

**UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY IN EUROPE:  
CHANGING PARADIGMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY**

**Special Case Studies  
Decision-Making Structures and Human Resources Management in  
Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and  
the United Kingdom**

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## **UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY IN EUROPE: CHANGING PARADIGMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY**

*... a Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth, and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium...*

*(Declaration on the Higher Education Area, Bologna, 1999)*

### **Introductory Remarks: A New Contract between Universities and Society**

Starting from the idea of building a "Europe of Knowledge", the role and structure of universities as key players both in research and higher education is without doubt a central one. National university systems have to some extent different histories and are built on various role models. As a result, discussion is currently taking place with different levels of intensity and emotion, though a certain convergence in the issues at the heart of the debate about university reform can be seen. These range from the partial retreat of the State as central financier of the university (science) system, to an increase in the entrepreneurial character of research and higher education institutions, the growing flexibility of personnel structures, the diversification of financial resources, the adaptation of curricula to labour market requirements and above all the call for new forms of quality assessment. At the core of the debate we find the notions of autonomy and academic freedom, and new forms of responsibility towards society and accountability towards stakeholders. The list of such indicators for change could be continued. While these changes have to be understood in the context of global socio-economic and socio-political shifts, the indicators show clear national variations, reflecting different histories in the field of higher education and its relation to the state, different political cultures and different positions of the university among other knowledge-producing and distributing institutions. To recapitulate, one could say that at stake is a repositioning of the universities as institutions of research and higher education (HE) in knowledge societies. We could use the metaphor of a contract between universities and society, negotiated in the 1970s under particular conditions and based on a certain set of values, that is currently being renegotiated in the context of wider societal changes.

The need for a new contract has become evident in many ways over the last decade, and three aspects which seem crucial for our analysis will be considered here. First, the expectations societies have with regard to universities as knowledge-producing institutions, but also as central players in the higher education sector, have undergone fundamental change. This change was to a certain extent brought about by the very success of the

institution. The mass expansion of higher education has not only led to the growth of the university system (both in research and teaching) and raised the level of general education in contemporary society, but has also posed the question of the future of this process. At the same time, the societies we are living in have gradually shifted to being so-called knowledge societies<sup>1</sup>. This means that knowledge and the structures in which knowledge is produced, distributed and applied play a central role in the development of society at large, that soci(et)al change is increasingly oriented towards scientific progress, and that science and technology become a privileged resource for action, thus eliminating other sources of explanation and action.

However, and this is the second aspect to consider, the expansion, diversification and differentiation of science has not only brought about change at an organisational level, but has also had consequences for the kind of knowledge produced and how it is produced. Potential users of knowledge start to play an important role at a much earlier stage of the process of knowledge production, and thus enter the university setting as actors. The assessment of the quality of scientific findings and their impact on society at large is no longer left exclusively to the science system, but so-called extended peer-groups (involving scientists as well as non-scientists) are starting to claim a central role for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, universities have to be understood as one institution among many in the network of institutions in contemporary societies. We are currently experiencing a repositioning of different sectors within our societies - economy, labour market, social system, politics etc. - both at the level of nation states and at the regional (EU) and/or global level. Universities are thus asked to reposition themselves in this new relational network, to redefine and adapt their functions, while at the same time protecting their space of autonomous decision making and their genuine innovative role. They have to be recognised as global players while being able to develop a clear local profile.<sup>3</sup>

The central question to be discussed in this paper is that of university autonomy. Are we really witnessing an increase in institutional university autonomy, as often claimed in policy documents? If so, on what levels do these new spaces of self-determination exist? Why is it so central for higher education to increase its autonomy and finally, what should universities do to make use of this freedom in a responsible way?

The issue will be addressed from two different perspectives. In the first section we will conceptualise the dynamics of current changes. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the way autonomous spaces are created and occupied within the universities, but also to work out how far seemingly autonomous spaces are invaded and controlled by societal forces. We will also address the close link between the autonomy of the university and the debate about freedom of research and teaching. This

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<sup>1</sup> For a good comprehensive overview of the issue of knowledge, see Heidenreich (2001), Stehr (1994, 2000), Weingart (2001)

<sup>2</sup> See Gibbons et al. (1994) and Nowotny et al. (2001)

<sup>3</sup> See Felt (1998)

should lead us to see that the question of university autonomy cannot be answered simply by reading the preambles of the various new legal frameworks or by interpreting legal formulations. While some changes lead to an increased degree of freedom in decision making and shaping the environment of higher education, these changes can also cause a regression in freedom of movement at other levels. Thus it is essential not only to assess the formal level of autonomy, but also to pay more attention to the informal mechanisms that are at work and to those areas that are less clearly regulated.

The second section is devoted to the discussion of concrete examples. In the model developed in the first section we identify areas within the universities which seem important in terms of the degree of autonomy. We will discuss two of them, namely "decision making structures" and "human resources". In order to illustrate the differences but also the similarities in the way in which these areas are structured in the context of nation states, we have chosen eight examples of European countries: Finland, as one of the reform-active Nordic countries; Hungary, as representative of the EU-accession countries; the Netherlands, as a small European country with a long experience in university reform which is often taken as an example in this domain; Spain, that just a few months ago introduced a major university reform, which has given rise to protest; the UK as the precursor of rather radical reforms (entrepreneurial university, etc.); Greece and France, which have started reform on the teaching side, but so far not engaged in more fundamental restructuring; and Italy, which is also engaged in a broader process of reform. Needless to say, we will not be able to offer a complete and detailed analysis of the eight countries: we will however try to consider – by examining some major elements of their functioning mechanisms – how, or rather how far, autonomy can be achieved or not in specific settings.

## SECTION I

### **Changing Paradigms in Higher Education Policy**

What are the general tendencies in current changes in the university system and its societal environment, and what are the underlying common dynamics? First of all we will try to model the interactions between university and society at large. At the same time we will show how different societal forces attempt to act on the university system in order to make it better respond to their needs, expectations and values. These forces may be either clearly visible, as for example through funding, or more implicit, such as the values that contribute to the definition of societal relevance for research and teaching. Universities also try to safeguard their future development by enlarging their societal influence and by gaining space in which to make autonomous decisions. Thus what we are observing

is a kind of "boundary work" (Gieryn, 1995) through which universities as institutions and the knowledge they produce are shaped by society, while in turn influencing the society in which they are embedded. Society can reach into the core of the university in different ways and at different levels. Thus we will identify in the abstract body of the "university" sub-entities and areas which seem crucial for the question of autonomy.

Secondly, we will discuss the notion of autonomy itself and how it is linked to other central issues such as academic freedom and accountability. These notions are often seen as closely intertwined in the public debate, but also in discussions within the academic sector. Finally, we will discuss two typologies, which might help to describe and understand current changes in the university system: one of university management styles, the other of State-university interaction.

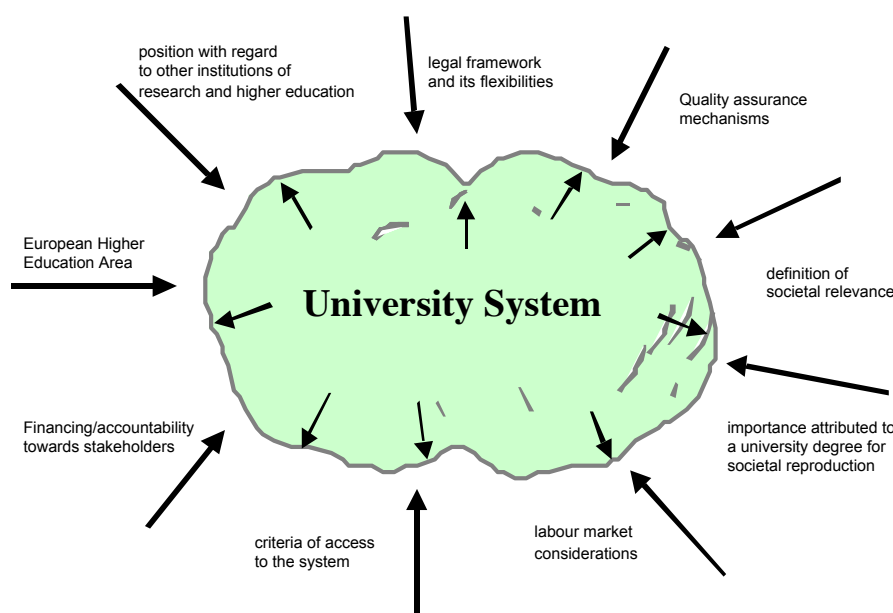
### **I.1. Boundary work: Modelling Interaction between University and Society**

The boundaries of the science system with regard to its societal environment are broad, flexible in form and over time and often not explicitly defined. Explicit work on positioning science or scientific institutions and thus clarifying its boundaries as well as protecting inner space from external intrusion is carried out mainly if science has to legitimate itself or if its authority is challenged. If social interests appear to be expanding, protecting, denying, or restricting the authority of science, then pragmatic demarcations of science seem of interest to scientists as well as to science policy makers. (Gieryn, 1995) While Gieryn applies this concept to the science system as a whole, we will limit ourselves to the university system. Thus we will not consider the university system as something defined only through its explicit legal framework. What we observe when analysing change in the higher education system is that different forces are at work both from outside the university and from inside. While universities aim to expand their space of autonomous decision making and thus also their freedom of research and teaching, society tries through different mechanisms to impose its vision, values and interests upon this terrain. These negotiations differ in their degree of emotional content and range from a more partnership-oriented way of dealing with change, towards conflict-oriented situations. What are the forces which different societal actors have at their disposal to shift and shape these boundaries of the university system? How can they reach into the internal structures? And what does the university do to counteract such forces?

In discussing the issue of university autonomy, we have to be aware that often the difference between the "real" university and the idealised model of universities with which we work on the rhetorical/conceptual level gets blurred. Indeed, we speak about universities and a higher education system which implies a certain degree of homogeneity, but when taking a closer look, and here one can but agree with Burton Clark's

analysis, we soon realise that in order to understand the changes taking place in the different systems throughout Europe, we need to grasp each institution's setting and history. Only such a detailed analysis will enable us to understand transformations that have taken place or are in process. (Clark, 1998) In fact universities are institutions with individual profiles, and there are wide differences between and within national systems, though we are witnessing a certain homogenisation of the discourse of higher education across Europe.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, a number of **external forces** which shape the university system are identified as examples in what follows (see Figure 1). Each national system and institution is subject to these pressures in different ways and thus has to find a variety of ways to counter them. This explains why, although there is a highly pre-structured common discourse on university reform, the actual measures taken and the impact on the individual institutions turn out to be so different.



**Fig. 1. Boundary Work between the University System and Society**

Let us try briefly to show what kind of impact these forces might have on higher education and evaluate their consequences for university autonomy.

### **European Higher Education Area**

Supranational forces are increasingly playing a central role in reforming universities: harmonising higher education systems in order to allow for the mobility of students and researchers also demands structural adaptation of the way national systems are organised.

The challenge for the universities will be to allow for structural harmonisation without falling into the trap of standardisation. Universities have to continue to think of themselves as local entities, with a specific culture, in a national setting which is in turn embedded in a global network of institutions of the same kind. Developing an individual profile while allowing for exchange will be the best formula for becoming an attractive institution for researchers and students.

### **Position of a given university in the overall setting of national (and international) institutions in the area of tertiary education**

How does the position of different kinds of institutions in the higher education sector look in the national context? What is the relation between private and state universities, between universities and more vocationally-oriented higher education institutions?

Competition among institutions in the higher education sector with different legal status and aims can lead to at least two outcomes. It may lead to an improved profile and focus on the central tasks, but also – in particular under strong external pressure – to a blurring of the boundaries between these institutions.

At times when applied research ranks high, and on-the-job training is seen as an asset, universities may be tempted to adapt to more vocationally-oriented teaching, which should in fact be the task of other institutions.

Another issue is raised through the existence of private universities alongside public universities. Competition on this terrain might lead universities to be more explicit about quality issues, but also different value systems may be imported.

### **Legal framework defined by the State for the universities**

Is the legal framework constructed in such a way as to give the university considerable freedom for development and innovation? Or is strategic decision making kept with the State (or State dependent bodies), with the university having only the rather restricted right to organise day-to-day administration? If the latter is the case, then this arrangement seems even more risky for the autonomy of the university than explicit State interference. It would mean that the university is kept busy with handling



day-to-day operations without being able to set real innovative incentives autonomously.

### **Societal relevance of research and higher education**

There is extensive discussion on the need for universities to be more open towards society: Universities should be more accountable to society at large, certain kinds of research should be regulated by society (e.g. genetic engineering) and public participation should be assured whenever research might have a negative impact on society. These are but the most important claims. In fact, the question of social responsibility of higher education is reformulated in unfavourable terms for the university.

Yet this poses quite a different kind of question which is often overlooked: Who defines what is of relevance for society? In most official documents it seems to be taken for granted that the players in the economic field represent society. Both the question of how students respond to the needs of the labour market, and the place of applied research in universities, seem revealing in this respect. Thus if we speak about participation by society in the shaping of scientific research, we are confronted with a rather limited socio-economic model of this interaction.

### **Societal importance attributed to a university degree**

Is it important to have an academic degree in order to occupy key positions in society and does it matter who awarded it? If the two questions are answered in the affirmative, then the university will try to attract outstanding students and try to position itself with regard to other institutions. However, the societal values attributed to the university are not under the complete control of the institution, but are negotiated. Thus external expectations will affect the way in which the university functions (the issue of elitist institutions vs. open institutions).

### **Labour market considerations**

What is the most suitable background and curriculum for students in relation to the needs of the labour market? The answer to this question increasingly seems to influence the curricula offered and the know-how transmitted. At the same time the interface of the university with the labour market has become highly complex as traditional professional profiles are decreasing, and diversification and fluctuation can be observed. Coupling education too closely to the labour market will therefore carry a certain risk.

### **Criteria of access to the university system for students and staff**

Tuition fees and stipend systems have massively influenced access to

higher education. If universities are left with low budgets, then fees become a major source of income and a lot of restructuring will take place around this issue.

Furthermore, access to university posts can become a crucial issue. Is there a national body for accreditation, setting standards and thus playing a central role? What are the formal and informal preconditions for giving access to university posts and who will decide on them?

