

## CHANGES IN THE GOVERNANCE OF FRENCH UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract:** *The evolution of the student population, the generalization of the new public management and the process tend to modify the governance and the characteristic of the French university system. The Bologna processes are applicable to all countries of the European Union, please allow some degree of harmonization of degrees and courses, it does not directly affect the modes of governance of universities. The modes of governance are strongly dependent on the historical events that have little by little marked the university traditions and also by the laws and measures these last years within the framework of the new public management. A detailed historical approach makes it possible to better shape the particularities of the French university system, as well as researching the causes and consequences of current features of this system.*

**Keywords:** *universities governance; legislative reform; New Public Management; Bologna process; massification.*

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### Introduction

The introduction of new public management in the universities governance of in France, is part of the wave of modernization logic of the public service and a search for efficiency on the model of the Anglo-Saxon countries. We chose to adopt both a historical methodology and in-depth analysis of the governance profiles of academic institutions. This study is part of a context of national and international disruption of public governance systems. The diffusion of the concept of New Public Management at the university raises many questions. And this especially as French universities, still dominated by the state, have been assigned many objectives sometimes contradictory. Universities will have to choose between several strategies, in a context of international competition and strengthening of the knowledge economy and human capital

### 1. The major stages of the evolution of French universities from the Middle Age

#### 1.1. From the Middle Age to 1968

The first universities appeared in Bologna, Paris and Oxford between 1180 and 1220. The term *universitas* meant a community of men united by an oath, and constituting a legal entity capable of bearing and defending its interests before the royal powers, ecclesiastical or urban. Before the twelfth century, the literate, who know Latin, are mainly monks. From the twelfth century, under the effect of an ecclesiastical reform, the masters and the student seek to emancipate themselves. The creation of a university stems from a quest for independence from episcopal authority, and also from secular power. On the other hand, it is thanks to the pontifical

support that the universities have been able to gain their independence. The popes wanted to ensure direct control over the formation of clerics (Favier J., 2017).

**Table 1:** The three major periods of the French university system  
From the Middle Age to the 19th century

Middle Age	The university, one of the oldest public institutions in Europe. Concept of the homo academicus with a search for independence vis-à-vis the authority of the bishop and local authorities. Domains: scholastics, Hellenic studies, law, doctor, faculty of arts faculty of science. Creation of the university corporation (beginning of peer management), like the other corporations of the Middle Ages. Access to these corporations through degrees and exams.
1793 Convention	Closing of the universities, organized as a professional corporation, under the Revolution (Decree of the Convention of September 15, 1793) The French Revolution favours the schools (Normal Superior, Polytechnic, Central, etc.).
1806 Napoleon reopens the faculties	Objective: providing the imperial power with administrative and judicial frameworks. Faculties limited to purely professional teaching (law, medicine) are placed under the authority of rectors appointed by the political power. In all other developed countries the rector is elected by his peers and deals only with the university. From the 19th century onwards, academic disciplines, faculty and deans' empowerment, and collegial governance of faculties that will be regrouping at the end of the 19th century to form university institutions

The project of the k-to-12 school system formalized by the Companions of the New University since the 1930s (Garnier B., 2007), the reform project of Jean-Zay and the Langevin-Wallon plan after the Second World War seek to redistribute social positions according to merit (Derouet J.-L. & Normand R., 2011). In the same vein, in the 1950s, the French and English pedagogical left support the project of the "comprehensive school", condemning any early selection and advocating retention in the school environment for up to fifteen or sixteen years. The elite, from the grandes écoles, was strongly linked to the higher public administration.

