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University Governance in Europe: Managerial Convergences or Political Harmonization?

ABSTRACT

Objective: This contribution attempts to highlight the convergences and divergences of the strategies and modes of governance put in place in the current context of European universities (knowledge economy, budget restrictions, changing demand of students and employers).

Methodology: A study of three universities from three different countries, two public and one private, is proposed from the analysis of the internal official documents (strategic projects) of the structures and interviews with the leaders.

Findings: Elements of convergences and divergences are highlighted, which makes it possible to make hypotheses to verify in other researches.

Value Added: The approach is exploratory and complementary to the analyses in terms of the structure and strategy model of higher education institutions

Recommendations: The implementation of the Bologna Process is still often instrumentalized or rejected (defence of local specificities or fears of excessive standardization), but the current evolution of constraints and environments seems to go far beyond this non-normative project. It should therefore be considered as an opportunity for a positive and effective response to the present stakes.

Keywords: Governance, Universities, Structures, Bologna Process, European integration

JEL Codes: I23, H52, M14, Z18

Introduction

The university today is no longer that cenacle of thinkers and researchers that it was for a long time. In this university model, recruitment is done by co-optation, management is done by peers, the study period is only the first phase of a long apprenticeship that leads the student to obtain a diploma, a proof of his ability to control specific knowledge, and, sometimes, to produce new knowledge.

To cope with "massification", the university has set up numerous training programs responding to both the demands of students and the expectations of organizations, private and public.

The university is now an actor of the territory that meets the needs of skilled labour markets and that tries to give students the best opportunities for their professional insertion. With public finances now very constrained, the university must also find new sources of funding. The university sometimes becomes "entrepreneurial" and adapts its mode of governance to this evolution.

The professional integration of the students supposes an extended network of economic partners and includes more and more, a network of alumni.

The constraints lead to new forms of governance (senate, strategic advice, etc.) and to broadening the profiles of decision makers. The President/Rector is “managerialized”, the administrative function, not to mention bureaucratic, becomes paramount.

To illustrate this evolution, this contribution is based on the study of three European universities, one French, one Slovak and one Bulgarian, two public and one private, which faced the same evolutions, respond to it in different ways, particularly in terms of governance structure. Based on a documentary analysis and a dozen interviews conducted with decision makers from these universities, four themes were highlighted:

- 1) Entrepreneurship within university structures (devices, new formations in logic of autonomy, definition of objectives, specific management, see Shattock, 2005);
- 2) The evolution of the modes of governance (managerial evolution in the sense of the NPM, empowerment of the managers, evolution of the powers of the stakeholders, ideological evolution);
- 3) Managerial and educational innovations and finally
- 4) The place of digital.

The project of this study is to highlight, taking into account the differences of national contexts and the importance of the European context, the institutional convergences and divergences and the forms of adaptation, reactions or anticipation to evolution but also representations and values within the European Union (Dobbins, 2011, 2017). This study focuses on the evolution process of the three universities analysed. The sample is therefore not representative of European universities and none of the three is intended to be a university model in their respective countries.

Convergences and Divergences of National Contexts

The *Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica* (MBU) is experiencing a significant decline in its number of students. The migratory balance of Slovakia (5.4 million inhabitants) is low, but still positive since 2012, and it does not explain this decrease (from 165 000 to 120 000 students between 2012 and 2017) whose cause is especially the emigration of part of the students after their secondary studies, to Western Europe. This phenomenon is even more important in Bulgaria (see below).

The Slovak universities (23 public, 12 private) face a new situation, having expanded rapidly after 1989 with an undergraduate enrolment increasing from 60,000 to more than 200,000 between 1989 and 2009. For the Rector of the University Matej Bel (MBU), "The position of public universities is clearly dominant compared to the whole system", because "private higher education institutions are mainly oriented towards the law, economics, management, international relations". Overall, "public universities have long had a tendency to become more attractive than private universities", not least because "the quality of education in public institutions is higher."¹

The entrance to the university is generally with a process of selection for graduates of secondary schools, but this demarche has no longer selective effect in the current demographic situation. An independent Accreditation Commission was established in 1990 to monitor and evaluate teaching and research. This reform of the accreditation process has led to a decrease in the number of educational programs offered.