### **Funding and accountability towards stakeholders**

This is maybe the most central factor of influence with regard to the autonomy of the university. If the acquisition of third-party funding becomes an absolute need and if evaluations are based on success in this domain, then external influence on research will definitely increase. This of course has also to be seen in close connection with the debates around freedom of research. This freedom was only possible under the ideal conditions of large-scale state funding. In that sense, the definition of autonomy given by Babbidge and Rosenzweig as early as 1962 is revealing: "a workable twentieth-century definition of institutional autonomy (is) the absence of dependence upon a single or narrow base of support." (Babbidge & Rosenzweig, 1962, p.158)

With regard to accountability we have to scrutinise the meaning of this notion. Is it accountability in the sense of full responsibility or is it a technical term?

### **Quality assurance mechanisms**

As universities try to obtain more autonomy, they have agreed more or less reluctantly to implement procedures of accountability and external quality assurance. However, we have to be aware of the fact that in many systems what counts as quality is not solely defined by academic institutions, but also by the norms and expectations of other external players (extended peer-groups). Thus it is important to understand quality assessment as a crucial point in the articulation of the relation between the State, different economic players and the university system.

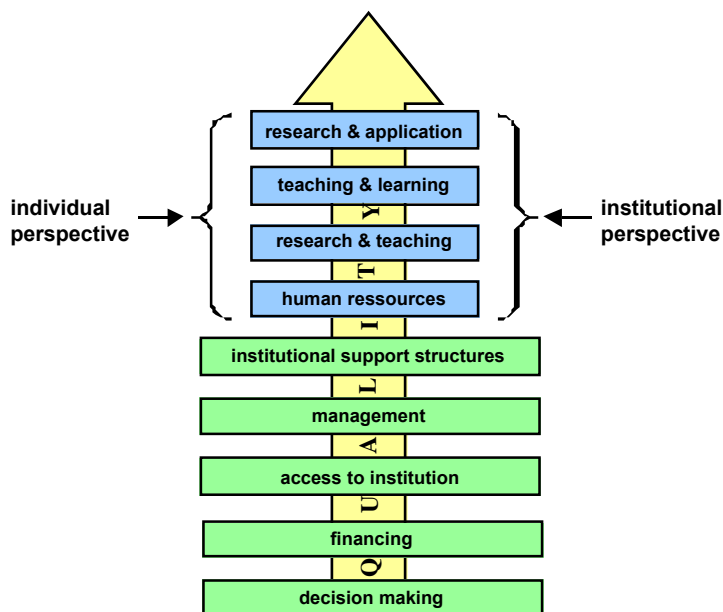
While the analysis has so far focused on the external forces that impact upon universities, universities must also be understood as actors that try to enlarge their sphere of influence and shape their environment. They take action to control and avoid dependencies, and to maximise their operational autonomy. Gornitzka and Maassen have identified two kinds of strategies in their study on "Governmental policies and organisational change in higher education". On the one hand "the role of leadership and internal power distribution are major factors that determine how organisations change in the context of external demands and expectations" (Gornitzka & Maassen, 1998, p.16), and thus only the development of clear

internal positions makes it possible to occupy and arrange autonomous spaces. In this sense it becomes understandable why the extension of university autonomy through new legal provisions was generally accompanied by putting in place clear often top-down decision-making processes, in which individual leadership figures play the central role, abandoning collegial decision making (sometimes replaced by collegial consultation). In fact it is this aspect of the reforms that has been most heavily debated among researchers who find themselves better represented in a collegial type of decision-making procedure.

On the other hand, "organisational actors seek actively to interact with environmental constituents in order to shape and control dependence relations [...] they exercise strategic choice within the constraints imposed by their environment but also the 'enablements' the institutional environments provide." (Gornitzka & Maassen, 1998, p.16) This means that representatives of universities are involved much more in tasks that do not belong to the classical university repertoire. Scientific advice and expertise is surely one of the areas which universities have become increasingly involved in. But also on a structural basis the fact that a university degree is needed to practise certain professions can be seen as one such way to gain control over the environment.

Having so far treated "the university" on a more general level, it is important to draw attention to the internal structure and identify the key areas that should be considered when investigating an increase or decrease in the autonomy of the university. Figure 2 provides an overview of the structure.

Two kinds of areas are identified. The lower block of five areas embraces general decision-making structures, finance, issues of access to the institution (at the level of both students and staff), management and institutional support structures. They are all at the very basis of the functioning of the university as an institution, defining the general framework of rules and internal regulations and they determine the detailed mechanisms of management. We could consider them as the skeleton of the university as an organisation.



**Fig.2. Internal Structural Entities of the University**

The upper block of four areas addresses the issues linked to human resources management (with a particular focus on academic staff), research, teaching and learning with the different relations between these areas, namely teaching and research, teaching and learning as well as research and its potential applications. All these four areas are characterised by a tension between the interests of the individual actors (researchers, teachers, students) on the one hand, to maximise their degree of freedom of action and possibilities of free decision making, and on the other, the interest of the university as an institution to fulfil the general policy goals it has set. Within these areas for example the question of freedom of research and teaching comes up regularly, in particular under the increasing societal pressure which is brought to bear on the university. Turo Virtanen pointed to this issue with regard to teaching very clearly in his recent study of the Finnish university system. "The true nature of 'freedom of teaching' is difficult to assess, but when many junior academics work as 'acting' teachers, without tenure, they are reluctant to challenge the expectations of senior colleagues. Freedom of research is also related to funding, which is more and more from external, non-academic sources." (Virtanen, 1999: p.64) Also on the research side the increasing lack of basic state funding and the need for external funding in order to maintain international standards was often seen as a problem for innovation on a broad basis.

The issue of quality improvement and control runs as a central theme through all these different areas. While building up extensive quality monitoring processes is surely a central tool for the possible enlargement of the autonomy of the institution, the question of who determines the rules and value systems that are applied needs to be asked. Through quality

assurance mechanisms, these values become so deeply woven into the procedures and judgements of the institution that they become gradually invisible and thus unquestionable (Felt 1999). This also holds in particular for all rigid, indicator-based systems. While they seem attractive at the policy level as they can claim to be "objective", they neglect the complexity and fuzziness of scientific enquiry. In this sense policy makers and scientists alike need to be ready to take risks when entering areas of innovative research, and structures have to be designed to account for such possibilities.

## I.2. University Autonomy and Academic Freedom

The notion of autonomy – though never clearly defined – has been central to the debate on the reform of universities over the centuries. It was perceived as the key element that would allow for the transformation of the institution from the inside and guarantee the freedom of research and teaching. Broad agreement seemed to exist on the importance of aiming for institutional autonomy of the university as a **basic value**, even though it would be debatable if it ever existed in the way it was imagined and used in the diverse policy discourses.

At the same time, it should be underlined that autonomy is perhaps a necessary but not a sufficient condition to ensure academic freedom. There are indeed many mechanisms in which autonomy at an institutional level might be translated into restrictions for the individuals working in these institutions.

Autonomy of the university in the broadest sense (Stichweh, 1994) would thus mean the ability to:

- make independent decisions on the limits of institutional commitment in certain topics and areas
- set up a value system and define forms of capital, which structure the field and allow scientists to advance
- decide on the criteria of access to the institutions, both at the level of scientists and students
- define strategic tasks and set institutional aims
- determine the links to other fields in society which are seen as crucial for further development (e.g. politics, economics etc.)
- assume responsibility for the decisions taken and possible effects on society.

In particular this last point seems crucial, as granting autonomy to a scientific institution will be automatically accompanied by the need for it to assume the responsibility for its actions and to be accountable towards society. This means that autonomy is and always has been closely linked to systems of accountability. This connection between universities and society also provides the key for future development. How will these forms of accountability be developed? Who will define how much accountability is enough? What will be the criteria for assessing whether universities fulfil the tasks society expects of them? And who will represent society in

defining these expectations, or to put it more bluntly, who will be the stakeholders that are allowed to determine the values and criteria of success for universities in the future?

These questions make clear that far from this idealised vision of autonomy, we have to consider autonomy as a shifting notion which is historically dated, and which should be understood as a relational feature at a given moment in time with an important impact on the way that science functions. The model the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1975) has developed for the scientific field provides us with an excellent tool to reflect on this notion of autonomy. In fact he points out that we are living in a highly differentiated society which is structured by a number of *relatively autonomous* fields like science, politics, art, religion, etc. With regard to science he underlines the fact that the scientific field has always been structured around **two poles**: one is *autonomous*, largely self-referential, which means that it has its own language, its own history of relevant problems, a way to deal with research questions and a high degree of symbolic capital. This makes reference to the more internally-oriented features of the scientific field. The other pole is *heteronomous*, which means that it is clearly guided also by political and economic interests. As a consequence in a given field – and here we are focusing on the scientific field – there are always two poles present which bring their relative force to bear on the options for future development. Talking about university autonomy therefore always means talking about degrees of autonomy and the relation between different forms of interests that co-exist. Safeguarding autonomy would mean finding arrangements to accommodate these different forms of interest expressed through the heteronomous pole, while at the same time allowing for a flourishing development in terms of the more autonomous forces.

Having hinted at the way the notion of autonomy is historically grounded, reflecting a particular balance between the different forces in and around the science system, it is revealing to remark that often in the current policy debate the notion of autonomy is used in a technical sense. It is presented more as a technical, operational tool, necessary for running the university and formally recognised by the State through clearly defined legal provisions. This often leads to the fact that accountability is understood and implemented not as a process of negotiation between universities and the representatives of society, but merely as a technical exercise to be evaluated using a clear and rigid set of indicators. However, indicators also have their histories and values, and reducing accountability and evaluation to a purely technical exercise means silencing debate about the hidden values behind some of the provisions that are put in place. (Felt 1999)

Finally, even if autonomy is granted to a university by law, it will require – as explained above – certain structures and procedures within the universities which enable these institutions to exert this autonomy. Thus structural changes are closely intertwined with the fact of becoming an autonomous actor. The crucial questions to ask are thus: What are the issues that can be regulated within the university? How tight is the legal

framework into which these regulations have to fit and what is defined on the political terrain? How far can institutions be autonomous with regard to strategic issues such as orientation of research, choosing the fields in which to employ professors, or setting up new curricula while eliminating others? And who is to judge on what basis the university fulfils the expectations of the different stakeholders which finance the institution?<sup>4</sup>

While autonomy is a key notion in current debates about the reform of the higher education system, academic freedom seems to be taken for granted in Western industrialised societies and is thus not very high on the agenda. With the exception of certain countries, which are notoriously seen as problematic with regard to freedom of expression in general, the topic is rarely touched upon. Implicitly it seems to be assumed that if autonomy is granted in whatever form to higher education institutions, academic freedom will quasi-automatically come along with it. Altbach (2001, p. 206) expressed this very clearly: "Those who are responsible for leading and funding higher education are far too concerned with finance and management issues" and seem to forget about this central aspect of academic life.

Indeed we encounter a problem similar to the one we discussed with regard to autonomy. Even though we would very quickly agree on the importance of "academic freedom" for the development of contemporary societies, the meaning of this notion remains extremely vague. Let us structure the problem around a number of questions. Do we mean freedom within the area of science, or do we mean a broader freedom of science from any political control? Does this freedom of expression also hold for issues that are non-core academic issues? Do we need to reconsider academic freedom in the era of Internet and distance education? How should we handle the claim for academic freedom at times when in particular the debates about more recent developments in biotechnology have clearly shown the ethical issues that are at stake? Is the issue really a matter of how much politics needs science, and how much politics science can stand and still be able to develop in an innovative way?

While an extensive debate of this notion would go far beyond the reflection we can offer here, it is nevertheless worth addressing some aspects that seem central for the future development of universities. First, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) argue in their book on academic capitalism that the increased involvement of academia in corporations and the growth of privately sponsored research is gradually transforming academic work and also has a significant impact on academic freedom. Basic research is in some key domains (e.g. biomedical sciences) already largely financed by private firms, and their interest in research that yields quick and financially tangible results is evident. State funding has not followed the high-tech needs developed in many areas of research in the same way. Patenting and

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<sup>4</sup> For a study of university autonomy as judged by academic staff in 20 countries see Anderson & Johnson (1998). The study nicely shows the considerable discrepancies between the formal idea of autonomy and the way it is perceived and experienced by scientists in the field.

the confidential nature of results (as they are owned by corporations) is increasingly becoming an important factor in academic life and causing a fundamental transformation of the value system at work.

Second, a number of analyses draw our attention to the impact on academic freedom in higher education of what is called "managerialism" (Entemann 1993). Altbach, for example, underlines "the notable increase in the power of administrators and other officials as distinct from the authority of professorial staff in the governance and management of academic institutions" and reaches the conclusion that this will "dramatically affect the traditional role of the academic profession - with repercussions on academic freedom as well." (Altbach 2001, p. 216) In particular he sees a major influence at the level of curricula, but also with regard to the main research directions to take. In this sense academic freedom is to be understood as threatened from the outside, though internal structures may play a key role in allowing for or undermining it. In this sense faculty would become "managed professionals" (Rhoades & Slaughter 1997), and a clear shift in the power dynamics would become visible through "increased formalization and evaluation of faculty work". (Gumport 2000, p. 78)

This leads to a third aspect to be considered, which I would like to summarize under the notion of "the assessment paradigm" (Neave & Van Vught 1991). In fact over the past decade in virtually all European countries, evaluation of organisational and individual performance has been imposed on many different levels. While raising the question of quality assurance and control is surely important for the further development of the university system, we have to be aware that efficiency and flexibility have become dominant values, being both the way to survive in an ever more competitive environment, and a potential threat to "public higher education as an intellectual enterprise". (Gumport 2000, p.69)

Finally, Gumport (2000) identifies in his analysis of the US system of higher education a drift from higher education as a social institution to higher education as an industry. As indicators he underlines the strong presence of the idea of the consumer, academic stratification and management as well as an increased use-value of particular types of knowledge in the wider society and exchange value in certain markets. The increased use-value of knowledge is, in his view, evident in both the culture of ideas and the commerce of ideas. "We are witnessing a reshaping of the institutional purpose of public higher education: in its people-processing activities as well its knowledge-processing. The change entails not only what knowledges are deemed worthy but also who has access to and the ownership of them." (Gumport 2000, p.88) Most of what is hinted at in this analysis also holds – with varying degrees and some delay – for the European context. In that sense it would be worthwhile not only to use the US as a model, but as a terrain to investigate more closely the impact these shifts have on the internal procedures of the higher education system.



