# University Governance in Meso and Macro Perspectives

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the two sides of university governance, As a meso concept it deals with universities as organized structures where priorities have to be set, decisions made, budget allocated, teaching programs developed, and research achieved. It relates to the sociology of organizations and the paper first explores the four founding models that aimed at qualifying university governance and how they help understanding the evolution of universities in recent years.

But at a macro level, university governance deals with universities as a sector and focuses on how they interact with one another, their relationships to the state and how they are affected by national as well as transnational and global transformations. University governance is studied as a state-steered national system, as a field or as a competitive arena.

**Keywords**: collegiality, bureaucracy, power relations, state intervention, field, competition

University governance is one of the areas of research in the multi-disciplinary field of higher education studies. As is the case in other sectors (Meyer & Bromley 2013), large organizations have expanded in higher education. P. Blau had already observed this (Blau 1973) in the seventies, and it is even truer today (Whitley & Gläser 2014). The number of universities in the world is not precisely known but is estimated to be more than 20,000[1]. The

[1] The number depends on how one defines "universities", and there is no agreement on what estimate of the number of institutions is most accurate. For an example of a website providing global statistics, see https://www.statista.com/statistics/918403/number-of-universities-worldwide-by-country/ (consulted on October 26 2020).

size of these higher education institutions varies greatly, from a few thousand students for some to over a million for others, but most are large employers with more than a thousand workers. Universities are not a rare and small category as they have over 153 million enrolled students according to UNESCO. Understanding what they do and how they do it is thus crucial for contemporary societies that increasingly rely on a skilled workforce and the training of citizens. How such organizations are run is therefore a first question raised by university governance, "defined as the constitutional forms and processes through which universities govern their affairs" (Shattock 2006 p.1) and the interplay of multilateral relationships between academic university leaders, deliberative bodies, and the university's administration (Mignot-Gérard 2003). Thus, university governance casts universities as organized structures that need to set priorities, make decisions, allocate budgets, develop teaching programs, and produce research. It relates to the sociology of organizations and work and first developed in the 1960s. But university governance can also be studied at a macro level when universities are addressed as a sector or as a category: the main issues are then how they interact with one another, relate to the state, and experience national as well as transnational and global evolutions. These two different perspectives can be studied independently or approached interactively: does university governance at the macro level impact the governance of universities as organizations, and vice versa? Nevertheless, we will see that authors focusing on the meso level rarely link their analysis to macro governance, beyond considering it as a large and rather general contextual framework. Macro analysis more frequently infers its effects on the meso level of governance, but does not do so systematically either.

Many recent developments in the study of university governance at the macro and meso levels pertain to the diffusion of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in higher education

(Ferlie et al. 2008). In this sector as in others, NPM took rather different forms over time. A distinction needs to be made between the first NPM reforms (vertical reorganization of the public sector and clear differentiation of missions) and post-NPM reforms (intense cross-sectoral collaboration and increasingly central control) (Christensen 2011). NPM can therefore mean several things. The paper will address this by considering it as a strengthening of managerial logics, as a bureaucratization process fostering performance-based mechanisms, but also as an implementation of private practices and tools leading to more competition between universities pressured to become entrepreneurial.

But the study of university governance is not one-dimensional either. There is still no consensus on the qualification of the type of organizations to which universities belong and on how they evolve. In order to reflect this variegated analytical landscape, the first section will delve into the different conceptions. The second section will focus on the macro level, studying higher education as a national system, a field, or a competitive arena.

## 1. A contested definition of the organizational qualification of universities

Interest in universities as organizations is relatively recent. Although RK. Merton significantly contributed to the study of bureaucracies (Merton 1957), the sociology of science that developed around him primarily focused on academics as an ethos-driven community, and therefore ignored the formal structures in which they unfold. The strong program (Bloor 1976; Barnes 1977) that developed in reaction to the Mertonian approach to science did not pay much attention to the institutional and organizational environment of scientific activities either. The study of universities therefore did not arise from the sociology of science. Rather, it started at the beginning of the sixties, when a few publications shed light

on the structures in which the scientific community evolves. Interest in universities as organizations has developed since, leading to rather different, if not conflicting, characterizations of universities: a bureaucracy, a collegium, a corporation, an enterprise, an organized anarchy, a representative democracy, a political space, a service, a state-chartered unit, etc. Many typologies of university governance therefore coexist, depending on whether its evolution is described over time, generally from the collegium of the golden age to the enterprise today (for instance McNay 1995); or its variety is considered over space, with different models attached to different countries (Whitley 2008); or its heterogeneity is emphasized among universities, with different models observed within the same country or different models observed within the same university (Hardy 1991, 1996); or its variety in terms of visions for universities (Olsen 2007). In this paper, I will follow the typology suggested by Birnbaum (1988) based on four founding models that were developed in the 1960s and 1970s, because each of them expanded in new directions that reflect the evolution of universities in recent years. The first one, which was also the first to appear, posited the community of academics as central to universities, described as collegial organizations. But this perspective faced immediate criticism. Some considered it to be an exceedingly irenic take. A more power-oriented approach – the political one – developed and contributed to a more agonistic understanding of the way universities are run. Another critical approach to the collegial conception emerged among authors who stressed that universities also experienced the bureaucratic turn that M. Weber foresaw (1978 [1920]): it suggested analyzing them as quasi-bureaucracies. Finally a last angle developed around the notion of organized anarchies and underscored the organizational specificity of universities, but also shed light on how recent policies aimed to reduce it and transform universities into "organizations like others".