Excellence in research, the number and quality of teaching staff and the technical infrastructure are the main factors in the overall assessment that determine the type of recognition of institutions: 18 were recognized as universities at the end of 2012, including the MBU. This university is more

1. Interview of the Rector, June 2018.

resilient to the demographic crisis, with a population decreasing from 11,000 to 9,000 students, a decrease of 21% (28% nationally), but with a proportion of foreign students three times lower.

Self-managed and autonomous institutions now try to maximize their budget allocation, which includes institutional funds (transfer of state budget and grants from the National Research Fund) and project-based funding (specific program grants, Structural Funds, etc.). For the regulation of the demographic situation, it is possible to decrease the number of teachers. The public university staff, for the most part, is not a civil servant in the French sense of the term, but under a fixed-term contract (1, 3, 5 years), renewable (as in most Slovak public services) and may evolve into an open-ended contract after several contracts. The renewal of contracts is therefore not only linked to objectives (Come & Rouet, 2016), but also to a financial objective while the teaching activity decreases.

In 2003, a law allowed the transfer of ownership and management of the State's real estate assets to the Universities, thus strengthening their autonomy, and an amendment, in January 2009, authorized them to engage their property, under certain conditions, to finance joint research ventures with private companies, or to rent their buildings for commercial purposes.

The context of the *New Bulgarian University* (NBU) is also a low birth rate and significant emigration. The Bulgarian population has thus decreased from 9 million in 1989 to 7.1 million now. This demographic decline is partly compensated for higher education by the increase in the demand for training. As in Slovakia, the Bulgarian university system is selective at the entry, but the number of candidates in many fields and the development of private education relativize this selectivity (Georgieva, Pilev & Todorova, 2002).

The budgetary rigor imposed by the European integration process (accession in 2007), corruption, tax evasion and tax fraud have led governments to reduce public budgets and to seek alternative sources of financing (including in the form of tuition fees). Institutions have few means and academic professions remain unattractive in terms of income, which favours the con-

tinuation of the brain drain now less visible, because it is oriented towards Western Europe rather than to the US. Another reason: young people are increasingly adopting a “mobile” attitude and no longer a “migrant” behaviour, making multiple trips between their Bulgarian home and their European workplace (Rouet, 2012).

The latest law on higher education gives institutions a great deal of academic autonomy, particularly in the area of financial management. However, an accreditation system was introduced in 2009. Academic degrees are now issued by the institutions (doctorate, but also qualifications to the functions of associate professor – *docent* – or full professor), which has given an important debate about the quality and the control of nominations, now linked to the strategies of each institution. The reputational effect of institutions, both private and public, is thus very important for student orientation.

The evolution of the policy and regulation of higher education has resulted in a large fragmentation of the system: 51 accredited universities host 230,000 students in 2017 (280,000 in 2012, a decrease of more than 17%), of which 37 are public and 14 are private. This situation is often considered as ineffective, given the number of small (less than 5,000 students) or very small universities (fewer than 1,000 students). This context is quite similar in Slovakia. The European Commission recommended Bulgaria in 2017 to reduce the number of universities to ten. In 2012, the private sector welcomed 18% of students. This proportion is 13% in 2017: the number of students thus decreased less in the public sector than in the private sector.

The budget allocated to public higher education institutions has been calculated on the basis of the number of students since 1999. The trend is to reduce this funding, which corresponds to about 65% of total funding. Now, the government defines the number of students eligible for each training program and thus financed by the State budget. However, the demand exceeds these quotas, and the public institutions can ask students' registration fees. The increase in tuition fees in public universities is inconsistent with the State guarantee of access to higher education. Therefore, means-tested scholar-

ships supplement merit scholarships were implemented and the government has launched a student loan program. About 2% to 3% of students get a loan each year and more than 6% of students have scholarships from the State.