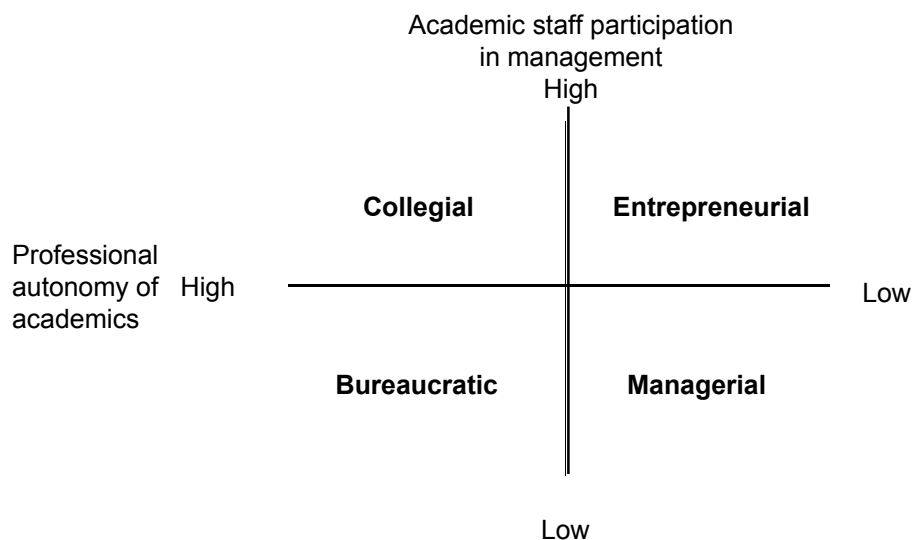
### **I.3. Typology of University Management Styles and State-University Relations**

After having developed the central idea of boundary work in order to understand the complex changes that are taking place in contemporary higher education institutions, and having shown the largely variant meanings of key notions such as autonomy and academic freedom, we now wish to add further reflections on the models of university management, and on a typology of the models of the interaction between the State institutions of higher education that will terminate this first section. Needless to say, such typologies are always simplifications and pure states of the kind described never exist. On the contrary, real settings generally present features of different types, while showing a preference for one type. However, what such models allow us to do is to reflect on the strong ties between certain features in the system of higher education, how they possibly reinforce each other and how far certain constellations emerge more often than others. In this sense the following should be seen as a toolbox for describing and analysing a wide variety of different settings.

#### ***Models of university management***

In his comparative study of "Managing Academic Staff in Changing University Systems", David Farnham (1999) points out that there is an apparent lack of consensus in how university management should be conceptualised. Even within institutions, different models seem to co-exist, often uneasily. Moreover, one would have to take into account both the more formal structures of organising higher education and the more informal "interests embodied in the customs and practices, unwritten rules and conventions defended by *ad hoc* groups and individuals in the system." (Farnham 1999, p. 18)

Focusing on the dual concerns of academics in both protecting their disciplinary interests and their right to take part in internal management, Farnham uses these two characteristics as a basis to build his classification of organisational models. (Fig.3.)



**Fig.3. Models of university management** (Farnham 1999, p.18)

The collegial and the managerial models are in a way the two extremes. The "collegial" university, combining a high level of professional autonomy with a high level of staff participation in management, was surely the ideal on which many of the universities were structured until the 1970s. In such a system authority was not imposed top-down by managerial hierarchies, but much more through collective agreement. Although it is often quoted as the golden age for the universities, one has to be aware of the fact that there was a price to pay for getting relatively large amounts of public funding. In fact some university systems, which saw themselves as working with this collegial model, were in the end quite dependent on the final approval of the State (e.g. when employing professors etc.). The current changes clearly move away from this model, a fact which has given rise to serious protest by academics in some national contexts. The main criticisms of this model were its lack of flexibility towards external change, slow adaptation to shifting demands on the part of stakeholders, and the lack of clear responsibilities for decision making.

Diametrically opposite is the "managerial model", towards which many reforms in higher education systems seem to be moving. It gives a limited amount of autonomy to academics, combined with a management style which we can find in the private corporate sector. This model is a top-down, hierarchy-oriented organisation with "the actioning of its corporate, financial and academic plans through executive management systems and structures." (Farnham 1999, p.19) Quite a number of the recently restructured universities adopt this model. It is generally not welcomed by the academics as it gives less freedom to the individual and has no collegial decision-making structures. Ultimate goals are increasingly defined by external forces, academics having only the freedom to decide how to fulfil them. In this sense the meaning both of autonomy and academic freedom is considerably modified.

In between these two extremes there are two further models. The "bureaucratic model" leaves relative autonomy to the individual, but at the price of making the university function as a rather mechanistic and role-based institution. A lot of effort is spent on establishing rules and administrative procedures which are often criticised for slowing down the speed of change and hindering adaptation to new needs. A strong administration acts as a gatekeeper for the organisation and holds a rather powerful position.

Finally, the entrepreneurial type of university is still rather rare in Europe, but some examples have appeared due to recent reorganisation. It is a task-based organisation, which is focused on searching for new markets for the institutions as well as for financial security through maximising diversified external funding. While the diversification of funding limits exclusive dependencies, it reduces the possibilities for action. Financial considerations become a central rationale for decision making. This model partly exists in the US and partly in the British context while it is now being tested in various continental systems of higher education. (Clark 1998)

### ***Models of Relations between the State and Higher Education Institutions***

While the classification discussed above allows us to understand the internal structure of the university, the following models enable us to make a better judgement of the possible relationships between the State and institutions of higher education. The chances of achieving university autonomy in different forms of relations between the State and higher education institutions' are the focus of the following classification. Developed by Olsen and adapted by Gornitzka and Maassen (1998, p. 14 - 16), it convincingly shows the relative meaning of autonomy in the different contexts.

<p><b>The sovereign, rationality-bounded State model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State control</li> <li>• Accountability to political authorities</li> <li>• Assessment based on political effectiveness</li> <li>• Centralised decision making</li> <li>• Change in HE follows political change</li> </ul> <p><i>Autonomy of the university: if government is overloaded then technical decisions can be left to the organisation</i></p>	<p><b>The institutional model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tradition based</li> <li>• Policy arena dominated by institutional leaders</li> <li>• Decision making is traditionalist and specialised</li> <li>• Assessment criteria: effects on the structure of meanings and norms</li> </ul> <p><i>Autonomy of the university is based on shared norms of non-interference</i></p>
<p><b>The corporate-pluralistic State</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universities challenge the monopoly of power and control through the State</li> <li>• Decision making is negotiated and takes place after consultation</li> <li>• Actors in policy making pursue their institution's interest</li> <li>• Societal participation through organised interest groups</li> <li>• Government interference depends on negotiations with other forces present</li> </ul> <p><i>Autonomy of the university is negotiated and a result of the distribution of interests and power.</i></p>	<p><b>The supermarket State</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal role of the State and other public bodies</li> <li>• Universities deliver services</li> <li>• Assessment criteria: efficiency, economic flexibility and survival</li> <li>• Dominant organisational form: corporation in a competitive market</li> <li>• Change depends very much on the environment</li> <li>• Little direct interference by the government</li> </ul> <p><i>Autonomy of the university depends on institutional ability to survive</i></p>

From these four models it is clear how the different political traditions and histories have an impact on the way university-State relations are shaped. It might help understand how – despite a rather homogeneous rhetoric on the role and functions of higher education – the different European countries nevertheless develop rather different models of reformed universities.

## PART II

### **Decision-Making Structures and Human Resources Management in Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom**

Within the conceptual framework laid out above, the second part of this paper aims to discuss two areas of change, namely decision-making structures and human resources management. By means of examples from eight different European countries, we will try to show how global change in the idea of the university is translated locally in rather different ways. Thus the aim of this part is not so much to give a detailed analysis of all eight different national contexts, which would go far beyond the scope of the paper, as to illustrate these two aspects of the process of reform and change. On the one hand, we will see how local histories, university traditions, social networks, political cultures and so on give rather different shape to seemingly similar reforms, while on the other hand we will identify trends of homogenisation, linked to the close-knit global networks in which these institutions are embedded. We therefore observe both globalisation and localisation, harmonisation and differentiation simultaneously.

Part II will be divided into three sections. The first will provide an overview of some elements of the more recent university reforms in all eight countries and address the accompanying rhetoric of change. This will be our starting point. Both primary and secondary sources will be used to show the different time scales with which countries implement reform, what they focus on, what appears to be the driving force for reform and what elements are not touched upon in these changes. It will allow us to identify some similarities, but also the major differences between the national settings and understandings of higher education institutions. The second section will then focus on the decision-making structures that are in place or undergoing reform. We will start by questioning the shift in the overall "philosophy" of decision-making that can be perceived through the micro- and macro-changes taking place. Then we will investigate some facets of how decision-making has changed and how much autonomy is given to the universities and in what areas, but we will also identify some of the areas that remain under central control. On the basis of some examples, we will examine how institutions handle these new possibilities of self-governance, but also how these new forms of autonomy demand new kinds of relationships between universities, the State and other stakeholders. The third and final section deals with the question of human resources management in the universities after reform. Particular attention will be given to the interplay between the perspectives of the individual researchers and teachers, the expectations of stakeholders and society at large, and the policies the universities have to develop for themselves as more or less autonomous institutions. In the same section we will proceed first by investigating the general visions developed for the "new university

staff" both at the individual and at the structural level. We will then move on to analyse some of the more concrete changes, with a short general reflection on the changing roles of the actors involved.

## **II. 1. Recent University Reforms and the Accompanying Rhetoric of Change**

In this section we will focus not just on the *legal* changes but also on the rhetoric in which these reforms are embedded. What are the reasons given for the need for reform and what are the declared aims? Is there any convergence in argumentation between the cases or are there obvious national differences? And how do the rhetorical constructions fit with the changes as implemented?

The eight countries could be grouped together as follows. The first would embrace the UK, the Netherlands and Finland. These three countries have carried out wide-ranging and to some extent radical reforms in recent years, and are oriented in many respects towards or influenced by the idea of university reform prevalent in English-speaking countries. The second group would be France, Italy and Greece. Current reforms in these three countries focus mainly on teaching, and no general reorganisation of decision-making and the personnel sector is taking place. Spain may be placed between these two groups. On the one hand, due to tradition, it is less influenced by the model prevalent in English-speaking countries, though the recent reforms are quite radical and touch on a broad range of issues. Moreover, the question of central versus regional authority plays a crucial role in the case of Spain. Finally, Hungary is also in a somewhat different position, as the debate about reform only really started in the 1990s and the country is now trying through higher education reform to adapt to the changes taking place at the European level.

Without going into the details of the different reforms, it may be said that the kind of argumentation is in fact rather homogeneous across many of the countries, with variations in the intensity of the rhetoric. The central argument put forward by governments is the need to increase the autonomy of the universities through reforms and thus to strengthen their capacity to respond quickly and efficiently to the demands formulated by society. Autonomy in this sense is seen as a way to manage the internal structures of the university, and the debate is far less oriented to the more value-oriented meaning of autonomy. The university is seen as a central contributor to innovation and economic growth. As we live in knowledge/information societies, better adaptation to the needs of the labour market and life-long learning have become central issues. The new structures need to adapt in order to fulfil these expectations in a more efficient way. Flexibility and dynamic development are two further crucial factors, which need to impact on both decision-making and personnel structures. Leadership becomes a central part of the vocabulary and thus decision-making structures oriented towards greater participation are considered to be too cumbersome and outdated. Mobility for students and

teachers is seen as a necessity. Staff mobility should solve the problem of the high average age of staff, particularly in those institutions where they have tenure. All these different features are somehow intended to lead to an improvement in the quality of the work performed in these reformed institutions.

As a result, quality assurance mechanisms are seen as the engine for the continual adjustment and improvement of the system, and are supposed to be set up both at the national level as well as within the individual institutions. The price for the new autonomy is a stricter system of ex-post accountability, task-oriented contracts or ex-ante indicator-oriented resource distribution methods. To be able to survive on the "free market" of research, financial resources are seen as proof that the institution (the individual) is able to meet this new quality framework. The scientist-entrepreneur emerges as a new kind of stereotype.

Of course there are also critical voices that question the central notions employed in the debate. Is this new autonomy not a form of novel dependency? What happens to the highly self-determined academic profession once stakeholders have their say with regard to quality criteria? How can we safeguard the freedom of research when the majority of research money comes from private sources? These are but a few of the rather pertinent questions frequently posed.

There is a rich literature discussing the different processes of transition and we can build on this experience. However, the system of higher education has reached a degree of complexity and a speed of change at different levels which makes it rather difficult to evaluate all the potential impacts of these reforms. In this sense our questions and observations are bound to be partial and preliminary. However, it is also important to stress that those who are less euphoric about change in higher education are often classified as outdated daydreamers who have difficulty understanding the changed societal conditions for universities. As a result, in many countries there is a high degree of polarisation in the debate, hindering fruitful discussion about reform.

A short overview of the most important recent reforms in the eight countries will now be presented, underlining some of the specific characteristics of the respective national systems.

Reforms of the university system in the United Kingdom might be considered as the most radical among the countries covered in this study. In the UK<sup>5</sup>, already in the 1980s, managerial ideologies entered the public sector and therefore also higher education. This led in the mid-1980s to the implementation of a new financial model separating research and teaching support. It was accompanied by the introduction of a national system of

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<sup>5</sup> For the analysis of the British university system in this section the following sources were used: Henkel (1999, 2000); Farnham (1999, 1999a); Hodgson & Spours (2000); Neave (1998); Trow (1998); Shattock (2001).

On the web materials can be found under: Ministry of Education [www.dfes.gov.uk/index.htm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/index.htm); national statistics: [www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/educaion/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/educaion/default.asp); and [www.euridyce.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.euridyce.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm)

research evaluation by the UK University Grants Committee, a fact which caused a completely new – and partly rather "unhealthy" – dynamic in the British higher education system. (Henkel 1999) From 1988 onwards tenure for university staff was abandoned, a fact which clearly fitted the general idea of the reforms to be made in order to reach a more flexible type of university system. At the level of the overall structure, the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) set up a unified sector for higher education for the first time, giving the former polytechnics and colleges the status of universities. Despite this legal uniformity, the differentiation persisted in certain more or less implicit ways between the so-called "old" universities (pre-1992) and the "new" ones. (Shattock 2001) Quality assessment procedures continued to play a central role, although under somewhat different conditions. The declared aim behind this reform was to raise quality in teaching and research, as well as to increase efficiency through the improvement of management and the development and use of performance indicators.