### 1.1. Universities as collegial organizations

Descriptions of universities as collegial organizations first appeared in the 1960s, mainly in the form of essays criticizing developments in US higher education that threatened collegiality. JD. Millett (1962), a political scientist president of Miami University, published a book in 1962 that was one of the first to argue that universities should be run as a community. The same year, P. Goodman (1962), a leftwing academic and novelist, pleaded for the defense of independent universities as one of the last "self-governing communities".

Collegiality was not precisely defined in these essays, but the idea of peers able to come to a consensus was already present. In his seminal article on collegial organizations M. Waters (1989) presents consensus as a central feature of collegiality and defines these organizations as "those in which there is dominant orientation to a consensus achieved between the members of a body of experts who are theoretically equals in their levels of expertise but who are specialized by area of expertise" (p. 956). In academia, consensus is supposed to arise thanks to common norms around scientific arguments (Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2016). Science and scholarship define codes of conduct and according to Olsen (2007) legitimate authority is based on neutral competence. But collegial governance of universities is furthermore associated with specific organizational practices and rules, such as leaders who are elected rather than appointed, and who behave as first among equals rather than as managers; academic freedom guaranteeing self-determination of one's own research agenda; shared governance (Manning 2013); "the use of peer review for positions, promotion, research funding and publication" (Sahlin & Eriksson-Zetterquist 2016 p. 3); "non-hierarchical, cooperative decision-making" (Rhoades 1992 p. 1377); and "democratic, anti-bureaucratic overtones" (Clark 1987 p. 384).

While most of these definitions restrict collegial governance to the community of scholars, BR. Clark (1972) extended this notion to the whole university as a community sharing the same values, and developed the idea of organizational sagas as a "collective understanding of unique accomplishment in a formally established group" (p. 178). In the three US colleges he studied, this collective understanding arose from the beginning of their foundation or after a crisis, and worked as a founding narrative producing a strong normative orientation for the faculty as well as the administrative staff and stakeholders of each college. The community of scholars was seen as part of a larger university community sharing the same views and forming a consensual space.

Even scholars working on collegial organizations have contested this irenic perspective. In his book on collegiality, E. Lazega (2001) argues that "collegial is not synonym for congenial and nice (…) Collegial committees can be as brutal as autocrats when they vote like lynch mobs" (p. 5). The status competition between colleagues who share solidarity but also are rivals is often forgotten in these analyses of universities as collegial organizations. Especially since collegiality is often presented as a university model of the past – a model that characterizes a (lost) golden age threatened by recent reforms and the managerial turn of university governance.

A rather dense and still active debate developed around the extent to which collegiality could survive within universities. It took two main perspectives. A first one opposes collegiality and management. The authors deplore or fear (Kwiek 2015) the replacement of collegial governance by managerial governance (Deem 1998; Deem et al. 2007; Palfreyman & Tapper 2010; Sahlin and Eriksson-Zetterquist 2016) as university administration grows and become

more professional, as university leaders are increasingly appointed rather than elected and are expected to become managers rather than *primus inter pares*, and as authority is retrived from academic bodies to the top of the institution (Shattock 2014a). The second perspective does not see a substitution of collegiality by management but rather a hybridization or combination of the two (Harvey, 1995; Schimank, 2005, Blaschke, et al. 2014) that may even be mutually enhancing. F. Camerati Morrás (2014) for instance observed that high-performing departments in UK universities exhibit managerial practices as well as collegial relationships among colleagues, leading to better performance in securing grants or publishing, and therefore in meeting managerial objectives. As outlined by DD. Dill (2014) and C. Paradeise and J.-C. Thoenig, (2015), this positive combination of collegiality and management seems to be common in leading research universities and elite US institutions. As is the case for the bishop in the diocese studied by E. Lazega and O. Watterbled (2010), university leaders cannot exercise hierarchical leadership and embrace top-down collegiality (sharing decisions with legitimate faculty representatives) in order to support the bottom-up collegiality that prevails among peers.

Building on these two perspectives, S. Chatelain-Ponroy et al. (under review) recently proposed a third way and conclude that conflict and hybridity can both be observed between collegiality and management, if one adopts a multi-dimensional definition of collegiality. Looking at the impact of performance measurement systems on research in French universities, they saw varying impacts depending on whether collegiality is defined as the individual academics' autonomy to design their research agenda, as cooperative behaviors among colleagues within their academic unit (Hatfield 2006), as enlarged participation in decision-making (Dearlove 2002), or as the balance of power between the university administration and the academic units. They show that while performance measurement

systems threaten professional autonomy, they do not affect collegial decision-making; the two other dimensions of collegiality vary depending on the status of universities (organizational citizenship worsens at elite universities, but not at others).

### 1.2. Universities as a locus of power relations

While the collegial model stresses consensus and collaboration, the political model "emphasizes plurality and heterogeneity" (de Boer & Stensaker 2007 p. 101). Victor J. Baldridge (1971) in his book *Power and conflict in the university* proposed a first approach considering universities as political arenas. Relying on a study led in his own institution, he described universities as a space where academics fight for resources or prestige and primarily pursue their personal interests rather than a shared scientific collegial principle. Universities are agonistic places, not peaceful, collegial communities of peers.