On the other hand, private universities in Bulgaria do not receive any financial endowment from the state and must assume the full costs themselves. Tuition fees in the private sector can be high (3 to 10,000 euros per year, in Business Schools in particular) or lower (about 1,000 euros per year to the NBU). This latter amount is to be compared with the tuition fees in the public sector, compensated or not by scholarships. These tuition fees tend to increase (between 100 and 500 euros per semester on average). Unlike, for example, in Slovakia or France, the difference between the amount of tuition fees in the public sector and a part of the private sector does not have a repulsive effect for some of the students who can also envisage a more important financial effort, to obtain much more comfortable study conditions in some private universities, especially at NBU.

The University of Versailles St-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ) is of recent creation (1991). The French universities have evolved considerably since 1968, and budgetary problems remain, while the demand for training from secondary school leavers continues to grow. At the same time, the responsiveness of the institution is regularly questioned. How to adapt training to the needs not only of the companies and organizations that propose employment, but also of the company itself?

A policy seems to have been unanimous since 1986: institutions must be more autonomous (but not with independence from government policy), meet the expectations of citizens and the training needs; participate in the influence of the country, especially at an international level (Imberti, 2015). From the point of view of successive governments, the number of universities in France is too high, so we need "large" universities capable of being present in the different ranking (Barbe, 2015), but governance must be based on instances of reasonable size, considering that a large assembly cannot be as efficient as a small one.

After two unsuccessful attempts in 1986 (Loi Devaquet) and in 2003 (Loi Ferry), a law in 2006 provides for the rapprochement between universities and academic institutions of the same city or region, thereby encouraging mergers as in Strasbourg, Bordeaux or Aix-Marseille. In 2007, the Law on University Freedoms and Responsibilities changed the composition of councils (by reducing the weight of staff and students), as well as the method of electing presidents and establishing financial autonomy. In 2013, the Law on Higher Education and Research created a new structure (Community of Universities and Institutions) to speed up mergers. In the same vein, an order currently being prepared envisages the total deregulation of the governance of these groupings.

This evolution obviously implies the evolution of the modes of governance, with inspirations from the New Public Management, but sometimes in a difficult local context, because if the government has not yet made evolve the statutes of the personnel (as in Slovakia), the processes of association and merger are not always legitimized and recognized as progress by local stakeholders. The example of the UVSQ is, on this point, significant (more than representative). Medium in size, it welcomes around 16,000 students in 2017–18. The UVSQ is one of five universities located in the West-Paris region and welcomes only 0.6% of the total population of students that grew by almost 10% between 2012 and 2016, more importantly in the private sector (18% of the total student's population) than in the public sector. This description can be put in perspective with the situation of the MBU and the NBU, which respectively welcome 7% and 4% of the totality of the students of the countries of implantation. In relation to the contexts, it should also be noted that the proportions of students in relation to the total population are quite close, between 3.4% and 3.9%.

Strategies and Decision-making Structures of the Three Studied Universities

The MBU, like all Slovak public universities, has decision-making structures largely inherited from the pre-1989 system. Even in a “new” country like Slovakia, which became independent in 1993, eleven years before accession to the EU, university structures have been maintained. However, beyond this apparent stability certainly linked to the positive role of organizational resilience during the crisis in the country, the abandonment of the state employee status (civil service) is a break that has very significant effects on the management of institutions (Côme & Meskova, 2011).

The second element is also decisive: the guardianship of the central authorities has changed logic. It is more a question of a technical and budgetary supervision than of a truly political supervision, which illustrates the difficulty of realization of the mergers between the public universities. For nearly fifteen years, the various governments have tried to reduce the number of public universities, without success since no merger has been achieved.