The 1990s were still characterised by broad debate about what direction the higher education sector should take in Britain, as the reforms did not lead to the expected outcomes, but resulted in a number of unplanned side-effects. The continuing climate of crisis led in 1996 to the establishment of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, which issued a rather influential report, the so-called Dearing Report (1997). Although this report can be criticised from a number of perspectives (Trow 1998), it certainly had an important impact on what happened in the aftermath. The report explicitly stated the need for broader access to the universities, the central role of universities in a knowledge-based economy was acknowledged, and higher education was attributed a major role in the process of shaping democratic society. Although part of the report can be criticised as a purely rhetorical exercise, a number of new arrangements were put in place: financial support for students was reformed, an independent review of staff pay and conditions of service was established, an Institute for Teaching and Learning was created, and a new quality assurance model and code of practice were put in place.

Similar ideas, albeit far less radical, were behind the reforms in the Netherlands and Finland. Reforms in both countries were identified by analysts in the higher education sector as being driven "partly by the fiscal crises of the European welfare state and partly by the political desires of the governments there to open access to higher education to a broader social range of students." (Farnham 1999, 345) The response to these requests was on the one hand the development of a binary system of higher education, and on the other the introduction of "elements of hard managerialism" into the national systems. Softer forms of managerialism, reflecting an awareness of the resistance of academic institutions to this tendency, were introduced at the institutional level.



In the Netherlands<sup>6</sup> the first important reform step in the last decade was the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA), which became operational in 1993. It replaced the 1986 University Education Act aimed at transforming the governance structure of the universities from a system of mixed leadership to one of executive leadership, with a view to achieving greater involvement of society at large. (Maassen 2000) In fact for the first time it regulated both kinds of higher education institutions (universities as well as the more professionally oriented HBOs (*Hoger Beroepsonderwijs*)) in particular with a view to homogenising organisation and administration, though they are otherwise strictly separated. Universities provide academic education and conduct scientific research, while HBO institutions are directed towards higher professional education and may conduct research only in so far as it is related to the educational activities and is situated in the application-oriented domain.

The real shift towards the executive leadership model both at the university and faculty level was only carried out by the University Government (Modernisation) Act in 1997. The university and faculty boards as well as deans acquired more managerial power within the governance structure. The role of the councils shifted from being control bodies to being advisory bodies. Moreover, this Act introduced a powerful new body of external stakeholders into the Dutch university governance structure, the Supervisory Board nominated by the university, but accountable to the minister. Finally, departments lost their former legal status. Situating the change in our grid of models of university management, we observe a clear shift from a collegial to a management model. In connection with staff matters, intense debate about future career structures took place in the second half of the 1990s, more power was given to the individual university with regard to negotiating staff contracts and the abandoning of tenure was seriously considered. (De Weert 2001)

In the Dutch case, the argument of "more flexibility through autonomy" was central for the reform. The key words that dominated the reform debate were the creation of a differentiated, efficient and cost-conscious system, and freedom for universities to make their own decisions, while at the same time introducing a quality control system. It was not only the research side of the university that was addressed. In particular students as clients should be given more opportunities to choose the higher education that best fits their own specific situation and interest, coupled with the needs of society for skilled workers.

**Finland**<sup>7</sup> is the third member of the group of countries that engaged in quite substantial reforms in recent decades. Indeed a number of interesting

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<sup>6</sup> For the analysis of the situation in the Netherlands the following sources should be mentioned: De Weert (1999, 2001), Veld (1996), Maassen (2000) Materials available on the web: [www.euridyce.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.euridyce.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm), Ministry of Education [www.minocw.nl](http://www.minocw.nl), National Institute for Educational Measurement (CITO) [www.cito.nl](http://www.cito.nl), Institute for Educational Research [www.ivovo.nl](http://www.ivovo.nl). Association of Universities in the Netherlands [www.vsnu.nl](http://www.vsnu.nl)

<sup>7</sup> For the analysis of the situation of Finland the following sources should be mentioned: Virtanen (1999), Hölttä/malkki (2000); Hölttä (2000); Web information on Finland: Ministry of Education [www.minedu.fi](http://www.minedu.fi); Zentralamt für Unterrichtswesen: [www.opf.fi](http://www.opf.fi) oder [www.edu.fi](http://www.edu.fi); see also [www.euridyce.org](http://www.euridyce.org);

reforms took place in the late 1980s and 1990s. The first initiative to mention is the Higher Education Development Act, which was passed in 1986 and intended to guarantee stable resource development for universities until the mid-1990s. This was done in order to prepare the ground for internal reform, leading to "management by results", with the introduction of an assessment system for research and teaching as well as increased efficiency in undergraduate and postgraduate education. From the early 1990s onwards the higher education sector was engaged in a process of diversification through the creation of the so-called AMK (*ammattikorkeakoulu*) institutions which were intended to educate students in response to the needs of rapidly changing labour markets.

The reforms that were to reshape fundamentally the Finnish university system in the early 1990s have to be understood in the light of a major recession in the country. In this rather difficult situation however, "knowledge and education were selected as the major cornerstones of the new (economic) development policy." (Hölttä & Malkii 2000, 231) Thus all measures taken have to be understood in this perspective. Along with a number of legal changes relating to tuition fees and curricula, a new funding system was also introduced. Lump-sum budgeting was brought in for universities, accompanied in the late 1990s by the introduction of so-called performance agreements between the State and each university. Three-year contracts were to be signed mainly on the basis of the number of degrees the university planned to award. Given also a simplification of the administrative processes, these performance agreements were to constitute the framework for a detailed form of accountability as well as for the development of future scenarios.

The most recent change of relevance for our case is the Universities Act, coming into force in the middle of 1998. This Act, together with the accompanying decrees, provided a new legislative framework for all universities in Finland (which had not been the case until then). This framework left room for each university to set its own rules for internal decision making. Under this new system, evaluation has become a central element in the process of university development.

**Spain**<sup>8</sup> is the country with the most recent major reform, but which is also the most hotly debated and heavily contested among all those mentioned. The *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* was passed at the end of 2001. The previous fundamental reform of the Spanish university system was implemented in 1983, putting in place a process of decentralisation, which

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<sup>8</sup> For the analysis of the situation in Spain the following sources should be mentioned: Parado-Diez (1999); Hanson (2000); Mora (2001), Godfrey (2002), Martin (2001), Villarreal (2002), Bricall (2000). See also the following sources: Ministry of Education [www.mec.es](http://www.mec.es); Scientific research and development [www.ine.es/htdocs/dacoin/dacoinci/i+disti.htm](http://www.ine.es/htdocs/dacoin/dacoinci/i+disti.htm); [www.euridyce.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.euridyce.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm); the web page of the Spanish Rectors' Conference: [idcrue.dit.upm.es/emglish/universidades](http://idcrue.dit.upm.es/emglish/universidades); [www.universia.net](http://www.universia.net). There are also a number of interesting discussion forums on the reform. My gratitude goes to Luis Aparicio for the time he devoted to going through original documents in Spanish on the recent university reform.

transferred educational decision making to the 17 regional governments, giving Spain the most decentralised system in education in Europe.

While it is impossible so soon after the reform to judge the precise impact it will have, it is interesting to see how dense the rhetoric of change is in both the legal documents and the accompanying texts. The central argument put forward by those supporting the law is that universities should acquire more autonomy in order to be able to react more flexibly and adapt to the needs of society. To quote a government spokesperson: "we need to make them [the universities] more entrepreneurial and managerial and thus better able to cope with the challenges of the future." (Godfrey 2002) Integration into the common European Space for Higher Education has also been given – although belatedly - as the driving force for this reform. Mobility should be increased both for researchers and for students and the system was seen as in need of internal coherence. Moreover, more highly centralised quality assurance management was seen as essential for future survival "in a competitive space".

The very broad opposition to the law comes from a variety of institutional actors (ranging from industrial and student representatives to the Spanish Rectors' Conference) who put forward many different criticisms. It is argued that the autonomy promised for the universities is not possible, as most of the important issues are already regulated by law or left to central power. The remaining space for decision making is too small to be seen as autonomy for the universities. Competition between private and public universities is feared to be unequal, while different values and work methods are brought into the public universities. The students' situation is also seen as worsening. With regard to hiring personnel, the new law makes it possible to increase the proportion of contract staff and provides for a national *habilitation* as a condition for employment in certain posts in the university, resulting in an increase in central control. The list of criticisms could go on. What is common in most of the statements is the lack of readiness on the part of the government to enter into any serious negotiations with the interested parties before passing the law. Indeed while in most of the eight countries in this study steps towards reforming the university were taken gradually and embedded in a process of change, the Spanish case seems the most abrupt. It remains to be seen how much of this change can be taken on board by the system all at the same time.

The next group of countries, Italy, France and Greece, while characterised by different histories and reasons for implementing change, have as a common denominator the fact that the reform procedure is clearly driven by concerns about teaching and quality assurance rather than by a more global restructuring of university management and governance.

For quite a while in the 1970s and 1980s the university system in **Italy**<sup>9</sup> "operated according to the principles of a centralised administrative system (the French model) with academic power channelled through chair holders (the German model), in pursuit of the traditional task of the reproduction of elites." (Moscati 2002, 4) One specific feature is the absence of a well-developed non-university higher education sector, which gives a central role to the universities. The first wave of more recent reforms started in the late 1980s, but did not transform the system as substantially as it was intended. However, it led to the setting up of the Ministry of Universities and Scientific and Technological Research (MURST), which had the task of drafting the three-year development plans for the universities, providing for their funding, co-ordinating participation in international research programmes and so on. Two further changes need to be mentioned. The 1989 law established the right to statutory autonomy for universities, but in fact very few of the universities actually took advantage of this opportunity to draw up their own statutes. Act 341/90 reorganised university teaching, allowed universities to make new awards, established the *Consiglio Universitario Nazionale* (CUN) to advise the Ministry on university matters and put in place a system of institutional accountability. However, some analysts conclude that these reforms remained largely a dead letter. (Brierley 1999) In this sense Italy is an interesting case in which the *de jure* possibilities and the *de facto* state of autonomy differ considerably.

The 1990s saw the start of heated debate and the launch of reform procedures, mostly linked to the problems of teaching and curricula, but also to autonomy in funding and to some extent in personnel decision making. (see Moscati 2001; Brierley 1999, 2000) A more general analysis of the problems of the Italian university system is to be found in the Martinotti Report (1997)<sup>10</sup>. The approach to reform used in the Italian case was defined as a "mosaic strategy" (Moscati 2001, 114), with the gradual introduction of a number of medium-sized changes into the system, thus achieving a reform of the system without too much resistance from vested academic interests. The recent changes relating to education matters have to be seen in connection with the fact that Italy signed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, an important step in the acceleration of these reforms. As in all the countries mentioned so far, the reforms also led to the introduction of a system of evaluation of university performance, co-ordinated by the newly founded National Committee for University Evaluation, set up by the MURST.

The buzzwords guiding the reform in Italy are autonomy, responsibility, assessment, flexibility, competition and a focus on the demand side rather than on the supply side, in the context of the general debate about university reform in other European countries. (Modica & Stefani 2000)

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<sup>9</sup> For the analysis of the situation of Italy the following sources should be mentioned: Brierley (1999,2000), Modica/Stefani (2000), Moscati (2001, 2002).

See also the following sources: [www.euridyce.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.euridyce.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://miur.it/progprop/autonomi/auton.htm>

The case of **France**<sup>11</sup> is specific for a number of reasons. It may be said that the university system has largely been resistant to some of the changes we have witnessed in other European countries. First of all, it is interesting to note that in the French system there is no clear distinction between higher and further education, or between education and training. "The result is that institutions providing school and post-school education are pluralistic and overlap in their provision, as well as being fragmented. There are 4230 institutions classified as higher education institutions by the education ministry" of which only 50 are public universities and 40 university annexes. (Burnham 1999, 76) Thus universities play a limited role compared for example to the "*Grandes Ecoles*" or the CNRS. What is also revealing for "the French model" is the fact that these different establishments of higher education have rather different relationships to the State and vary in their legal regulations. While the *Grandes Ecoles* are classic examples of the "institutional model" of university-state relations (discussed in Part I of this paper), which means that university autonomy is mainly based on shared norms of non-interference, this does not hold for the public universities, which are seen as suppliers of tertiary education for the large majority of French students.

Second, French universities already have legal and administrative autonomy (introduced in 1968 and reiterated by the 1984 Savary Law), but the notion of autonomy is full of contradictions. The strong tradition of centralised State policy can be clearly seen here, as much of the management is still in the hands of central bodies, while there are numerous possibilities of intervention and direct control also at the regional and intra-university level (e.g. through the *recteur*, who is the head of the regional division of the Ministry; through staff recruitment procedures by means of national pre-selection processes). Thus autonomy has so far only a limited meaning at a practical level and any fuller and more coherent autonomy would require further steps to be taken.

The third fundamental difference between France and the other European countries of interest for our analysis is the status of the majority of the university staff. In public higher education institutions most teaching staff are tenured and enjoy the status of civil servants. This means that the staff structure is under severe pressure due to the ageing problem, but also due to the absence of career possibilities for younger scholars. (Chevallier 2001)

The 1990s also saw the start of the debate on university reform in France. The *Université 2000* programme, which aimed to bring together national and local actors for discussion, was an important step in the direction of reform, but so far it has not led much further. In recent years critical voices on the functioning of the higher education system have been heard and some changes have been introduced, though not comprehensive reform. As part of the recent debate, it may be useful to quote two major documents providing a detailed analysis of the need for a fundamental

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<sup>11</sup> For the analysis of the situation in France the following sources should be mentioned: Burnham (1999); Chevallier (2001); CPU (2001); Fréville (2001), Musselin/Gignet-Gérard (2000); See also the following sources: [www.euridyce.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.euridyce.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm);

reform of human resources management at a political level (Fréville 2001), and for restructuring the system in order to achieve greater university autonomy (CPU 2001). However, Musselin and Gignet-Gérard (2000) have stressed in their recent study on developments in university governance in France that there is a perceivable shift in the ways university leaders see their own role, as they make use of the available autonomous space much more than a decade ago. In this sense it is not a matter of change by means of an explicit structural reform, but through the development of institutional policies, the effectiveness of decision-making by university bodies and the strengthening of the position of the university president.