This perspective further developed when J. Pfeffer and G.R. Salancik (1974; Salancik & Pfeffer 1974) researched resource allocation in universities and argued that power relations are fundamental to the way universities are run. They showed that those able to secure external funding are better equipped to negotiate and occupy power positions within their institutions. Interestingly, this study conducted in a non-for-profit organization was groundbreaking in the development of resource-dependence theory, which has since mostly been applied to firms and taught in business schools (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Nevertheless, resource dependence theory remains applicable to universities. The Kantian ideational conflict of faculties (Kant 1979[1798]) has become a conflict about norm setting as well as a struggle for money. Academics who obtain the most lucrative grants, develop successful patenting, or provide high tuition fees (like Business schools) can consolidate their influence

and better resist the top-down strategies some university presidents may be tempted to develop.

But power relations do not only develop between academics going after the same resources. They are also crucial between administrators and academics. In the collegial model, the administration is supposed to be small and serve the faculty. But recent reforms have led to the growth and evolution of university administrations (Rhoades & Sporn 2002; Blümel 2016). Administrative staff members are more qualified than before, and their mastery of procedures, accounting rules, and software provide them with more expertise. New profiles of administrative staff have appeared, such as "third space professionals" (Whitchurch 2008): they have been research-trained and have accepted jobs at the frontier of academia and administration, as project managers, counselors to grant applicants, fund-raisers, etc In parallel, university presidents, deans, and department heads, who were previously clearly considered as members of the academic profession, also constitute a new group: the academic managers. Even if most research concludes that they remain close to the academic culture (Deem 2010), and that their leadership can hardly be hierarchical (Bryman 2007), these functions require more managerial skills to hold discussions as equals with the "pure" administrative staff while also managing their academic colleagues (Rhoades 1998). The professionalization of these positions has led to the emergence of careers as university managers, who move from one university to others in some countries. These professional managers are generally not tenured and rarely move back to academic positions. One can therefore assume that they are less dependent on the opinions of the faculty they manage than elected administrators who may rejoin their department, and that they may more easily embrace a managerial role. This might lead to strong tensions if they forget they run a university (i.e. a particular type of organization, cf. 1.4) and ignore the countervailing forces

that academics may exercise, as shown by the forced resignation of some appointed university presidents.

All these developments have increased tensions between lay academics on the one hand, and the administration and academic managers on the other: academics complain about increased administrative control over their activity, as well as increased administrative tasks in their own workload (Teichler et al. 2013).

### 1.3. Bureaucracies

Another criticism of the collegial model is that it neglects the expansion in the size and complexity of universities, and the fact that they share characteristics with Weberian bureaucracies. H. Stroup (1966), who long served as a dean, was the first to write a book making this argument, but it really only became an issue after the sociologist of bureaucracy P. Blau (1973) tackled the issue in his book *The Organization of Academic Work*. Observing that scholarship developed in large organizations requiring procedures and administrative mechanisms, he wondered how scholarship and bureaucracy could work in tandem and examined whether academic organizations fundamentally differ from government bureaus or private firms in their administrative structures (size, structural differentiation, administrative apparatus). P. Blau concludes that universities obviously share some bureaucratic characteristics: division of labor, administrative hierarchy, and clerical apparatus, with variations among universities. But he also recognizes that they lack some bureaucratic attributes since there is no direct supervision of the faculty's work, and no direct operating rules on the performance of academic responsibilities.

H. Mintzberg (1979) further developed the analysis of universities as a specific type of bureaucracy. In his typology of organizations he suggested that organizations that are bureaucratic without being centralized – like universities – should be labeled "professional bureaucracies": they rely on highly qualified professionals working independently of their colleagues; furthermore, authority is based on expertise rather than the hierarchy that defines traditional bureaucracies. Professionals benefit from a technostructure providing them with support staff and services, which is, according to Minztberg, one of the reasons why professionals join such organizations. Instead of the *primus inter pares* shaping collegial organizations, professional bureaucracies are run by professional administrators, whose power is nevertheless weak.

But while in the ideal-type of Mintzberg's professional bureaucracies, the technostructure is deemed limited, recent university reforms have strengthened the bureaucratic feature of professional bureaucracies at the expense of the professional one. This did not just occur through the extension and professionalization of the administrative staff (as mentioned above) but also through the introduction of management tools. This aligns with the analysis of New Public Management reforms as a bureaucratization process. For example, P. Le Galès and A. Scott (2010) described it as a "bureaucratic revolution", C. Pollitt (1993) as "neo-taylorian managerialism", and P. Bezes (2020), as a "new bureaucratic phenomenon". For these authors, the reinforcement of bureaucracy favored by NPM is linked to the introduction and expansion of management mechanisms and steering practices based on performance, the use of incentives, the collection of quantitative data enabling the tracking and comparison of indicators, and more generally the quantification of results. Analysts of bureaucracies who previously focused on the definition and use of rules are now concerned with the production and use of numbers (Bezes 2020).

Such reforms have directly affected universities, as they have other public sectors. Some countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands experienced this early (in the 1980s for the UK), but the reforms eventually disseminated to all parts of the world (Marginson 1997; Mok & Tan 2004; Deem & Brehony 2005; Krücken et al 2006; de Boer et al. 2007b; Paradeise et al. 2009).