The autonomy of institutions, which is much greater since the last law on higher education, combined with this organizational resilience and the maintenance of joint structures that have become decision-making, runs up against the various incentives that governments can mobilize. All of the internal organizations and activities of the universities are decided by autonomous internal bodies: the academic council, the rector, the scientific council and the disciplinary commission for students. Very “classical” structures that conform to the dominant “model” in continental Europe (Ministry of Education of Slovakia, 2004).

Nevertheless, universities now have the opportunity to organize or reorganize their structure. The current Rector of the MBU, from the beginning of his first term, and because he had been elected with a mandate of “modernization” of the university, had undertaken consultations in order to change the current structure, considering in particular mergers of components. However,

the theoretical decision-making autonomy must be legitimized by council members, which obviously does not allow radical change without consultation and discussion. We find in this organizational logic the French situation.

For the Rector, "The governance of the university [...] is to a large extent limited by the national legislation [...] which restricts to a certain extent the autonomy of the institution [...] and determines the activity of governance in a meaningful way [...]. The last years of university development in Slovakia can be characterized by an attempt to get closer to the 'European' university standard."²

The NBU is a private university with a non-profit legal personality, very different from the two public universities studied. It is two-headed, based on a separation of powers: on the one hand, strategic and financial governance and, on the other, academic governance. Strategic and financial governance is the responsibility of the Board and the Honorary Chairman of the NBU. They decide on the general structure of the university, elaborate the institutional and social policy, decide on the educational, financial and economic strategy, and provide financing for its development. The Executive Director of NBU assists the Board and directs the administration of the university whose various departments deal with planning, development, financing, publications, archival holdings, and information technology, legal and economic issues.

For the Rector "on the one hand, this separation of domain helps to the extent that academic governance is not engaged with the daily concerns of the functioning of such a large organization as the university [...]. On the other hand, at another level, this separation is useful because it provides the opportunity for the Board, which is not limited by a time mandate and is not elected, to develop a long-term perspective for the development of the university [... no] subject to the cyclical interests of teachers."³

The academic governance therefore focuses, within the limits of its mandate, on the *"operational" part of governance, according to the objectives*

2. Interview of the Rector, June 2018.

3. Interview of the Rector, June 2018.

set by the Board in its strategic plan. "This duality of governance makes the university much more flexible. On the one hand, the university is solid because with the CA, it has a strategic vision towards the future, but on the other hand, it is operational as, in the context of the strategic plan, the academic governance can make decisions that it considers as appropriate," says the Rector.

The structural choice is inspired by Anglo-Saxon universities (some private donors, since the founding of the NBU, are Bulgarians emigrated to the USA), even if the leaders do not claim such a filiation and prefer to defend the specificity of their model. Thus, the pedagogical organization is original in the European University landscape (faculties organize training programs according to levels and not according to specialties and disciplines). During the last two years of the first cycle, students may take a second specialty as part of a minor-major device. A specific faculty manages the distance-learning programs and assumes digital development for all NBU programs (including MOODLE).

The students have the option to opt for a particular provision: the individual program that can be defined for both courses of study and allows them to complete their training and obtain their degree in a short time. The NBU, then, takes into account the motivations, choices and projects of the students, with a flexible and evolutionary system that has some consequences on the organization of the university itself.

Financial governance is conservative and tends to protect assets from various risks. Thus, the accumulated financial reserves guarantee the viability of the NBU and the achievement of the tasks and priorities set. The NBU does not receive any State funds. Its resources are tuition fees paid by students (several NBU-related foundations offer numerous scholarships, on merit or on social criteria); project revenues; financial income; income from specific activities (research, expertise, consulting, audit, experimentation), but also donations, legacies or sponsorship.

