

INTRODUCTION

Changed government perspectives on their role in system steering, changed community perceptions on the purpose of higher education, and changed economic conditions have impacted higher education institutions nearly everywhere. These developments have been studied and documented widely, both from a national as well as a cross-national perspective (Amaral, Jones and Karseth 2002; Goedegebuure et al. 1994; Marginson and Considine 2000; Meek et al. 1996; Neave and Van Vught 1991; Teichler 1988), focusing predominantly on the macro level. There is some agreement that the changing relationship between government and higher education is characterised by a common trend whereby governments increasingly refrain from detailed steering of their respective higher education systems in favour of more global policies that determine the boundary conditions under which institutions may operate.

Much less, however, is known about the effects of these shifts in governmental steering paradigms at the institutional level. Although claims are abundant that the academic ethos has been negatively affected through the imposition of corporate ideologies and bureaucratic reporting procedures, very little systematic study has been undertaken on the actual effects of these changes at the institutional (meso) or basic unit (micro) level. Notable exceptions are the study on innovations at the programmatic level (Van Vught 1989), the multi-national study initiated by the Carnegie Council on the changing conditions of the professoriate (Boyer, Altbach and Whitelaw 1994), and studies on the effects of quality assurance arrangements (Frederiks, Westerheijden and Weusthof 1993). This book too attempts to further understand the effect changes at the national policy level are having on patterns of institutional governance and management at the institutional level.

As explained in the preface, this is the second volume to result from the Douro River Seminar series. The first volume was concerned largely with the shifts in the relationships between universities and other institutions of higher education, and the state and society in general. That volume concentrated mainly on external governance issues as higher education institutions redefined themselves in relation to dramatic transformations in the control and coordination of higher education occurring in the external environment. This volume as well examines the response and adaptation of higher education institutions to their respective increasingly complex and turbulent external environments. But here the emphasis shifts more closely to the internal management and governance of higher education institutions. In the core chapters of this volume, national experts in the study of higher education

governance and management address the key question of how changes in management thinking and practice are affecting internal institutional dynamics. Answers to this question vary greatly across the various jurisdictions in which higher education institutions operate, though at the same time there appear to be some common trends.

Much of the previous volume examined the interactions of the major policy actors: government, government bureaucrats, university managers, academics, professions, learned associations, students, community lobby groups, etc. In the present exercise, we are not so much concerned with government and other external policy actors as with internal higher education dynamics and the institutions themselves. Universities and other higher education institutions, in line with the theoretical thinking of so-called new institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996; March and Olsen 1984), become themselves key policy actors with their own regulatory logic. According to Clark (2000: 36):

National and state legislatures, executive departments, commissions, and councils can announce broad policies, but implementation lies squarely in the hands of the constituent universities and colleges ... The institutions have trajectories of their own; they have policies of their own, of which governmental dictates are only a part. *It is important analytically to pursue the ways that higher education operates as a 'self-guiding society' as well as to see it as composed of institutions dependent on certain main patrons* (emphasis provided).

The higher education institution itself, incorporating its governance and management control structures, plays an important role in the determination of social and political, as well as educational, outcomes. This research orientation is somewhat different from the 'classical' position adopted by scholars working in the field of public policy in general and higher education policy in particular. Premfors (1992: 1907), for example, maintains that "the *object* of policy analysis is public policies, that is, series of government actions and their effects in view of some goal or set of goals". While recognising the importance of public policy and changes in the way in which governments have approached the coordination and steering of higher education, the *object* of study in this volume is mainly the higher education institutions and their *response* to public policy/government actions and the interests of other external stakeholders. This distinction is particularly important in an increasingly deregulated and complex world where institutions have mounting discretion as to their response to government policy initiatives.

Institutions do not simply respond to pressures and directives arising from their external environment, but actively participate in shaping the environment in which they must function. In this respect, Becher and Kogan (1992) make the useful distinction between structure and process. From a broader sociological perspective, Giddens' construct of structuration (1979) also highlights the importance of a dynamic interaction between deterministic structures and intentional action – structure is both the medium and outcome of social interaction processes. What is required is a dynamic perspective on the issue of institutional governance and management whereby existing structures at any given point in time can be perceived as the resultant of interaction between the actors involved (i.e. the outcome), which in turn can give rise to further changes and adaptations (i.e. the medium). Such a

non-static view appears appropriate in the light of the historical developments of higher education governance and management structures in relation to changing national policies. The country chapters in this volume should be read with this perspective in mind, thus helping to avoid an overly deterministic view of changes in higher education governance and management structures as merely the result of state intervention. More is said below about the hazards of simplistic determinism in comparative higher education research.

Approaching the higher education institution as a self-guiding society clearly focuses our attention on questions of governance and management at both the institutional level and within its various sub-divisions. A useful way of categorising the various levels of interaction is suggested by Clark (1983: 205–206) who concentrates on three authority levels: the understructure (basic academic or disciplinary units), the middle or enterprise structure (individual organisations in their entirety) and the superstructure (the vast array of government and other system regulatory mechanisms that relate organisations to one another). As indicated, the emphasis in this volume is on the interactions and dynamics at the understructure and enterprise levels, though it is fully recognised that all three levels must be understood in order to build a holistic picture of what is happening within particular higher education institutions and systems. Moreover, as also indicated above, there is a reciprocal process of action and re-action between all levels, and it would be a mistake to naively assume that academics residing within the understructure are totally at the mercy of the dictates of those who occupy the enterprise level and the superstructure. Trowler (1998: 142) maintains that “academics’ responses themselves have effects on the direction of change just as much as formal policy does”. In analysing recent changes in British higher education, Trowler goes on to argue that:

It may be that we are merely seeing the first stage of the extension of control over and proletarianization of academics: what Derber (1983) calls ‘ideological proletarianisation’, to be followed at a later stage by ‘technical proletarianisation’. Yet unalloyed images of ‘traps’ and ‘decline’ fail to take into account the resources that academics have to respond to curriculum and other forms of change which mitigate their effects or turn them to their own advantage.

