation towards decision-making and a nation-building role of government. A unified administrative arrangement produces uniformity as well as an exclusive administrative class. The southern variants are characterized by high degree of legal formalism, management by decrees coupled with clientelism. Legal formalism breeds double talk, and outcomes are arranged through informal

**Table 9.2** Families of administrative traditions—TRUE sample

<i>Anglo-American</i>	<i>Napoleonic</i>	<i>Germanic</i>	<i>Scandinavian</i>
England	France Portugal Italy	Germany Switzerland Netherlands	Norway

relations. Furthermore, the Germanic cooperation between state and non-state corporations, which often are given a special legal status, a feature strongly related to the organic view of society also stands out, in addition to the fact that German administrative structures are more fragmented than their French counterparts.

*Scandinavian traditions* combine the German orientation towards the law with a strong universal welfare orientation. It operates within unitary states, but shares with Germanic traditions similar corporate mechanisms of cooperation between state and non-state actors. In addition, it is also characterized by small ministries supplemented by a variety of autonomous agencies.

In the following table, the TRUE cases are distributed according to families of administrative traditions (Table 9.2).

Norway is an obvious example of Scandinavian administrative traditions. Usually France, Portugal and Italy are regarded as countries belonging to the family of the Napoleonic administrative traditions (Ongaro 2010). Ongaro underscores the significance of the interpenetration and porousness between the civil service and political careers in Napoleonic countries compared to the others, as well as the significance of law as opposed to management (Ongaro 2010). Again the problem of hybrids and compounds comes up (e.g. Netherlands, Portugal and Italy). Italy seems to have “imported” the French model in its entirety (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). This does not apply to Portugal, where the administrative tradition may be regarded as a specific combination of British, French and indigenous influences (Corte-Real 2008).

### *Diversity of Policy Advice*

The last item in the template is focused on the question of policy advice. Here we ask about the extent to which high level civil servants are directly involved in HE policy-making or whether important alternative sources of policy advice have emerged.

In general, the civil service is regarded as the prime source of policy advice and normally considered the most obvious source of professional policy advice and feasible options. However, the monopoly on policy advising once held by the civil service has gradually been broken. We have seen a considerable increase in the number and prominence within government of political advisers appointed outside the civil service framework. Additional policy advice is also being provided by a variety of policy and planning units as well as special advisers and various forms of experts, consultants and (politically affiliated) think tanks. The old civil service prerogative of policy advice has also come under pressure from various external sources, most notably external challenges such as internationalization, Europeanization, and multilevel policy-making processes. It has been increasingly argued that a shift from government to governance has occurred, where formal hierarchies are being supplemented as well as challenged by alternative organizational forms such as networks (Peters and Pierre 1998; Rhodes 1996). The capacity of the national bureaucracy to deliver policy expertise and policy advice is reduced, forcing the state to extract policy advice from institutions and networks outside the civil service, at the national level from semi-autonomous administrative agencies and networks, but increasingly also from international and supra-national arenas and networks.

Nevertheless, the extent and form of this kind of development vary considerably across nations. Based on McGann (2009: 13), the TRUE countries could be divided into three groups according to where think tanks are most prevalent. The UK, Germany and France are at the top, a middle group consists of Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands, while Portugal and Norway are at the bottom of the list.

Thus structures and processes of policy advice seem to vary across nation states, between highly competitive, adversarial, and politically partisan (UK), and more consensual and non-partisan (Germany and Switzerland), as well as technocratic ones (France). These differences seem to have affinity to differences in political-administrative systems. The UK case represents a type of system, where there are contested and more competitive processes of winners and losers. Here there is a tendency towards radical advice, of the provision of policy advice that facilitates more radical policy reform. Decentralized and federalist systems like Germany and Switzerland provide numerous access points for external policy advice. Yet what is produced is generally consensual, incremental and non-partisan processes of political advice. There is not much space

for partisan political advice, which would require a decoupling of think tank networks and dominant corporatist structures. Thus there is little evidence to support the standard proposition that the wider the range of sources of advice, the more likely it is that new ideas might be adopted by policy-makers (Peters and Pierre 1998). Napoleonic systems provide a different environment for policy advice. The centralist features of the political system offer few entry points for external actors and expertise. Policy advice takes the form of technocratic and statist expertise. We conclude this part by presenting the TRUE sample according to how the countries might be classified in terms of the five dimensions and the illustrations that we have discussed above (Table 9.3).

### *Political-Administrative Systems and Reform Policy*

After having presented the five dimensions of the political-administrative system based on the contributions of Lijphart (1999), Painter and Peters (2010a), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), and Verhoest et al. (2010) and classified the TRUE countries in terms of these dimensions, we are now in a position to formulate more systematic assumptions about the likely relative HE reform activity in these countries in terms of the timing, pace, rate and direction of reform.

We suggest the following propositions concerning characteristics of political systems and reform policy, including HE reform policy.

#### *State Structure*

Variations in state structures will produce reforms that vary in pace and scope. The most straightforward basis for this hypothesis is the different opportunities, pointed out by Lijphart (1999) that exist for actors to slow down, modify or prevent decisions from being made in unitary, centralized states (few) as opposed to federal and decentralized ones (many):

- In centralized state structures HE reforms are expected to be more comprehensive in scope than in decentralized states where numerous veto points are more likely to limit the scope of reforms.
- In centralized state structures HE reforms are expected to be more oriented towards policies that support hierarchization.
- In decentralized/federal states HE reforms are more likely to be oriented towards policies that favor network governance.

**Table 9.3** Types of political-administrative regimes, TRUE sample

	<i>State structures</i>	<i>Executive government</i>	<i>Actor constellations</i>	<i>Administrative traditions<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Diversity of policy advice</i>
England	Unitary Centralized Coordinated	Majoritarian	Separate not politicized admin. capacity	Public interest	Civil service/think tanks
Norway	Unitary Centralized Coordinated	Consensual	Separate, not politicized admin. capacity	Social democratic Consensual	Civil service/
France	Unitary Centralized Coordinated	Intermediate	Integrated, fairly politicized admin. capacity	Napoleonic	Mainly civil service
Italy	Unitary Decentralized	Coalition/ majoritarian	Politicized admin. capacity	Napoleonic	Civil service
Portugal	Unitary, centralized	Consensual/ intermediate	Politicized, but separate admin. capacity	Napoleonic	Civil service
Netherlands	Unitary Fairly fragmented	Consensual	Separate, fairly politicized admin. capacity	From legalistic to plural/consensual	Broad mixture
Germany	Federal Coordinated	Intermediate	Separate, fairly politicized admin. capacity	Rechtsstaat	Mainly civil service
Switzer-Land	Federal decentralized	Consensual	Separate admin. capacity	Rechtsstaat	Civil service

<sup>a</sup>Note that we have changed the geographical labels of administrative traditions for what we consider more relevant generic ones

### *Executive Dimension*

Variation in executive regime, in party composition and durability of cabinets has consequences for HE reform policy. These hypotheses are based on Lijphart's (1999) analysis of the characteristics of majoritarian and consensual systems suggesting variations both in the capacity to produce radical change and to keep up steady reform processes. However,

the argument that one-party majority governments produce more effective and efficient policy-makers is based on reasoning that confuses the impact of the “strong hand” with that of the “steady hand”. Lijphart argues that coalition governments are just as able or even better able to provide sensible and coherent policy-making, and that policies supported by a broad consensus have better chances of being implemented. Policies that stay on a steady course are thus superior to policies implemented by a determined government that may be succeeded by an equally determined opposing party resulting in a stop-go pattern of policy-making:

- Majoritarian political systems will produce HE reforms that are more comprehensive, radical and sweeping than consensual political systems.
- Majoritarian systems tend to produce a stop-go pattern of reform while consensual systems tend to produce a more continuous and incremental pattern of reform.
- Cabinet structures seem to have a weak explanatory power. All governments in our sample tended to seek and receive cross-party consensus. Thus it has to be acknowledged that consensual as well as majoritarian cabinet structures may be able to carry out significant reforms.

#### *Administrative Tradition/Administrative Culture*

The basic assumption here is that variations in administrative traditions tend to produce different reform trajectories along at least two dimensions. The first is the extent to which legal instruments are important or dominant compared to other policy instruments. The second is how administrative traditions induce different ways of practicing reform policies. These assumptions underscore the significance of legal traditions for HE reform. However, the relationship between administrative tradition and reform policy is not straight forward. Tentatively we suggest these hypotheses.

- A strong administrative law component (seen in *Rechtsstaat* and *Napoleonic* traditions) seems to strengthen focus on control and regulations.
- Administrative cultures of the *Rechtsstaat* tradition tend to induce incremental administrative HE reforms, whereas *public interest* traditions gravitate towards comprehensive HE reform.

- Administrative cultures of the *Rechtsstaat* tradition tend to induce reform through legal procedures, whereas public interest traditions gravitate towards a more varied set of devices.

### *Actor Constellation*

The actor constellation in focus here is the relationship between politicians and senior civil servants. It is usually assumed that this relationship is important for how reforms are implemented through public bureaucracies: They may be tightly integrated, e.g. through a spoils system, where senior civil servants act like politicians, or they may be separated in a constellation where politicians operating according to political criteria are sharply separated from administrators operating in accordance with “technical” criteria. As argued above, the implications of integration or separation are not straight forward. The underlying variable that is emphasized here is whether these actor groups enjoy trusting mutual relationships and how this interacts with the degree and form of civil servant involvement in policy-making (Peters and Pierre 2002; Verhoest et al. 2010).

- Political-administrative relations, where minister-top civil servant relations are adversarial with little civil servant involvement in policy-making, induce radical reform and favor NPM-oriented policies.
- Political-administrative relations, where minister-top civil servant relations are trusting with considerable civil servant involvement in policy-making, induce incremental reform and favor Network governance oriented policies.
- Cooperative and trusting relations between ministers and civil servants combined with a low capacity for control/(small ministries) and a weak position of central ministries might provide a fruitful context for reform policies in the form of autonomous agencies.

*Diversity of policy advice:* As already noted the nature of policy advice in the TRUE countries seem to be related to and affected by the political-administrative structure and the policy environment in which they are embedded, and at this point we are not in a position to formulate hypotheses about the effect of the diversity of policy advice on policies.

*Applying the Perspective on HE Reform Policy*

The different strands of literature discussed here differ along a number of dimensions. Both the Lijphardtian literature on comparative political systems and policy, and the literature on political-administrative traditions are associated with the macro-institutional context of the state (Yesilkagit 2010). But we also know that policies, institutional setups and structures vary within a particular country, albeit to a different extent, and they remain lodged in different setups, norms and traditions of governance (Peters 2010; Lodge 2010). We may also distinguish between different sector traditions (Yesilkagit 2010). Obviously this applies to the liberal Anglo-Saxon countries where coordination has been weak, but we also find a variety of sector governance traditions in more tightly coordinated countries like the Netherlands and Norway. Such features may reflect older structures and traditions embedded in the various sectors. Thus, the relations between national political-administrative systems and sector systems can be regarded as somewhat loose or indeterminate.

These reservations, notwithstanding, we shall use secondary data from the comparison of HE reforms presented by Paradeise et al. (2009), the most systematic comparative analysis available, in an attempt to test the assumptions that follow from the comparative analysis of political-administrative systems discussed above. The main conclusions in the Paradeise et al. (2009) study were as follows: The pace, methods and extent of reform and policy change varied across countries. If one considers the period from 1980 onwards, the study thus identified one NPM outlier (UK), one group of Continental European countries, and the Netherlands in between. The authors claim that the UK must be understood as a NPM outlier, apart from which the diffusion of most radical NPM ideas proved problematic. Outside the UK and possibly the Netherlands, policy-makers did not have the ambition of building an exhaustive system of operational instruments based on an elaborated ex ante theory of action. They also suggested that interest in new policy instruments in the other countries resulted mostly from increasing cost-awareness. In this interpretation, reforms and instruments have been largely contained within national HE traditions, and the new levers of action were digested by the environment they were supposed to impact. Implementation processes have tended to follow incremental rather than radical trajectories. In many countries, such as France, Italy, Norway, Germany, and Switzerland, general legislation would typically pile up,



whereas implementation tended not to follow policy objectives. Reforms that developed during the 1990s were mostly disjointed and incremental. Yet, deliberately or not, technical measures sometimes opened unexpected channels for change as was the case in France. Furthermore, tendencies towards systematic reform have become more perceptible since the turn of the century and more powerful instruments of funding, evaluation and governance have been introduced in countries like France, Norway, Germany and Switzerland (Bleiklie and Lange 2010; Bleiklie et al. 2011; Paradeise et al. 2009). Thus the net result of reform activity over a span of 30 years remains to be seen, as is the comparative reform histories of the “strong hand” UK-policies and the “steady hand” policies of France and Norway. These reforms span over quite a wide range of aspects such as legal status, funding, evaluation, institutional leadership, decision-making and internal organization. Thus it is important also to look at the focus or emphasis of reforms both as to the specific dimensions that are targeted in a country and the extent to which reform efforts are comprehensive or focused on one or a few dimensions (Paradeise et al. 2009). If we distinguish between NPM and NG policies, we find that network governance has contributed to limiting and modifying the effect of NPM policies in settings as different as the Netherlands and Switzerland (Bleiklie et al. 2011).

We argue that there are significant differences between countries with different administrative traditions. The Napoleonic and Rechtsstaat traditions have several features in common, when measured against the British public service tradition. But they differ substantially along other dimensions, and interact with other state level dimensions such as state structure. The difference between federalist and unitary states is a case in point. There is a big difference between the German federalist structure and the more unitary French organization of the state along the centralization/decentralization dimension. This also applies to social democratic systems normally associated with countries in northern Europe and Scandinavia. As a type of political-administrative regime, the social-democratic tradition shares the strong unitary state dimension with France, but still appears decentralized. Unlike the Napoleonic tradition, where the role that societal actors and networks legitimately can play is rather small and interest group participation is considered almost illegitimate, interventions into state autonomy and participation in policy networks is extensive and legitimate. This might suggest a more participatory pattern

of modernization, including policy formation and implementation, rather than a managerial pattern.

In order to produce a tool that can help us analyse the complex picture rendered by available studies of HE reform, we have developed a procedure to reanalyze data from Paradeise et al. (2009) inspired by the approach used by Pollit and Bouckaert (2004) in that we find their Neo-Weberian distinction between modernizers and marketizers as representatives of alternative modernization strategies useful for our purposes. Thus Continental European countries, usually perceived as NPM laggards, were here conceptualized as actors pursuing a positive modernization trajectory.

The Paradeise et al. (2009) study developed narratives as a central principle for the organization and interpretation of data. Narratives are stories about actual or fictional events. Their strength is based on their internal coherence that affords cognitive frames used as policy models and theories for action. However, what is gained in coherence may be lost in nuance and prevent us from identifying important factors that affect reform policies. A reconceptualization and recalibration of the various reform dimensions from a narrative to an indicator oriented framework may therefore help us identify more empirically delineated reform routes which entail a different type of evaluation of the reforms and their various components.

Based on thematic charts presenting reforms and changes in seven European countries from 1980 until 2005 in Paradeise et al. (2009: 247–290), we selected nine reform dimensions that are of particular interest to us and at the same time provide a broad range of reform activities in the HE policy field. The charts were originally developed to map changes between 1980 and 2005 and were developed after lengthy discussions were members of the project team behind the book discussed and selected dimensions they agreed were of importance to university governance and were researchable in terms of available data in the participating countries.<sup>6</sup> The thematic charts were then developed with brief verbal descriptions of each country's position on each dimension during the 1980s and during the 2000s. Based on the 20 different dimensions in this study we selected 9 dimensions (Table 9.4). Each country was given a score on three reform characteristics on each of the dimensions: (1) the amount of change involved, (2) year of reform and (3) degree of implementation. Scores were given on the basis of the

**Table 9.4** HE reform output in seven European countries 1980–2005

	<i>Engl.</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Netherl.</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Switzerl.</i>
1. Procedural	3	3	1	3	5	3	3
2. Ext. govern.	3	3	4	2	3	2	2
3. Stakeholders	0	2	2	1	4	3	0
4. Org decision	2	3	2	2	4	1	1
5. Int. organiz	0	3	2	0	0	0	2
6. Leadership	6	4	4	0	5	1	1
7. Ext. funding	6	4	3	2	3	2	2
8. Int. funding	3	3	3	1	4	1	2
9. Evaluation	6	4	3	1	1	2	1
	29	29	24	12	29	15	14

verbal characterization provided by the thematic charts about amount of change and degree of implementation as shown below in addition to the year relevant reforms were introduced in the countries in question.

