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University Reforms and Academic Governance in Switzerland

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1. Introduction

Entering the third millennium, higher education is confronted with major challenges, and dealing with them will require substantial rethinking of its missions, its role in society and its mode of operations. These challenges are numerous and varied. Some are connected to the *social demands* facing higher education (for example, the long-term increase in enrollments, the heightened importance of knowledge in modern societies, the diversification of the range of course content to be offered, etc.); some clearly take the form of *constraints* confronting higher education institutions (e.g., reduction of state support for education, increasing standards in terms of accountability, etc.); finally, some of these challenges can be interpreted less in terms of additional burdens or tighter constraints than in terms of *opportunities*, such as new avenues opened by the use of modern information technology and the renewed sense of responsibility for higher education to help social actors make sense of the rapid change in many aspects of political, social, cultural and economic life. For all these reasons, higher education is at a turning point; this is bound to have major implications for the *governance* of higher education institutions.

Switzerland[1] is no exception. The total number of newly enrolled students has nearly doubled and the number of students altogether has increased by nearly 30% between 1985 and 1998. Although the number of teaching staff increased, it did not catch up with this rapid rise in university enrollment. Paired with a clear cut in the federal and cantonal budgets allocated to education and science as a result of the economic slowdown in the early nineties, Swiss universities were asked to improve efficiency and to contribute more actively to the society as a whole beyond their fundamental missions of the creation and transmission of knowledge. Swiss universities attempted to react to these pressures by strengthening cooperation among them, by offering new programs at the master's level and in the framework of continuing education reinforcing the industry-university tie and also reviewing their governance.

As Peterson (1995: 140) observes, "Writing about structure, governance, and leadership of a university in a time of stability is a daunting task. Doing so in a period

[1] See Conseil Suisse de la Science (1993), Kleiber (1999) for the case of Switzerland.

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of reform is probably foolish." The extreme complexity of the issues at hand are related to the fact that "[...] universities are at an unusual confluence of some basic social, political, economic, and technological forces which threaten to reshape the basic processes and structures of our institutions" (*ibid.*, 141). Consequently, we cannot hope to do justice to this complexity, and we have deliberately chosen to focus on one issue - the relationship between the *responsiveness* of Swiss universities to social demand in a broad sense, and their *responsibility* towards society, in the context of *university governance*.

Section 2 presents the concepts of "responsiveness" and "responsibility" and introduces our central research question. Section 3 discusses methodology. Section 4 presents a selection of the results of an analysis of legal texts and Section 5 presents the results of a questionnaire survey on higher education. Section 6 contains a comparative overview of the priorities of reform in university governance from the perspectives of Switzerland and Japan. Section 7 concludes. It is important to note that this study is not intended as a detailed descriptive account of the Swiss higher education system; nor is it a general essay on the broad question of university governance in a time of change. Rather, it is intended as an attempt to relate a set of very fundamental questions about university governance and the actual practice of everyday decisions made in university governance - as it were, an exercise in bridge-building.

2. Responsiveness, responsibility and accountability

As mentioned above, higher education is required to meet many challenges, each of them very demanding and specific in its implications, all at the same time. The state itself is one of those institutions that has to discharge a large number of complex duties, and the state apparatus normally enjoys the use of a wider range of instruments to act upon the situation; by contrast, the universities have much more restricted courses of action at their disposal.

It is also the case that the university is one of the oldest surviving institutions of western history. It is actually older than the modern state and has shown an extraordinary capacity for adaptation and change. It is precisely some of the aspects of this *capacity for change* that lie at the core of our research project.

Therefore we focus on one aspect of the process of change that we believe to be relevant to just about *all* forms of implementation of change. In order to identify this core dimension of change, it is useful to reconsider the list of challenges in terms of two concepts: responsiveness and responsibility.

