



Le jugement des pairs comme outil de management des universités *Peer-review as a management tool*

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Introduction



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Introduction (1)

- Main argument of the paper: universities are not only transformed by internal reforms of their governance but also by external peer review used as a management tool
- Linking the reforms of university structures and governance to the agentification of higher education and research systems



Introduction (2)

■ Reforms of university structures and government

➤ Main trends

- Less deliberative bodies, more executive leadership
- New competences are decentralized towards universities
- Universities as employers
- Stakeholders more present and more active

➤ Effects : "constructing universities into organizations" (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000)



Introduction (3)

- Many critics of these evolutions but empirical studies show that reform are often less effective than expected

 - Among other reasons, the organizational characteristics of universities
 - Loose coupling (Weick 1976)
 - Unclear technologies (March, Cohen and Olsen 1972)
- => Deficit in legitimacy of university leaders



Introduction (4)

■ Outline

1. The empowerment of academic « elite »
2. The case of three French universities



1. The empowerment of an academic « elite »



1. The empowerment of an academic elite ⁽¹⁾

- Many studies conclude to the dismissal of the academic profession
 - Less protection from the state
 - Empowerment of higher education institutions
 - Transformation of the relationships between academics and their universities



1. The empowerment of an academic elite (2)

■ Increased role of evaluation agencies and research councils

- Development of evaluation agencies in all countries since the 1980s (Schwarz and Westerhejden 2004)
- More resources to already existing research councils // creation of new research agencies
- Legitimized by the state : Peer review-based *versus* political decisions
- Increase in performance based funding , either based on evaluation or project-based research



1. The empowerment of an academic elite (3)

➤ New forms of academic judgment

- More international
- More formalized and standardized, definition of evaluation criteria (not always academic)
- More collective (less interpersonal) decision-making
- Publicity of results



1. The empowerment of an academic elite (4)

■ Effects

- Reconfiguration of the academic profession
- Concentration of resources
- Relationships between the state and the academic profession
- Governance of universities



2. The case of three French universities



2. The case of three French universities (1)

■ Study led in three universities

- A study funded by the ESEN
- 100 interviews led in three universities (UniSciences, UniLettres, UniMulti) in Spring 2011
- Sample: presidents, vice-presidents, administrative and academic staff elected in university bodies, administrative staff, deans, head of departments and head of labs



2. The case of three French universities (2)

■ Increase in centralization

- A consequence of the LRU (2007 Act) , but not only
- The ANR and AERES processes favor centralization
- Direction of research are created at the university level to collect data, centralize budgets, communicate about success



2. The case of three French universities (3)

- The *Grand Emprunt* (calls for Labex and Idex...) is under the control of university leaders
- Preparing the evaluation by the AERES: a centralized process
 - Mock evaluations are organized
 - Control of what is sent to the AERES
- Control of what is made public on the AERES website



"None of the answers was a scandal. But we intervened on the answers prepared by the research units. For instance, one of the colleagues did not understand anything. L'AERES was saying that this unit does not enough welcome international visiting scholars for long period of time. And the colleague answers: 'we welcome international scholars for short periods because our location is not suitable for more'. So I told him: 'do you think you will get international PhD candidates if you say that your building is not suitable? Say that you are developing a solid dynamics of international relationships and that you already collaborate with this and this country, and that you aim at welcoming post-docs and researchers'. He was developing a narrow answer while it was easy to reverse the critics and to say he was about to expand the international collaborations for his lab. That is the work I have done for almost all answers, with more or less reformulation. Because this is public, this will be read, looked at, so the answers to the AERES must become a way to attract people. I told them: 'you will apply for an ANR call and what will the experts do? They will look at the evaluation you got from the AERES. So be careful and do not worsen your case in your answer to the AERES'. So we somewhat subverted the process." (Vice-President, UniSSH).



2. The case of three French universities (4)

- External peer-reviews favor less egalitarian allocation of resources and more control
 - External peer reviews are used
 - to allocate the research budgets between research labs
 - To restructure some labs
 - To make decision about new curricula
 - This is not contested by the university bodies but the implementation differs from one place to another
 - Introduction of incentives and “tricks” in order to improve the situation



"The research in this university is now organized in four research institutes. They are managerial instruments and are thematic-based. To allocate funding, the university uses the same algorithm as the ministry and applies it to each institute, taking into account the number of academics etc. (*Question : what are precisely the criteria?*) I do not know precisely but the number of academics, the number of research active individuals, the number of people with a second thesis (habilitation à diriger des recherches) are taken into account. I do not know precisely.... On top of that, we introduced a supplementary parameter taking into account the grade given by the AERES to each lab. Last year, this multiplying parameter was of 1.4 if a lab got a A and 1.6 if they got a A+." (Director of a research lab, UniMulti).



2. The case of three French universities (4)

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"They developed a fellowship, on a competitive basis, to allocate 3000 euros to faculty members who do not publish enough, and who were offered 50% less teaching. So they had to write a research project and each lab could present its candidates." (Director of the department for research, UniMulti)



2. The case of three French universities (5)

- The normative impact of the evaluation and funding agencies
 - Evaluation and funding agencies diffuse norms
 - They are appropriated by many actors, even when they do not agree with the reforms
 - They put research activities at the forefront



"You might still publish a very important paper in a third tier journal. I say it again : we have amateurs. We have colleagues deliberately publishing good papers in third tier journals. They publish in journals diffusing 50 exemplars and run by a friend of them. I do my best. Slowly they come to respect what is asked. We can not ask for resources if we do not evolve. Twenty years ago, publishing in top journals was not a must. Everyone knew about what was out. There was a specific form of evaluation based on the fact that everybody knew everybody. But it is over. We can not count on that anymore. Colleagues must say in which journals they publish". (Director of lab, UniSSH)



2. The case of three French universities (5)

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"I do not push my colleagues in teaching activities because I want them to have time to develop their research agenda. I can not impose them not to invest in teaching but I can dissuade them and say: be careful with your career. Managing degrees will not help your career." (Dean, UniScience)



2. The case of three French universities (5)

- Universities empowered by external peer-review but...
 - External peer-reviews are used as a management tool
 - Managerial and professional powers converge to control those who do not get external reward
 - Those rewarded can better negotiate with the university leadership



Conclusion



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Conclusion

- Reforms of the structure and governance of universities are only one side of the coin
- They are reinforced by the agentification of higher education and research systems
- Revisit the university-environment relationships



Thank you very much

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