1. **Change:** (0) None (1) Minor (2) Major
2. **Year:** (0) 2000s (1) 1990s (2) 1980s
3. **Implementation:** (0) Weak (1) Medium (2) Strong

Scores on each criterion may vary between 0 and 2 and on each dimension between 0 and 6. The scores thus give a condensed expression of whether a country has been a swift and sweeping reformer as opposed to a slow and incremental one, or something in between. With nine different reform dimensions the scores also give an impression of reform emphasis as well as reform persistence. The reform dimensions are: procedural reforms, external governance, role of stakeholders, internal decision-making, internal organizational structure, leadership, external funding, internal funding, and evaluation. The results are presented in Table 9.4.

The countries have been grouped in order to keep different administrative traditions together, based on the idea that administrative culture and tradition play an important part in distinguishing between HE reform outcomes. Therefore Public interest (England), Social democratic (Norway), Napoleonic (France and Italy)<sup>7</sup> and Rechtsstaat (Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland) traditions seemed as a good point of departure to formulate assumptions about reform experiences. We would expect the former traditions to achieve high scores and the latter to

achieve lower scores. We are not going to comment on all the 12 propositions presented above in detail, but rather focus on the actual scores of the seven countries and how they may be interpreted against the backdrop of the political-administrative characteristics discussed previously.

Not unexpectedly, England achieved top score, combining a majoritarian system, a unitary state structure, long cabinet life, and a public interest administrative culture. Norway's high score is interesting. It may suggest that although consensual systems may be slow in making comprehensive reform, sustained activity across a broad range of issues may yield results over longer time spans that match those of majoritarian regimes. This case may testify to the thesis suggested by Olsen (1996) about the "triumph of the tortoise" in the context of national reform policies. Still, there is also much to suggest that the Norwegian political system has moved in the direction of a majoritarian system the last 10–20 years (Baldersheim and Rose 2010).

However, the position of the Netherlands and Norway with the same reform score needs further discussion. The Dutch position is not well explained by the characteristics of these models. Timing may be the major difference compared to other consensual regimes. The fact that the Dutch started reforming rather early has given new policies longer time to take effect than in countries that started later. In addition, the fact that the Netherlands is a unitary state makes a major difference compared to the two other federal *Rechtsstaat* regimes in which the federal governments firstly, play a minor role compared to the *Länder* and Cantons and secondly constitute a structure with far more veto points that limit the possibility for comprehensive reform policies at the federal level.

The concept of the Napoleonic family of administrative traditions is not often explored in comparative public administration (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). The two Napoleonic regimes look quite different when it comes to HE reform. The Italian structure is characterized by a combination of unitary and decentralized state structure and a tradition of large majoritarian coalitions. It has also been argued that the closer connection between Italian politicians and top civil servants forged by the spoils system have reinforced both the tendency to radical and broad reforms, as well as the sudden interruption or reversals of them (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). But Italy has arguably produced little in terms of HE reforms compared to France. The Italian reform pattern seems to represent the classical "Napoleonic" pattern where reform tends to focus

more on legislation and procedure at the expense of other policy instruments that are needed in order to achieve political reform. In this sense the broader focus of the French reforms may demonstrate that with deployment of a broader range of policy instruments, this pattern is less prevalent than in Italy. This is somewhat at odds with prior descriptions of French administrative policies as rather fragmented and weakly influenced by NPM ideas (Rouban 2008). There seems to be contrasting and somewhat contradictory evidence in Napoleonic countries on reform experiences. The conventional view is that administrative reform has been more limited in France compared to most other countries, like the northern European countries or the UK. The Napoleonic administrative tradition creates an unfavorable environment for the implementation of NPM models and mechanisms. Still it has been maintained that path-breaking budgetary and procedural changes have been carried out and a full set of performance instruments implemented (Bezes 2010). There has been a slow but steady ideological conversion among top civil servants, and NPM has become the new orthodoxy, at least for some reform issues. Through a combination of displacement and layering processes reforms have taken new and surprising shapes, where “low profile” procedural reforms have been reshaped as budgetary reforms, taking on performance measurement elements in the process. But such layering and conversion processes where policy-makers work around the opposition by adding new institutions without dismantling older ones (Palier 2004), and where policy instruments change significantly during the policy process also makes the task of inventorying policy change along different policy areas problematic.

The substantial differences between the Italian and the French reform profiles are also interesting in relation to notions of implementation gaps. Often it is assumed that Napoleonic systems provide severe impediments for implementation of NPM reforms (Ongaro 2010). The variations discovered do not provide empirical support to such a view.

The low reform scores of Germany and Switzerland is clearly what one might expect in federal political regimes that produce many veto points compared to the rest. In addition, in the German case the combination of minimally winning coalitions and the powerful and reluctant position of the professoriate should be mentioned, and in the Swiss case, the dominant perception that their system works rather well in terms of quality as well as efficiency. Still, from a Swiss point of view it could be argued that policies have worked not in spite of, but because

they are enmeshed in a system of consultations and organized interests. One major reform, therefore, introduced after prolonged and extensive debate and consultation, could achieve at least as much as ten smaller initiatives, and a broad consensus improves the chances of having policies implemented. Even though Swiss reforms might seem modest from a comparative cross-national perspective, commentators have characterized changes brought about in the 1990s as a paradigmatic shift that deeply modified the HE system (Perellon 2001). Federal authorities have managed to gain influence over the definition of the general conditions within which HE policy has to be developed in Switzerland. The road that had to be followed in order to get there has been characterized as tortuous (Perellon 2001).

Specific explanations aside, the structure of the findings does not conform well to conventional comparative divisions like the consensual-majoritarian divide or the *Rechtstaat*-public service divide. There are, however, indications that the Netherlands as well as Norway has been moving from the *Rechtstaat*-consensual regime towards a majoritarian-public service oriented regime. The high reform scores of the two northern European states also conform to the Pollitt and Bouckaert findings on administrative policies, which identified major implementation differences between continental European countries on the one hand and the UK, as well as between Northern and Southern Europe.

We argue that a more differentiated grid of political-administrative regimes, where administrative traditions and cultures are the most enduring features, might be more fruitful for our purposes. This allows a more fine-grained interpretation based on four different traditions; the public service, *Rechtsstaat*, social-democratic and Napoleonic traditions normally associated with distinct geographical denominations. One might suggest that the Netherlands perhaps should be treated as a North European social democratic country comparable to Norway, as these states arguably share a specific participatory modernization trajectory which will have to be explored further.

It might be objected that our use of quantitative methods in comparative research in order to assess policy outputs and performance is problematic. The greater number of policy initiatives are taken as unquestioned achievements. In a generic sense this type of quantification postulates equal effectiveness of German and British HE policies. Policy counting obviously has its shortcomings. So does equating outputs with performance. The actual impact of these reforms is a question that needs

further research. There is obviously a danger that policy outputs in consensual/PR and decentralized countries, with their structural characteristics, might be underestimated in this type of analysis. Still we would argue that this kind of policy counting, which includes both the scope of reform in a number of well-selected areas as well as their implementation, nonetheless provide a useful measure of policy-making capacity as well as policy output.

## CONCLUSION

We have argued in this chapter for the usefulness of testing structural approaches in comparative studies of HE reform policies. Based on contributions by Lijphardt (1999), Politt and Bouckaert (2004), Painter and Peters (2010a), and Verhoest et al. (2010) we outlined a typology of political-administrative regimes, and tested the approach empirically based on data from Paradeise et al. (2009). The results demonstrate that there is no straightforward unequivocal relationship between political-administrative structures and reform activity. Nevertheless, we have demonstrated its usefulness because it helps us clarify how structural conditions may have deep implications for policy outcomes, but in a much more flexible and ambiguous way than one might have expected if the goal had been to identify one to one relationships between structure and outcome. Thus the next step is to link agency to reform policy.

Accordingly, the structural approach can help us make sense of some of the variation we have observed. The three high score reformers belong to three different administrative traditions, and all four traditions are represented if we include France which is not far behind, among the high score reformers. This suggests that the traditions per se cannot explain the variation we have observed in a deterministic way. The only common characteristic is the unitary state structure we find in all the high performing countries. However, the lowest score reformer also has a unitary, although (increasingly) decentralized, state. Among the low score reformers Germany and Switzerland share characteristics on a number of dimensions, but Italy hardly share any with the two former countries. We are left with the impression that structural characteristics offer different conditions for reform processes that may limit or be exploited by actors who may want to promote, to slow down or downright prevent reforms from being introduced. Thus there are different paths to high reform scores, one based on the ability of actors to implement swift

and sweeping reform (England, Netherlands) and another on the ability to keep up a relatively steady incremental process over a broad range of issues (France, Norway). Similarly, there seems to be two main roads to low reform scores, one characterized by federal structures and many veto points (Germany, Switzerland), the second by decentralized structures with a reform focus on legal and procedural issues and a relatively strong separation between formal procedure and informal practice. This leads to the unsurprising conclusion that the relationship between structural conditions like the ones studied here and policy processes is not deterministic but stochastic. It also demonstrates the necessity of studying empirically how structures and agency interact in affecting the outcome of policy processes.

## NOTES

1. Data on one of the eight countries in the TRUE project, Portugal, are not complete (cf. note 7).
2. In addition to the literature on comparative political systems, there are various strands of literature that might be relevant for our purposes: literature on *welfare state regimes* (Esping Andersen 1990) and partisan politics and redistribution policy (Iversen and Soskice 2006; Iversen and Stephens 2008); on *public administration and public policy* (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004); and on *networks and their role in policy formation* (Bleiklie 2006; Koppenjan et al. 2009; Rhodes and Marsh 1992; Van Waarden 1992).
3. This approach provided the template for the comparative analysis of public management reforms in 12 different countries as well as the EU: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, England and USA.
4. Also role perceptions of top civil servants will be important, e.g., whether they consider themselves as judges, arbiters or negotiator/mediator or as party politicians or accountants (Olsen 1983).
5. By administrative tradition we mean “a historically based set of values, structures and relationships with other institutions that define the nature of appropriate public administration within society” (Peters 2008: 118).
6. The project, Steering of Universities (SUN) was funded by the EU PRIME program, led by Catherine Paradeise and the team had members from seven different European countries.
7. Data from Portugal were not collected in the SUN project.



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## Actor Constellations and Policy Making

*Ivar Bleiklie, Svein Michelsen, Mary Henkel  
and Emanuela Reale*

**Abstract** The chapter focuses on the HE sector itself, and the way in which it shapes HE policies in the light of two different perspectives: The first emphasizes the importance of organizational arrangements of the HE sectors for the shaping of HE policies. Then a comparative analysis of three countries—England, Italy and Norway is developed. The second perspective focuses on the HE sectors as areas in which organized actors pursue certain goals and values, and is used to provide a detailed analysis of policy processes. The empirical analysis is limited to the same three cases mentioned above. The chapter concludes by suggesting a possible way of conceptualizing the relationship between the organizational setup of the HE sector, its policy processes, and HE policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of higher education policy has traditionally been limited by its focus on higher education institutions and systems. Policies have by implication been conceptualized as external shocks that affect higher education, and the research questions have turned on how and to what extent they have caused change. As pointed out in Chap. 9, little attention has been given to the structural conditions under which policies are made, such as the political-administrative setup of the higher education policy sector and how this might affect the specific content and emphasis of higher education policies. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the political processes themselves—how and by whom policy proposals are made, by what actors they are promoted and shaped, and how they are supported and decided upon.

In Chap. 9, we looked at the relationship between characteristics of political-administrative regimes and higher education reform activity. In this chapter we will focus on the higher education sector itself, and the way in which it shapes HE policies. We will do this departing from two different perspectives: First, we raise the question of the extent to which and how characteristics of higher education policies are shaped by the organizational arrangements of the higher education sector. Like any policy sector we may consider the sector of higher education in the following two ways: The first is the policy sector as an organizational structure, a set of stable organizational arrangements through which authority, responsibilities and resources are distributed according to rules shaping the conditions of action under which policies are made. Based on this perspective we first focus on characteristics of the political-administrative apparatus and develop a comparative analysis of three countries—England, Italy and Norway. We develop a set of dimensions on which the comparison is based and we try to identify patterns that may demonstrate whether we can make a reasonable case in favor of the assumption that there is a relationship between the organizational structure of the HE sectors and policy content. The second perspective focuses on the HE sector as an area in which organized actors pursue certain goals and values, define identities, collaborate on common projects, struggle for power and compete for resources. Here we go into more detailed characteristics of policy processes.<sup>1</sup> The empirical analysis is limited to the three cases of England, Italy and Norway. In the last part of the chapter we suggest a possible way of conceptualizing the relationship between the

organizational setup of the HE sector, its policy processes, and HE policy. In the context of the TRUE project, policy is what is brought to bear on the institutions as policy pressure and the conditions under which it is produced. Our aim is to identify *higher education policy regimes* as a set of conditions that shape policies in terms of their structural arrangements, in terms of their actors in pursuit of particular policy goals and the interplay between these two sets of factors—thus policy processes are seen as shaped by as well as shaping structural conditions (Bleiklie 2006).

### HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY REGIMES

The concept of ‘policy regimes’ as it is used here is developed from a previous somewhat different context (Bleiklie 2006 [2000]). It departs from a general institutional approach that aims at identifying and bringing together core dimensions of formal organizational arrangements as systems of rules and norms with an actor’s perspective on bounded rational action shaped by the normative and resource environment.<sup>2</sup> We seek to identify these regime characteristics in order to find explanations of variations in HE policies. We define the concept of policy regime as follows: the constellation of actors and patterns of influence that are particular to a policy area or an entire polity. Because of the purpose of the analysis and the way in which it is informed by the availability of comparative data, we will use a somewhat different set of criteria in order to compare the policy sectors of the three countries. The policy regime concept should not be confused with the Lijphardtian typology of political-administrative regimes used in Chap. 9. While the latter represents an attempt to understand rather stable patterns in democratic politics in a number of European nation states, here the characteristics of policy regimes are used to explain policy-driven change within the sector of higher education. We will look at two sets of variables in order to explain policy outcomes as they emerge nationally.

The dependent variable—*policy change*—is here defined as policies aiming at organizational change in HE institutions, in particular changes that move university governance from the traditional model towards a managerial model, as outlined in Chap. 1. We define policy in terms of the policy instruments that are deployed (Schneider and Ingram 1990), focusing on the choice and use of policy instruments that are crucial to the pace and scope of change. There are numerous definitions and typologies of policy instruments (Bemelmans-Vidéc et al. 1998; Bleiklie 2006,

Schneider and Ingram 1990). Here we follow approximately the Ingram and Schneider (1990) typology, but narrow down the selection to instrument categories that are particularly important in the present context. We distinguish between: (a) authority and rules, (b) financial incentives (resources), and (c) consensus-building.

### *Structural Arrangements and Government Capacity*

First we are interested in how structural arrangements promote government capacity for top-down steering through organizational arrangements: (a) specialization of the government apparatus, (b) the form and degree of coordination and control of central government agencies below the ministry level, and (c) the relationship between HE institutions and central government authorities in terms of formal institutional autonomy.

#### *Specialization*

The central dimension here is the choice between broad multi-purpose organizations and narrower or even single-purpose organizational designs. This entails on the one hand a preference for large ministries or more focused ministries and the construction of more specific agencies on the other. An important feature of higher education policy sectors in Europe is that they have become increasingly specialized during the last decades. Where central administration agencies responsible for universities used to be made up by one (sometimes two) ministries, separate agencies have now been established under the ministries for a number of separate functions such as accreditation, quality assurance, funding, admission and/or internationalization. This variable will be measured in two ways: (a) by the number of central agencies, and (b) data on the position of the different institutions, their problem structures and reform ideas (Verhoest et al. 2010; 70–71), and we will do so to the extent that our data can shed light on this. Assuming that the degree and form of specialization may make a difference to policy processes and outcomes, we will look at possible relations between policy variation and varying degrees of specialization.