**Greece**<sup>12</sup> is another country where recent reforms have so far mainly focused on teaching. A more fundamental restructuring of the system as a whole has not yet been carried out. Greece has a dual system of higher education, with 18 universities, 14 technical educational institutions and the Patras Open University (opened in 1997/98). Greece has a decentralised State administration, but the education system is governed by national laws and executive acts. Since the entry into force of the 1982 Framework Act, universities have been fully self-governing public law entities. This reform among other changes brought about the abolition of the chair system, which was replaced by a section-department system. Students acquired a significant role in electing the governing bodies of the university, a National Council of Higher Education was created as a policy-making body, and university curricula were reformed. Another reform in 1992, which was much less wide-ranging, placed limits on the opportunities for the promotion of teaching staff to higher levels, and made an attempt to improve financial autonomy, while stimulating post-graduate studies and the development of research institutions associated with the universities.

While the Greek system is characterised in the Eurydice documents by the phrase "the university decides, the State supervises", recent evaluations carried out in Greece have revealed that there is still a high degree of State control over key issues. There is a legal framework in which universities can define their day-to-day functioning for themselves, but the number of strategic issues to be decided upon seems limited in actual fact (e.g. the student admissions policy is governed by the central administration, the funds allocated to the university are earmarked, the recruitment of professors is dealt with centrally). Moreover, universities are criticised for not using the opportunities for reform they have in theory, as

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<sup>12</sup> There is little research into higher education that includes analysis of the Greek university system. Information on the Greek system is taken mainly from the Eurydice web site: [www.eurydice.org/Publication\\_List/EN/List\\_des\\_titres\\_EN.htm](http://www.eurydice.org/Publication_List/EN/List_des_titres_EN.htm) and from interviews with members of the scientific community and the ministry. Further information was taken from recent evaluations of the universities: CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme: Institutional Evaluation of the University of Macedonia Economic and Social Sciences (Thessaloniki). CRE Reviewers' Report. March 2000; CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme: Institutional Evaluation of the University of Patras (Greece). CRE Reviewers' Report. December 1999; CRE Institutional Evaluation Programme: Institutional Evaluation of the University of Ioannina (Greece). CRE Reviewers' Report. October 2000.; EUA (European University Association) Institutional Evaluation Programme: The University of Crete. EUA Reviewers' Report. August 2001; EUA (European University Association) Institutional Review of the Aristoteles University of Thessaloniki. EUA Reviewers' Report. July 2001.

they prefer to stick to existing structures. The universities have the right to elect their own executive bodies and to decide on the management of their internal affairs under State supervision. In the Greek university system democratic decision-making structures are still the basic mode of operation, with the participation of representatives of all members of the academic community in decision making. External members do not take part in decision-making process within the universities.

Two major advisory bodies draw up reform proposals concerning universities for the respective Ministry. These are the Higher Education Council (SAP) and the Interuniversity Research Council (DES).

The most recent reforms introduced by the Education 2000 Act, passed at the end of 1997, focus on teaching in an attempt to radically adapt the system to European standards. To this end university entrance examinations have been abolished in order to increase admissions, open-choice study programmes have been set up and study programmes have been restructured. Moreover, a comprehensive system of evaluation is being developed in order to improve the overall output of study programmes.

The last country to mention is **Hungary**.<sup>13</sup> Hungarian universities were based on the so-called "Prussian model of a strong state apparatus and a semi-autonomous professorate" (Morgan 2000). After the dramatic changes in 1989, it soon became clear that university reform was needed in order to adapt both to the university systems in place in other European countries and to the needs of the new economy. The World Bank played an important role in these reform activities as it made a substantial loan to the government. Hungary took its first big step towards university reform through the Higher Education Act in 1993, which was amended in 1996. The law set up a new national body called the Higher Education Research Council, intended to function as an advisory board to the Ministry and to take on a rather important role. The difficulties this Council encountered due to the lack of mutual trust on the part of the actors involved, from the universities to the ministry, clearly reveal the historical factors Hungary has to cope with when reforming the higher education system. (Morgan & Bergerson 2000) The second important reform step was taken with Act LII of 1999 on Restructuring the Institutions of Higher Education. This did not introduce any major administrative changes, but was a radical step in fostering the integration of higher education institutions at a national level.

Some of the arguments made for change were the integration of higher education institutions (too many small institutions), the extension of educational opportunities by establishing multifaculty, multidisciplinary

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<sup>13</sup> A great deal of information on the Hungarian situation can be found on the web. The following addresses are of particular interest: Ministry of Education: <http://www.om.hu/english>; Confederation of the Hungarian Conferences on Higher Education: [www.fksz.huninet.hu](http://www.fksz.huninet.hu), Higher Education and Scientific Council: [www.ftt.hu](http://www.ftt.hu), House of Professors: [www.prof.iif.hu](http://www.prof.iif.hu), Hungarian Institute for Educational Research: [www.hier.iif.hu](http://www.hier.iif.hu); Union of Higher Educational Conferences: <http://deneb.huninet.hu>; Hungarian Accreditation Committee: [www.mab.hu](http://www.mab.hu).

Moreover, the following articles were used to complete the analysis of the Hungarian system: Barakonyi (2001), Hrubos (2000), Morgan & Bergerson (2000), Morgan (2000).

institutions, the improvement of facilities for research and development, the setting up of regional intellectual centres, and the strengthening of the relationship between these institutions and their environment. The notion of efficiency was also central, in the sense of improving the use of resources as well as eliminating redundant multiple structures. Moreover, the issue of responsiveness was addressed by stating that the university system should be made more flexible and attentive to the needs of individuals and the economy.

The Hungarian system is a dual system with university education organised in traditional faculties with a more theoretical-scientific orientation and non-university education (i.e. colleges, vocational education) in accordance with needs of the economy. There are State universities and colleges, higher education institutions controlled by various churches (mainly the Catholic Church) and private colleges in the Hungarian system.

So far it may be said that in principle Hungarian universities have become autonomous institutions, in terms of defining the internal organisational and operational framework, selecting staff, students numbers and so on. However, there is still a considerable degree of state control over central issues.

In concluding this section, it may be of interest to add some more general observations. With the exception of Greece and Italy, in all the countries dealt with in this study, the traditional universities have become only one player among many at the level of higher education. While vocationally oriented education is receiving increasing attention, the space occupied by private universities is also growing. Both factors will definitely have an impact on the way universities develop in the future.

We can also see how different reforms are being designed and implemented in the various national settings. While some countries are involved in a process of regular reform with consultation, others are adopting a series of small-scale changes, while in other cases there is an attempt to push through reform in one big step despite the risk of institutional resistance. In other cases one can see a gradual and partial adaptation of the university governance structures to the new demands even without formal reshaping processes. On the basis of this observation there appears to be a need for in-depth comparative and qualitative research in university reform strategies in order to better understand how change can take place in certain cultural environments.

The strong correlation between increasing autonomy and setting up accountability structures can be clearly seen in virtually all cases. Evaluation procedures and other forms of accountability have been set up in most countries, though different ways of implementing and making use of these procedures may be seen.

Finally it is revealing to note how central the notion of institutional autonomy has become, and how little the role of the individual academic is considered in these reforms. The problem of individual autonomy, which could in fact be in contradiction with the strengthening of institutional



autonomy and accountability, is rarely addressed. In this sense it may be said that these recent reforms have strengthened the university as an institution and increased the voice given to society and stakeholders, but have attributed less importance to the situation of individual researchers and teachers.

## **II. 2. Decision-Making Structures between Autonomy and External Control**

In the following section we will focus on the different ways recent reforms have reshaped decision-making processes within universities and what that means for the autonomy of these institutions. This domain is central as it redefines the position as well as the scope of action universities will or are expected to take in contemporary knowledge societies. Decision-making structures are one of the crucial places where the border line is negotiated between the internal autonomy of the universities as knowledge-producing and educational institutions and external control. We will therefore consider the levels – institutional versus individual – on which this new form of autonomy is to be formulated. We will not depart from an idealised vision of autonomy and compare the current situation in different national contexts, but focus on the different ways in which this autonomy takes shape. It is more a question of "What kind of autonomy are we talking about?" than one of measuring changes against an abstract ideal.

Investigating different models in the domain of decision-making structures in national university systems which have undergone reforms aimed at increasing institutional autonomy illustrates the wide range of possibilities. These emerge from the blend of management traditions as well as the ideals and values on the basis of which legislators and universities act. To a certain extent focusing on decision-making structures can reveal how governments and other actors grant varying degrees of freedom to universities while maintaining their influence where deemed necessary, and how the institutions themselves handle this new situation and demonstrate their capacity for adaptation, resistance and innovation.

We have structured our observations on the basis of three perspectives. As a first step we will identify what we would like to call "the changing philosophy" behind the decision-making structures implemented. With what kind of expectations and for what purpose are these reforms to be understood? This is an important question, as national systems might implement procedures that look rather different, but which follow the same basic philosophy. In the second part we will analyse the existing structures, but also see what might be identified as the emerging common features in the newly devised decision-making procedures. We will ask the following questions: Who decides what? What are the new central actors (bodies or individuals) in these decision-making processes? What kind of issues can be decided within the universities, and what is left to the terrain of general politics? The last perspective in this section will be devoted to an

examination of the new kinds of relations developing between universities, politics and society at large. In what forms will the "needs of society" be expressed in the national systems of higher education? Who will represent society in making strategic choices with regard to future development in this sector?

In each perspective we will give selected examples from the eight national contexts in an attempt to characterise the emerging differences and similarities.

### **II.2.1. The Changing "Basic Philosophy" behind Decision-Making Mechanisms**

It seems appropriate initially not only to see the reforms in university decision-making structures as a legal redefinition of the governance in higher education, but also to examine the underlying "basic philosophy", the implicit values behind these changes. Our observations can be grouped around four issues.

First, an important **redefinition of agency** for the different actors in the sphere of higher education can be diagnosed. There seems to be a tendency to separate more clearly than before detailed decision-making and accountability roles from the control function. In many of the new arrangements, universities can decide autonomously on certain issues, while the State exerts control through various newly established mechanisms, and more weight is given to stakeholders and society at large. Autonomy is in this sense not a synonym for independence, but rather a matter of decision-making under external constraints, developing internal university policies and taking on more responsibility than ever before. Voices critical of the changes that are currently taking place in the university system underline the fact that given the increasingly tight external constraints of the universities and the fact that choices to be made independently by the universities are rather limited, recent reforms could be interpreted as a retreat by the State from its central task of financing higher education<sup>14</sup>.

The second point to be made concerns a stronger **orientation of the universities to expectations formulated by diverse societal stakeholders**. In fact the idea that university students should respond to the needs of the labour market and that representatives from different sectors of society should have their word on the future options for university development are omnipresent in recent reforms. The idea that universities are institutions that offer services to society, in both research and teaching, has indeed become widespread. This is further reinforced by the fact that in many European countries private universities have come to play a more dominant role than before, gaining a competitive advantage over public universities. As a result of stakeholder involvement, we can see decision-

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<sup>14</sup> This argument was put forward for example in the protests about the new university law in Spain. See a number of press articles on the subject: Short 2002, see also Special Dossier on Higher Education, El País, <http://www.elpais.es/temas/dossieres/leyuniversidad/index.html> (visited 26 August 2002)

making bodies in the university including members from society, criteria used in the accountability procedures for the universities embracing non-academic values, and decisions concerning academic staff no longer being based on purely academic criteria.

The third observation about the overall philosophy behind the changes would be a **shift of decision-making authority** from collective, often representative elected bodies with democratic decision-making procedures, to individual officers or smaller selected groups of individuals. Collegial management has thus been reduced considerably or at least changed fundamentally. There are still collegial bodies in many universities, but they no longer have decision-making power, and function mainly as consultative bodies. The intention is to increase the speed of decision-making, making it more of a professional activity, with a clear definition of responsibility with regard to decisions taken. Management is no longer seen as a part-time job that academics can do alongside their research and teaching duties, but as a full-time activity requiring special skills. In this context it is revealing to see how staff participation in decision making (introduced mainly in the 1970s and 1980s) has changed from an active to a rather limited consultative role. In many of the reformed systems, students still have an important voice, but they are seen less as members of the university who should have a voice, and more as consumers of educational services.

Finally, the way higher education is conceptualised and the terminology that dominates the general rhetoric of the **university** is clearly that of **an enterprise**. We speak about input/output relations, efficiency and improving university-industry relationships. Patent issues have become an important issue within universities, and the market-oriented production of knowledge and expertise plays a central role, along with customer relations. The models for running universities are increasingly shifting to the "managerial type" with an accompanying decline in the professional autonomy of individual academics. In order to be able to take decisions, large-scale information and assessment systems have been put in place, which have a tendency to further restrict the "freedom of movement" of the individual.

### **II.2.2. Restructuring Decision Making within the Universities**

Structural changes in decision-making now become central to our reflections and we will look first of all at the way in which this domain is regulated by law at the national level. Are uniform and detailed regulations laid down for all institutions of higher education, or is framework legislation provided, in which the detailed internal structures are left to be decided by individual institutions? The second aspect to be considered concerns the kinds of decision-making bodies that are set up in order to answer the different needs that are considered important. Thirdly, we will analyse how autonomy in decision making is linked to accountability structures. The overriding question to pose would then be whether in all the

observed varieties there are any dominant models of university management. What are the new roles played by the State in these changed settings?

First of all we should note that in all the countries which have been through major structural reform of the university system, **governments tend only to lay down the general legal framework** while the **internal structures and detailed mechanisms** of administration and consultation are left to be **decided by the universities**. This reflects a new understanding of autonomy in the sense that more responsibility is delegated to the individual institution for devising adequate internal mechanisms. This division of labour can be seen in parallel to what is happening with regard to university curricula. On the one hand the globalisation of the higher education system requires greater homogeneity of overall regulations, while on the other hand institutions need to develop specific profiles in order to be able to compete for the best students. The task of developing new internal structures is however rather complex as there is a fundamental need to break with existing decision-making logic, rituals and experience. Reform is therefore often judged as risky and difficult to implement as it can encounter resistance. This new freedom also brings tighter structures of accountability, and means that universities increasingly have to deal with difficulties such as unstable financing, staffing problems and fluctuations in student numbers. Moreover, in order to be able to make use of the possible space for autonomy, universities need to adapt much faster than ever before and develop a clear internal policy in order to protect their boundaries and interests effectively from intrusion by external bodies.