Bureaucratization takes the same form everywhere. It involves the development of procedures and the formalization of processes deployed by administrations, supported by the introduction of software to expand standardized processes and categories to all parts of a specific institution. This allows for a greater centralization of data and increased control that is further strengthened by the centralization of decision-making processes. The development and use of performance metrics and indicators expand, leading to classification and the creation of categories. External stakeholders (for instance the list of highly distinguished researchers[2]), public authorities (number of undergraduate students who fail), and institutions themselves (amount of research grants per academic) create these categories, which are decontextualized (Espeland & Sauder 2009): they do not take into account differences in working conditions or in upstream scientific and pedagogical regimes, and they disregard content. They therefore allow units and people to be ranked according to the same metrics or the same accounting

[2] These are academics in the top 1% by citations for their field and year of publication in the world, "demonstrating significant research influence among their peers", as mentioned by the website that publishes this list (https://clarivate.com/news/global-highly-cited-researchers-2019-list-reveals-top-talent-in-the-sciences-and-social-sciences/, July 21st 2020)

system in order to compare them. This ongoing development of assessment and ratings has significantly developed in higher education and research (Gingras 2016). W. Espeland and M. Sauder (2007, 2016) conducted one of the most convincing studies of this phenomenon in *Engines of Anxiety*. They show the impact of the publication of rankings on US law schools and analyze them as policing mechanisms not only for the administrative staff of the admissions offices, but also for the deanship and more broadly for the faculty.

The use of incentives is also part of the bureaucratization process, and it aims to govern behaviors within universities. As observed by Le Galès and Scott (2010), the bureaucratic revolution started with the introduction of instruments, but ultimately impacted behaviors: many examples can be found in higher education institutions. For example, in some French business schools the publication of papers in world-class international journals was associated with a financial bonus in order to guide the faculty's publication strategy. In many places, involvement in research is recognized by the reduction in teaching load, the ability to buy out classes for those who successfully secure grants, or the attribution of a specific status (like the research professorship in UK universities).

The general result of bureaucratization is an increase in control at all levels (individual and institutional), as reflected in the spectacular development of accreditation and evaluation agencies in the 1990s (Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004 for Europe) as well as the development of external reviews (Musselin 2013). Additional administrative personnel and new processes have been needed to produce all the requisite evaluation reports. The bureaucratization process therefore also increases red tape: applicants and reviewers are supposed to use templates to facilitate the comparison of applications and evaluations, and to produce comparable assessment reports. More staff is needed to develop the templates and

ensure that procedures are transparent and robust. Thus the increase in evaluation also leads to the emergence and empowerment of an evaluative administration at both ends: for the evaluators as well as for the evaluated. The latter create new offices to prepare evaluation reports and processes for their institution. This bureaucratization is costly and resource-intensive.

Finally, the internal organization of universities was not spared. It experienced restructuration (Capano and Marini 2014) that changed the level of centralization and of internal differentiation, as well as the balance between academic leadership and academic deliberative bodies.

Most studies nonetheless downplay the concrete impact of this bureaucratization process and the capacity of figures and measurements to control behaviors. First, international comparisons of the introduction of such processes underscore important variations in how NPM reforms are implemented, and the level of bureaucratization achieved (Paradeise et al. 2009; Schimank 2005; de Boer et al. 2007a). Second, they frequently record a decoupling of the public discourses and policies pushing for these mechanisms, and their implementation. The studies therefore conclude that their impact on universities is relatively weak (Whitley 2008) and the decoupling between the reforms and their implementation rather high. A legal enforcement of change, as well as the persistence of traditional modes of resource allocation are observed, because defining a legitimate measurement of academic outputs is difficult (Enders et al. 2013).

### 1.4. Are universities particular organizations?

Finally, some research highlights and discusses the organizational specificity of universities. The seminal reference is the article published by M. Cohen, et al. (1972) on "organized anarchies", of which universities are an ideal-type. In this attempt – not without irony – to resist a rationalization of universities, the three authors strongly highlight the particular character of universities and somewhat overemphasize the absence of rationality in the decision-making processes at work in this kind of organization. But this doesn't diminish the impact of their contribution, which has been major and goes beyond higher education. The garbage can model of decision-making in particular has been redeployed to study other sectors (Padgett 1980; Kingdon 1984; Bendor et al. 2001). By emphasizing the volatility of attention, the plethora of solutions waiting for problems to solve, and the aggregation of attention around solutions that ultimately do not solve problems, etc., it definitively deconstructs over-rational conceptions of decision-making in many areas. But more fundamentally, and of greater operational relevance to the understanding of universities, is the notion of organized anarchies. This oxymoron hones in on what makes universities organizationally specific: they have multiple missions and are therefore pluralistic organizations (Denis et al. 2001); their core activities (teaching and research) are low-tech; and the attention of their members fluctuates.

Building on this discussion of what makes universities special, I proposed to focus on two organizational specificities of academic activities and argued that both impact university governance (Musselin 2006). A first organizational specificity is weak technology in teaching and research, and its implications: these activities are difficult to replicate; they are difficult to describe (you can walk someone through the technology used to produce a Rolls-Royce but not that of the research process resulting in a Nobel Price); their concrete effects are difficult to evaluate (is what I teach really useful for my students?). A second specificity lies in the fact

that research and teaching are loosely coupled activities (Weick, 1976); one can (be it good or bad for the students!) teach a class without knowing what a colleague may have taught the class beforehand. Or one can embark on project within his or her research group first thing in the morning without knowing what the adjacent research group is doing or without needing it to succeed in its efforts to enable one's own research. Weak technology and loose coupling explain why hierarchical relationships are not very efficient in universities and why university leaders lack legitimacy and cannot behave as top-down managers: decisions and information do not circulate well (up and down[3]) because of loose coupling; academics are the only one mastering research and teaching technologies and therefore contest the legitimacy of the leaders who want to change them.