#### *Coordination and Control*

Here we use three indicators: (a) control capacity is measured by the size and status of the responsible ministry or ministerial unit (Heidenheimer 1992), which will give us an indicator of the policy making capacity of



the ministry in its function as a political secretariat for the minister; (b) coordination, which turns on the relationship between the ministry and subordinate central government units that may have a relatively independent position and freedom to make their own strategic decisions or operate under tight ministerial control. In the former case coordination may turn on negotiation, mutual adaptation and consensus, while in the latter case coordination will be directive and turn on instruction; (c) institutional autonomy (Chap. 3). Institutional autonomy in HE varies across countries. As higher education institutions in public systems also are executive agencies of the sector, they are both actors within the system and implementers of given policies with varying degrees of freedom and power to shape policies as part of the implementation process.

### *Political Processes*

Political processes and their outcome may depend on a number of factors. Here we emphasize four: (a) actual actors or constellations of actors that are particularly influential in political processes; (b) the definition of the situation that motivates a policy proposal (crisis/routine); (c) the scope and nature of participation (elitist, consensual); (d) major decision-making areas and decisive events.

### *Actor Constellation*

The question we seek to probe with this indicator is whether there are particular constellations of influential actors that we must observe such as elites, specific dominant actors (e.g. a ministry or funding institution), unions, associations of universities, accreditation or evaluation agencies or others that tend to be particularly influential. Furthermore, these actor groups may be more or less structurally fragmented or integrated. Bleiklie (2006) demonstrated how such rather stable characteristics manifested themselves in England, Norway and Sweden in the 1990s, where respectively co-opted elites, the ministry–university relation and the university teacher association played crucial policy making roles. There is no reason to assume that relatively stable patterns of a similar kind should be irrelevant in the 2010s.

### *Definition of Situation*

Policy-driven change may occur in many different ways—from forceful external shocks to the political system that causes abrupt changes (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), to gradual imperceptible changes that

build up over time to make up long-term fundamentally transformative processes (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Nyhagen 2015). The importance of ideas in processes of change is widely recognized in political science (Hall 1989; Hood 1995). We emphasize in this connection the importance of the definition of the actual situation on which particular policies are brought to bear. A crucial element in how change processes of policy change play out is whether they are considered attempts to solve crises or routine processes that represent continuing improvements or adjustments to existing policies in a relatively stable environment (Jacobsen 1964).

### *Decision-Making and Participation*

The engagement of actors who participate and affect the outcome of policy processes may vary in several ways: Across countries and over longer spans of time we may observe policy process variation in terms of openness and inclusiveness (e.g. the use and composition of reform commissions, policy advice, other forms of access for affected groups or the public at large). In each particular case participation also may vary in ways that are not necessarily predictable, e.g. if specific resourceful actors who would not normatively engage actively, chose to mobilize.

The importance of agency implies a focus on decision-making and the arenas where decisions are made and how actors or actor groups may affect the outcome on particular arenas (Bleiklie 2006). Such areas and the distribution of decision-making powers vary considerably across nations. Two major aspects of agency will be considered. One aspect is the extent to which particular actors or actor groups under given circumstances manage to affect the outcome of a policy process according to their preferences. The other aspect turns on how decisions may have unintended consequences, in some cases how even apparently minor decisions unintentionally may alter fundamental aspects of higher education systems and the way institutions are organized and operate.

### *Linking HE Policy Regimes with National Political-Administrative Regimes*

The reader is likely to ask what the relationship is between national political-administrative regimes and policy regimes. One might reasonably expect that as the HE sector is part of larger national political-administrative structures, HE policy regimes can be expected to be shaped by these

overarching structures, thus rendering a specific sector analysis superfluous. There are at least three reasons why we should not accept this assumption right away. One relates to the extent of horizontal coordination within central government in the various national settings, as significant differences across countries can be identified (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). We might also distinguish between different sector traditions (Yesilkagit 2010). Obviously this applies to countries where coordination is scant, but also in countries which are more tightly coordinated a variety of sector governance traditions can be found (Ibid). This is a difficult variable to estimate since sector traditions are usually a question of convention rather than law. Italy is considered as a quasi-federal structure, with weak horizontal coordination (Reale and Poti 2009; Ongaro and Valotti 2008), while the UK and Norway are considered as more coordinated. A second reason is that public higher education as a policy sector has tended to be rather insulated from the rest of the public administrative system. In a number of countries (e.g. England, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands) universities were established (and presumably traditions developed) well before modern nation states and political-administrative traditions were established. Additionally, the sector has traditionally been considered as a peculiar sector where universities enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and should be managed in a radically different way compared to public agencies in other sectors. Finally, if we take the argument about agency seriously, one cannot assume without questioning that characteristics of policy processes may be deduced from system level characteristics. We assume therefore that the relationship between political-administrative regimes and policy regimes needs to be studied empirically before we can draw any definite conclusions.

### POLICY SECTOR CHANGE PROCESSES

We use a series of measures to observe different indicators of policy change. Without moving into policy implementation processes per se we also look at observable manifestations of reform policies at the institutional level. The following four indicators are used: (a) reform activity: i.e. the number of reforms launched by the central government (Chap. 9); (b) emphasis of the proposals (Chap. 9); (c) policy pressure experienced at the institutional level (Seeber et al. 2015); (d) managerial strength of institutional leadership. Change along all these indicators is measured and evaluated according to two types of scales, a three-point

**Table 10.1** Indicators of policy change

	<i>England</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Reform activity	HIGH	HIGH	LOW
Reform emphasis	BROAD	BROAD	PROCEDURAL
Policy pressure	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Managerial strength	HIGH	LOW/MEDIUM	LOW

ordinal scale (HIGH, MEDIUM and LOW) and one nominal scale (procedural versus broad). In the latter case the values indicate the degree to which reforms are oriented towards procedural instruments or whether reform emphasis had been broader, including a variety of other reform instruments. On that basis some broad ‘implementation routes’ for the different countries can be specified accordingly Table 10.1.

As already pointed out in Chap. 9, England and Norway are countries with high reform activity and a relatively broad reform emphasis compared to the rest of the eight countries in the TRUE sample—a relatively high number of reforms covering a broad range of areas. In both countries we find the strongest emphasis on institutional governance, funding and evaluation. However, the English reform emphasis on these three areas is stronger than the Norwegian emphasis which is more evenly distributed across all nine policy areas that we measured. Italy makes up a contrast with relatively low reform activity and the strongest emphasis on procedural reforms. Thus two of the countries have a high level of activity over a broad range of issues. In the English case high activity and reform pressure come with governance reforms that have substantially strengthened leadership and management structures, while the Norwegian case is characterized by low to medium managerial and leadership strength, and the Italian case falls in the low managerial strength category. What distinguishes the Norwegian case in this context is the prominent role of consensus-building as a policy instrument which tends to soften policy pressure, and puts management in a weaker position vis-à-vis rank and file academics at least in the short term. Although reform rhetoric and general goals may be similar, the instruments by which policies were implemented are different. The wide range of instruments used by English and Norwegian authorities—particularly financial incentives—distinguishes them from the continued emphasis on procedural reforms by their Italian counterparts. Thus the three cases arguably display patterns that invite us to assume that there is

some connection between reform characteristics (activity, emphasis, policy pressure and governance) and the degree to which universities have changed from a traditional to a managerial organizational model. The differences between the Norwegian and English cases should, however, make us cautious not to draw too strong conclusions about the strength of this association.

### POLICY SECTOR STRUCTURES COMPARED

The entire HE policy sector has obviously gone through enormous changes in all European countries during the last 40 years. First of all, we know the well-documented growth as regards student numbers and the number and specialization of HE institutions. Second, we find as a general tendency that the number and specialized functions at the central government level have increased.

#### *Specialization*

The first observation we would like to point out is that it is not just the degree of specialisation that is of interest. Equally, if not more important, is how functions are divided and which functions are allocated to dedicated agencies.

In our three cases, we find that HE at the central level is under the responsibility of one government ministry and not spread out on several ministries like in countries such as the Netherlands or Switzerland. However, while the responsible ministries in Norway and Italy are ministries of education and research, in England responsibility for HE and research fell under the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (until July 2016),<sup>3</sup> indicating a stronger focus on employment and relevance to the economy and heavier emphasis on the performativity of research and education than in the other two countries. In Italy and Norway, higher education is both part of ministries of education and thus reflect the role of higher education as part of the combined national education effort.

Below ministry level all three countries, like most West European countries, have established agencies for quality assurance and/or accreditation (Table 10.2), although differently organized. In all three countries one agency is responsible for higher education quality assurance, while these functions in Italy also include research evaluation and

**Table 10.2** Central government agencies below ministry level

	<i>England*</i>	<i>Italy**</i>	<i>Norway***</i>
General		Dept. of HE MiUR	Dir. for Education
Funding	HEFCE	Office for HE funding MiUR	
Research council	RC UK with 7 Research councils	CNR	RCN
National research ctrs		CNR, INFN, INAF, etc.	
Quality/accreditation	QAA <sup>a</sup>	ANVUR (AVA, VQR)	NOKUT
Others			
–Statistics	HESA	ISTAT	
–Student complaints adjudication	OIA		
–Access/admission	OFFA		SO
–Student funding	SLC	MiUR and Regional gov- ernments	SELF
–Internatl coopera- tion		CNR and MiUR	SIU
–Lifelong learning			Vox
–Habilitation		ANVUR (ASN)	

<sup>a</sup>The QAA fulfils this function at one remove from government: HEFCE was given the legal duty to ensure that assessment of the quality of HE was undertaken under the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act and QAA is responsible to HEFCE for this function and makes annual reports to HEFCE

\*Academies – Higher Education Academy, Royal Society and British Academy are not included

\*\*Association of universities is not included

\*\*\*Three research institutions directly under the ministry, the biodiversity bank and the national open university are not included

the habilitation (postdoctoral qualification) of university academics. In England and Norway research evaluation is undertaken by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in the former case and by The Research Council of Norway in the latter.

Research funding is organized very differently in the three countries. Research councils constitute a major source of external funding in England and Norway. While Norway has one monolithic research funding organization (RCN) covering all research areas, England (or rather the UK) has

seven specialized research councils that have organized themselves under one informal coordinating body (RCUK). Italy (like France and Portugal) has a tradition of organizing research in a national system that includes Higher Education Institutions and several Public Research Centres (CNR, INFN, INAF, etc.). However, unlike France and Portugal, Italy has not a specialized research funding agency outside the ministry, as all funding activities are concentrated in one dedicated department of the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MiUR). CNR and INFN have some funding responsibilities for specific project funding schemes; the former also plays a key role for international cooperation in all the fields of science. Thus in Italy we find the characteristic division between universities and national research centers organized outside and independently of the universities that we typically find in other Napoleonic countries such as France and Portugal. In terms of centralisation, Norway and Italy have concentrated research funding under one agency whereas England has a more fragmented central funding structure. A final observation is that the organization of research funding varies along several dimensions which make straightforward comparisons somewhat difficult.

Looking beyond quality assurance and research funding we find clear and interesting differences between the three countries. In England three agencies deal with student affairs (fair access, independent adjudication and student funding) in addition to a statistics agency. In Italy there is one agency merging competences on quality assurance, research evaluation and for habilitation, which is a pre-condition to be hired in a permanent position at a higher education institution. Finally, in Norway there are various agencies which reflect a welfare orientation: that of a national admission office, coordinating admissions to all certified higher education institutions, an agency for student loans, an agency for international cooperation, and an agency for lifelong learning.

Here we see clear traces of more general political-administrative traditions when it comes to how the research function is organized. There are also clear differences when it comes to additional agencies to those already mentioned. England has four different agencies, three of which are dedicated to handling student affairs. It is worth noting that all three are strongly associated with two decisive moves towards a more market-driven higher education system in England.<sup>4</sup> Norway has four different agencies—student admission, student loan funding, international cooperation and an agency for promoting lifelong education. Italy has just one additional agency for habilitation, typical of several continental European countries.

## *Coordination and Control*

### *Control Capacity*

In all three countries higher education as an area of public responsibility falls under a ministry subdivision in ministries with wider responsibilities, in England the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (until July 2016), in Italy the MIUR and in Norway the Ministry of Education and Research.

In the English Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Secretary of State was supported by three Ministers of State, one of whom had responsibility for universities and science and, unusually for a Minister of State, attended Cabinet meetings for some years. Most of the services of the Department were delivered by nine executive agencies or ‘non-Departmental Public bodies’ (NDPBs), which employed about 14.500 staff. The ‘core’ Department consisted of 2.500 staff in 2016. Among the national agencies concerned with higher education and research is the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which employs 299 (Full Time Equivalent) staff, the Quality Assurance Agency with 174 employees, the seven Research Councils with 6326 employees and the Student Loans Company with about 2.500 employees. There are 108 universities and university colleges in England<sup>5</sup> (out of a total of 130 in the UK) employing a total of 295.000 staff.

In Italy MiUR has a total of 4.536 employees; the percentage of those working in the units at regional level is 75% of the total. the Department of Higher Education accounts for 238 employees. It supervises the activity of all the higher education institutions, both universities and other academic organizations on arts and music (AFAM). MiUR also supervises the most important research centers in Italy—14 organizations with more than 11.944 employees. CNR is the largest research organization in Italy (7.018 employees) and performs research through 103 institutes and participates in consortia and other collaborative structures. ANVUR is by contrast small (18 employees) and uses several external collaborators and experts to develop the tasks related to the institutional mission.

Responsibility for higher education in Norway falls under the Department of Higher Education, one of seven ministerial subdivisions. The ministry has a total of 310 employees of whom 72 work in the Department of Higher Education. It is responsible for 11 agencies (2.428 employees), 2 research institutes (599 employees) and 36 higher education institutions (41.000 employees). Among the larger agencies



are the Research Council (504 employees) and the Quality assurance and accreditation agency NOKUT (121 employees). Another important aspect is the capacity of the parent ministry/ies for policy making and control. The Norwegian ministry of education is small measured by international standards, but quite big measured by Norwegian standards. The Department of Higher Education has traditionally been a minor part of the ministry, and its capacity for policy making can be regarded as somewhat limited. In terms of staff numbers the 72 staff members are far fewer than the corresponding numbers for England (2,500) and Italy (238). However, given the different population sizes and not least the different ways in which the systems are organized it is difficult to draw valid conclusions about the relative policy making capacities in the three countries.

### *Coordination*

Initially it may be useful to distinguish between formal coordination and actual practices. Traditionally the relationship between ministries and agencies under them are ambiguous, characterized by cross-national variation and changes over time. Thus agencies may have a relatively independent position and make their own strategic choices without asking the ministry for permission or operate under tight ministry oversight. Furthermore, they may be located in different organizational settings as independent ministries or as part of ministries with wider responsibilities. The organizational location of an agency within the civil service bureaucracy may in turn serve as indicators of policy and coordination emphases at the governmental level.

The most significant higher education ‘agency’ below Ministry level since 1992 in England has been the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Its status can in part be attributed to its primary specialist function, the administration of funding for English universities’ higher education provision and UK universities’ research infrastructure. This has been an important source of power, including a certain amount of regulatory power. Funding allocations are largely, but not wholly formula-based, and HEFCE has been able over time to use discretionary funding to assist universities in strategic development decisions, as well as to sustain the financial viability of individual institutions in case of crisis or short term problems. As will appear from the following, the English tradition of using intermediary agencies for coordinating functions stands out particularly compared to the Italian case, and in recent years to somewhat lesser extent to the Norwegian case.

In Italy MiUR is in charge of coordination, which is not delegated to other agencies, thus the country is still characterized by a strong concentration at governmental level. However, the effectiveness of coordination in Italy is rather weak, due to the fact that other ministries have important commitment in research beyond MiUR—for instance in the areas of health, agriculture and environment, that maintain independent positions from MiUR as to strategies, priorities, and organization. Despite the polycentric structure of the country, the coordination of the HE sector is fully under MiUR control.