Although the reforms seem rather similar in structure, the degree of freedom given to the universities and the ways in which they are bound to the State (through mechanisms of accountability or contracts) are subject to wide variation and need a more refined reflection. At the same time it is important not to overlook the fact that due to various historical factors and political cultures, there can be huge differences between *de jure* regulations and their *de facto* meanings, and the way the State is entrusted with university affairs. Moreover, various countries have different starting positions for the reforms (problem definitions vary largely) and thus interpret and implement the changes in different ways.

What the systems have in common is the fact that internal regulations are generally devised by the highest internal university body, such as the university board or council. In most cases these are collegial bodies, where staff representation is assured. In virtually all cases students are also represented on these bodies and thus decisions can incorporate student views, particularly with regard to teaching issues. By leaving such important internal decisions to a board with staff participation, the acceptability of internal regulations can be expected to be much higher than if an individual officer were to decide on a particular issue.

In the Finnish case it is the University Board which develops university regulations, in Spain the University Assembly and in Hungary the University Council (all bodies assuring broad representation of staff and

students). In Italy and Greece this role is played by the Senate, a body consisting of the Rector, the Deans, the head of administration, elected members of staff and so on. In both systems internal decision making is still strongly based on the participatory idea. In the UK this power is with the University Council, a mix of internal and external expertise. In the Netherlands it is the Executive board (usually three members - the Rector included) that draws up internal regulations, which are then approved by the University Council. In France institutional autonomy is fairly limited and most important issues are regulated centrally.

Let us take the example of the UK, which has the longest tradition with regard to the autonomy of internal structural decisions, but which has also been critically analysed in terms of the consequences this kind of autonomy can have on higher education institutions. Each university is responsible for its own internal organisation, running its own administration and recruiting staff as it considers appropriate, as well as deciding on teaching methods, the level of tuition fees, degree programmes and admission procedures. Yet it is interesting to note that many universities come up with very similar looking internal structures. The management style can be characterised either as managerial or entrepreneurial according to the type of university. With regard to the relation of the university to the State, it is possible to identify a certain tendency towards what we called the "supermarket State". This means that the autonomy of the higher education institution can only be maintained through effective mechanisms of economic survival. In this sense the university and its autonomy are highly dependent on the capacity to attract money from many different sources, so we could call this market-driven autonomy. Moreover, the regulations laid down by the state regarding the criteria for the distribution of funding are so standardised that the notion of autonomy in a broad sense can certainly be questioned.

The second interesting aspect about recent changes is **the kinds of bodies that have powerful positions in the new governance structures**. We will see that, in many countries, bodies with stakeholder representation have obtained quite central and powerful positions. Important strategic academic decisions thus partly remain beyond the control of the peer group. Either strategic bodies have been created whose members are appointed by the government, or the government maintains the right to directly decide and intervene on issues deemed to be crucial.

In most of the national university systems under consideration there are cases in which representatives of society are brought into the advisory procedures of the institution. Yet there are important differences in whether institutions can decide themselves on the kind and the degree of this societal participation.

In the UK, although each individual university has considerable autonomy, the highest decision-making body, the Court or the Board of Governors, ultimately responsible for the affairs of the institution, comprises senior staff and a majority of independent members who are neither employees nor students of the institution. Thus external voices are

given considerable weight at this central level of decision making. Although with clear variations, this model is taken up in some of the other reforms we can observe.

The Netherlands and Spain represent the most far-reaching models in this sense, as in their new governance structures they have bodies consisting entirely of individuals from outside the university playing a significant role in strategic decisions affecting the university. Since 1997 in the Netherlands it has been the Minister who has appointed (after nomination by the university) the Supervisory Board, the highest body in the new university management structure. It has to approve all strategic policy documents and can therefore stop any substantial change. The Supervisory Board appoints (and can dismiss) the Executive Board which lays down internal regulations, develops strategic teaching and research policy and is responsible for day-to-day administration. The Executive Board in turn appoints the Deans or faculty boards responsible for the organisation of research and teaching, as well as teaching and examination regulations. In the case of Spain the budget and the programme of universities have to be approved by the Social Council, which is a powerful body at the level of the autonomous regions.<sup>15</sup> Three members of this Social Council also sit on the University Assembly and it is thus directly represented in the university. Under the new legislation the university is governed by the rector and the governing board, with the University Assembly representing the staff. Below that, at faculty level, the Dean is the leading figure and finally there are the Directors of Departments.

A possibility for including external expertise into university boards is foreseen in the case of Finland, Italy, France and Hungary. In the case of Finland the university can opt to include external expertise on the university board but is by no means obliged to do so. With regard to the interests of society at large, it has the autonomy to found own advisory bodies. The Administrative Board of Italian universities can include members from outside the university (local or regional authorities, chamber of commerce, etc.), and this matter is regulated by the university statutes. The French system also provides for external expertise on all three councils (for research, administration and teaching issues). In the case of Hungary, permanently invited members of the University Council may come from the Council of Public Employees, representative trade unions, and ministries as well as other organisations interested in educational policy. Also within collegial bodies there may be representatives from outside the university, whereas individual officers must be members of the teaching or scientific staff.

Finally, Greece remains something of an exception as there is no provision for external members on university decision-making bodies.

The third important aspect of decision-making increasingly appearing in reforms in different countries is the idea of **management by**

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<sup>15</sup> This reform led to massive protests by students and university staff. One of the main criticisms was directed at the fact that the debate is about autonomy while all the crucial issues are regulated by the State, the law or external bodies.

**results.** This means that the State does not exert direct detailed decision-making power, but controls previously agreed output - both in research and teaching. In order to be able to do so, more or less detailed contracts are drawn up and in some cases formulae are developed on the basis of which funds are allocated. In this context it is also significant that government funding is only part of the university's income, with student fees and other income playing an increasingly important role.

It may be said that across the eight countries taken into consideration we find a broad spectrum of different ways of managing this area of the government/university relationship. At one end of the spectrum, as in the case of Greece, State funding for the university is the main income and complex, lengthy and detailed annual negotiations about university budgets take place. At the other end of the spectrum, we find countries like the UK, where government funding is only part of the universities' income, and relatively high tuition fees and other third-party income are an important part of the budget. In the UK, public funding is determined by "a formula taking into account the particular circumstances of the institutions, like the size and composition of the student body, the subjects taught and the amount and quality of research". (Eurydice 2000, 496) In between these two extremes we find a variety of national models.

There is an overall tendency for planning periods to get longer, extending over three or four years, with annual renegotiations. Universities therefore have increasingly to define policies for future development; thus, internal consultation and decision-making on medium-term objectives become crucial. Through this process of setting up medium-term agreements with governments, visions for the future of universities take shape; as a result, these agreements should be seen not only in pragmatic terms but also as an important area in which the degree of autonomy of universities to shape their own future is negotiated.

Let us consider some examples on the spectrum between the UK and Greece. An interesting case is the Finnish solution, where stronger target orientation has been introduced as the main strategic instrument in recent reforms, while higher education has remained free of tuition fees. This means that, after negotiations with each university, the Ministry draws up so-called "result contracts" for a period of about three years with annual adjustments. A number of performance criteria (National Evaluation Council for Higher Education, 1996) assure relatively tight control from outside, and a certain amount of funding is allocated through a clearly defined formula. In the Dutch case we find a similar model. Universities receive lump-sum budgets after negotiations, based on structural indicators on the basis of which funding is distributed among higher education institutions.

While such a model-based distribution of public money has the advantage of greater transparency, one should not overlook the tendency of higher education institutions to adapt once the criteria have been laid down. In order to maximise funding they may neglect other possible pathways of development, which would be more innovative and rewarding for both the university and society. In this sense, even if there is an initial agreement

between the government and the universities on the formula and indicators to be used for distributing part of public funding, it is important to understand their power in shaping the autonomous space of universities.

The fourth and final aspect of the new decision-making arrangements to be considered concerns **the procedures "measuring" the quality of universities' work and the role they play in the future development of universities**. While granting more space to universities for shaping decision-making structures and handing over part of the responsibility to these institutions, governments have also put in place national structures of quality assessment and control. Therefore the discussion about the quality of the universities' "output" and the weight this should be given in policy making both inside and outside the university has become central to change. Several aspects of quality measurement are of interest for our discussion. First, one can see quality assurance mechanisms as a means by which policy expectations in the university become visible, whereas these values and criteria would otherwise remain implicit. Through the criteria used, the indicators developed and the different weighting of various aspects of university work, an ideal picture emerges which can exert a powerful influence on higher education institutions. Second, in asking who is involved in putting in place quality assurance mechanisms, and who takes part in defining the basic criteria for evaluation, we can learn something about stakeholders, their role and the extent of their power in the new universities. Third, the time scales for these evaluations give us a picture of basic societal ideas on the functioning of innovation and reproduction processes within universities. The shorter the evaluation cycles, and the less evaluation is seen as part of a process, the more superficial the items to be evaluated will become, resulting in extreme cases in a kind of intellectual book-keeping exercise (number of students, papers, third-party funding, etc.). Fourth, the more weight is put on evaluation as a process of negotiation where initial results play the role of a central input to be debated, the more such instruments might in fact lead to the creative improvement of higher education. Finally, defining the criteria which should be monitored and the balance between them produces a kind of ideal profile for staff and their output in higher education.

In virtually all the national contexts investigated, though in rather different forms, national evaluation agencies have been established to perform this task. Along with the restructuring of research and teaching, the evaluation of academic output has, in a way, become a profession in its own right. (House 1993, Felt 1999) These agencies are involved both in the assessment of a person's qualifications and of structural features. They become powerful players in reshaping the universities, while maintaining a rather remote position of "objective" quality measurement.

The British system is by far the oldest, and offers the most direct coupling with the allocation of funds by the government. For this purpose regular Research Assessment Exercises are carried out, with a system of marks which in turn are entered into the formula for calculating financial support. Such rigid coupling mechanisms, however, do not reflect the



complexity of the tasks universities have to fulfil and leave little space for creative development.

In this sense, the Dutch solution is perhaps the most elaborate one, all the more so as it leaves space for necessary negotiations. In the Netherlands it is not a government agency that is in charge of the evaluation, but the VSNU (an umbrella organisation comprised of all Dutch universities) which lays down standards, methods and criteria, and carries out the evaluation process. In this system of quality assurance, which relies heavily on qualitative methods and peer-review procedures, evaluation is seen much more as a process and is in a way carried out by the universities themselves. The government takes on the role of a kind of observer of the process at a meta-level, making sure that the results of the evaluations are taken into consideration when planning change in universities. The evaluations consider a set of different perspectives on the work of higher education institutions, embracing the notion of quality in the traditional view based on internal criteria, the relevance of the knowledge produced in the sense of uptake and distribution of knowledge, input/output relations, as well as the compatibility of the organisation's work with its self-defined aims. There is no strict coupling of the results to funding, though they nevertheless play a central role.

France also has a National Evaluation Committee, set up in 1985, with the task of independently evaluating higher education institutions, though, so far, there is little evidence that the outcomes have had any impact on funding mechanisms.

In Finland the reforms of the late 1990s included the setting up of a Council for Higher Education Evaluation. In the Finnish case, unlike the British example, there is no direct coupling between the outcome of the evaluation exercise and the allocation of government funding. It is seen rather as a tool for fostering systematic improvement and as a basis for negotiations.

In Italy an Observatory for the Evaluation of the University System was set up in 1996, with the task of carrying out a comprehensive evaluation of higher education institutions. It is planned in the medium-term to use these evaluations as a tool for the redistribution of funding and to set incentives, but so far little progress has been made in this direction.

The last example for the establishment of such national evaluation bodies is the reform in Spain. Here a National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency has been established, collaborating closely with the national co-ordination council which is an important player in the distribution of resources.

These evaluation procedures have become the area where new value systems are implemented and where the national governments can express their ideals. Autonomy of the universities therefore also has to be questioned under these conditions. If the criteria for evaluation are mainly defined by governments and funds are distributed accordingly, then this is a most powerful tool for exerting influence without needing to take responsibility for the decisions taken.

### **II.2.3. Relations between the University, Politics and Society: The Changing Meaning of Autonomy**

Looking back at the many different reforms that have taken place in relation to decision-making structures in the eight countries in recent years, it is important to stress once more the fundamental changes that occurred in relations between the university, politics and society. While the State is partly withdrawing from the terrain of higher education, there is a need to analyse how far politics or other societal forces (via different forms of representation) nevertheless exert a direct or indirect influence on decision making and university development. In this connection four more general observations seem relevant.

First, State intervention takes place in a much more indirect way than in the past and therefore needs much closer investigation in order to make the potential consequences visible. The way funding is allocated, the kind of accountability required, the role played by alternative funding sources, the dependence of research in universities on the number of students, and many other features have to be considered in decision-making procedures. Thus processes become more complex than they were before, more and different actors have to be taken into consideration, and the levels of interaction between university, politics and society become more closely intertwined.

Second, one can observe that while States often used to interfere down to the micro-level of decision taking in the universities, in the reformed systems intervention is often only possible at the macro-level. This means that influence can be exerted through budgeting, contracts between the State and universities and other kinds of agreements, though only in a rather indirect way. This is a rather invidious position for universities, as they are living on a boundary and have to take decisions for which the entire responsibility falls on them.

Third, we have seen that even if there is a consensus on stakeholder participation, the models have taken rather different forms. While in some national contexts they play the role of consultants, in others they have important control and even decision-making functions.

Finally, quality assessment and control mechanisms are often used by external actors to exert indirect control. By getting involved in defining criteria as well as by setting up national evaluation agencies, politicians and stakeholders can bring in their expectations and values in a much more stable and continuous way. Thus the central area of quality control, which was always seen as the terrain defining a profession's values, is now inhabited by a broader variety of actors influencing both the production of knowledge and its dissemination throughout society.

### **II. 3. Human Resources Management: Relations between Individual Aspirations, External Expectations and Institutional Targets**

Having analysed some of the similarities and differences between national university systems with regard to decision-making structures on the basis of recent reforms, we now shift our attention to the matter of staff structures. Over the next decade, in virtually all the European university systems that underwent rapid expansion in the 1970s and 1980s, we will witness a wave of renewal due to the large proportion of staff reaching retirement age. This has twofold consequences: on the one hand the phenomenon of the "ageing of the profession" linked to the high degree of tenured positions has left younger academics for a long time with little chance of moving to stable positions at a senior level. On the other hand, due to this huge turnover the government reform of the role and working conditions of academic staff will have a greater impact on the profession than ever before. As much of the resistance to change in universities has come from existing staff and the values they embody, such a fundamental shift will allow for a much more radical repositioning of the university as a whole in contemporary society. In this sense one can see coming changes in human resources management as a central element in the reform taken as a whole, but and also with regard to university autonomy in particular.