Nevertheless, the organizational specificity of universities has been challenged. N. Brunsson and K. Sahlin-Anderson (2000) do so in a paper dedicated to the transformation of public services: they argue that reforms seek to reshape public services into organizations, i.e. define clearer boundaries and identities, establish a hierarchy, and impose rationalization. This is of a piece with recent higher education reforms: universities are asked to exhibit a stronger institutional identity and to make their strategy explicit in mission statements (Kosmützky & Krücken 2015); they are encouraged to brand their name (Drori et al. 2013) and to adopt

[3] France recently experienced a merger mania. A national administrative evaluation body has just led a review of this process ten years after the first merger occurred. They were quite surprised to observe that even in the oldest merger, some lay academics were not really aware of it and said that nothing changed for them. This is a typical loose coupling effect, whereby the top is engaged in a demanding reform that does not impact the day-to-day work of the faculty staff.

differentiation strategies (Altbach et al. 2017); finally, they are expected to be governed like organizations in the private sector.

G. Krücken and F. Meier (Krücken and Meier 2006; Meier 2009; Krücken 2011) describe this trend as the strengthening of university actorhood. Universities have to demonstrate their capacity to be a collective actor. This process is part of another component of NPM-related reforms and the flipside of bureaucratization. It puts "a greater focus on markets, competitive tendering and privatization and more emphasis on service provision and consumer orientation" (Christensen 2011 p. 504). As a result, universities are expected to behave as firms or corporate actors (Bleiklie, 1994, Oba 2005). As is the case in firms (or what the reformers think the case would be in firms), university leaders should analyze their environment and create a development strategy that clearly respond to it, allocate funding in relation to this strategy and to performance-based criteria, and set incentives to facilitate achieving their goals. Internal reorganization was to facilitate this transformation by turning bottom-heavy professional bureaucracies in more hierarchical managerial organizations. In some countries (Norway or the Netherlands for instance), where university leaders can (or should) be appointed instead of elected, the prerogatives of the deliberative bodies (university councils or senates) have been reduced in favor of the university level. One consequence is that university boards or boards of trustees have become more dominant in many universities at the expense of senates or university councils, thereby reducing the participation of academics in decision-making (Capano 2011; Shattock 2014b) .

This evolution is not just a management issue. The entrepreneurial university model (Clark 1998) also involves seeking alternatives to state funding. Higher education institutions are encouraged to develop profit-seeking activities with industry and produce useful knowledge.

This affects research as well as teaching. Scientific production is to be paired with patenting and licensing while the impact of research also becomes a criteria (Power 2018). As for teaching, the development of digital technologies is viewed as a form of industrialization of the production process (Zawacki-Richter 2019), from an art-craft regime wherein the professor was the sole producer of his or her class, to a more collective process that includes pedagogical engineers, technicians, and teams of teachers working together on the same digitalized class.

Nevertheless, as with the bureaucratization process, the transformation of universities into entrepreneurial organizations with strong actorhood is limited. The trend towards more vertical, strategic, and autonomous universities is underway but it is proceeding at various paces and in different forms (Huisman 2009, Paradeise et al. 2009), and it is not as rapid and as deep as reformers expected. Comparing firms to universities, R. Whitley (2008) observed large differences: "a firm is able to take decisions that are binding upon its members and commit resources to achieve collective goals (…) They are additionally able to use authority to organize and direct the work of their staff for organization-specific purposes" (p. 24). By contrast, universities lack the "discretionary authority over the acquisition, use and disposal of human and material resources, and [are not able to] generate particular kinds of problem solving," which he attributes to "the pervasive uncertainty about both cause-effect relationships in knowledge" (p. 26).

Bleiklie et al (2015) suggest that one reason universities resist the reforms transforming them into more vertical and top-down organizations is that knowledge organizations – and thus universities – are "penetrated hierarchies": their capacity for action largely depends on the influence of factors outside of their environment, such as institutional pressures, control of external resources, and key social relationships with external actors. Going beyond their

definition, I would suggest that the verticality of universities and their actorhood are systematically challenged by the horizontal networks their members belong to. These networks mitigate institutional affiliation. This is of course the case for the disciplinary affiliation of academics who simultaneously align with a discipline, a professional association, and an institution. But academics are also linked to a range of third-party funding organizations providing them with resources that increase their material autonomy, negotiation capacity, and symbolic reputational power vis-à-vis their university leaders. Furthermore they are involved in scientific networks of colleagues located in other institutions and countries who might influence the content of their research and teaching much more than their direct colleagues or their own institution. The university strategy pushed by university leaders may thus be moderated by discipline-based resistance, alternatives offered by third-party funding, and external influences.

Finally, while many studies anxiously conclude that a firm model is being imposed on universities, there are good reasons to believe that a reverse movement may in fact be taking place. Quite surprisingly, the firm model that reforms have sought to impose on universities is a very traditional one, based on vertical relationships, authority, and planning... But firms themselves have engaged in transformation, flattening their hierarchies to make room for a project-based organization of work, and providing more responsibility to their employees. As P.-M. Menger (2002) was already arguing at the beginning of the 2000s, work in firms might become more akin to artistic and scientific activities, more project-based, and less tightly coupled. The same movement making firms more like universities seems to be occurring as the former turn into pluralistic organizations (Denis et al. 2001), i.e. organizations characterized by diffuse power and divergent objectives – two hallmarks of universities

(because they have multiple missions to achieve) that are apparently becoming common in firms.