Central coordination of higher education in Norway falls clearly under the Ministry of Education and Research. However, with the differentiation of central government agencies such as NOKUT and establishment of one research council (under a different Ministry department) receiving funds from most ministries may also have contributed to fragmentation of policy coordination. The form of coordination in the English and Norwegian cases seems to have moved in recent years from a hierarchical type towards less centralized forms, and in some cases subordinate agencies such as the Norwegian student admission agency have taken on coordinating functions, sometimes in surprising ways (Michelsen et al. 2016). At the same time, it should be noted that coordination used to turn on the legal framework and to a lesser extent on the content and quality of teaching and research than is the case today.

### *Institutional Autonomy*

The relationship between central government authorities and HE institutions can be described in terms of the five dimensions of formal institutional autonomy used in Chap. 3 focusing on the formal authority of the institutions to make decisions at their own discretion as opposed to decisions that are left to the state or regulated nationally, and dependencies that otherwise reduce the space left for the institutions to make their own decisions. English HE stands out as the high autonomy system, a characteristic that in relative terms is not just the outcome of recent reforms, but also a long standing tradition (Kogan et al. 2006). Even so, the English concept of institutional autonomy has arguably changed towards more emphasis on institutions as strategic actors in a substantially broadened and more complex arena, and less emphasis on academic autonomy. Thus English institutions are formally free to make decisions on hiring of personnel, the students they want to admit, their internal governance system, how to handle their budgets and make investments and are subject to relatively light reporting requirements.

Nevertheless, there are large inter-institutional differences as to degrees of dependencies affecting the space left for making decisions. Both Italian and Norwegian higher education is medium autonomy systems. However, while Italian institutions enjoy high autonomy to determine their internal governance and are free to make budgetary and investment decisions on their own, Norwegian institutions enjoy high autonomy when it comes to hiring decisions and choosing the students they want to admit. Italian institutions are most restricted when it comes to the command they enjoy over human resources, while Norwegian institutions are most restricted as regards financial dependence on the public purse and relatively heavy accountability requirements.

*Policy Change—Summary*

We conclude this part by first observing the emergence of formal quality assurance and accreditation systems administered by dedicated agencies, as well as the existence of agencies for competitive research funding at universities in all three countries including in the country where research used to be organized outside the university sector. Secondly there are some differences between the three cases that arguably fit familiar typologies of an English Public Interest regime, an Italian Napoleonic regime and a Norwegian Social Democratic regime (cf. Chap. 9). The first is oriented towards the market and the administrative structure reflects the focus of a system where student fees now have become an important funding stream, and student concerns figure more prominently in policy processes. The second reflects a traditional regime where fewer functions beyond the traditional ones have been specialized. The third reflects a welfare state orientation of a small country focusing on centralized arrangements for student access and funding, internationalization and promotion of lifelong learning. This co-existence of emerging common structural arrangements combined with remaining nation specific features amount to apparently some trivial observations, from which it is difficult to infer a direct and unequivocal link to policy content. This gives all the better reason to take a closer look at the policy processes.

## POLICY PROCESSES

It is quite a common claim that HE education policy making is changing fast. Where HE used to be an insulated sector dominated by government bureaucrats and academics representing their universities as the dominant voices in the policy making process, it is now under much

stronger influence from external stakeholders who together with government bureaucrats have reduced academic influence over HE policy notably, if not radically. To put it in the words of Gibbons et al. (1994): where science earlier used to “speak to” society, society now increasingly and forcefully “speaks back” to science. Our findings do not immediately support this claim without qualification. The fact that several reforms have been adopted, some quite unpopular among rank and file or at least among certain groups of academics, does not mean that change solely has been promoted by external stakeholders and inflicted upon resisting or reluctant academic institutions. They may also be driven by certain alliances of academic and external stakeholders such as politicians or senior civil servants, which, in England in particular, also include institutional leaders or their representatives. Furthermore, we may also find enduring national peculiarities holding their ground in higher education systems and institutional governance (Kogan et al. 2006; Paradeise et al. 2009).

### *Actor Constellation*

One source of cross-national variation is the specific actors or actor constellations that influence policy making and policy content. This influence may be caused by the fact that certain actors or groups of actors are positioned in ways that repeatedly enable them to influence policy content in the face of a number of changing circumstances in the environment. Thus we ask whether there are certain actors or group of actors that in practice enjoy privileged positions or otherwise are particularly influential within the system. One of the core ideas of HE reforms in the last decades has been expressed in the ambition to strengthen political control over the HE system and the managerial structures within academic institutions. A common claim is that this also has strengthened hierarchical political control over the policy making process. Our findings contribute to the questioning of this claim.

Our clearest example is the English case where co-opted academic elites play crucial roles in policy making affecting policy proposals, decisions, implementation and management of the most important mechanisms for quality assurance and resource allocation. The role of co-opted elites has been identified and analyzed by Becher and Kogan (1992), Kogan and Hanney (2000), and Kogan et al. (2006), and our recent data on policy processes support earlier findings about their crucial

position. The co-opted elites are thus recruited from different relevant civil service agencies within the sector as well as academic institutions, and thus formally break with the notion of an unbroken chain of hierarchical control. Nevertheless, important changes have taken place. In England there appears to have been a transition from traditional governing to network governance caused by a depletion of the ministry and the reliance upon intermediary bodies with limited resources and formal powers, but with strong networks in the academic world and extensive knowledge of how it works (see also Beuselinck 2010).

Policy making in Italy presents a very different and more conflict-ridden picture where indeed reform proposals promoted by the policy layer seem to be heavily criticized and resisted by representatives of major academic interests such as the National University Committee (CRUI) and rectors' conference (CUN). The relationships among major actors are characterized by tension and conflict, in particular between the state represented by the Agency for Evaluation and Research (ANVUR) and the academic world represented by CRUI and CUN where ANVUR acts as a buffer organization between the ministry (MIUR) and the academic actors. In addition to disagreement about the content of reforms, there is also a turf war between ANVUR and CUN, e.g. in accreditation processes. Thus this is a scenario where the political and administrative bodies are pitted against the organizations representing academic disciplines (CRUI) and institutional leaders (CUN) in a conflict-ridden and low-trust relationship.

The Norwegian policy making process seems to have gone through a transition from a hierarchal to a more networked process. Where the ministry used to be the dominant actor in the policy making process and the most important relationship was between individual institutions and ministry (Bleiklie 2006), this has now changed in two important ways. At the central government level the establishment of agencies under the ministry implies delegation of tasks to actors that are not under direct political control. Most important among these actors is the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Research Council (RCN). The other development is that institutions increasingly seek to influence policies through collective arrangements such as the Association of Universities and State University Colleges (UHR) or subgroups of institutions such as when the three major research universities join forces on particular issues. Civil servants perceive the decision-making process as less hierarchic, where civil servants are better educated

than before, and where policy is made in a dialogue between bureaucrats and the political leadership. At the same time both politicians and civil servants recognize their dependence on academics in the design of policies in order to improve quality of higher education. The policy process is considered consensual, informal, characterized by a high level of trust, and the movement from hierarchy towards networks is paralleled by a blurring of institutional lines.

### *Definition of the Situation*

Major reforms may come about in different ways. Here we distinguish between reform processes that are perceived as responses to a severe crisis threatening the survival of the system and reforms that are addressing (possibly more proactively) rather vague threats to the quality and efficiency of the system. If an actor or a dominant coalition of actors manages to gain acceptance for a crisis definition, it will also potentially give them more clout not just to devise policies in response to the crisis, but also quite possibly to act more quickly, with fewer restrictions and with greater force.

A rather typical example of the crisis definition was the introduction of student fees as a major funding stream for English higher education and student choice as the major force shaping the future higher education system in 2011. This was done against the backdrop of the financial crisis of 2009, and the decision by the incoming coalition government to make deficit reduction its first priority in 2010. The force and swiftness of this reform effort is reminiscent of the English HE reforms of the 1980s which also were undertaken against the backdrop of severe financial problems followed by a forceful and relatively rapid introduction of a managerial model of public sector administration as part of the solution to the crisis.

Italian and Norwegian reform efforts seem to have been shaped by perceptions of vaguer threats although not necessarily less severe to the quality and efficiency of their higher education systems. Compared to England the reform processes have tended to unfold more gradually in Italy and Norway. Nevertheless, the gradual character of the reform processes and the slower pace with which they have unfolded does not mean that they are similar in terms of content and outcome.

This brief analysis of certain characteristics of the policy processes in the three countries leaves us with the following impression.

Actor constellations have undoubtedly changed as a consequence of specialization of the central government administration as well as through the development of massive higher education systems and the emergence of collective actors such as various associations of HE institutions. These changes have in turn been paralleled by new ways of making policy. Nevertheless, the extent to which these new ways of making policy actually have emerged varies as we have seen considerably. This brings us to our concluding remarks regarding how these emerging structures and policy processes add up to fundamentally altered power constellations and operating conditions for academic institutions and activities.

### CONCLUSION

In various publications from the TRUE project (e.g. Bleiklie et al. 2015a, b) we have addressed organizational changes in academic institutions and their relations to actors in the environment such as agencies for research funding and for quality assurance. One of the major hypotheses we have suggested is that while academic influence used to be based on professorial positions within universities, they increasingly seem to be based on positions of academics on bodies engaged in research funding, quality assessment, academic gatekeeping functions on editorial boards, hiring committees, policy commissions and external institutional boards. This fits well with the emergence of networked rather than hierarchical decision processes that we observed in the cases of England and Norway. The Italian case demonstrated that emergence of similar structural changes is not necessarily paralleled by new ways of making decisions. In this case academic influence seems to be based in academic institutions, and the collective actors representing them are struggling against government reforms to protect the academic system from the effect of arrangements they do not trust.

Thus the three higher education policy regimes show clear similarities in their structural arrangements and some of the major changes they have gone through in recent decades. Nevertheless they also retain clear features that can be traced back to typical characteristics of the overall political-administrative regimes. However, the policy processes and patterns of change seem to differ, where in particular Italy stands out from the English and Norwegian cases, as the traditional hierarchical forms of decision-making in Italy seem to have changed less and come with a higher level of conflict and lower level of trust. Network decision-making

in England and Norway may in both cases be seen as representative of a specialization of the political-administrative structure and a parallel reconfiguring of academic influence. The mechanisms through which they developed are nevertheless different, where co-opted elites play a crucial part in the former case, and informal relations, participation and consensual decision-making seem to be central in the latter.

## NOTES

1. Although there are good reasons to limit the analysis in this chapter to fewer cases than the eight countries in the original TRUE sample, the three countries were chosen both because they represent clearly different political-administrative regimes within a European context and for the practical reason of available interview data. The main data sets have been collected in connection with the eight country comparative TRUE project (Transforming universities in Europe) funded by ESF and consist of: (a) 30 interviews (10 interviews per country) at the national policy level of politicians, senior civil servants in the ministries responsible for higher education, and representatives of quality assurance agencies, research councils, associations of higher education institutions and unions of university academics, in addition to university leaders; (b) descriptions of structural characteristics of the three political-administrative systems and policy sectors and of three universities in each country. In addition, we use: (c) survey data on managers in 3 universities in each country, (d) in depth interviews among managers in one university in each country.
2. The former version was based on two main dimensions: an 'influence' dimension where we developed a typology of actor constellations and patterns of dominance (respectively the state; individual institutions; elite groups or interest organizations such as teacher or student unions) (Bleiklie 2006) and a 'cohesion' dimension specifying a space of variation in the relationship among actors ranging from tightly knitted 'policy communities' to more narrowly specialized and transient 'issue networks' as originally defined by Rhoades and Marsh (1992) "The criteria used in the Rhoades and Marsh analysis of 'cohesion' are membership, integration, resources and power. A 'policy community' would thus be characterized by: its limited membership; frequent interaction with shared basic values; all participants having a resource base and the ability to deliver their members' support; and a relatively equal power distribution among the network members. On the opposite end of the continuum is the 'issue network', characterized by: a large and/or wide range of affected interests;



- fluctuations in contacts, access, and level of agreement; unequal resource distribution combined with varying abilities to deliver members support; and unequal powers among the group members” (Bleiklie 2006).
3. From July 2016 the responsibilities of the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation falls under two ministries: The Department for Education and The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.
  4. Two of the agencies, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), were created under the 2004 act, which licensed higher education institutions to charge variable undergraduate tuition fees; the third, the Student Loans Company (SLC), was given a greatly enhanced role in 2011, when (substantially raised) tuition fees became the major source of HEIs’ teaching funding and were channeled to them through the SLC, with profound implications for the organization structure of English higher education and for the role of the HEFCE within it.
  5. This figure includes six private universities.

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# Policy Instruments in European Universities: Implementation of Higher Education Policies

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**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the implementation of HE policies in European universities and how it varies across countries. Two aspects of policy implementation are focused. One is the substantive policies that are put in place in terms of policy instruments such as legislation, financial incentives and organizational arrangements. The second aspect is the process of implementation understood as patterns of participation and trust among the actors involved. The aim is to explain cross-national variation focusing on the relationship between political-administrative structures, implementation processes, policy instruments and substantive outcomes. By analyzing variation in the use of policy instruments as well as characteristics of the implementation processes, the approach goes beyond simplistic generalizations, categorizing countries globally as respectively high or low implementation performers.

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on the implementation of higher education policies in European universities and explain how they vary across countries. Our aim is to analyze two aspects of policy implementation. One is the substantive policies that are put in place in terms of policy instruments such as legislation, financial incentives and organizational arrangements, and the second is the process of implementation understood as patterns of participation and trust among the actors involved. Basically we thus ask what instruments are put in place and how it is done. We ask how universities as implementers respond to government policies, and given their response, how they go about transforming these policies into institutional practices. Thus we focus on the relationship between government and individual university institutions and on the relationship between leadership and subordinate academic units within individual universities. We want to explain cross-national variation focusing on the relationship between political-administrative structures, implementation processes, policy instruments and substantive outcomes as described by those who manage them at the institutional level. By analyzing variation in the use of policy instruments as well as characteristics of the implementation processes, our approach goes beyond simplistic generalizations categorizing countries globally as respectively high or low implementation performers (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013; Nyhagen 2015).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The traditional shortcomings of systematic analyses of implementation across countries have implications for how the phenomenon of implementation is understood. Not least in the higher education sector it has often been perceived as a government initiated process followed by more or less resistance and rejection of government policies by academic institutions and by individual academics within them. In addition, universities tend to be perceived as decentralized, loosely coupled systems (Weick 1976) or organized anarchies characterized by garbage can decision-making (Cohen et al. 1972). Their core missions are fundamentally ambiguous and difficult to standardize (Musselin 2007). Thus top-down implementation of government policies in academic institutions is apparently doomed to fail because academic institutions are experts at subverting government initiated reforms, by rejecting or transforming them into

measures to their own liking. Alternatively, if reformers are more heavy handed, reforms may prove damaging to the academic institutions they are supposed to improve.

Our interest is not merely built on the observation of the lack of studies focusing on the interrelation among structural variables, implementation processes and policy instruments, but also because of the gap between the literatures on policy instruments and on public management (Peters 2000). One consequence of this gap between the two strands of literature and the variables associated with them is that the relationship between managerial styles (or processes) and policy instruments (or policy content) is not fully examined.

Accordingly we start out at the level of political-administrative regimes, asking what implications public management styles have for the choice of policy instruments and the way in which they are applied. Here, we take as our point of departure the typology developed by Painter and Peters (2010) in their contribution on “administrative traditions” where they, building on Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), distinguish between four families of administrative traditions: Anglo-American, Napoleonic, Germanic and Scandinavian.<sup>1</sup> This makes it possible to identify variation across traditions that we find on the European continent.

What kind of relationship can we hypothesize between higher education policy regimes (cf. Chap. 10) with specific administrative traditions, reform goals, policy instruments and their implementation in academic institutions? One alternative is a tight relationship where traditions shape goals which in turn shape policy instruments and implementation thus making policy outcomes easy to predict once the administrative tradition has been identified. A second alternative is looser relationships where case specific relations between policies, institutional setups and structures (Peters 2010) must be identified and studied inductively. A third alternative suggests that public reforms are shaped by national political-administrative traditions as well as the peculiar characteristics of specific policy sectors (Yesilkagit 2010, and Chap. 10).