Garnier B. (2007) considers that these new ideas concerning the role of education meet an economic necessity at the time: "Beyond the rhetoric of the democratization of the school and the lyricism of the reconstruction of the devastated house, the concern of the Companions of the new University is especially the broadening of the base of recruitment of the elite which the French economy needs after the Great War to direct the country and to implement the reforms which were imposing themselves in their eyes. The Companions seek the widest possible consensus around a project which aims above all at the economic and social efficiency of the school. "

Indeed, the application of these ideas could not prevent processes of circumvention of the equality of treatment (by the choice of options and sectors, the practice of a hidden selection in some universities ...). The elite, more attracted by positions of power and management in multinational firms, large international organizations rather than the national framework occupations within the state apparatus, favours: bilingual classes, twinned institutions, the international baccalaureate and / or the "World class". For the rich, schooling within long networks corresponding to

international trading systems. Conversely, the other social categories opt for a national curriculum and for short courses. The twentieth century is marked by the development of mass education: the effects of this new conception of national education combined with the demographic dynamism of the 1950s and 1960s are rapidly felt in higher education in terms higher education, as shown in the following table.

**Table 2:** Evolution of enrolments' Students in higher education since 1960 (in thousands)

	1920	1930	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2013	2020 (forecast)
<b>University</b>				215	661	858	1 160	1 397	1 437	1 500	1 661
<b>Other higher education institutions</b>				66	130	215	293	454	560	591	592
<b>Total</b>	50	78	137	310	851	1 181	1 717	2 160	2 319	2 430	2 630
<b>University share (in %)</b>				69,3	77,7	72,7	67,5	64,7	62	61,7	63,2

Sources: *Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur de la recherche et de l'innovation*  
[https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/8/EESR8\\_ES\\_08-les\\_evolution\\_de\\_l\\_enseignement\\_superieur\\_depuis\\_50\\_ans\\_croissance\\_et\\_diversification.php](https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/8/EESR8_ES_08-les_evolution_de_l_enseignement_superieur_depuis_50_ans_croissance_et_diversification.php)

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Theodor W. Schultz received the Nobel Prize in 1979 after publishing in the early 1960s work on the new concept of "human capital". The strengthening of the massification of students at the university would also stem from the growing importance given by theory to the human capital concept in explaining economic development, competitiveness and growth (Shultz TW, 1960, 1961a, 1961b, Lucas R., 1988).

### 1.2. The period 1968-2007

The 1968 crisis had a major impact on the evolution of university governance, in power games, particularly on the weight taken by some students' unions and teachers' unions. According to Prost A. (1989): "The National Union of Higher Education, through its active solidarity with students throughout the events, had gained from them real credibility and it had partly returned to teachers, as unionists, the audience they had lost as professors".

This union, by associating some famous academics' names, has been able to preserve the legitimacy of the university function, and has taken a considerable weight in the governance of the universities. Many meetings of discussions between teachers and students, and often between student unions, including UNEF, and teacher unions were held, and referring to two new joint reports between teachers and students. Thus, the radical and categorical Marxist ideology of students strongly involved in the movement has more legitimacy for individualities than the entire faculty, which has reinforced the crisis of power (Prost A., 1989).

Since then, students have opposed many legislative projects, notably those concerning the selection at university entry and the increase of registration fees (Devaquet bill of 1986). The law of higher education of January 26, 1984 (Savary Law) modifies the governance of universities by the creation of three councils elected by the university community of each institution (teachers-researchers, teachers, students, administrative staff); the board of directors, the board of studies and university life and the scientific council. The university president is now elected by the three councils assembled in assembly with the absolute majority of the members in exercise.

The impact of 1968 also had an impact on the evolution of university legislation. In particular, two laws were passed during this period:

**Table 3:** legislation from 1968 2007

law Edgar Faure (1968)	- reorganization of the university system after May 1968 - Universities become legal persons
law Savary (1984)	Extension des fonctions des universités Modification de la gouvernance des universités par la création de trois conseils

The still growing enrolments' in higher education has been reinforced by Jean-Pierre Chevènement's policy in 1985 of a minimum qualification at the end of compulsory schooling and the objective that 80% of an age class reach the baccalaureate level. The creation of vocational baccalaureates was intended to increase the level of qualifications of young people.