The financial problem is crucial because of the drop in student numbers but especially the centring of the institution on the student and his project. The NBU must therefore act to obtain new financing and has defined a "strat-

egy 2020" which provides for the creation of a company council. The role of this new body is to try to attract private investment, to promote external financing projects directly linked to the institution, to receive resources for complementary economic activities and new financial income, not only to improve revenues, but also to reduce the share of tuition fees for students in the budget (Vassileva, 2017, p. 8).

The UVSQ is now focusing its strategy on a major fusion project that could lead to the establishment of the largest French research university (Paris Saclay), which raises the problem of linking this objective with the previous one, at the creation of this university, and regarding the training needs in West-Paris.

The UVSQ undertook, a few years after its creation, to develop continuous training and set up training programs that are directly linked to the needs of companies. On the basis of the former "Training and Research Units" (UFR), some institutes were created, more autonomous, in compliance with the regulations, smaller than the former UFR, likely to be more reactive, even proactive, in relation to their environment.

The comparison with the MBU here is interesting: the approach of successive Rectors was to bring together and merge the Faculties to search by scale effect of possible budgetary savings or staff while the UVSQ presidency gave priority to institutional dynamics. The second choice is obviously much more of an entrepreneurial logic. Nevertheless, the regulatory texts give little autonomy to these new institutes related to central decision-making structures.

In compliance with the regulations, institutes have adopted a continuous development of training programs: a systematic evaluation by students is discussed, in parallel with consultations with representatives of the professional community, and then program changes are proposed to the various councils for a quick implementation, from one academic year to the next. Such an approach is possible at the NBU, but not at the MBU.

The UVSQ experienced a very difficult period in 2013 from the budgetary point of view. Being "young", it is indeed not staffed at the same level as the older universities and, with financial autonomy and the integration of staff costs

with the budgets of the institutions (and no longer directly envisaged in ministerial level), the budget equilibrium was difficult to realize and necessitated an emergency plan and a request for additional budget from the State. To achieve a rebalancing, it was necessary to reduce investments, to limit the recruitment of staff (especially contract workers, since it is not possible to act on the civil servants) and set criteria for the opening of courses (minimum number of students in particular, size of groups, etc.). The balance was reached after two fiscal years and the university was able to increase the share of off budget funding from the State. The UVSQ was one of the first universities to experience such a situation, which then touched more than fifteen universities, a direct consequence of the effects of a regulatory evolution towards greater autonomy while the modes and structures of governance did not evolve or only a little.

Similarities and Divergences of University Governance

Putting into perspective the three national contexts and the three university cases makes it possible to go beyond global thinking and attempt to evaluate the levels of convergence of governance. It is also a question of not systematizing a link often made between the Bologna Process and the evolution of governance.

The same objectives can indeed be determined by different logic. For example, the Slovak, French and Bulgarian governments consider that the number of universities (public or private) on their national territory is too high for different reasons. The Slovak and Bulgarian governments wish to increase the quality of education and not to increase budgets; it is not a question of creating very large units, but of not let small units. The French government wants to increase the attractiveness and influence of the country by setting up major universities that can be recognized internationally, even if it means creating several categories of institutions and/or not prioritizing their public service missions.

Bologna Process and Evolution of University Governance

In many sectors, the forced adoption of this level of bachelor's degree has not kept pace with specialization demands and students have few opportunities in the labour market. This debate is very important within the MBU, which claims greater autonomy for the evolution of programs. Indeed, the declension of the BP did not include any flexibility on this point: the programs are very precisely defined by the establishments that propose them to the commission of accreditation every five years and then they cannot be easily modified between two accreditation campaigns.