The following four questions are of particular interest: (1) *What policy instruments are chosen in order to implement higher education policies?* (2) *To what extent are administrative traditions reflected in the choice of policy instruments?* (3) *How are the policy instruments implemented in individual universities?* (4) *To what extent are academics and other affected parties involved in the process?*

These questions are analyzed based on case studies at four European universities in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway concerning the implementation of a higher education policy reform. The case studies are based on qualitative interviews with university leadership which will give the opportunity not just to assess the choice of policy instrument per se, but also to analyze the question in light of what consequences it has for the party being influenced, i.e. the university.

### *Administrative Tradition*

The idea of administrative traditions as an important dimension for the scope and speed of public sector reform emerges from the literature on political-administrative regimes (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2014). Administrative traditions assume the existence of a characteristic set of values in the central bureaucracy. We will borrow from the elaboration on administrative culture and administrative tradition (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Painter and Peters 2010). We emphasize, in particular, the different administrative system characteristics related to implementation.

The notion of administrative culture refers to a characteristic pattern of values likely to influence reform and opportunities for implementation and forms part of the regime concept. Based on the typology of administrative traditions that distinguishes between the four traditions mentioned above we distinguish between four political-administrative regimes: the Public interest, the Rechtsstaat, the Napoleonic and the Social Democratic. These regime types each come with a set of expectations regarding how and to what extent public reform policies are likely to diffuse down to and into the organizational level. In this study three regime types are represented in the empirical data; the Napoleonic (Italy), the Rechtsstaat (Germany and arguably the Netherlands) and the Social Democratic (Norway).

The Rechtsstaat regime promotes the role of the state as an important integrating force within society. The main role of the state is preparation, promulgation and enforcement of laws. Within this administrative tradition, public reforms are assumed to be “stickier” or slower. Modifications in public policy are likely to require modifications in legislation as well as in administrative culture. The two cases characterized by the Rechtsstaat regime; Germany and the Netherlands are different on a number of dimensions such as state structure where one is federal the other unitary,



and recent history during which the Netherlands has moved closer to the Social Democratic regime emphasizing consensus and participation more than one might expect based on the *Rechtsstaat* assumption.

The Napoleonic regime shares the understanding of law as a state instrument with the *Rechtsstaat* regime. However, the role of societal actors and networks is limited and interest group participation is by and large considered illegitimate. Rather, the state autonomy is fundamental within this administrative tradition. The Napoleonic regime, here represented by the Italian case, is often associated with a legalistic tradition to the effect that policy is closely associated with legislation, and an implementation gap where there often is a distance between reform prescribed by legislation and the actual existence and/or use of management tools (Ongaro and Valotti 2008). The implication for implementation at the organizational level is that of stability or even stasis where the university has a high degree of freedom and can continue as before either by resisting change or by making cosmetic adjustments. This is exacerbated by a low level of trust and a high level of conflict between the major actors, politicians and administrators on one side and academics on the other, pointed out in Chap. 10.

The Social Democratic tradition is constituted by features from several traditions. The statist and organic view of state–society relations as well as strong commitment to the welfare state are main features as well as extensive participation in decision processes. The strong emphasis on the welfare state is based on a “social compact” emerging from extensive democratic and communitarian traditions. The Norwegian polity is characterized by collectivistic and egalitarian values, consensus, low level of conflict and a comprehensive corporatist system (Lægneid et al. 2006). The Norwegian political-administrative system has often been said to favor incrementalism, sustained by close relations between political and administrative leadership, characterized by mutual trust and consensual approaches to policy-making (Christensen and Lægneid 1999).

These variations in regimes and administrative traditions tend to produce different reform trajectories and have, *ceteris paribus*, implications for implementation and the selection of policy instruments.

- A strong administrative law component (seen in *Rechtsstaat* and *Napoleonic* regimes) tends to strengthen the focus on control and regulations.
- Regimes of the *Rechtsstaat* type favor incremental administrative HE reforms.

- *Rechtsstaat* regimes favor reform through legal procedures.
- *Napoleonic regimes* favor incremental reform, but have a potential for more radical reform that may be released under certain circumstances (centralization combined with norms of uniform treatment as well as the limited role of societal actors in policy-making) compared to *Rechtsstaat* regimes. On the other hand they are likely to favor incrementalism more strongly than *Social Democratic* regimes with their more open and participatory tradition.
- *The Napoleonic regime* is more likely to produce implementation problems, measured by the distance between reform goals and results, compared to the other regime types.
- *The Social Democratic regime* is likely to open up for legitimate participation by societal actors in policy-making and a more open process.
- *The Social Democratic regime* is likely to be influenced by an organic view of the state with the implications that implementation is considered as a dual process.

The above assumptions related to the different political-administrative regimes are not necessarily accurate in the context of higher education. A selection of comparative studies of higher education policy can contrast this picture of reformers and implementers of reform. The countries studied in this article have demonstrated ability to produce and implement changes in higher education (Bleiklie et al. 2000, Høstaker 2006, De Boer et al. 2007). This goes for both countries that were expected to behave according to the *Rechtsstaat* model of change and countries that are associated with the Napoleonic model—using legal policy instruments and experiencing implementation gaps and incremental change. UK is often singled out as the reform leader with political-administrative system capacities to generate comprehensive reforms. This is supported by studies of UK higher education (Ferlie and Andresani 2009). A study of reform in public funding policies in three countries representing different political-administrative regimes (Public interest, Napoleonic, Social Democratic) also concluded that they all had experienced change resulting from reform, although to a varying extent (Nyhagen 2015).

### *The Field of Implementation and Policy Instruments*

The classical study of implementation in higher education research by Cerych and Sabatier (1986) has had a strong influence on later implementation research in the field of higher education. Still it has been

claimed that researchers in the higher education field have been only moderately interested in implementation studies (Gornitzka et al. 2005). Some have argued that the field is characterized by isolation within its own sector, by application drift and sensitivity to policy agendas that have prevented the development of implementation theories specifically aiming at the higher education field (Kohoutek 2013). One of the shortcomings of implementation analysis of higher education policy is the tendency to neglect the potential influence of structural characteristics. This again has led to overly simplistic labelling of countries as high or low implementers (Bleiklie and Michelsen 2013, Nyhagen 2015). This should be surprising considering the fact that studies have shown considerable cross-national variation in the choice of policy instruments and how they are implemented (Paradeise et al. 2009; Bleiklie et al. 2011). Still scholars claim that university organizations have changed by becoming increasingly “complete” rational organizations (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000, Ramirez 2006, Krücken and Meier 2006) thus altering the conditions for policy implementation within higher education institutions. At a more general level, the interest in implementation research has been assumed to be in decline (Schofield 2001). Others have argued against such a claim while maintaining that past reviews of implementation research have been unable to capture the actual interest in implementation studies outside core fields (Sætren 2005, Hill and Hupe 2002). Implementation studies have developed from the top-down approach of Pressman and Wildawsky (1973) where implementation is understood as a hierarchical process and towards bottom-up approaches and various combinations of the two approaches (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993).

The literature on policy instruments has been influenced by the general developments in the field of policy implementation such as the top-down and bottom-up controversy. The development of the latter approach spurred a more horizontal perspective on implementation as governance. The implication was a shift in focus from hierarchy to markets and networks where government is mainly considered as one among many actors. Accordingly, policy is the result of a compromise resulting from the interaction among several actors rather than from the unilateral decisions of one single actor. This shift corresponds to what has been called the second generation of policy instruments demanding other skills than conventional tools (Howlett 2005). In this picture, government is facilitating more than directing behavior of target groups.

The new tools that emerge involve a high degree of relativism and voluntarism, i.e. the decision to change behavior is left to the governed.

Policy instruments are usually thought of as means of government intervention in society in order to accomplish goals or to solve problems. Behind the concept of policy instruments lies the assumption that their main role is to make target groups do things they otherwise would not have done (Schneider and Ingram 1990). Thus, policy tools or policy instruments are the means applied to put a specific policy into action, i.e. to implement that policy. Policy tools are part of policy formulation and show how policies are specified (Howlett 1991). One analytical implication is that it enables us to assess the consistency of the relationship between overall political goals and actual implementation. A second consequence is that it is possible to see how policies have been transformed or shaped when put into action. Usually, there is neither any unequivocal relationship between policy goals and specific instruments nor is it easy to identify and isolate one specific effect of each instrument. Instruments tend to be charged with political values. Instruments are also “substitutable” to some extent (Howlett 2005) as policy goals may be reached by using several different instruments.

Policy instruments may be categorized in many different ways. One important distinction can be made between substantive and procedural policy tools. Substantive policy tools are “designed to alter the mix of goods and services provided and made available in society”, while procedural policy tools are “primarily intended to alter the policy processes rather than substance, per se” (Howlett 2005).

We distinguish between four types of policy tools using the Ingram and Schneider typology (Schneider and Ingram 1990, and Chap. 10) modified somewhat to fit the need of the empirical analysis in this chapter. The first type of instruments—*authority tools*—is characterized by orders and prohibitions (licenses, permits, regulations). The central mechanism here is the authoritative relationship in the sense that target groups are obliged to act in line with the demand of the policy maker. The second type are financial instruments—*incentive tools*—that has the role of providing either positive (grants, subsidies) or negative (taxes, user charges/fees) incentives. These policy instruments provide target groups with a certain leeway to choose whether to take action or not. The third type—*symbolic and hortatory tools*—is designed to increase or decrease the degree of information and motivation of the target group. These policy instruments aim at influencing behavior of individuals or

groups through the “transfer of knowledge, the communication of reasoned argument, and persuasion” (Vedung 1998: 33). The fourth family of *capacity tools* provide information, training, education and resources to enable individuals, groups, or agencies to make decisions or carry out activities. Among such resources we specifically include organizational measures such as establishment of specialized agencies at government level, mergers of higher education institutions or internal reorganizations by putting in place structures and procedures related to the organization of teaching or research.

The literature on policy instruments cannot just add to the understanding of the role of policy instruments, but also of the relationship between politicians and target groups (Vedung 1998). The implication that the different policy instruments have for the relationship between politicians and target groups is important. Regulation implies that target group members are obliged to do what the policy maker decides, while the use of financial instruments or incentives does not require the target group to carry out an action, In the latter case “the governor makes action easier or more difficult by addition or deprivation of material resources” (Vedung 1998: 31). We assume that implementation policies may vary along two dimensions—the first turns on the extent to which specific instruments tend to be preferred, and the second on whether policies are mono-instrumental or apply a variety of instruments.

The next question turns on the relationship between policy instruments and the organizational processes through which policies are implemented. It is tempting to assume that there is an association between specific instruments, such as authority tools, and top-down implementation processes, given that target groups are obliged to act according to the demands of the authority issuing them. This is implied by the statements by Howlett (2005) about “second generation” tools designed to facilitating rather than directing behavior as well as by Vedung (1998: 31) above. Linking these observations to the assumptions about the potential effects of administrative traditions we may expect that implementation in universities in Napoleonic countries will be tend to turn on authority tools and top-down procedures with little if any room for participation and bottom-up influence. Universities in Social Democratic countries are likely to display an opposite pattern with a wider array of instruments, higher rates of participation and bottom-up influence during implementation as well as a higher capacity for change. Finally universities in Rechtsstaat countries are likely to display a mixed pattern

favoring reform through legal procedures, but in a less centralized and more consistently incremental way than Napoleonic countries.

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The four cases in this chapter are located in different countries and were selected for a theoretical purpose. We use qualitative interviews to shed light on the four cases: (1) the establishment of a central university unit and a new bachelors program at a German university, (2) implementing measures from a national higher education governance reform (the Gelmini reform)—particularly department mergers—at an Italian university, (3) introducing a profiling policy at a Dutch university, and (4) developing a general institutional strategy at a Norwegian university. The four universities in question are all comprehensive research universities, but differ in terms of age, internal university governance, relationship to actors outside the university and the national higher education systems to which they belong. Although the specific national policies in the four cases are different, we argue that they represent instances of similar policies in the sense that they have a common overarching purpose. As it was pointed out in Chap. 1, public higher education policies have had an overarching goal of transforming universities from what we call a traditional decentralized, loosely coupled model to what Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) call “complete organizations” with a common goal, and with leadership and managerial structures that enable them to behave strategically in order to reach their goal.

Yet the cases are located within different higher education systems in which the specific relationship that has historically developed between the state and the university varies. German universities have historically been associated with the Humboldt tradition where research had a key role and “the chair holding professor had achieved virtually unparalleled status and power” (Clark 1986: 229). Italian universities are part of a system usually associated with the continental model characterized by centralization of power in the hands of the state formally in control over funding, status of personnel and careers, and the curricula (Reale and Poti 2009). Dutch universities have been characterized by closely intertwined academic self-governance and state regulation (De Boer et al. 2007). State–university relationships in Norway have traditionally relied upon a common understanding that universities, while being formally

clearly integrated within the civil service, were to be given a great deal of autonomy to serve their purposes (Bleiklie et al. 2000).

These cases were also selected because they belong to different political-administrative regimes and thus provide the opportunity to explore the explanatory power of such regimes on higher education policy implementation. One of the regime types, the Rechtsstaat regime, is represented in two countries, which makes it possible to discuss variation within one regime type. A further argument for the selection of cases was the opportunity to explore the classical assumptions about the Napoleonic regime associated with the “implementation gap”, legalistic tradition and “stickiness” of many aspects of political development (Ongaro and Valotti 2008; Bezes 2010).

The qualitative data are cases of policy instrument influence in European universities. The selection of the sample of universities was based on the extent to which they reflect key decision-making processes in research universities, and are likely to differ in terms of the form and degree of political interference in university affairs and degree of implementation of public policies. The cases build on semi-structured interviews of central actors (Table 11.1) about a specific strategy process in each university, and data have been collected by researchers in each of the participating countries. Monographs have been written following an agreed upon standard to systematize the data material and for translation purposes. The universities where the cases are situated are anonymized to protect informants.

## IMPLEMENTATION IN UNIVERSITIES IN FOUR COUNTRIES

Over the years, the use of policy instruments in higher education has changed both in terms of the type of instruments applied, and in terms of the way policy instruments are applied (Bleiklie et al. 2000). The number of policy instruments has expanded and displays a great variation, but they are also applied in a different context of managerialism and New Public Management. In the following section, we will compare contrasting cases of universities in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway focusing on the use of policy instruments. We are looking for similarities and differences in the selection of instruments rather than delving into detailed analysis of every aspect of reform policies.

**Table 11.1** Description of country, universities, number and positions of informants

<i>Case</i>	<i>Data: number of interviews and positions (rank):</i>	<i>Type of university</i>	<i>Country</i>
(1) Establishment of central university unit and new bachelor program	7 interviews carried out in spring 2012: President, 2 Deans that are Senate members,, University Board member, Central administrator, Administrator at the HR Department, Administrator at the Strategy and Excellence Department	Old comprehensive university	Germany
(2) Implementing measures as part of a governance (Gelmini) reform—particularly department mergers	11 interviews carried out in spring 2012: Vice-Rector, 2 Deans, 3 Heads of Departments, 3 Board members, President of the Observatory of Research, President of the Evaluation group	Old comprehensive research university decentralized	Italy
(3) Introducing profiling policy	12 interviews carried out in spring 2012: Interviewed members of the top management, mid-level managers, heads of department and academics at different levels	Old comprehensive research university	The Netherlands

(continued)



**Table 11.1** (continued)

<i>Case</i>	<i>Data: number of inter-views and positions (rank):</i>	<i>Type of university</i>	<i>Country</i>
(4) Developing general institutional strategy	8 interviews carried out in spring 2012: Rector, Assistant university director, Director of research, Board member, Dean at Faculty of mathematics and natural sciences, Dean at Faculty of social sciences, Faculty director at Faculty of medicine, Faculty director at Faculty of education	Old and large comprehensive research university	Norway

### *Policy Instruments Within European Universities*

#### *The German University—setting up a Central University Unit and a new interdisciplinary program (NIP)*

The case at the German university turned on the establishment of a Central University Unit (CUU) and the emergence of an interdisciplinary four-year English-taught bachelor degree, closely related to the current government's request for new innovative study programs (NIP). The primary goal of the CUU's was to promote international and interdisciplinary teaching, support the efforts of the faculties in this field and search for new approaches to teaching and instruction. The four-year Bachelor's degree of the new NIP was the first interdisciplinary English-taught undergraduate program at the university as well as in Germany. The introduction of a new English-spoken interdisciplinary Bachelor's degree was clearly related to a government initiative encouraging universities to create innovative study programs. Thus one element was the use of *a symbolic and hortatory tool* designed to motivate universities. In addition, *incentive tools* were important for implementing the new Bachelor's degree as it was followed by direct funding from the Ministry of Education and Research; "The biggest support actually came from the

Ministry...” (Vice-rector). This was a policy that opened up for the governed to decide upon structure and content of the program.