## 2. Dissemination of New Public Management in French Universities

In the last 30 years or so, and in practically all OECD countries, public management reforms aimed at making administrations more efficient and above all cheaper are trying to adapt certain private management rules context of the public service. The limitation and mastery of public deficits and public debt in parallel with the desire to better meet the expectations and demands of users-consumers, are the main objectives of all successive reforms, constituting what is usually calls the New Public Management (NMP).

According to Chappoz Y. and Pupion P.-C. (2012) the new public management does not constitute a stable and homogeneous set of principles and tools according to the country. However, it is characterized by common philosophy revealing some salient points:

- The separation between the strategic decision-making power of the political power and the operational, public management;
- A greater requirement on the quality of goods and services delivered by public administrations through:
  - New rules for resource allocation and orientation of public activities;
  - Decentralization of services and creation of autonomous regulatory agencies;
  - Greater transparency on the quality and cost of services;
  - Regular evaluation of public services by users.

- The use of market mechanisms for the supply of goods and services of general interest to achieve greater efficiency in the use of public funds by means of:
  - the privatization of certain administrative services;
  - the application of human resources management rules used by private companies (merit pay, abandonment of the status of civil servant and advancement to seniority, ...);
  - Increased competition between administrative services and the private sector.

From a neo-institutional perspective, the NPM, which corresponds to the new definition of administrative governance, aims to profoundly transform the steering systems and the historical values of the civil service (Boitier M. et alii, 2015). It gives a predominant role to evaluation, whether internal (agencies or evaluation mechanisms) or external (consultation of users-consumers), and considerably modifies the rules of resource allocation.

Boitier M. et al. (2015) identify several dimensions in the new control of the management of administrative systems, which: control by culture, administrative control, strategic control (planning), managerial control (with the system of rewards and remuneration).

From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the new public management began to be introduced in France with the adoption of the Law of Organization of the Finance Act (LOLF) in 2001. The following table summarizes the main and recent French legislation for the implementation of the new public management:

**Table 4:** Recent stages of the introduction of new public management in France

<b>1st august 2001</b> LOLF	State expenditure: quantified objectives and results indicators (accountability). Distribution of powers
<b>12 July 2005</b> Organic law	Law amending the LOLF Decrease in complexity of public operations and public-private partnerships
2007 Law RGPP	« Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques » (General Review of Public Policies): State reform, lower public expenditure, improved public policies
2012 Law of Modernization of Public Action	This new legislation aims to improve and replace the RGPP

In parallel and in a complementary way, to this diffusion of the new public management in the French public administrations. French universities are committed to setting up an evaluation system in line with the European recommendations and the decisions of the European ministers in the framework of the Bologna process. The main objectives of this process (site europa.ec) initiated by the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (site europa.ec) are as follows:

- Promote the mobility of students and job-seekers through the introduction of the three-cycle LMD system (Bachelor / Master / PhD), greater recognition of qualifications and periods of study between member countries and the

reinforcement of the compatibility of the different European education systems.

- Make European universities and colleges more competitive and attractive to the rest of the world;
- Modernize education and training systems to better meet the needs of a changing labor market in the context of the advent of the knowledge economy.

The last two points correspond well to the objectives of the new public management applied to universities and to the progressive evolution of the labor market which requires a higher qualification and a greater mobility of the labor force. LMD and the validation of prior learning has made it a priority to individualize learning paths, transnational mobility, and maintain an individual portfolio of skills from "cradle to grave".