How will these "new universities" be staffed and what are the qualities the newly recruited teachers and researchers will need to have? Will continuity of staff and thus longer-term contracts still be dominant, or will the idea of the flexible university get stronger? What will the planned move of personnel across Europe and beyond mean for the different local/national settings? What effect will these new boundary conditions have on the choice of areas of research and for scientific and technological innovation in general? Will increasing external pressures on staff and time-constraints result in the kind of research questions asked being reduced in order to deal with the risks relating to research evaluation? And what will it mean for teaching if the level of "student-output" and the market-value attributed to academic activities become important criteria for quality assessment? Can we continue to speak in this sense of individual autonomy and freedom of research and teaching, or do we have to reconsider these ideals so highly valued in academia? What will relations look like between the new academic staff and stakeholders, and what impact will all this have on knowledge production? These are but a few of the key questions arising from changes in the domain of personnel, or to use the more recent formulation, of human resources management. Only some of them can be dealt with in the following section.

Staff issues in higher education must be addressed at different levels, as outlined in the first part of this paper. While decision-making touches upon the whole structure of the institution, human resources policy is much more closely related to the preoccupations of the individual researcher. In this area the tensions between individual and institutional autonomy are thus rather high, and questioning the importance given in the management of universities to issues like individual creativity, academic freedom and

personal commitment has become vital for academics. In short the central point to ask is how the recent reforms provide a link between broad institutional interests and individual perspectives, while at the same time responding to the expectations of society.

These issues relating to academic staff draw our attention to the growing importance of human capital ideology in at least two ways. The first point concerns the "output" of universities in the form of students. In an information society it may be assumed that expanding human capital serves societies, firms and individuals. However, as has been clearly pointed out, this has a number of consequences for higher education. Universities are not regarded as "self-reproducing" institutions any more, but are expected to play the role of "agencies of transition" between the academic world and labour market. However, education has itself become a form of risk capital as "the social status of the credentials provided by universities has steadily become more problematic. (...) the ticket obtained on leaving university is no longer for a life journey." (Kivinen & Ahola 1999, 196) In that sense the role and value attributed to university education is haunted by uncertainties which are reflected in the terms of the public debate. The second point is that human capital ideology becomes visible at the level of university staff. There is a clear shift in policy focus away from the individual academic worker and his/her individual possibilities of development to the aims and efficiency of the institution.

The key words structuring the debate have become flexibility (which means moving away from tenured contracts to fixed-term contracts), mobility (which means the movement of teaching and research staff through the global networks of universities), entrepreneurial spirit (which means closer interaction with potential users of scientific knowledge), transdisciplinarity (which means the capacity to tackle complex problems crossing different disciplinary territories), and finally efficiency (which means optimal use of resources leading to high institutional output).

In the following section, we will analyse the personnel structure and the degree of autonomy given to the university from three perspectives. As a first step we will focus on the shifts in the more general vision of and rhetoric on the role of "the new academic staff". This seems important as it proves complex and lengthy to implement changes in staff policy, as most people working in the universities hold medium- or long-term contracts – thus postponing effectively any change to the next generation. Drawing attention to the way we talk about the handling of staff issues and the expectations that are formulated will allow us to examine the ways in which universities are likely to change in the future. Then, the second step will be to look at changes in career structures and selection mechanisms in some countries. Here we will be able not only to discover significant differences between the legal situation in the different countries, but also between the *de jure* and the *de facto* handling of these issues. Particularly at this level national traditions and historical developments come to play a crucial role. What importance is given to hierarchical structures? How are control mechanisms implemented? How much space is given to individuals

in the institutional setting? What are the classic career structures that have been in place so far? And finally, who decides and according to what criteria whether or not a person will be able to start a university career or remain on a career track? These are but some of the central questions to be asked. The third part of this section will then be devoted to some observations about the shift from what used to be seen as "staff administration" to "human resources management. "

### II.3.1. A Shift in the General Vision of Academic Staff

While it is revealing to look at the new legal frameworks for academic staff in universities and the career structures foreseen, it is even more interesting to question the underlying general vision concerning academic staff. What kind of people are to be members of staff in the universities of the future? Will the employment structure be more diversified than now in order to respond to the rapidly changing environment and to demands from stakeholders? Or will there be less differentiation in the overall categories while flexibility will be assured through short- and medium-term contracts? Are the categories of scientific/educational staff laid down at the national level or are they left to the needs of the individual university? How much freedom exists for each university to define employment conditions? Are the latter regulated and protected at the national level? Will research and teaching, on the basis of the Humboldt's ideal prevailing today still, continue to be embodied in one and the same person? What are the qualities the "new higher education staff" should have and how do they compare to the expectations – implicit or explicit – that were present when the majority of the senior staff now in place were hired?

We will group our observations around six topics.

The first and maybe clearest change concerns the debate about the **balance between permanent and non-permanent positions** within the university. While tenured positions were seen for a long time as **the** way to assure the academic freedom of the individual, there is no longer any consensus on this issue in the countries studied here. Many countries play with the idea of somehow shifting away from professors being civil servants and also from offering them tenured contracts. This is the outcome of a number of changes that appeared progressively in the different national contexts. The first step was to hand over decisions on the staff to be employed to the universities with a view to reducing government interference. While this was greeted quite positively by the universities, it quickly became clear that it also meant that the increasing financial pressure was transferred to them. The State could freeze budgets or increase them in an inadequate way, with the result that staff costs became a heavy burden for the institutions. The answer was a call for more short-term, less stable and more task-oriented employment in order to minimise

institutional risk, a point which we will touch upon later. This, however, put universities in quite a contradictory situation. On the one hand, institutions have to develop policies in order to survive on the higher education market while having a high percentage of tenured positions that fosters little flexibility in terms of management. On the other hand, being competitive on the higher education market requires staff commitment and therefore a degree of stability.<sup>16</sup> Even though universities are increasingly aware of this delicate balance between flexibility and stability, it is evident that continuous and satisfying employment conditions as well as regular academic careers have become less common for a growing number of staff within the universities.

The rapid growth of the higher education sector led not only to a considerable expansion of the number of staff, but also to a **functional differentiation within the profession**. While, before the mass expansion of higher education, professors were the dominant group of academic workers, in recent decades an increasing number of new temporary academic positions have been created. In fact, as some analysts point out, the staff structure is now more or less dominated in number by middle-ranking non-professorial staff. But this also means that a central part of the university's workload both in research and teaching is now carried out by academics in unstable and often financially precarious positions. This has given rise to serious criticisms in recent years. (e.g. the case of Spain, Abbott 1998) In virtually all countries doctoral and post-doctoral positions have been created or the number of such positions has been increased. Indeed, it is considered to be of strategic importance to keep talented young scientists in the institution and to offer them research opportunities. In several analyses, however, we come across the problem that short-term temporary working contracts and rather low pay make it increasingly difficult to retain good researchers. This is particularly true for those areas where excellent employment conditions are to be found outside academia. Thus a future challenge will be to consider also the surrounding labour markets when defining university contracts. (Farnheim 1999)

These changes in the staff structure have been accompanied by a shift in power relations within the universities. The new staff categories have made their voices heard through institutional channels and this has resulted in some loss of power on the part of the professors. This explains the sometimes hot and emotional debates in some countries about which ranks in the university hierarchy should get access to decision-making bodies or to positions of leadership.

The mass expansion of higher education, but also the functional differentiation of university staff, have had consequences for the basic idea of combining **research and teaching in one person**, which was gradually seen as **less central**. The rapid increase in the number of students has led institutions in some countries to create positions with mainly teaching

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<sup>16</sup> Enders (1997, 19) argues very convincingly from the data in his study that "the commitment to the institution varies significantly by rank reflecting scholars' status in the hierarchy of positions, their seniority within the institution as well as the nature of their employment."

duties. While this seemed to be an ideal solution for the institution in response to external change, those who occupied the posts do not seem to share this positive vision on a long-term basis. What happens after a while is what Martin Trow calls "academic drift". This means that academics occupying these positions are not satisfied with their job situation and gradually try to get their status shifted towards more research duties. This is a good example of how implicit value systems become functional. While on the rhetorical level teaching is declared as being central to the university, in the real world of quality assurance mechanisms and employment the teaching record is often of secondary importance. Moreover, it is interesting to note that in some countries the creation of standardised teaching packages is under consideration and this might in the long term lead to the idea that the individual teacher can be replaced (at least at the undergraduate level) and it might also undermine the idea of freedom of teaching in rather subtle ways, making positions with heavy teaching loads even less attractive.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most central shift can be observed in the move from the rhetoric in the 1970s, where the quality of the individual researcher, his or her creativity and development possibilities and the maximisation of participation were put very much to the fore, to contemporary policy documents which speak much more of **human capital**, a concept that clearly focuses on the overall aspect of staff development and much less on the role of the individual researcher. This squares with the more general observation that institutions and their aims as well as institutional autonomy are at the core of the reforms. Individual researchers and teachers are conceptualised mainly as contributors to this aim, and less thought is given to individual autonomy or freedom of research, which continue to exist only at a rhetorical level. Overall it may be said that there is a shift away from giving the individual researcher and his or her working conditions a central place in staff considerations and human resource concepts. This means a move to more structural considerations and it may be said that a certain "disembodiment of intellectual capacities" is taking place. Creative capacity and innovation are conceptualised less in terms of the individual researcher, though he or she still plays an important role, and more as an overall skill to be developed across the whole category of staff. These policies are in clear contradiction with the mechanisms functioning within the academic profession, which still clearly focus on rewarding individual intellectual contributions, though teamwork is becoming increasingly important at all levels.

Not only has the handling of staff issues been reformed, but also **researchers** themselves and the **capacities** they need to provide have changed in recent years. While individual research records still play a central role in the choice of staff, new criteria are also applied. Acceptance of a certain degree of mobility within the curriculum, flexibility with regard to different work environments, the capacity to collaborate across different

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<sup>17</sup> The fact that distance and e-learning have become central policy issues and have been heavily promoted in recent years has led and will continue to lead to standardisation in teaching and learning.

institutional settings (between university and industry), the experience and readiness to take over management tasks (acquiring project money, handling large-scale contracts, leading larger research groups etc.) have become important qualities for a researcher. It is no longer the solitary genius that is the dominant stereotype in this domain, but much more the managing scientist and gifted communicator.

Finally, and maybe underlying all these aspects, there is a shift in the **power given to non-professorial staff in decision making over academic staff**. So far, the norms of the profession (which were often seen as discipline-based) as well as staff selection have in most settings been left to the most senior staff, thus making them responsible for the renewal of their own academic field. In recent reforms, much more power is given to university management to recruit staff and to decide the contract's precise terms. Concern has been expressed in some analyses of recent changes that staff decisions might in future be taken by individuals without sufficient experience and background in teaching and research, resulting in a decline in the quality of working conditions.

### **II.3.2. Staff Structures, Career Models and Selection Mechanisms**

In this section, staff policy measures, the career models now being developed and the resulting selection mechanisms are to be investigated. Is there any policy regarding the structural composition of staff and the relation between permanent and non-permanent positions? What is the balance between staff flexibility and stability of employment? Are these issues regulated within the autonomous space of the university or are they settled at governmental level? Who decides about employment conditions, promotion and staff quality assessment, and who lays down the criteria applied?

To start with, it is interesting to note that although the rhetoric concerning the need to reform academic staff structures seems fairly homogeneous, the national **models of staff categories** show clear variations. While some countries have a limited number of permanent positions and dedicate less effort to regulating non-permanent employment, others develop fine-tuned grids for all possible employment categories. Moreover, an ever-increasing number of academics are to be found on short-term contracts, not only in the framework of research projects but also for specific teaching tasks. In addition, the permeability between the different levels of positions varies greatly. Flexibility in staff employment conditions as well as in promotion has an important influence on the way universities exert their autonomous status and manage to attract outstanding researchers and teachers.

The variations between the national settings investigated in this paper might be explained by their respective university histories, by the degree of flexibility in and between the staff categories, as well as by the culture of union representation. In general there is a need to differentiate



between regular teaching staff (such as different kinds of professors or lecturers), visiting staff, assistant teaching staff (junior positions) and special teaching staff (such as language instructors). In the group of regular teaching staff there is a clear divide between countries which still use tenured contracts and those which have abandoned tenure. It is also important to consider the career flexibility existing between the different levels in the main teaching categories. While in some countries there are career pathways which allow academics to move upwards in the academic hierarchy due to the excellent quality of their contribution to research and teaching, in other countries there are significant barriers between the different categories, which block very different task profiles and hierarchical positions.

The **general framework of employment** in a specific category is still as a rule laid down at the national level. In those countries where no major structural reforms of staff structures have been carried out, there is a centrally organised allocation of academic posts and definition of working conditions and pay. Thus a considerable degree of influence over the universities is left to the government. This is even more important as salaries are a major part of the universities' budget and therefore crucial for the institutions' flexibility. This is for example the case of France or Greece, where the Ministry allocates and controls the number of positions and precise employment conditions. However, in countries which have recently implemented more radical reforms in the staff sector, like the UK or the Netherlands, individual contracts come to play an important role. They have to comply with the basic rules of employment laid down by the government, but can contain a number of job-specific elements. While this increases the institutions' flexibility and the chances of attracting the best people to the universities and gives rise to competition for highly qualified staff, it can also lead to significant differences in job satisfaction and consequently give rise to new forms of tension within the institution.

Both staff categories and employment conditions point to what is perhaps the central element of debate in many countries, namely the **relation between permanent and non-permanent staff** as well as the status of university staff (civil servants or not). Here we can discern a trend away from tenured positions and from university professors being civil servants, but only a few countries have radically subscribed to this model so far. In most countries the State remains a central player in laying down the basic rules of employment as well as employment categories; in some cases, it even decides on the balance between staff categories. In general there is a clear move away from direct influence by the government in the countries where there have been major reforms, though important State influence remains through budgets and contract regulations. Universities are forced to find a balance between highly qualified staff with stable working conditions and a high level of job satisfaction, and a more flexible workforce on short-term contracts often linked to lower pay. In this sense the possibility of autonomous decision making on staff matters is clearly limited by external financial and structural constraints.