## 2. University governance: from systems to markets?

University governance does not only cover the internal relationships, power relations, and decision-making within universities, but also relates to the interactions between universities, as well as between them and state authorities. The latter are more developed when universities are public, even if private (non-profit and for-profit) universities are often subject to some public regulations and may collect public subsidies.

In this perspective university governance is addressed in three different ways. The first focuses on the structure and characteristics of national higher education systems, and explores the typology of institutions, their relationships to public authorities, and how the latter steer – or not – the system. This approach heavily weighs the historical trajectories of these national systems and the differences between them. The second approach considers higher education as a field and points to the structuration of tensions within the field, while also emphasizing convergences and isomorphic processes. The third approach casts higher education as a competitive arena and underscores the development of competition between universities and the economization of academic activities.

### 2.1. Higher education as national systems

Because of the significant variety in the structuration of higher education, many authors have suggested typologies to characterize, compare (Dobbins, et al. 2011), and classify national

systems. Some basic descriptions distinguish whether the systems are centralized (France) or decentralized (Germany); unitary (United Kingdom since 1992) or binary (like the Netherlands, with universities and *hogescholen*); public (China) or private Chile; mass (USA) or elite (Switzerland), etc. BR. Clark (1983) suggested a more analytical – and much-quoted – understanding of higher education systems known as the "Clark triangle". The Different national systems are situated in a triangle according to their proximity to three modes of coordination represented by the three angles: market, state authority, and academic oligarchy. When this book was published, the United States was located very close to the "market" corner, the USSR, to the "state authority" corner, and Italy, to the "academic oligarchy" corner. Meanwhile my country, France, was exactly in between state authority and academic oligarchy. In order to account for recent developments, some authors trace the trajectory of countries within the triangle (with Italy moving from the academic oligarchy corner towards the market one, for example), or they transform the triangle into a new figure with additional angles (de Boer et al. 2007b).

Clark's coordination model provides an overarching architecture between the disciplines (that link academics), the universities (that host the disciplines), and the bureaucratic structures producing unitary regulations. This model is therefore vertical (with disciplines encompassed by universities that are themselves encompassed by a national system) but also too simple because it suggests that the national coordination of universities obeys the same logic as the national coordination of the academic profession. My own research on France and Germany challenges this conclusion (Musselin 1999, 2004[2001]). I suggested qualifying national university configurations, defined as the prevailing relationships between universities, the academic profession, and public authorities, and how they affect the way universities are run, the way ministries make decisions, and the way the academic profession manages itself. I

showed that the prevalent co-management strongly established between state authorities and the academic profession in France held back French universities and prevented them from becoming strong institutional actors and relevant interlocutors of the ministry until the end of the 1980s, thus linking meso university governance to macro university governance.

Yet most of the characterizations and comparisons of national higher education systems continue to focus on the relationships between universities and public authorities, emphasizing the "hierarchical instrumental vision" (Olsen 2007) of universities by states. According to J.P. Olsen this vision developed in the early eighteenth century, when states – more so in continental Europe than in the United Kingdom and the USA at the time – started to see universities as an "instrument for shifting national political agendas". The relationship with the state was then considered central to describing national higher education systems, as in the typology suggested by R. Whitley (2008, Whitley & Gläser 2014). He distinguished four cases: fragmented hollow organizations when universities are arms of the state; bifurcated hollow organizations when academics have some influence over career decisions and educational programs; state-chartered universities "authorized by the state for particular purposes and under certain conditions" (p.29); and market-based universities that are rather independent of the state. This typology recaptures the more traditional distinction between the Napoleonic, the Humboldtian, the British, and the North-American models (Shattock, 2014b), but interestingly links the nature of relationships with the state at the macro level to the organizational autonomy and type of meso institutional governance it allows.

Although these higher education systems are described as path-dependent and resilient to reform, many authors highlight two recent shifts affecting the different national systems. The first one pertains to greater state involvement in higher education and increasingly

instrumentalized universities: research and higher education are expected to contribute to the wealth of the nation and are seen as a crucial issue for contemporary societies defined as knowledge economies or knowledge societies.

The second shift concerns the action of the state itself. Instead of intervening through command and control, and maintaining universities as hollow organizations, governments developed "steering at a distance" and provided more institutional autonomy to higher education institutions. But as T. Christensen (2011) stressed: "The 'old' university system was characterized by low formal autonomy but high actual autonomy. (…) Modern university reforms develop universities with higher formal autonomy than the old ones, but lower autonomy in reality" (p. 511). F. Van Vught (1989) described this as a self-regulatory system, while Enders et al. (2013) speak of "regulatory autonomy" to describe a situation where the autonomy granted to universities becomes a means of increased government control. Universities define their programs and develop their strategy but have to adopt quality assurance procedures, go through accreditation systems, and undergo regular evaluations. The allocation of funding is linked to meeting criteria (like developing cross-disciplinary research or training programs, projects tackling societal challenges…) that are defined by the states and work as incentives. The concrete implementation of "at a distance steering" and the autonomy granted to universities varies from one country to the next (Capano, 2011, Bennetot Pruvot & Estermann 2017), but this approach has been widely adopted and reinforced by the proliferation of agencies (research councils and evaluation or accreditation agencies) (Van der Meulen & Rip 1998) between the ministries and the universities.