The first point contributes to strengthening the construction of the European economic, educational and cultural area. The policy of lifelong learning enabled by the implementation of the system

The university crisis, reinforced in particular in the 20th century by massification, is another important explanatory factor for the need to reform the university system. The table below brings together the different elements of the university crisis, in the delivery of public services, as well as their main reasons, as denounced by the political actors and numerous authors (Derouet J.-L. and Normand R., 2011)

**Table 5:** The factors of the French university crisis

<b>Elements of the French university's crisis</b>	<b>The reasons for the crisis</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong growth of students from the middle and lower classes in the first cycle</li> <li>- Decreased prospects for success</li> <li>- weakening in academic knowledge</li> <li>- Increase in school competition</li> <li>- Inflation of diplomas</li> <li>- relative downgrading of university degrees</li> <li>- Concern over the decline in the level</li> <li>- Strengthening social inequalities with the strengthening of selective sectors (Schools of Higher Education, technological university institutes)</li> <li>- Endogamic recruitment of preparatory classes for Schools of Higher Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Higher population numbers at the end of secondary education</li> <li>- No selection at the entrance of the first cycles,</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Delegation of part of university equipment programs to local authorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase of the state budget deficits and decrease of the fiscal acceptance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low performance</li> <li>- Bureaucratisation and administrative over-management</li> <li>- Increasing administrative burdens for teachers</li> <li>- Reserved relations between teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Absence of results duties,</li> <li>- Uninterrupted succession of reforms</li> <li>- Weaknesses of governance within the university</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low link with the economic world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- segmentation of academic disciplines</li> </ul>

Elements of the French university's crisis	The reasons for the crisis
- Very low rank of French universities in international assessments	- Defence of the rights acquired by the unions and the perverse effects of the May 1968 thought

**Table 6:** Main legislative milestones of the French university reform

(2004) Law Allègre and law Goulard	Creation of SAIC (industrial activity service and private law) for contract management of research with companies (ADFAC) and European organizations and technology transfer
2007, creation of l'AERES	The Agency for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES) allows the establishment of a system of evaluations, according to the European recommendations and the decisions of the European ministers in the Bologna process framework
Extended Responsibilities and Competencies (RCE)	Modifications to the rules and methods of financial management and human resources of universities, as well as their steering device.
August 10, 2007 LRU	The Law on the Freedoms and Responsibility of Universities (LRU), or law of autonomy or law Pécresse, in phase, aims to: strengthen, improve the governance of universities in a more autonomous but supervised framework
March 9, 2013 Law Fioraso	establishes the process of grouping universities in the form of Communities of Universities and Institutions
July 22, 2013 Law ESR	The law Higher Education and Research (ESR), modifies and strengthens the LRU (student success, new ambitions for research and openness to the socio-economic environment, nationally and internationally)

Table 6 presents the different legislative milestones of the reform of the French university:

In parallel with this new legislation, France has many control and steering tools, such as:

- The National Agency for Research (ANR), which has become a member of the European Science Foundation, responsible for managing tenders and allocating grants to public institutions and laboratories;
- - The Agency for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (AERES) promotes quality approaches in line with European standards.

The State has progressively introduced management control and steering tools (IGF-IGAENR, 2007), including:

- Budget allocation through a performance-based and activity-based allocation system (SYMPA),
- Budget forecasts and dashboards in LOLF mode,
- Sifac software, for analytical and accounting financial management, and Siham, for the management of human resources according to a scheme comparable to companies.

The budget allocated to universities by the state, local authorities or private actors (foundations, companies) now defines the strategy, management and resource allocation in many OECD countries (Boitier M. et al. , 2015). With regard to state



funding, the allocation of funding for research activity is based on these quantified performance indicators (rankings, number of publications or citation indexes). The amount of private funding depends on the willingness and efficiency of the universities (in valuing research, reputation, etc.) for the perception of such funding. With the multiplicity of their objectives: production and dissemination of knowledge, basic research and industrial innovation, training of future citizens, professional integration, animation of economic, social and cultural life at the local level, ... universities are now characterized by a multiplication of stakeholders: users, now treated as consumers that institutions must meet, the actors of local life: economic, social and cultural, the state. They also act within the framework of a competitiveness become international.