The way in which the German university responded to the policy was determined by an initiative from the university leadership and rectorate, i.e. the University President, the Head of Administration and the Vice-rector for teaching. Thus the policy was implemented through the establishment of a new organizational unit. However, it was pointed out by university leaders that the motivation for establishing the new Bachelor’s degree was closely related to the efforts of the leadership to position the university for the next round of the excellence initiative. The university leadership argued that it would have a: “...positive effect on the excellence initiative”, and that “...it is the only type of student program in Germany now”. Teaching was not part of the excellence initiative as reflected in this quote: “teaching is still not a part of the initiative but it is anyway important to differentiate itself from other universities”.

The decision-making process in the German case was characterized by the strong involvement of few actors, primarily the university leadership represented by the President, Head of Administration, and Vice-rector for teaching making the formal decision. The process of creating a new interdisciplinary Bachelor’s program was by and large a top-down decision. Thus, the central leadership was mainly in charge of implementation. Only after the decision was formally made, and after clarifying the funding of the Bachelor’s program, a broader and more inclusive discussion took place at the level of the faculties. The deans held that; “no deans were involved in the decision”, thus confirming that the main actors were the rectorate and central university management. One reason why the university leadership could disregard other decision-making units like the academic senate and the faculty leadership is closely related to the funding of the new Bachelor’s degree. The Ministry’s direct role in the internal governance of the university is not considered common practice in German higher education. Thus the case is not necessarily representative for the interaction between German central government authorities and universities, particularly when it comes to implementing central policies at university level.

#### *The Italian University—Merging University Departments*

The case at the Italian university is related to the Gelmini reform of 2010 that aimed at changing institutional governance and internal organization. The reform encouraged a multi-campus structure and caused

universities to change their organization of research and education from a faculty to a department structure. Additionally, the governance structure of universities was a target, and the standard model of central governance included the Rector, the Academic senate and the Board of directors. Moreover, the Gelmini reform introduced a tenure-track system and eliminated all temporary contracts below the level of associate professorship. It also advocated university mergers offering neighboring institutions the opportunity to merge or create a federation. The Gelmini reform is closely tied to legislation as *an authority tool*, thus confirming the legalistic and procedural tradition of Italian higher education (Reale and Poti 2009). This is further backed up by other interpretations of the reform arguing, “the state has drawn on its traditional policy instrument by laws and decrees” (Dobbins and Knill 2014). Although more market oriented policy instruments were used in the implementation of the Gelmini reform, the “state did not retreat from strict regulation” (Sousa and Magalhães 2013) or “steering by law” (Dobbins and Knill 2014). Thus the reform did not escape the traditional and perennial problem marring the relationship between the governor and the governed, the state and university, where passed legislation lack support during the implementation stage, blocking other reform elements from diffusing downwards.

Despite the formal expectation that regulatory policy instruments be binding and coercive, implementation of department mergers was resisted at the university, and the interviews reflect the reluctance against unwelcome changes. One board member argued that “People just did not want to do that, they would have avoided this change” while a member of one department claimed that “We were an élite department, few people but very good in research. Now it will change, for sure”. Still, the way in which the process of department mergers was organized by opening a discussion of possible affiliations, investigating the opportunities for mergers with other departments, indicates that the university leadership enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy.

The overall decision-making process was driven by the Rector, which is reflected in the statement of a board member: “It was a very big effort to make any single decision because the Rector in person decided the process...”. The board member continues to describe the process of finding possible departments to merge with as democratic in the sense that deliberation took place and that successful mergers were achieved “by talking” and that departments were “convinced to become member

of a Department instead of another through explanations”. This perception together with negative reactions, with which the reform proposals were met at different levels of the organization, may suggest an implementation gap. One dean stated that the process did take into consideration the “span of time” needed claiming it “is necessary to let things be implemented in a smooth way”. Another dean clearly pointed out challenges that may follow from too little participation in the decision-making process and questioned for instance the role of the new Head of department. Further disagreement existed at the dean level concerning the foreseen challenges that come with large departments: “...my experience is that the larger the structure; the more there will be sub-groups”. Even harsher reactions to the merging process were detected at the department level by questioning the very need for the reform: “(The merging of departments) is a heterogeneous process the necessity of which was not felt at all”.

#### *The Dutch University—Research Profiling*

The case at the Dutch university was an effort to develop a profiling policy, and started in 2004. The project grew out of awareness of the Executive Board<sup>2</sup> that the university had to focus on research. The project mainly was set up following a request to develop strategic priorities from the Dutch Government related to the research grant for 2004. Thus, it seems that *authority tools* like legislation or guidelines were central to implementing the profiling policy. The policy encouraged leading researchers to identify common research interests with members of other research groups, and to set up joint research projects geared towards a specific theme or focus. The overall aim of the profiling policy was to make universities part of the world’s top research community in several research fields (Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2011). An important parallel objective of the University Management was addressed, namely the encouragement of multi- or even interdisciplinary project teams that were working together on a topic of societal relevance.

The Government would give special support to specific strategic areas and underlined that collaboration between research groups would be central. *Incentive tools* such as performance agreements with higher education institutions and additional resources as incentives for research focus areas and profiling were additionally used to further support and follow up the policy. The policy was further supported by the fact

that the projects were quite successful attracting third-party funding—another goal that had ranked high on the university agenda when the policy was set up. Still it seems as if the push for concentration on few and specific research areas was integrated into already established internal strategies and goals. Thus the policy supported an existing trend rather than a break with the past.

The implementation process would be both bottom-up and top-down driven, in the sense that universities were supposed to make a list of strong research areas in a first round, while in a second round the Association of Universities in the Netherlands would use this list to carve out focused research areas. Thus despite using an authority tool associated with coerciveness, it was linked to the use of incentives, and there seemed to be a strong element of involvement from the academic staff. This picture of involvement is supported by the fact that the faculty leadership represented by the deans from the various faculties were in charge of coordinating the process within their own faculties. In addition, the deans were responsible for identifying priority research areas based on feedback from department research leaders. Therefore, the deans played an important role in the final selection of priority research areas. Our interviews suggest that the profiling policy did not restrict the opportunities for the academic staff to carry out research in areas they were interested in. In this sense, the introduction of profiling policy used by the university leadership as an adaptation to a policy area in which stand-alone authority tools and regulation traditionally enjoy low legitimacy.

*The Norwegian university—developing a new university strategy*

Strategic planning at Norwegian universities has over time become a requirement by the government. From the early 1990s, white papers on research and higher education from the Ministry of education and research have directed attention towards strategic planning at universities as well as steering and profiling of scholarly activity (Larsen 2000). Nevertheless, while early university strategy reports tended to be formulated in general terms more recent strategy reports are linked to explicit demands for the development of clearer profiles and increased reform capacity (Larsen and Langfeldt 2005).

The case to be analyzed is related to the current university strategy document, covering the period 2011–2020. This process is not specifically related to a reform initiative but to the fact that all Norwegian universities are formally obliged by the Ministry of Education and Research

to develop strategic plans and goals against which the performance of the institution can be assessed. In order to document effects of the plans, universities are required to establish assessment criteria (Norwegian Ministry of education and research 2013). Thus *authority tools* like laws and regulations oblige universities to formulate strategic plans. The content, however, of the strategy and the internal processes through which the overall institutional strategy is formulated, are decided upon by the individual university. This latter fact is reflected in the selection of goals and means.

Especially two goals regarding the role of the strategic plan were perceived as important by the university leadership. Firstly, the plan was to constitute the main source for strategic decisions of the university and secondly, it was to be the source for all further plans and decisions at lower levels of the formal hierarchy. The main substantive goals for the strategic plan was to increase internationalization; improve quality of research and teaching; increase interfaculty co-operation; improve follow-up of students and employees; better management; and raise the level of interaction between external and self-funded research.

Although the university is obliged to have a strategy, the content and direction of the strategy remain the responsibility of the university leadership. One member of the university board representing the academic staff offered a description of the process claiming that the Rector wanted “to put his fingerprints” on the process in which features such as a long-term perspective, transparency and a democratic decision process were important. The Rector described the process as necessary in order to produce “a new legitimate plan for the strategic work at the university” and that the university strategy was thought of as a “steering instrument” throughout the organization. Other members of the university leadership confirmed this picture of the Rector’s focus on a hierarchical, integrated strategy that was meant to include every leadership level in the organization. The strategy was supported by the Assistant University Director as it integrated research and teaching and had a long-term perspective of 10 years.

The faculties represented by the deans were also important actors, and supported the description of the decision-making process as an integrated strategy. The Dean of social sciences argued that; “now the process is much better organized” and that “the (new) rectorate took charge and started a more tidily organized process including hearings, and opened up for input”. The university management formulated a

“hearing” letter<sup>3</sup> which was sent out to parties inside and outside the institution. This resulted in more than 140 written replies. Overall there was a great deal of faith in the strategy process from leaders at various levels.

The particular feature of the Norwegian case compared to the others, is the broad and inclusive strategy process from an early stage. In that sense the university leadership’s strategy process reflects a long standing tradition with deliberation and consultation in public decision-making. This picture of inclusiveness implies that the regulatory policy instrument of the strategy plan offers a great deal of autonomy and room for interpretation. Thus the process opened up for widespread influence and communication by creating an arena for co-optation of possible resistance during the implementation process.

#### POLITICAL-ADMINISTRATIVE REGIMES, POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The German case demonstrated how a policy—establishing international study programs—*symbolically* communicated as a government exhortation, gained strength as it was combined with financial *incentives* and became part of the strategic positioning of the university for even more resources. The two policy instruments reinforced each other and made the implementation more effective. Thus, the expectations drawn from an administrative tradition of control and regulation, incremental higher education reform and the use of legal policy instruments do not seem to fit. Other policy instruments than regulatory ones were used that even served to facilitate implementation and thus departing from the image of an incremental reformer in higher education. The implementation comprised various policy instruments combining a top-down initiative within the university with the establishment of a central university unit given the task of promoting international and interdisciplinary teaching, and the emergence of the interdisciplinary English-taught four-year Bachelor’s degree.

The case at the Italian university and the implementation of the Gelmini reform supports the impression of a legalistic and procedural system. Here *authority* tools (legislation and decrees) were used to implement a whole range of goals such as university governance where a standard model was introduced converting the internal organization of research and education from faculties into departments. The

expectations drawn from the Napoleonic administrative tradition of legal policy instruments, incremental reform, and implementation gap were supported by these findings. The Gelmini reform consisted primarily in legislation specifying the goals and means of the reform. Empirical data support the impression of incrementalism and an implementation gap where policy initiatives were met with resistance throughout the university organization.

The profiling policy in the Dutch case was initially related to implementation by application of *an authority tool* as the government policies of strategic university priorities originated in a regulation as part of the research budget. In addition, offering strong *incentives* for implementation by setting up performance agreements and additional funding for universities that implemented the profiling policy, were important. Thus, implementation of the profiling policy was carried out by means of two policy instruments that increased the implementation pressure. Thus in the Dutch case the Rechtsstaat regime is reflected in characteristics such as a strong administrative law component emphasizing control and regulation, incremental higher education reform and legal means. However, the use of *authority tools* was combined with *incentive tools* providing incentives for implementation thus extending the range of instruments applied. Furthermore, important university actors were mobilized combining top-down initiatives with input from the faculty level.

In the case of the Norwegian university which was required by government regulation to formulate an overall strategy, *authority tools* were used. However, the requirement was formulated in a general way demanding that goals be stated in order to assess university performance. In many ways, the statist and organic view of state–society relations is reflected in the strategy development case. The Social Democratic regime characteristics with relatively extensive participation of actors throughout the organization during implementation and a process that was perceived as open and inclusive by the actors involved, was supported by our evidence. One interpretation of the Norwegian case is that power is not a zero-sum game where increased influence of one governance level necessarily reduces the influence of other levels. To the contrary, that all levels may be empowered simultaneously through inclusive participative arrangements (cf. Chap. 6). A second observation is that the case also reflects a distinct Norwegian university tradition with strong and influential middle management or faculties. However, interviews at the department level were not included in this study. Although we know that



departments were formally included in the decision process we do not know how the process was perceived by actors at the department level.

## CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that a variety of policy instruments are used to implement higher education policies in the different countries. One observation that can be made, based on the findings in this comparative study, is variation as to how governments seek to make their higher education systems and institutions more efficient and effective, while at the same time improving their academic quality. We also found that the Italian case stood out from the other three in its reliance on authority tools and legal instruments in order to obtain change. When combined with institutional autonomy this allowed the institutions in practice to choose whether they would adopt the changes or not. It appears that in the other three cases implementation depended on the combination of several tools where formal changes were supported by capacity tools or financial incentives. The Norwegian case illustrates the point. While institutions were given autonomy to define the content of the reform, the institution complied with government expectations by mobilizing wide spread participation in a high trust environment. The evidence suggests that there is not a deterministic unequivocal link between policy regimes, the selection of policy instruments and the degree of policy implementation. Furthermore, the assumption that specific regime characteristics can be used to predict choice of policy instrument is not supported by our observations in the German and Dutch cases. Yet, when we look at the Italian and Norwegian cases our findings suggest a relationship between policy regime characteristics and choice of policy instruments. Thus we are left with a conclusion that is similar to the one that was drawn in Chap. 6: National political-administrative regimes and policy sector regimes make up the environment of actors engaged in higher education reform processes, and they both limit options and open up possibilities for action and change.

One might argue that the four reforms are different and do not lend themselves to comparison. Our rationale for comparison has not been the specific content of the reform, as long as it is a reform of strategic significance to the institution and falls within the general rationale of the NPM movement. The findings are not conclusive: They only partly support the idea that characteristics of political-administrative regimes and

national peculiarities affect choice of policy instruments. Yet these characteristics were clearly visible in two cases, and the observed pattern was similar to those reported in Chaps. 6, 9 and 10. This strengthens the case for further exploring the potential of this approach to comparative policy studies.

## NOTES

1. Only three administrative traditions will be dealt with in the analysis as these are represented in the empirical data.
2. The executive board (College van Bestuur) is the highest governing and administrative body in Dutch universities. It consists of three persons including the Rector and is appointed by the Supervisory Board after hearing in the university council. The membership of the Executive board is incompatible with membership in the Supervisory Board, the deanship, and program directorship.
3. The “hearing” letter is part of a Nordic tradition of deliberation and consultation called “hearing” or “remiss”, in which actors considered “affected parties” of public decisions are invited to comment on policy or reform proposals as part of the democratic process.

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PART IV

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Conclusion

# Organizational Configurations of Modern Universities, Institutional Logics and Public Policies—Towards an Integrative Framework

*Ivar Bleiklie, Jürgen Enders and Benedetto Lepori*

**Abstract** Given the highly differentiated and nuanced analyses of change processes in university systems provided by the TRUE project, the chapter first reviews this evidence along a set of common dimensions concerning variation in organizational university configurations and their linkages to HE policies and related environmental pressures. This review underscores the need for a more refined analytical framework to accommodate the diversity of empirical observations and provide a more nuanced approach on how environmental contingencies impact organizations. In the last section, we propose a framework building on recent developments in neo-institutional theory, arguing that concepts like

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institutional pluralism and organizational hybridity provide useful analytical lenses for understanding changes in contemporary university organizations, the potential of which remains largely unexplored.