### 2.2. Higher education as a field

Adopting a less state-centered perspective, P. Bourdieu provided the first analysis of higher education as a field in *Homo academicus* (1988[1984]). The book draws on a study conducted in 1967 and 1968, at a time when the discipline-based "Facultés" were the main pillars of the French higher education system, while universities were only administrative units with no meaningful presence (Musselin, 2001[2004]). The academic field described by Bourdieu is therefore not a field of institutions but rather a field of academics belonging to Facultés, and university governance at both the macro and meso levels can be simply reflect developments in the academic field. While tensions between the Facultés were widespread, the field was also defending its autonomy vis-à-vis its external environment. According to Bourdieu, this field reproduces tensions within the dominating class and pits the Facultés close to economic and political power (Medicine and Law), whose members share the characteristics of the dominant class, against those with greater cultural prestige (Science and the Humanities and social sciences): "the university field is organized according to two antagonistic principles of hierarchization: the social hierarchy, corresponding to the capital inherited and the economic and political capital actually held, is in opposition to the specific, properly cultural hierarchy, corresponding to the capital of scientific authority or intellectual renown" (Bourdieu 1988[1984], p. 48). From this higher education perspective, universities as institutions are transparent, but facultés – i.e. discipline-based communities of scholars and structures distributing positions, organizing recruitment (and reproduction), and managing careers – are central.

Are the two hierarchization principles identified by Bourdieu still relevant? With the development of project-based funding and the growing role of research councils and evaluation agencies, the tensions and level of differentiation among members of the same discipline/faculté have increased (Münch 2017). The distance in terms of recognition,

resources, and negotiating power between those who secure funding and positive evaluations and their less successful colleagues has grown. This creates a hierarchy between the disciplines getting external resources and the rest, and between "the haves" and "the have nots" among academics within the same discipline. The gradual concentration of funding and successful academics in a limited number of universities (because of growing competition, see below) produces a vertical and horizontal differentiation of higher education institutions. R. Münch (2017) thus confirms the bourdieusian perspective according to which "the academic field is characterized by the tension between the competition for progress in scientific knowledge (…) on the side of the autonomous pole, on the one hand, and the competition for funds, influential positions in the academic business, and distinction on the side of the worldly, heteronomous pole, on the other hand" (Münch 2017) (p. 5). He thus concludes that the winners in the current system are not academics pushing "for progress in scientific knowledge" but those seeking to accumulate material and symbolic capital[4]. But even if one accepts R. Münch's conclusion about the resilience of the two principles of hierarchization, it appears that the academic field no longer opposes the disciplines/facultés, but rather the "have-nots" and "the haves" within the disciplines.

Some neo-institutionalists also built on the field concept to analyze the development of higher education worldwide. But by contrast with the Bourdieusian tradition or the notion of

[4] A conclusion close to the argument of JH. Mittelman (2018), who considers that the objective of becoming "world class" diverts universities from their core mission.

strategic action fields[5] suggested by N. Fligstein and D. McAdam (2011), they do not emphasize the antagonistic relationships that develop within the field so much as the convergent processes that lead to the diffusion of rationalized myths within a population of organizations (in this case, universities). Following JW. Meyer, some sociologists started noting the incredible expansion of higher education and the exponential growth of student bodies in the world (Schofer & Meyer 2005) over the past century. Comparing the curricula of training programs in universities located in different parts of the world over a century, they also uncover a convergent trend in content and underscore a growing belief in the universality of knowledge (Frank & Gabler 2006). As discussed by G. Drori et al. (2009) this is part of a global culture towards universalism, rationality, and empowered actorhood that is not limited to universities but rather affects all sectors (Ramirez et al., 2016). Universities have thus developed as a global institution sharing some common characteristics that make them recognizable across all countries. They rely on institutionalized categories such as "students" and "professors", "disciplines" (Meyer et al. 2007), and productive entities called "lectures" and "seminars". Following these rules, categories, and structures doesn't guarantee efficiency but provides legitimacy and facilitates access to certain resources. Higher education institutions therefore aim to be recognized as "universities". The definition of what "university" means and what its role should be depends on global narratives that disseminate in higher education at the global level. According to JW. Meyer et al. (2007) and FO. Ramirez (2006), the rationalized university, i.e. mass education, activities linked to societal needs and useful knowledge, increased organizational flexibility and managerial dynamics – have

[5] In this conception of fields, incumbents exercise a dominant influence and impose their views on the challengers who occupy less favorable positions within the field and may try to change the dominant logic.

become the legitimate global script[6]. DJ. Frank and JW. Meyer (2020) conclude that one should not be misled by local variations in the university's formal organizational structure: "the university as an institution – a cultural entity rather than an organizational one – has a universalized quality" (p. 5). Not only has the rationalized university disseminated in the global higher education field, but it has also become "the locus of interpretable order in a rapidly globalizing, but stateless, world society" (p. 17). In knowledge societies, with the standardization and universality of knowledge, the university has become a central institution, defining expertise and training the experts. C. Eaton and ML. Stevens (2020) also emphasize this centrality of universities in the institutional order of modern societies, and stress their distinction as central, polysemic, and quasi-sovereign organizations.

### 2.3. Higher education as a competitive arena

A rather different view is proposed by authors who see higher education as a competitive arena. Although they recognize that research has always been a competitive activity and that competition for students has long existed, they note a rather radical increase in competition over the past two decades. This is attributable to two major phenomena.