### 3. The evolution of the governance of French universities: different perspectives

The governance arrangements of universities in the past have progressively evolved according to significant historical events as we have seen in the first part. We can resume the typology of the different logics of governance described by Boitier M., Rivière A. (2016) at work concomitantly in the French university consider, in order to characterize the three major historical periods, as in the Table 7.

In France, debates on the governance of universities are fed upstream by numerous public reports from the administration (IGAENR reports) of the French republic's institutions (Cour des comptes, EESC) (Fréville report) or of the National Assembly (Claeys reports, Appeared report, the Déaut ... report) or even of national consultations (Berger Report) or of ad hoc committee (LRU follow-up report, CNE report, AERES report), as well as by the work of the European Commission, the European Parliament or the working groups set up under the Bologna Process. The teacher unions and student representations also took up this issue. Local authorities, in order to strengthen their strategy of attractiveness and the development of their action sphere) wish to be fully associated with the governance of universities.

**Table 7:** Profile of university governance prevailing according to the periods

from Middle Age to 1968 (dominant academic profile)	Autonomous Community of Researchers Production and transmission of universal knowledge Peer-defined standards
From 1968 to the end of the 1990s (dominant political profile)	Joint democratic arena Electoral process Representative of internal political balances Elected, Union or political affiliation
The period of The New University Management (dominant manager profile)	Actor of the knowledge economy: Promotion of intangible capital in the service of competitiveness Management control, evaluation and financing agencies, quantification and ranking

The development of a contractual policy with universities and the creation of a national evaluation committee were instituted using methods of establishing a new mode of public management and a power to the detriment of the ministry, and Peer management.



The current period actually looks like a transition period: confrontation between the three profiles, by taking up the typology established by Boitier M., Rivière A. (2016).

**Table 8:** Strategies related with each governance profile

	<b>Dominant academic profile</b>	<b>Dominant political profile</b>	<b>Dominant manager profile</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University of intensive research</li> <li>- International Vision</li> <li>- Search for private financing</li> <li>- Definition of an internal evaluation logic</li> <li>- Link with the network of Schools of Higher Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- little used evaluation or variable geometry evaluation</li> <li>- Heterodox management system</li> <li>- little connection with the school of higher education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- search for efficiency and productivity</li> <li>- Accountability to the supervisory authorities</li> <li>- Extern evaluation set by these authorities</li> <li>- only a few institutions will develop local structures of excellence</li> </ul>
<b>Governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low unions' weight</li> <li>- Low power of local authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High union and policy weights</li> <li>- High bargaining power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Little autonomy</li> <li>- scrupulous respect of the rules advocated by the state and local authorities</li> </ul>
<b>Student management disposals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of student selection systems</li> <li>- Favouring the upper classes and the most talented students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Risk of drastic decrease in student numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training for the middle classes</li> <li>- Very large student population</li> </ul>
<b>Management of academic staff</b>	Internationalization of careers	clan management (with risks of favouritism and clientelism) long-term risk of deteriorating the quality of research and teaching	National and weakly international careers

According to Boitier M. et alii (2015), the internal actors in each university can strongly influence the legitimacy of the control systems. The evolutions of control systems are the fruit of complex and processual interactions and conflicts of logic. The LRU, which facilitates external partnerships, also weakens faculty representation and the principle of peer management by giving more prerogatives to the university's president and board. Institutions are encouraged to create foundations and increase their participation and collaboration with private companies and other stakeholders.

## Conclusion

Finally, the current reform tends to extend the device of the Schools of Higher Education to the most prestigious universities. It does not reduce inequalities but rather seems to increase them, as it increases regional disparities by favouring existing large university centers. However, it is likely to further increase the international visibility of the most highly rated universities.

The most important point concerns the strategies in the modes of governance: University governance focused on international competition will differ significantly from other types of universities. Some universities will either have to change their strategy and reconvert, either disappear or become short-term universities more or less in relation to major international universities and intensive research.

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