## INTRODUCTION

Already in our introductory chapter, we pointed to how the debate concerning the organizational form of the university system tended to feature two very distinct and contrasting models, i.e. the bureaucratic-academic organization and the corporate-managerial organization (Musselin 2007; see Chap. 1).

The traditional bureaucratic-academic ideal type stresses the peculiarities of universities as organizations (Weick 1976; Cohen et al. 1972). They are bottom-heavy with low potency for collective action. Organizational leadership is weak compared to other organizations. Organizational change takes place mainly through continuous local adjustments, while major change is difficult to achieve; central policies are often weak and interventions on this basis may have only minor, local effects. It is the academic professionals who act, rather than the university as an organization, especially when it comes to professional matters (e.g. research, teaching, academic careers). At the same time, universities form part and parcel of a regulatory regime regarding non-academic matters (e.g. budgets, salaries, infrastructure) in which they are subject to state control. Governments control universities by defining the bureaucratic rules of the game exercised by state authorities as well as by the intra-organizational administration.

On the contrary, the corporate-managerial model stresses the actorhood of universities as organizations, their capacities for corporate strategic action as well as for managerial intra-organizational control (Krücken and Meier 2006; Whitley 2008). Universities act as organizations that possess a certain degree of independence and sovereignty, with self-interested goals as well as with rational means for commanding their resources and for controlling their professional staff. ‘Old public administration’ is replaced by ‘new public management’ embedded into a new regulatory regime. The state delegates part of its authority to the organizational agent, the university. Traditional forms of bureaucratic control are replaced by alternative means, such as audits and accountability measures, incentive structures for organizational behavior, contractual arrangements or quasi-market mechanisms.

Much of the debate on the changing nature of universities as organizations strongly contrasted the two models, which were perceived as largely alternative and incompatible, and suggested an archetypical transformation of the organizational form of the university (Greenwood and Hinings 1996) that affects the configuration of the structures and processes of organizing according to a common interpretative scheme. In turn, it was considered that this transformation was promoted by global managerial templates (Meyer et al. 1997) and by policies supporting the transformation of public sector organizations into corporate entities (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000), like New Public Management (NPM; Ferlie et al. 2008).

Beyond this largely conceptual debate, empirical analyses started to display a more complex and nuanced reality, where transformations are gradual and piecemeal (de Boer et al. 2007; Seeber et al. 2014) and, despite global templates, a variety of configurations and of local orders is emerging (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013; Bleiklie et al. 2015; see Chap. 1 in this book). Studies of public policies showed the diversity of intellectual traditions and governance models across European countries, which can hardly be summarized as a general move towards new public management (Bleiklie et al. 2011; see Chaps. 9 and 10).

Thanks to its comparative nature, but also the diversity of the intellectual and (Lepori in Chap. 2), the TRUE project has provided a highly differentiated and nuanced analysis of the on-going change processes in university systems.

The first goal of this chapter is therefore to review this evidence along a set of common dimensions concerning (1) variations in organizational configurations among European universities (Section “[Dimensions of Organizational Configurations](#)”) and (2) their linkages to higher education policies and related environmental pressures (Section “[Environmental Pressures and Organizational Configurations](#)”). The TRUE project provides in this respect a more systematic view of these processes, covering eight countries and a reasonably large number of universities (up to 26 cases for the survey data); the subprojects also addressed these questions using a variety of theoretical lenses applied to different dimensions of organizational and political processes.

This overview underscores, however, the need for a more refined analytical framework to accommodate the diversity of empirical observations and to provide a more nuanced approach on how environmental contingencies impact organizations. Such a framework should also be able to

propose underlying sociological and behavioral mechanisms accounting for the observed patterns and, therefore, move from descriptive analyses towards explanatory (or even predictive) accounts. Therefore, in the last section of this chapter, we propose a framework that builds on recent developments in neo-institutional theory and, particularly, in institutional logics (Thornton et al. 2012): we argue that concepts like institutional pluralism and organizational hybridity (Kraatz and Block 2008; Greenwood et al. 2011) provide useful analytical lenses for understanding changes in contemporary university organizations, the potential of which remains largely unexplored (Lepori 2017).

### DIMENSIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATIONS

Based on the results of the TRUE project (see Chaps. 3–7 in this book), we suggest four dimensions which delimit what we call the space of organizational configurations in European universities, i.e. *autonomy*, *hierarchy*, *formalization* and *participation*, which we describe with reference to the two ideal types presented in the introduction.

- (a) *Autonomy* (Chap. 3 in this book) addresses the organizational autonomy of universities in regards to their decision-making competencies and the exemption of constraints on the actual use of such competencies. In the traditional bureaucratic-academic ideal type, the organizational autonomy of the university is high in regard to academic matters of teaching and research. Organizational decision-making on these matters is largely left to academic professionals and partly exempt from external interference by the state. Organizational autonomy for non-academic matters is low and pre-determined by a regulatory regime of state control. In stark contrast, the corporate-managerial ideal type assumes more freedom from external rule-setting and interference as well as high organizational decision-making competences in non-academic matters. Academic matters remain in the core of universities' decision-making competencies due to new means of external organizational control (e.g. audits and accountability) and influence (e.g. competition in quasi-markets).
- (b) *Hierarchy* (Chaps. 6 and 7) refers to the well-known capacity of organizations to coordinate and control action that, in many cases, is seen as one of the very purposes of creating

organizations. The bureaucratic-academic ideal type characterizes the university as a flat and loosely coupled organization with weak leadership; an organization being administered but not managed and controlled. The corporate-managerial ideal type calls for enhanced co-operation that is guided by organizational goals. Authoritative leadership and management are means for coordinating the university as a collective entity that is engaged in a common project. There is thus an important element of hierarchy within the organization, and control-oriented management plays a crucial role for direction, decisiveness and planning of organizational policies.

- (c) *Formalization* (Chaps. 4 and 5) refers to organizational decision-making being more or less guided by explicit rule systems and standards set at the national or organizational level. The traditional bureaucratic-academic ideal type assumes low formalization in regard to academic matters. In the absence of rule systems and standards, garbage can decision-making prevails. Non-academic matters follow bureaucratic rules and standards. In the corporate-managerial ideal type, formalization is expected to be high, both for non-academic matters and academic matters. Targets, performance indicators, and regular evaluation of units and staff are, for example, introduced together with standardized information systems as a major venue for hierarchical control and decision-making.
- (d) *Participation* (Chap. 6) addresses the role of professionals and of their communities in the organizations and their environment. The traditional ideal type portrays academic self-governance or collegial decision-making as a main characteristic of universities as organizations embedded in the peer-review-based self-steering of academic communities as the primary production units. In the corporate-managerial ideal type, the rise of ‘hierarchy’ and ‘formalization’ are mirrored by a decline in power of the academic community concerning organizational matters. Organizations assume stronger powers *vis-a-vis* their professional staff and a stronger sense of corporate ownership of their performance. At the same time, new forms of external organizational control that mobilize the academic community, e.g. for peer review in competitive quasi-markets, assume a strong role of the academic community in the organizational environment.

## NUANCED EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

TRUE empirical results provide evidence that substantial parts of the European university system have moved away from a traditionally professional and loosely coupled model and that some levels of hierarchy and formalization are currently found in most universities (Seeber et al. 2014). At the same time, our findings display considerable nuances and variations in this respect. The two organizational templates—the bureaucratic-academic ideal type and the corporate-managerial type—thus represent two ‘archetypes’, whereas individual universities can be characterized in general as hybrids, which combine characteristics of the two archetypes.

Autonomy is a good case in point. Although we have seen a general movement in the interpretation of autonomy towards the corporate-managerial model, Chap. 3 shows that there is considerable variation across countries as to how far individual institutions have moved and considerable tension between ‘formal autonomy’ and ‘autonomy in use’. Moreover, autonomy is a multidimensional concept and universities might act more or less autonomously in various spheres of organizational life. Autonomy-in-use within the focal organization is also not necessarily a copy of prescriptions for formal autonomy. In fact, European universities presently enjoy in practice a considerable amount of decision-making space in regard to such matters as budgets, finance, human resources, and in many cases even more than we would expect from their formal autonomy situation. Comparing these capabilities across the countries investigated highlights two constellations of university-government relationships: Universities exploit the decision-making space that has formally been granted to them by the government, or universities assume higher autonomy than formally granted by either exploiting mutual dependencies with the government to maximize their decision-making space, or by exploiting the leeway provided by the incapability or disinterestedness of the principal to control and enforce formal rules and regulations.

Growing organizational decision-making capabilities go along with the widespread adoption of some elements of a strong central hierarchy and of the formalization of decision-making processes. Differences in national policies generate variance in this respect, which can be associated with the strength of NPM pressures. Five of the six most hierarchical universities are, for example, British and Dutch—countries which

have developed stronger NPM pressures for their universities—whereas French and Italian universities are subject to weak NPM pressures and are all among the least hierarchical. The formalization of intra-organizational control via practices of setting goals and measuring results is also related to the strength of NPM pressures and positively associated with the strength of the hierarchy within the organization. ‘Hierarchy’ and ‘formalization’ can be mutually supportive in situations where hierarchical leadership uses its powers to introduce rule systems for intra-organizational control that reduce the power of academics.

At the same time, there are clear limitations to this process of ‘formalization’ and ‘hierarchization’ and no university in our sample displays a hierarchy where academics are excluded from decision-making (see Seeber et al. 2014). The case of intra-organizational budgeting exemplifies the variety observable across European universities (see Chap. 4 in this volume). We find three major groups of universities: a group of universities where internal resource allocation is highly formalized by partly mirroring the formalization of external resource allocation from the state; a group of universities that is characterized by higher levels of incrementalism and a low degree of formalization at the other end of the spectrum; and an in-between group, with a medium level of formalization, a stronger involvement of collegial bodies in decision-making and reputation-based resource allocation.

Depending on environmental NPM pressures, universities also reshape formal control instruments to a varying degree in a softer way: formal hierarchy is combined with informal control through social relationships, exploiting the hierarchical structure to construct social authority. A balance is sought between vertical structuring and horizontal peer coordination, while bureaucracy might be interpreted in an enabling way, where rule systems are co-designed with the principle workers. Formal structures are thus not necessarily mirrored in intra-organizational power constellations.

The case studies on organizational strategy making in European universities (see Chap. 7 in this volume) exemplify the difficulties of running universities as corporate-managerial actors, as intended by the conceptions of the new organizational ideal type. Strategy making is neither coherently following a rational planning model nor coherently following a perspective on strategy as an emerging practice based on sense making. Rather, universities oscillate between these two poles depending on the environmental jolts that trigger organizational responses and

shifting power constellations within the organization. Cognitive goals that call for concerted organizational action struggle with loosely coupled organizational structures and the political aspects of academic life. Rational planning might then become a partly symbolic action inviting another circle of decoupling and coupling between emerging strategies and rational planning.

In regard to intra-organizational decision-making, European universities keep substantial components of their traditional professional governance, particularly when it comes to matters in the academic core, such as the management of teaching and research, and the recruitment and promotion of academics. This characteristic seems to be resistant to policy pressures and is largely maintained by the universities in our sample, also in countries where NPM pressures are strong (see Bleiklie et al. 2015; Canhilal et al. 2015). A new form of ‘compartmentalization’ has emerged in which the tension between the bureaucratic-professional ideal type and the corporate-managerial ideal type is to some extent resolved by the division of powers. While hierarchical leadership and organizational management exercise stronger control over managerial issues, such as the organizational infrastructure or resource management, academic matters tend to be due to more decentralized departmental decision-making with the stronger influence of individual academics. Our analysis focuses largely on the formal-structural dimension of these processes, while one could argue that the “dark side” of organizations, i.e. informal processes (Clegg et al. 2006), is highly important in universities and the influence of academics is much stronger in such processes (Musselin 2011, Chap. 6 in this volume).

It has been more than three decades since new ideas and practices emerged across Europe on how to steer the field of universities and how to configure and run them as organizations, thus it can be concluded that European universities have taken a different organizational form when compared to the early 1980s. The redistribution of authority and control throughout the field and within universities has undoubtedly led to a re-engineering of the university as a more autonomous entity, a more managerial organization, and strengthened the position of the university as a corporate actor. European universities presently construct stronger formal hierarchies and rule systems and have gained a higher level of intra-organizational control. But these changes have occurred alongside more traditional patterns of organizing, such as academic self-governance, the influence of soft power, intra-organizational struggle

and contestation that strongly influences the organizational configuration of European universities. A full-blown move towards a new archetype of the university is not a European reality. Instead, the shift so far has been to a more managed professional public organization model (Hinings et al. 1999; Lander et al. 2013). We realize that our analysis is essentially cross-sectional and, therefore, we cannot know whether this state of affairs will be a lasting characteristic or a transitional state in a further move towards the corporate-managerial ideal type.

Further, any conceptualization of the current reality of European universities as organizations in a single type fails to cover persistent and newly emerging varieties of organizational configurations across Europe. Such variation is expressed in all four dimensions—organizational autonomy, organizational hierarchization and formalization as well as the role of the academic community—and the relative strengths of these dimensions are not necessarily highly associated. Our analysis of intra-organizational control regimes in European universities along the two dimensions of ‘centralization of power’ and ‘formalization of social relationships’ (Bleiklie et al. 2015) exemplifies such variation.

None of our three case study universities—belonging to three different higher education systems—could be characterized as a clear-cut case of a loosely coupled organization. One university corresponded to the model of the ‘soft bureaucracy’ where central control is achieved through impersonal rule systems based on performance measurements and the leadership discretion for organizational restructuring. The second university achieved centralization through personalized informal power and the leadership control of resources and information generating asymmetry between the ‘leaders’ and the ‘led’. In the third, university governance is shared between leadership and academics with weak formalization of central control and extensive participatory arrangements representing features of the traditionally loosely coupled system.

Our analyses also call for careful reconsideration of strong policy assumptions that ‘function follows form’, i.e. that certain ways of steering and running universities as organizations will determine superior performance. We do find, for example, some significant associations between research quality and certain organizational characteristics: research quality is higher in specialized universities, in older universities and in larger universities. Such organizational characteristics are, however, neither systematically associated with dimensions of organizational ‘autonomy’,



‘hierarchy’, ‘formalization’, and ‘community’ nor do we find systematic direct associations between these dimensions and research quality.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATIONS

Our discussion above has already pointed at the role of the environment for universities as organizations, most namely—while not exclusively—the role of the state. Change in organizations, and especially radical change in regard to organizational configurations is likely to be the outcome of the interaction of factors ‘endogenous’ to the organization and dynamics ‘exogenous’ to the organization.

In this respect we highlight the role of three processes: compliance with institutional pressures (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), control of external resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), as well as the mediating function of external social relationships (Burt 1992; Kogut 2012). The diffusion of an organizational template—the corporate-managerial ideal type—does not necessarily lead to convergence. Its interpretation and instrumentation in the different political-administrative systems (Bleiklie et al. 2011; Paradeise et al. 2009) translates into national variations influencing organizational structure and behavior in differential ways. This is most clearly illustrated by the differential uptake of NPM-inspired modernization concepts in the different countries and their influence on their universities’ organizational configurations. Policy changes cannot, however, be solely characterized in a simple and unidimensional manner, as related to the stronger or lower introduction of NPM rationales. We observe a higher degree of complexity in policy regimes, as well as lasting dependencies on the state, even in countries with a high amount of NPM pressure.

Such dependencies throw their shadows over the processes of intra-organizational decision-making. Even for universities with a considerable amount of formal autonomy, their autonomy is in many cases strongly limited by their lasting financial dependence on the state and many governments use this power base to contractually bind their universities in target agreements or performance agreements. Most universities also experience the considerable influence of external actors—most namely the government and its agencies—on their internal decision-making. This position in the ‘shadow of hierarchy’ (Mayntz and Scharpf 1995)

reflects various and shifting tools of government that influence organizational behavior from a distance: funding, regulating, auditing, as well as normative pressures.