On the one hand, universities are expected to be *responsive* to society's needs. These pertain to rising enrollments, diversifying course content, increasing of the range of courses offered, guaranteeing economical and transparent operation, safeguarding the democracy of access and of internal structures all this while of course ensuring relevance and quality (or, to use another popular term, "excellence") in teaching and research. In addition, universities are expected to fulfill an ever-expanding list of missions that have less and less to do with teaching and research,

and more and more with the provision of the fundamental aspects of quality of life. Meeting these multi-faceted demands is the *responsiveness* side of the role of universities.

On the other hand, while responding to society's demands, universities also have a *responsibility* that may not be fully captured by its operation as a responsive institution. Because society is changing, it needs frames and references for social, political and economic debate, and construction of meaning, identity, and consensus on policies. The universities have a key role to play in providing these. We have noted that some of the duties that higher education is entrusted with can quite easily conflict with each other. In these cases, universities must exercise their sense of responsibility vis-à-vis society, by adopting solutions that maintain and reassert the intellectual, ethical and social values on which they are built. This reassertion precisely constitutes one way of exercising their leadership role in society. It can sometimes mean selecting ways in which change should take place, sometimes encouraging and advancing change, but also sometimes resisting it.

Responsiveness and responsibility are present, at some degree or other, in each of the challenges listed above. Hence, meeting these challenges and engineering the corresponding changes calls for recurring arbitration between the requirements of responsiveness and responsibility; what is more, the arbitration must be a transparent one and to play by certain formally and socially accepted rules.

Much still needs to be investigated about the relationship between responsiveness and responsibility, because their ubiquitous confrontation in university policy, particularly in a context of change, implies that this relationship must be a rich and varied one. However, an integrative inquiry of this relationship would far exceed the scope of our project. Rather, we are interested in *how the joint presence of responsiveness and responsibility is accommodated in university management and in particular, whether the joint exercise of responsiveness and responsibility allows for accountability.* In other words, we wish to investigate whether processes (and the structures within which processes take place according to formal procedures), in higher education institutions, allow universities to be *responsive*, to be *responsible*, to *acknowledge the complementarity between responsiveness and responsibility*, to *arbitrate between them when necessary*, and to do it in such a way as to *demonstrate accountability.*

In this study, *accountability* is largely synonymous with *transparency*, but implies a little more than generic transparency; specifically, the notion of accountability includes two conditions[2]:

- First, an explicit acknowledgement of the social actors to whom one is held accountable (e.g., the local parliament; taxpayers; students);
- Second, a commitment to play according to certain rules that are socially, politically, legally and scientifically legitimized (e.g., the adoption of recognized scientific criteria in the evaluation of projects and people, instead of nepotism and power plays), and to make a redress whenever it is found that this is not the case.

[2] Different authors stress different aspects of "accountability"; see e.g. Berdahl and McConnell (1994).

This research also aims at contributing to the efficient governance of universities in a context of change. As Cameron and Tschirhart point out (1992: 88), "some evidence exists that managers and administrators can adapt to these [changing] environmental conditions by responding appropriately". This gives rise to a set of questions, pertaining not so much to *positive* processes and structures, but to normative stands about them, such as:

- How do stakeholders judge existing processes and structures in terms of their capacity to achieve responsiveness and responsibility in a context of change?
- Do stakeholders diverge in their views about the re-engineering and re-structuring required?
- What are the governance strategies, decision processes and organizational structures that can be advocated on the basis of answers to the preceding questions?

This second set of questions is therefore intended to elicit answers that can help sketch out principles of the *best practice of university governance* in a context of change. The fact that universities must *respond* to changing social demand is, of course, well-known and lies at the core of just about all the literature on university reform: the reciprocal fact that universities also have *responsibilities* towards society (which are not fully captured by their responsiveness role) is also recognized (the 1998 *Glion Declaration*). Analytical work focusing on the links between responsiveness and responsibility is much harder to find. When the question is further specified as that of the integration of the responsiveness-responsibility complex into processes and structures, there is an almost complete dearth of research. Therefore, there is little in the way of existing literature to bank on, implying that this study, to a large extent, will have to venture into mostly uncharted territory. More specifically, the precise issue of how university governance can be responsive and responsible in a context of change, particularly when these two principles conflict with each other, seems not to have been formally analyzed, whether in theoretical or empirical terms. As a consequence, this report has an exploratory character, with all the risks and opportunities inherent in this type of research.