Bulgaria signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, and became involved in the monitoring committee. The country has carried out an institutional reorganization to strengthen the evaluation mechanisms (notably with the creation of a National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation) (Rouet, 2012). The country has chosen to maintain a three-cycle architecture already in force in 1995: a first cycle of 3 or 4 years of study (professional *bakalavar* or *bakalavar*), a second cycle of 2 to 4 semesters integrating very often followed a course of 6 months (*magistar*, most in 3 semesters) and doctoral studies of three to five years. The structure of the studies is still the subject of a debate in Bulgaria, because the duration of most masters does not facilitate European co-operation. The relevance of the four-year duration of the first cycle is also discussed, but it seems difficult to envisage adopting a 3+2 type structure not only because of the mechanisms of professional integration (and even if the number of students wishing to pursue a Master's degree steadily increases), but also because the adoption of a 3+2 architecture would lead, in fact, to the increase of one year of study for the vast majority of students, which is not financially sustainable.

Thus, while in France, with the systematization of the second cycle in two years, the average time of studies has increased (while levels of exits to Bac+3 are still necessary), leading to a general increase in budget expenditure, the master is not so requested in Bulgaria where it is more recognize

as “post-graduate” programs. In France, the total population of students involved in master programs is 13% less than the total number of students in the first cycle (30% for Slovakia and 55% for Bulgaria).

As in Slovakia, the Bologna Process is considered in Bulgaria by a large number of stakeholders as an institutional reform linked to EU membership (Gura & Rouet, 2011), or even a “catch-up” instrument allowing a transformation of the existing system. The French situation is very different. The time for introduction of new instruments (curriculum, ECTS, diploma supplement) was longer than in the other two countries and the reforms were often rejected by Academics and Students who lambasted the BP (and some form of European integration denounced as an institutional standardization).

Thus, in the three countries studied, the implementation of the elements of the BP was often concomitant with very important reforms that have changed the structures and modes of governance. The BP, sometimes paradoxically, was used as external evidence (Bodin & Orange, 2015).

Constraints to Strategies

The three institutions studied have a major budget constraint, linked in Slovakia and Bulgaria, to a drop in student enrolment, in France to a contraction in public budgets. For the Rector of the MBU, “the budget of the university is underestimated for a long time [...]. Financial sources that come from the state cover two key expenditures: wages and energy. An important part of the operating [...] is covered by off-budget resources.” However, despite the possibility of not renewing the contracts of most of the staff, the organizational structure is resistant to such a radical solution and the non-renewals are decided only in extreme limits.

The MBU, signatory of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, develops management in accordance with the academic values and considers the institutional autonomy within these limits: first university in Slovakia to obtain the European label “HR Excellence in Research”, it aims to develop and maintain

a stimulating and beneficial work environment in the field of research. The MBU claims the valorisation of its experience for further optimization of the organizational structure, in particular the services of the Rectorate in order to make the work more efficient and reduce the overall salary needs. At this point, the UVSQ strategy is very close since a job map is being developed for the same purpose.

Governance and Stakeholder Participation

The three universities studied envisage the implementation of an effective internal quality assurance system and organize the preparation of accreditations by mobilizing all the stakeholders (Saarinen, 2009). The NBU seems to be the most advanced institution on this point.

For the Rector of the MBU, the current situation is both a “moment of rupture” and a moment of stagnation, because the reforms remain “only in theoretical and verbal terms.”

The governance of the NBU is clearly liberal in orientation and the administration and the managers have a very important weight in the decisions and the policy of the establishment. The strategy is student-centred, linked to the needs of the labour market; it is a “customer relationship” approach and a search for innovative “products” in the fields of education and knowledge. Overall, this student-oriented strategy leads to significant changes in the practices of teachers themselves.

Two fundamental considerations may explain this neoliberal approach. First, managers must ensure the survival and good financial and economic condition of the university in a context marked by several negative trends: the demographic crisis; political instability; lack of substantive reforms; lack of modernization of the educational system at the national level; and the competitive situation between Bulgarian universities and other European universities for a large proportion of students willing to study abroad.