At a relatively high level of generality, two broad and distinctive pressures that have brought about change in the way in which higher education institutions are governed and managed can be identified: the European/Continental model and the Anglo-Saxon model. With respect to the European situation, government has increasingly stepped back from the direct control of higher education institutions, forcing a corresponding need for increased management expertise at the enterprise level. This in turn can be seen as a strengthening of institutional autonomy. In contrast, the higher education systems shaped by Anglo-Saxon traditions have lost some of their institutional autonomy to governments intent upon introducing various quality control and accountability measures to better determine educational outputs. Of course, while governments in Europe have devolved somewhat direct control over higher education, they also have been very interested in quality assurance and other accountability measures.

Neither the pressures nor tempo of change in either the European or Anglo-Saxon contexts have been uniform across the various countries involved. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the consequences of these changes have also been just as varied. However, in the longer term, will the processes driving change in higher education force convergence on a new and universal mode of governance and management? Some students of higher education speculate that this has already happened, with changes in higher education merely being one derivative of the broader and universal new public sector management push (see below). The evidence presented in this volume would lead us to be more cautious about such a conclusion – a topic taken up in some detail in the final chapter.

Another broad trend affecting governance and management of higher education in several countries is the ‘privatisation’ of public higher education and the introduction of concepts of market steering. In some countries, this has also been coupled with the rise of a significant for-profit, fully-fledged private sector of higher education.

In examining the concept of the ‘market’ in relation to public higher education it is important to consider both its financial and ideological dimensions. In relation to the first dimension, an ongoing challenge faced by governments everywhere is how best to meet the costs of a mass system of higher education. A rather common (though not universal) policy response has been to pressure the higher education institutions themselves into seeking a greater proportion of their revenue from non-government sources through diversifying their funding base. To reinforce this shift in policy, governments have also sought to develop and implement mechanisms which can be used to differentially reward institutions on the basis of the amount of non-government funding secured. The second dimension of the ‘market’ as it applies to higher education is, however, far more complex, involving a redefinition of the basic ideological principles underpinning the relationship between higher education and the state, on the one hand, and higher education and society, in general, on the other. There is some evidence that market steering of higher education is fundamentally changing governance and management relationships at the base unit and enterprise levels and helping to redefine the academic profession (see Slaughter and Leslie 1997; and Meek this volume). However, as other chapters in this volume demonstrate, the consequences of market steering are neither universal nor at the same stage of development in all countries.

The final chapter to this volume will address in more detail the question of whether it makes sense to draw general/universal conclusions about contemporary changes to the governance and management of higher education across different national jurisdictions, or whether we need to be much more cautious and differentiated in our assessment of what is going on in the various countries. That analysis, of course, will be informed by a more thorough review of theoretical approaches to the study of higher education governance and management presented in chapter 1, along with the empirical evidence presented in the subsequent country chapters.

While a systematic discussion of the conceptual and theoretical bases to understanding recent changes in higher education governance and management is taken up in chapter 1 and the conclusion to this volume, it is important to note that a

unified theoretical template has not been imposed on the country contributors. In our judgment, the cases are too diverse and the state of theoretical development in the field too meagre to warrant such a measure.

The remainder of this introduction will first present some cautionary words about the use of the comparative approach to higher education policy research, followed by an outline of the relationship between management practices and institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The next section provides a brief critique of new public management (NPM). A good deal of the writing on management in both the general public service and higher education sectors begs the question of whether NPM is actually a tangible phenomenon, or a set of value judgments designed to serve particular ideological interests. Thus, it is necessary to discuss the legitimacy of NPM in some detail. The following section looks at definitions and terminology, drawing a distinction between management as a technical activity and *managerialism* as a set of ideologically based prescriptions on how an institution should operate. Distinctions are also drawn between collegiality, governance, management, administration and leadership. The penultimate section presents an overview of the system characteristics of the countries examined in this volume, and the introduction concludes with a brief outline of what is to follow.

1. A CAUTIONARY NOTE ON COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

This book provides a critical analysis of changes and developments in the management of higher education institutions in a number of countries. In so doing, we attempt to avoid three common pitfalls in comparative discussions of higher education management.

The first pitfall common to many higher education discussions concerns the assumption that all national systems of higher education are experiencing the same changes and at the same pace. A related issue concerns the mistake of assuming that the language we use to discuss higher education management means the same thing in different national contexts. There has been a tendency to assume that higher education institutions everywhere are converging on a common organisational type in a post-modern, global society. The empirical evidence does not support such an assumption, particularly when we go beyond the superficiality of change in comparing specific countries.

Comparative higher education research continues to suffer from problems of mutual misunderstandings; in fact, it is exacerbated by the very global trends that seem to provide a familiarity if not unity to higher education reforms. As one Douro Seminar participant noted, it is easy and dangerous to gain a false impression that we are all talking about the same problems just because we are using the same words to describe them.

While strengthening management at the institutional level appears to be more or less a common theme amongst the countries examined in this volume, there is no assumption that the exact same factors have promoted the strengthening of higher education management in each national setting, that strengthening management involves exactly the same processes everywhere, or that management reform, even

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