In the group of countries where there has been little or no overall structural reform of the university system in recent years – France, Italy and Greece – there are still almost ideal conditions for the staff. France has in the main teaching staff category two kinds of positions: *maître de conférence* (assistant/associate professor) and full professors. While both positions are civil servants, the latter holds a tenured position immediately upon employment while the former has a one- or two-year trial period before becoming tenured. Thus, as one analyst underlined, you have no right to make a mistake in personnel policy in the French system. This means that more than 90% of this staff category is tenured and there is a severe ageing problem among the permanent staff. (Chevaillier 2001)

Italian universities are quite similar to the French system as there are two kinds of main teaching positions: the full professor (with a preliminary three years as extraordinary professor) and the associate professor. Both are State employees and hold permanent positions. The post of contract professor may be held for a period of up to six years.

The main teaching staff in the Greek system are employed at four levels: full professor, associate and assistant professors and lecturers. While the first two groups are elected in tenured positions, assistant professors can try to obtain tenure through promotion while there are only temporary contracts for the position of the lecturers.

In Hungary there are two kinds of permanent positions available in the university: the university professor and the university reader. While the former are still appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic, all other permanent and non-permanent teaching staff (university reader, lecturer and assistant lecturer) are appointed and dismissed by the rector.

The Finnish system still has more than 80% of permanent positions. Professors and associate professors (the formal difference was abolished in 1998) account for some 27% of staff, senior assistants and assistants represent 32% and lecturers 25%. Unions play a major role in negotiating employment contracts and salaries in the Finnish system. However, only the basic conditions are fixed and each individual academic can negotiate specific conditions of contract and pay.

With regard to staff employment strategies, Spain holds a middle-ground position as it aims to legally define an upper limit of 51% for the number of academic staff who can be civil servants. This means that nearly half of all posts can now be temporary and these staff are appointed for a specific purpose. In this sense the new law has brought radical change to staffing structures.

An excellent example of yet another solution to the question of tenure versus non-tenure is to be found in the Netherlands. Tenure in the Dutch system does not apply to a person, but to a specific position. When there is no need for this position any more, the academic does not lose his or her job. Although provided for by law, the number of staff on non-tenured positions is extremely low and in fact dismissing staff has proved to be rather difficult. With the reforms of the 1990s, flexibility was introduced into human resources, meaning the liberalisation of rules for recruitment, local pay bargaining, institutional salary scales, etc. This also

increased the possibility of employing academic staff on temporary contracts. In former times there was an automatic promotion procedure from one grade to the next, which led to an excessive number of professors, a fact which was seen as a problem for the overall balance of the system. Some universities have drawn up special human resources management plans in order to meet their needs (personal and variable contracts are offered), though always with the Ministry of Education as a participant in negotiations on pay and conditions of employment.

The Dutch reform in 1992 was crucial in this respect as, from then on, institutions were legally able to determine at a local level some of the employment conditions for academic and non-academic staff, with the exception of certain defined matters which still came from the Ministry (like standard working hours, social security issues, job evaluation and salary scales). This was an important step towards decentralisation, the next stage being the Minister's decision to replace government regulation by an institutional framework in which universities negotiate with trade unions on salaries and conditions of service. (de Weert 2001)

The British system is among all European systems investigated here the most radical one with regard to staff policy. Academic tenure was abandoned as early as 1988 and since then full-time academic staff have had permanent contracts. Within the different categories of academic staff, promotion is always preceded by a positive evaluation. To become a professor, you have to apply for a post (it can be either a personal chair or a chair open on a competitive basis). All personnel issues are regulated within the university. However, many of the studies about academic staff in British higher education show the growing pressure felt by the individual to comply with the institution's objectives, a tendency closely linked to highly standardised evaluation and funding procedures.

While these examples show quite important differences between academic working conditions among different European countries, there seems nevertheless to be one common trend observable, namely the **increasing creation of new short-term positions, in particular for doctoral students or those at post-doctoral level**. This is linked to a number of factors. First, due to the age structure of the academic workforce and the fact that most positions filled in the 1970s and 1980s were tenured, there is little chance of an academic career for young and gifted scholars. Universities all over Europe have dealt with this problem by creating temporary positions for this workforce in order not to lose them after their university education. Second, there is an increasing need for a more flexible staff structure in order to respond to the different requirements of students. Having a rather large group of contractual positions is seen as a way of responding to such needs. Third, some of these part-time temporary positions are taken up by people who have a job outside the university, but are integrated into the university curricula in order to bring more on-the-job training perspectives into higher education. As this is seen as an important asset for new curricula, the hiring of external experts has been tested in most European countries. Finally, these short-term contract staff are

generally paid far less than permanent staff and are often given a heavy workload in order to keep within spending limits.

Two examples can be given of the kinds of problems the short-term employment of young researchers can create. Debate was particularly intense in the case of Spain, where the deplorable working conditions for short-term contracted post-doctoral researchers was documented by the international journal *Nature* in 1997/8 (Abbott 1998). While an attempt was made to attract qualified young people back to Spain, it was not possible to offer them decent working conditions and they started to get organised in order to fight these conditions of exploitation. Similar problems are also debated in the case of France (Fréville 2001), where most of the main teaching staff are tenured, while an increasing number of young researchers on short-term contracts carry out a significant part of the institution's tasks, but are badly paid and hold temporary positions. In the history of French universities such a situation had already given rise to severe conflict between contract staff and the Ministry leading to the "incorporation" of hundreds of such long-term contract workers: this meant giving them tenure. However, such a move did not solve the problem and new temporary contracts were created, with a maximum time length in order to avoid any legal disputes.

A third issue that seems central when investigating the question of university autonomy with regard to **academic staff** is the **selection procedures** that are put in place. It is through them that the State in some cases still tries to keep a significant degree of control and influence over the universities. Models vary also in this case due to different traditions in government-university relations.

From the eight countries under consideration, only for the UK and the Netherlands can it be said that there is no influence on personnel decisions on the part of the government.

France and Italy are two interesting cases in this regard. In the French system there are commissions at the national level for each discipline which carry out an initial selection of candidates for posts in a particular field, either for an assistant professorship or a full professorship. This means that both disciplinary control and centralised power is exerted and in this way the pool of potential candidates is defined. Italian universities also used this system as a means to "counterbalance" the increased autonomy given to individual universities. In the 1990s this caused a dispute between the supporters of decentralisation and university autonomy, and those who wanted to assure government control. The 1998 law proposed some kind of compromise between the two positions. On the one hand, it abolished the qualifying examinations and the list of nationally qualified candidates. On the other hand, the universities cannot take decisions over staff autonomously, but have to delegate the task to a national commission that pre-selects a list of three candidates. (Moscati 2001, 123)

Also in the case of the Spanish reform, the stated autonomy of the universities in staff decisions is somewhat weakened by the State having

increased control, for example through the fact that anybody wanting to teach at a university must pass an exam in order to receive a "national habilitation", which is under national control. (Godfrey 2002)

In Finland, there is a clear trend towards deregulation in the personnel sector and the selection of staff is entirely in the hands of the university. The university can set up new positions and abolish old ones, and fixed-term appointments for academic staff have become more common. In general these new regulations are closely linked to evaluation procedures and the measurement of input and output. For professors, the faculty board establishes the post, external referees make a selection from the candidates, then the faculty board decides on the candidate, together with the rector. For other staff, it is also the faculty board which decides.

In the case of Greece the university has full autonomy to select candidates for posts and to decide on the areas these posts will be allocated to, though the Ministry can still decide on the number of posts to be given to a university and control the economic and legal aspects of the selection and appointment process. In Hungary the situation is somewhat similar. The council, together with the rector, decides on the appointment of academic staff. Professors only are appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic.

### **II.3.3. From Staff Administration to Human Resources Management: Some Indicators for Change**

When looking at the debates about university reform in many European countries, it is interesting to see how personnel management is addressed. As noted in the introduction to this section, there is a clear shift away from "taking care of the personnel" within an institution, towards managing "human resources".

Thus we would like to formulate the hypothesis that the human resource concept is the most fundamental force for change with regard to the new universities. How is that linked to the question of an institution's autonomy? And what are the structural answers an institution has to find to counter the difficulties linked to this?

First of all in many of recently reformed university structures, special commissions or offices for staff development have been or are to be set up. With an environment changing at ever faster speed and expressing ever clearer its demands towards the university, the staff – in particular those holding permanent positions – need to be committed to continuous learning and repositioning processes. In this sense the motto of lifelong learning does not only hold for the members of society but is increasingly present also in the thinking of university management.

Second, it is important that in most countries the university is now no longer perceived as a place for highly qualified individual researchers and teachers to carry out their work, but as an organisation that has to provide certain services to society (education, knowledge production, expertise etc.). In this sense specific policies have to be developed inside the

university in order to live up to these expectations and thus to assure its long-term survival. As a result, but also on the basis of a high degree of autonomy, institutions have introduced quality monitoring and quality assurance schemes.

Both these points lead to the fact that staff are increasingly treated in a more collective way than before, and the idea of being “replaceable” has become an important part of thinking in relation to the development of academic potential. This is in a way the reverse side of the flexibility argument. From the point of view of autonomy, this means that there is a clear shift away from an individual formulation of autonomy towards institutional flexibility.

The fourth and final observation concerns a clearer separation between those who have high-ranking management positions and those who hold senior academic posts. In many cases management positions are no longer linked to the fact of being a recognised academic. This has on the one hand the consequence that people with specific management skills are starting to play an important role in the new entrepreneurial and service-oriented universities. On the other hand, it means that higher education and research issues are subject to the influence of people who have never been involved in such activities themselves. This brings with it the danger of underestimating the needs of the academic workforce and overlooking the fundamental conditions for innovative academic work.

## **Concluding Remarks**

By way of conclusion four points should be made. First, it is important to understand change in the university system as a process characterised by a polarity of forces that are at work. On the one hand there is an increasingly strong push for the homogenisation of the overall structure of higher education - in particular if one wants to foster mobility and exchanges across Europe. It is not only a question of formal contracts and procedures, but also of informal exchange and network building, that results in more and more university members migrating across national boundaries. The identification of “good practice” and its transfer still seem a guiding principle in the science policy arena. This explains why specific solutions in one area can become model solutions in others.

On the other hand, a globalised higher education network is perceived important to develop individual profiles and to adapt their decision-making mechanisms, value systems and management procedures to this specific identity. They have to fit a cultural context, dovetail various experiences and different relational networks, and this must make sense to the staff of the institution. From this point of view, autonomy also means increased insecurity and responsibility, two sides of development which staff with leadership functions will have to cope with. When stressing the need for tailored solutions, there is no doubt that learning from other experiences is central, but elements that function in one specific system will not necessarily do so in another context. Managing a university within

the limits of the given autonomy will mean finding the most suitable way to maximise freedom of movement, both for the institution and the individuals who work in it. Universities as institutions will have to learn to manage the tension between homogenisation and differentiation.

Second, while there is definitely an increase in autonomy at certain levels, we should also see the counterpart to this. The ideological foundation of the university has undergone major changes and it is not clear on what basis these changes are to be justified. Let me use the metaphor of a pendulum. After the "democratic euphoria" of the 1970s, when science and the university as an institution were seen as a democratic arena in which decisions had to be taken on a common basis, the pendulum is now swinging far in the other direction. The time scales on which scientific work is judged are becoming shorter and shorter, more and more research is tied to specific contracts, and fewer institutions are willing to risk investing in unknown territory. Intellectual creativity needs time, freedom of movement and the feeling that risk-taking is accepted in the institutional setting. If we construct universities as autonomous institutions, the aim should not only be to bring in as much and as diversified funding as possible - and to spend time on related contracts only - but also to search actively for a balance between these activities and more long-term strategic developments. The delicate balance between autonomy, freedom of research, and individual aspirations to do research is at stake. The university will thus have to learn to create niches in its own institutional space which allow for both quality of work and creativity, and it will need to take these risks and feel accountable for such choices.

Third, there seems to be a growing belief that giving more autonomy to the university has to be accompanied by rather sophisticated procedures of accountability. While one could surely agree on such a connection, current models tend to become too technocratic in some countries. To assure control of the input/output ratio, much emphasis is put on making measurable work which is difficult to modulate in a quantitative way. While the British experience should have taught us all about the drawbacks of over-simplistic managerial mechanisms, the newly reformed systems seem tempted still to introduce such models of accountability in order to minimise risk, at least in formal terms. In this way we might fall into the trap of not grasping the fascinating and bewildering variety of innovation and knowledge production present in these institutions, while being able to account for mediocre but regular output. Thus, when thinking about procedures and methods of evaluation and accountability, the following quote might be of some help for reflection: "Methodology is important, but is no substitute for content. There is no guaranteed methodological path to the promised land. There is nothing mystical nor transformative about methods of any kind. You can kiss a frog if you want, hoping it will turn into a handsome prince, but when you open your eyes, you will find you are kissing a frog."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Newsletter of the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Austria, 2/1993

Finally, changes in personnel management show the limits of a free-market system for institutions such as universities. In many countries in Europe, the number of students has fallen in some of the central scientific disciplines such as physics. Worried voices claim that this is the result of disenchantment caused by societal critics, who have made science seem less attractive to the younger generation and who thus make them reluctant to take these subjects. Allow me to speculate on other reasons. Could it depend on the way in which the institution/university has changed and on the path it has chosen to take? Maybe, with the disappearance of the free inquiry model, certain kinds of persons have also disappeared. Maybe it is the idea that knowledge production is divided into ever smaller units and takes place under enormous time constraints that is discouraging. Probably the reasons are a mixture of these. If we want to attract excellent scientists, then universities have to become places which are attractive again.

While the economic competitiveness of scientific institutions, the quality assessment of scientific work and accountability to stakeholders have surely become key forces in universities, we have to be aware that some counter-steering on the part of the university as an autonomous institution might be needed. If the directions taken are not critically examined, if we do not balance the relation between contract research and non-economically oriented research, if we do not question the criteria that we apply for evaluation purposes, and if accountability does not mean taking responsibility but simply represents a technical procedure, then it might be that we are steering slowly the universities into a dead-end. Autonomy means responsibility for the decisions taken and for developing a clear role within contemporary society; it means accountability in the sense of opening up the university towards society, while keeping it sufficiently closed in order to ensure favourable working conditions; it means being competitive but selective on areas of focus; it means assuring quality, but understanding that this is a living notion that needs constant scrutiny; it means taking risks in order to safeguard the future; and sometimes it has meant and will mean not only thinking with the times, but also against them. This might be a unique challenge to be taken up by universities.

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