### *New Public Management and the Role of Public Policies*

One of the aims of the TRUE project was to investigate the association between patterns of organizational configurations of public universities in Europe and changes in their environment frequently associated with the diffusion of NPM policies.

There are good reasons to assume such an association. In recent decades, higher education has experienced unprecedented growth, in quantitative terms in regards to the size of the field and related costs, as well as in qualitative terms related to political and societal expectations. This has in turn triggered policy-makers' attention to the field, its functioning and organization. General templates for public sector reform, such as NPM, also seemed to provide scripts for a modernization agenda in search of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education. While NPM comes in different guises, common assumptions are that state-university relationships have been changing and that environmental pressures on universities have grown. Further, it is assumed that changing rule systems, changing resource dependencies and institutional pressures will reshape the organizational configuration of the European university towards the corporate-managerial ideal type.

There are good reasons to be cautious in assuming a uniform isomorphic trend in public policies and their impact on organizational configurations across Europe. Global modernization templates hit nation-states with their own ideational traditions, political-administrative structures and implementation styles that define the space for policy action. This space is likely to affect the policy adoption of global templates in general, as well as domain specific templates that appear in the field of higher education. In this sense, it is not surprising if global policy templates sometimes include far-reaching expectations regarding the modernization of the state itself, which is a non-trivial and far-reaching exercise that is assumed to provide the very conditions for second-order policy changes.

Further, and as we have argued in our introductory chapter, NPM-inspired policy templates have never been without alternatives, such as

Neo-Weberian conceptions of the role of the state, or policy frameworks derived from Network Governance approaches. Thus we might expect different pathways to change in higher education. Another note of caution can be drawn from the widespread observation that the relationship between policy intentions and policy outcomes is not linear. The implementation of modernization agendas interacts with institutional structures and power constellations that cause variations and deviations on the pathway from policy intention to policy outcomes.

Last but not least, the very target of political reform, the universities, cannot be expected to be passive recipients of modernization agendas aimed at transforming their organizational form. Organizations possess a repertoire of responses to environmental change that they can mobilize according to their norms and interests. In this perspective, the environment provides a template for how universities should be organized while universities can be more or less selective in their adoption depending on the coerciveness of such templates and the outcomes of intra-organizational conflict on institutional change. Universities represent an interesting case that allows the examination of the different facets of the environment-organization relationship. Most of them are public organizations subject to state regulation and intervention, and they are highly dependent on the state for financial resources. They are subject to global institutional pressures to adopt a corporate-managerial model that is, however, due to variation in national policy adoption and enforcement. At the same time, universities are very open organizations, characterized by a dense set of social ties to the policy layer, to other stakeholders, to academic disciplines and other organizational providers that influence external dependencies. Intra-organizational power can therefore be acquired through the control of such external relationships and external dependencies.

### *Empirical Evidence*

Our data indeed suggest that national political-administrative systems have some explanatory power regarding cross-national variation in higher education policies and the degree of reform activity (see Chap. 9 in this volume). Rather than mechanically affecting policies, political-administrative systems seem to offer different conditions of action that may limit or offer opportunities that are open to actors who want to promote, redefine, slow down or prevent reforms from happening. Thus we

could observe how national political-administrative conditions seemed to offer different paths to high reform activity; one of which is based on the ability of actors to implement swift and sweeping reform (England, the Netherlands) and another on the ability to keep up a relatively steady incremental process over a broad range of issues (France, Norway). Similarly there are different conditions that lead to low reform activity, one characterized by federal structures and many veto points (Germany, Switzerland), and the second based on decentralized structures with a reform focus on legal and procedural issues and a relatively strong separation between formal procedures and informal practices (Italy). Although reform activity in itself does not necessarily put pressure on universities to adopt the corporate-managerial model, the two are clearly connected, as most higher education reforms in one way or the other are justified in terms of NPM and related managerial ideals.

In regard to the autonomy dimension, many governments across Europe made attempts to withdraw from the old tools of state micro-management to empower the universities' decision-making capabilities. The timing, breadth and depth of such political reforms have not been uniform across Europe (see Chaps. 3 and 9 in this volume) but many countries have introduced measures to change the formal autonomy situation (as prescribed in rules and regulations) of their universities. Also, if we look at internal decision-making in the universities in our sample, patterns in terms of the organizational decentralization of and engagement in decision-making also appear to reflect wider national system characteristics to a certain extent (cf. Chap. 6 in this volume).

Looking at the connection between sector characteristics and organizational change in universities (Chap. 10), we emphasize characteristics such as how integrated or fragmented the sector is in terms of diversity of and relations among higher education institutions, government agencies, interest groups and other stakeholders. Furthermore we find different patterns of power distributed within the sector: among politicians, ministry civil servants, agencies, unions, higher education institutions and academic elites in order to identify the mechanisms through which policy ambitions are translated into specific proposals (e.g. the extent to which proposals are developed by politicians, civil servants, expert commissions, representative commissions or other forms of policy advice and consultation). Not least, we find variation regarding the extent to which higher education issues have become subject to parliamentary politics and contestation among political parties. This implies that actor

constellations behind policy proposals, decisions on instrumentation, and implementation regimes differ from country to country, partly reflecting traditions and values of higher education and partly those of the wider polity.

So far our data indicate that policy sectors tend to reflect broader national patterns in terms of participation, power constellations and styles of policy making, yet the sectors also have developed peculiarities within each country, reflecting how actors interpret the task of steering, monitoring and managing the sector, and how their perceived interests are affected.

Power in universities also depends to some extent on the external linkages of organizational actors and their access to resources (see Bleiklie et al. 2015). National policies do not only provide instantiations of concepts like hierarchy and rule systems, they also shape intra-organizational control through regulatory interventions, for example deciding how leadership is recruited, attributing power to hierarchical levels, and defining rules for evaluating performance. They furthermore shape the structure of the resource environment in different ways that enable or limit control of external resources by the leadership and professionals. Interactions between these processes are not necessarily mutually reinforcing, but create situations in which hierarchical control is both enabled and restricted. Although the timing and the purposes of external evaluation exercises are, for example, often defined by public authorities outside of academia, academics may influence the use of such evaluation systems and the recommendations that are given, through the role they play as peer reviewers as well as through their role in the internal governance of the focal organization or unit under evaluation (see Chap. 5). Different evaluation regimes emerge, depending both on the type of evaluation (research evaluation, teaching evaluation and other assessment activities), the degree of NPM pressure and the degree of organizational autonomy in dealing with such evaluations.

## TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

In this section, we move towards a theoretical framework for understanding the institutional complexity and sources of variation that characterize the contemporary reality of higher education as an organizational field and of European universities as organizations. We build our argument on three inter-related steps: First, we build on the theory of

institutional logics as a meta-theory for understanding institutional complexity, i.e. the coexistence of various institutional logics providing templates for material and symbolic practices within the organizational field. Second, we argue that the state and possibly other stakeholders function as enactors of institutional logics and that variation in national public policies provides a source of variation within the field of higher education and within universities as organizations. Third, we conceptualize universities as institutional actors that can be selective and strategic in responding to their institutional environment, thus providing another source of variation in organizational forms and practices.

### *Institutional Logics*

The institutional logics approach builds on the seminal essay of Friedland and Alford that stimulated a new approach in institutional theory by conceptualizing organizational fields at the intersection of different societal spheres, such as the bureaucracy, the family, the market or the profession, all characterized by their own institutional logic (Friedland and Alford 1991). Institutional logics have been defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton and Ocasio 1999: 804). Institutional logics are not purely conceptual schemes or systems of meanings but are meant to build the link between culture and meanings on the one hand, and actors and practices on the other hand, by providing material and symbolic sources for agency and change (Thornton et al. 2012).

The institutional logics approach thus builds on neo-institutional thinking around the importance of the institutional environment for understanding organizational field dynamics and organizational behavior (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Tolbert and Zucker 1983) that has also been influential in higher education studies. Importantly, viewing organizations as being embedded in a multilevel inter-institutional society extends institutional theory both beyond conceptualizations of one dominant source of rationality, such as in the world systems approach (Meyer et al. 1997), and beyond isomorphism in organizational fields where institutional templates reduce heterogeneity of organizational forms (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Rather, this approach opens up for the understanding of the sources of heterogeneity in organizational fields

characterized by the presence of multiple institutional logics (Kraatz and Block 2008) and an interactive relationship between institutions and agencies (Battilana and D'Aunno 2009).

In this stream of research, *ideal types* have become a frequently used tool in order to analyze institutional complexity and its implications for organizational actors (Thornton and Ocasio 2008), which represent the extremes of the possible configurations available to the field's actors. It is therefore not expected that logics correspond one-to-one to observed instantiations in practice, but rather they draw the available 'space of choices' to actors, who, when faced with institutional complexity, deploy differentiated responses (Greenwood et al. 2011) and become hybrid organizations.

### *Logics in Higher Education*

Research inspired by the institutional logics approach has frequently considered the higher education field as a prototypical case of a field characterized by institutional pluralism (Kraatz and Block 2008). The field is being dominantly shaped by the bureaucratic logic of the state, the professional logic of academic work, and increasingly by the logic of the market. This thinking has long been established in higher education studies through the seminal work of Clark and his triangle of coordination of higher education systems between the state, the profession and the market (Clark 1983), while the logics approach has so far rarely been used in higher education studies (Cai and Mehari 2015; Lepori 2017).

Various contributions in this book build on this stream of research while extending the argument towards the understanding of institutional complexity in the higher education field. In recent decades, the traditional 'social compact' between higher education, the academic profession and the state has been eroding, and the special status of the university as a social institution is no longer taken for granted. In many European countries (and beyond), institutional entrepreneurs developed beliefs and practices within the context of wider reforms of public services and public management (de Boer et al. 2007) in order to change the coordination of the institutional field and its organizational population. Models of state supervision instead of state control, or output control instead of process control, as well as 'market-like' competition combined with accountability and related attempts to strengthen the actorhood and responsibility of universities as organizations have become

prevalent. This new idea of how to organize government-university relationships and the autonomy and control of universities has been inspired by the growing popularity of New Public Management approaches that find some of their theoretical backgrounds in principal-agent theory (Enders et al. 2013). The higher education field is thus experiencing increasing institutional complexity with the rise of a new logic ('the market') that overlaps with a re-formulation of the old bureaucratic logic towards organizational autonomy and accountability ('the audit'). At the same time, beliefs and practices inscribed in the professional logic, such as peer competition and peer review, are mobilized in the instrumentation of the market-audit logics in higher education.

In this perspective, the bureaucratic-academic and the corporate-managerial type we introduced at the onset of this chapter can be considered as two ideal types of organizations available to contemporary universities. Our empirical findings show that one type did not replace the other, but the university field is characterized by their coexistence and, therefore, it becomes relevant to investigate the different ways they are enacted by individual universities and the factors accounting for the variation.

### *Re-Conceptualizing the Role of the State*

Institutional logics provide a useful framework to conceptualizing the impact of public policies on university organizations. By definition, logics are a cultural and normative system, which are present within society or specific societal fields, like higher education. The state can be considered as a specific actor (or, more realistically, as a collection of actors) that influences the content of the logics, but especially the extent to which they are conveyed to organizations. Public policies are a central mechanism transmitting institutional pressures to organizations, by its legitimacy to set social norms, by direct regulatory interventions unfolding coercive pressure and by resource dependencies.

While societal actors might be relevant as well, the state therefore has a prominent role in enacting institutional logics within the university field, in determining the level of pressures and the prevalence of alternative logics and the extent to which they are considered compatible. The state also influences the power of other stakeholders within the field, for example by incentivizing new university-business relationships or by promoting the student as a fee-paying customer (Jongbloed et al. 2008).



Given that the state acts as a filter of broader societal changes and pressures, we further highlight its role in generating variance between countries as public policies endorse and combine different logics by country and over time. The strength, content and influence of NPM-inspired policy templates differ substantially across European countries. Such differences can partly be attributed to the prevalence of different political-administrative regimes that produce variation in the selection, interpretation and instrumentation of institutional templates.

Therefore, two mechanisms generate differences in university responses at two levels: Differences by countries related to the difference in national policies providing instantiations of institutional logics and organizational archetypes, and differences between individual universities due to their characteristics and local orders. This model therefore builds a bridge between the existence of global templates (Meyer et al. 1997) and the emergence of local orders (Paradeise and Thoening 2013) considering that the diversity of institutional logics and organizational archetypes is constitutive to the organizational field of higher education and that the state and other stakeholders have a critical mediating role between the global and the local.

### *Responding to Institutional Pressures*

Institutional logics follows long-standing calls within neo-institutional theory to rediscover the agency of actors and to take into account the variety of responses of individual actors to institutional pressures, particularly under conditions of pluralism (Greenwood et al. 2011). Universities are not passive recipients of institutional pressures but can act strategically in order to reach their goals and defend their interests. Institutional complexity provides sources to organizations for trying to blend and to comply selectively rather than to adhere to one of the available organizational archetypes provided. We provide empirical evidence that responses of universities to institutional pressures are more nuanced and complex than simply adopting or resisting and that we observe an ongoing process of the emergence of hybrid practices combining managerial elements and professional elements (Bleiklie et al. 2015; Canhilal et al. 2015; Berg and Pinheiro 2016).

At the organizational level, in turn, we consider universities as prime examples of hybrid organizations (Battilana and Lee 2014; Battilana and Dorado 2010), i.e. organizations embedding different institutional

logics generating local orders (Paradeise and Thoenig 2013) in search of organizational solutions to institutional problems. While hybridity was traditionally considered as a source of conflicts and instability for organizations, it is now increasingly becoming clear that, under some conditions, it also bears advantages, as hybrid organizations might be able to resort to a broader repertoire of solutions and to access resources coming from different audiences (Kraatz and Block 2008; Smets et al. 2015). One could even argue that today's universities can work only if they are both managed organizations, with some level of central power and strategy, *and* professional decentralized organizations. The relevant question therefore becomes how universities can combine and blend competing principles, while at the same time keeping a coherent identity and being able to work effectively (Lepori and Montauti 2015).

## CONCLUSION

The TRUE project can be seen as an expression of a long-standing process in research and practice where universities are no longer considered as 'special organizations' *ex ante* but are being viewed through theoretical and practical lenses developed for organizations in general, including private sector organizations (Musselin 2007). In doing so, universities are considered as one organization, as a corporate actor enacting single responses to institutional pressures.

Our results demonstrate how fruitful this approach can be in enriching our understanding of contemporary universities and the extent to which there are deep similarities between universities and other types of organizations, like professional organizations (Lounsbury 2007) and other public sector organizations such as hospitals (Berg and Pinheiro 2016). A broader linkage to organization theory not only can further our understanding of universities, it could also lead to a broader relevance and generalizability of our findings, as it was in the 70s when several important theories of organizations were developed from studies of universities, like resource dependency (Pfeffer and Salancik 1974) and Garbage Can Theory (Cohen et al. 1972). The fact that some of the TRUE outputs are being published in management and organizational journals (Seeber et al. 2014; Bleiklie et al. 2015) or presented at top international conferences in the field (Frølich et al. 2010; Lepori and Canhilal 2015) might be considered as a modest step in this direction.

Yet, this approach neglects the body of literature in which academic fields that span organizational borders are considered to be an important force in the evolution of the field of higher education and an important source of intra-organizational fragmentation (Clark 1995; Becher and Trowler 2001). The unifying organizational approach has been very fruitful as demonstrated by our study and other work in this stream of research. Yet, the diversity of ‘academic tribes and territories’ and the lack of functional integration remain as constitutive characteristics of universities and are open to the possibility of intra-organizational variation. Different organizational sub-units may find heterodox ways of dealing with institutional complexity and organizational archetypes. They might as well remain a source of frustration for attempts to enact single and lasting organizational responses to institutional complexity. The relationship between these sources of fragmentation and organizational behavior has yet to be articulated systematically. Some of the TRUE findings display, for example, a systematic difference between specialist universities and generalist universities, particularly concerning their identity, while also their internal governance (Seeber et al. 2014). Further work is needed to dig deeper into disciplinary fragmentations as sources of inter-organizational variations and intra-organizational variation.

As usual in good academic research, the responses we found to our initial questions have opened new pathways for future inquiry.

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