The NBU reformed its programs in 2003, creating 24 undergraduate programs. In 2010, the process continued and the number of programs was 54. The NBU has strengthened the place of “practical” courses and internships at all teaching levels in order to improve the link with the needs of the professional sectors, and has introduced free programs to be chosen in complementary program (minor). Currently, the NBU offers 106 master programs and 66 minor in the first cycle.

A situation is very different for the MBU where the regulation limits the possibilities of programs creation. The public universities in Bulgaria, according to the Rector of the NBU, have also difficulties to reform, first because their governance is elected by the faculty, and therefore, *“management decisions are very difficult [...] the reforms are difficult to implement since the management of the university has a limited horizon of action and [it] must take into account the opinions of those who elect this direction, the teachers themselves”*. With the establishment of major universities in France, many stakeholders fear precisely such a situation that would lead to a democratic regression within the institutions.

How to reconcile effective management and democratic functioning giving the possibility to everyone to express and act? The structure of the NBU leaves place for internal democracy, but differently in nature than in the MBU or the UVSQ.

Digital Strategy and Innovations

The strategy of NBU is based on a design that can be discussed: in an environment characterized by the Internet, ICT and mass dissemination of information and knowledge, the teacher must increasingly ensure the mediation between the knowledge and the student and not just being a knowledge holder. NBU claims a continuous innovation approach and NBU teachers are constantly developing new courses, programs, and forms of e learning without always being provided with the necessary resources to obtain good quality or to be trained on a regular basis.

The problem of innovation is also interesting at this level and an observation of practices and systems clearly differentiate the three universities: at first the NBU, then the MBU then the UVSQ could be considered as innovative. Digital technology has become very important to the NBU, whose project remains humanistic and not at all technically oriented. Since 2002, the NBU has adopted the Moodle system, also used at the MBU for over a decade. Electronic assessments and virtual classrooms are now part of everyday life for all NBU students and teachers, with an electronic system access system for teachers (E-Teacher) and students (E-Student). These systems alleviate and facilitate the administrative tasks, after obviously a time of adaptation. The situation at MBU is closed and the university has benefited from Structural Funds for the financing of this evolution. The situation at UVSQ is more contrasted, but overall less advanced at this point. Overall, innovative practices are rarer and more isolated.

The incitement of innovative practices obviously requires an effort on the part of the decision makers. The NBU has set up a special faculty that manages the digital developments, and the MBU have invested heavily not only in the materials, but also in the training and emulation of staff.

Internationalization strategies

The three institutions have formulated an internationalization strategy often very precisely (NBU), with the definition of priorities (MBU, UVSQ), and surpassing the short and medium term to truly integrate an approach to internationalization beyond the mobility and the attached programs.

While the MBU's strategy mainly focuses on international exchanges (attracting foreign students) and quality of education (attractiveness factor), the UVSQ, whose strategy is also explicitly focused on a student, relates its international strategy to the process of looking for prestigious partners, related to the goal of a merger in the University Paris Saclay. Students are only concerned with improved attractiveness and a better international ranking.

Conclusion

To put in perspective, these three universities highlight the low autonomy of their strategic field because of the weight of the constraints but also the path of dependence (a strategic reorientation is difficult or impossible, because the weight of the past decisions is too pregnant).

Governance structures have evolved differently (traditional bicameral for the MBU, bicameral unbalanced for the UVSQ, separation of powers for the NBU). The Bologna Process, finally, had an influence only for the NBU and the focus on the “student relationship” remains difficult to implement for the MBU and for the UVQ.

Thus, the MBU implements a “classic” management, while at the UVSQ, the President remains rather a mediator and the administrative management predominates. The NBU is part of an entrepreneurial logic with management by project. Educational innovations are the subject of incentives (MBU and UVSQ) while they are at the centre of NBU’s proactive strategy.

It is not a question of calling into question the modelling approaches of the structures but of completing them. The evolution of universities in Europe, and their harmonization, is certainly based more on the relative convergence of projects (centred on the student in a logic of acquisition of skills), than on a standardization of the structures of governance and control.

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