First, the transformation of universities into more autonomous actors able to act collectively and to define their strategy was conducive to their transformation into rivals. Until recently, scientific competition primarily opposed researchers, research teams, or countries, but it now

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[6] For these authors, whether actual university governance at the meso level is really following the legitimate global script is not an issue. They even often stress that actual practices and official adherence to a global script are increasingly loosely coupled.

also opposes universities (Hasse & Krücken 2013; Musselin, 2018). International rankings reflect this reality and feed it. This emergence of universities as competitors started earlier in countries like the US where universities developed before the academic profession structured itself and where national rankings first appeared. However, it is now a global phenomenon. Universities must position themselves in a competitive environment (Paradeise & Thoenig 2013).

Second, governments have increased the pressure by introducing competitive mechanisms. Calls for proposals and performance-based criteria in resource allocation have expanded and become the norm (Palfreyman & Tapper 2014). This is what L. Degn and P. Sorensen (2015) termed "the competition state", which grants universities organizational autonomy but controls what they should compete for. Control over universities is exercised through competition and the norms and standards set by those organizing the competition and selecting the winners (Maassen & Olsen 2007).

As a result the higher education space is expanding and stretching like the universe. While the number of universities and the distance between them in terms of resources and reputation was quite narrow at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century, the number is much larger today, as is the material and symbolic distance between them. A much greater variety of institutions (horizontal differentiation) and a longer stratification (vertical differentiation) now exist, and competition activates both. It pushes institutions towards diversification and specialization but also increase inequalities and differences between the winners and the losers of the competitive game. This is well described and analyzed by R. Münch (2017) who observes that there are many requests but a limited number of funding agencies, resulting in the concentration of human and material (thus symbolic) resources in institutions able to secure

funding, and therefore to hire academics able to get more grants, and establish an oligarchic position.

In many cases, this competition for resources and for status (Podolny 1993; Münch 2017) is not yet a market. Following Weber (1978[1922]), a market (Swedberg 1998; François 2008) must simultaneously present competition and exchanges: the vast majority of the competitive game in higher education does not include exchanges or pricing mechanisms. Competition drives the allocation of resources but the attributed budget depends on how much the applicants applied for, rather than on the competition itself.

Some activities resemble market-like situations, however. Such is the case for the recruitment of students and tuition fees in countries with high fees, although this price reflects complex economic rules and does not simply result from the intersection of supply and demand or indicate quality (Ward & Douglass 2006). It is also increasingly the case for the academic labor market: universities look for candidates meeting their needs (these needs and what define the best candidate differ from one institution to the next) and negotiate the price to be paid (salary, working conditions, etc.) with the chosen candidate after the hiring committee has ranked the candidates (Musselin 2009[2005]).

The still partial marketization of higher education can also be observed with the rapid development of for-profit universities when they sell certifications (Eaton 2020), the creation of private consortia of higher education institutions, and the valorization of research as an economic engine (Berman 2012) and driver of commercial activities between universities and industry (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff 1995; Etzkowitz et al. 2000).

In line with the research concluding that the organizational specificity of universities is dissolving as they transform into firms-like business (Marginson & Considine 2000), some authors fear that higher education systems are evolving into an industrial sector in which universities sell training programs and research results to consumer-students and firms, heralding the rise of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). A broader trend, especially in wealthy countries, is what has been termed as a financialization of higher education (Eaton et al. 2016; Schulze-Cleven 2017) attributable to the growing recourse to private money (including student debt).

## 3. Conclusion

Because of its macro and meso aspects, university governance is a vast field. It is also a rather conflicting one. Although "transformations" and "reforms" have been at the heart of publications over the past forty years, scholars have not converged in their definition of these processes, let alone their concrete impacts. Some dismiss the academy while others downplay the capacity of reforms to deeply transform universities and the academic profession.

The focus on reforms and their consequences probably explains why some other issues are under-explored despite meriting attention. To conclude I would like to mention two of them.

First, how are internal university governance and performance linked (Enders et al. 2013 for a review)? This would of course first require defining performance and adopting a pluralistic definition. It could be measured in a traditional way in terms of research production, graduation rates, or access to the job market, but more challenging measures could be added, such as the contribution to the democratic quality of a country, or to sustainable behaviors,

etc. The crucial question would be whether the attainment of a high level of performance might be connected to a university's governance style. Do more governed universities perform better on these different dimensions than bottom-heavy collegial ones, as expected by reforms, for instance?

A second understudied perspective, with a few exceptions, would be to more systematically combine the analysis of national higher education systems with the analysis of welfare systems. This perspective has been quite extensively developed for educational and vocational training (for instance Busemeyer 2015), but rarely for higher education. H. Pechar & L. Andres (2011) nevertheless initiated this orientation and argued that the development of higher education in the 20th century primarily involved higher education becoming one component of national social policies. More recently, G. Goastellec (2017 and 2020) suggested looking at access to higher education as a policy instrument because it affects the social organization of societies by sorting the population and by limiting access to both knowledge and the certifications required to exercise recognized professions. In the last chapter of her *habilitation*, G. Goastellec (2020) analyzes European countries and examines the link between their level of national investment in social policies and the share of higher education (compared with health, housing, etc.) within these policies in order to draw a typology of regimes of higher education inequalities. Can this kind of analysis be applied to university governance? Do different kinds of welfare states (Esping-Anderson 1990), different levels and contents of social policies, and different forms of capitalism (Hall & Soskice 2001) favor different types of university governance at the meso or at the macro levels? These remain open questions.

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