3. Methodological aspects

3.1 Key categories

We are interested in governance in the context of change, and hence in the way that governance itself changes to reflect macro-level societal change. Change affects structures and procedures, but characterizing them, in the final analysis, must be based on the identification of what actors *do*. To the extent that responsiveness and responsibility are principles that ought to be exercised as characteristics of the decisions made by actors in the university system, these actions themselves must be placed at the center of the empirical observation. These are the actions we call *acts of governance*. Examples include appointments to tenured positions, creation or termination of programs of study, drafting of yearly budgets, etc. Hence, a small

selection of *acts of governance* are investigated in this study, and responsiveness and responsibility are evaluated with respect to such "acts".

Nonetheless, *elements of structure* do exist within the universities, and they do exercise the decision-making power that manifests itself through *acts of governance* - as such, they need to be featured in the study. *Elements of structure*[3] (noted "EoS" below) are distinct from *structure* in the sense that they are not given *a priori*, but emerge only as the locus of specific acts of governance. For the sake of convenience, formal structures (e.g., the Council of Faculty Deans, the University Council, the Rectorate or Presidency) are referred to later *in lieu* of *elements of structure*, but these are mere institution-specific proxies for the broader (and presumably less variable) *elements of structure* which are present in most institutions and which carry out acts of governance.

At the same time, some *groups of stakeholders*, though not formally part of the structural bodies of universities, are affected by reforms in university governance, and the way in which their positions change as a result of reforms are a further indicator of the degree to which *responsiveness* and *responsibility* are actually practiced. These stakeholders can be defined in sufficiently broad terms in order to represent relevant groups across specific contexts and still constitute relevant components of the analysis. These are the *civil society*, including business and public opinion; the authorities or the *state*; *tenured professors* as a professional corporation[4]; *students* and non-tenured research and teaching staff.

Civil society and *students* are groups whose relevance is fairly clear and does not require further discussion. However, the role of the other two groups must be pointed out, since it reflects specific power structures within the Swiss higher education system. The importance given to the *state* as an actor in the field of higher education reflects the fact that in the Swiss university context, its role has always been, and remains, a central or even near-monopolistic one, contrary to what can be observed in the United States. The importance of *tenured professors* as stakeholders reflects the fact that *tenure track positions* are comparatively rare in Switzerland, although the pattern can vary, not only across universities but also between faculties (e.g., Law, Sciences, Arts, etc.) within any given university[5]. It is often the case that time-limited master-assistant positions, though roughly similar to assistant professorships in the north American academic system, imply comparatively fewer perspectives, let alone guarantees, of future academic employment. Hence, a major

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[3] We define EoS by their functions: EoS maintaining links with non-university community (e.g. "Academic Council"); EoS maintaining links within the university (e.g. "University Council"); EoS reserved for tenured Faculty members (e.g. "University Senate"); EoS carrying top decision-making power (e.g. University Rector or President); EoS bringing together a limited number of actors with decision-making power within the university (e.g. Council of Faculty Deans); EoS with decision-making power at the Faculty level (e.g. Dean, Faculty Council [within a Faculty]).

[4] In this context, the word *guild* could be quite appropriate.

[5] *Tenured* means, in this context, holding a work contract without an explicit time limitation or a specified duration, which is normally renewed automatically at regular intervals up to retirement age.

gap separates intermediate positions from tenured professorships, reinforcing the strategic relevance of the latter, and explaining why appointment procedures are, particularly in Switzerland, such a key dimension of governance. The reader may note the absence of lecturers and researchers in our groups of stakeholders. This absence is merely a consequence of the point just made: Not only do non-tenured lecturers and researchers have few, if any, secure job prospects; they also, by and large, enjoy no more influence in university governance than students themselves. *Acts of governance*, *elements of structure* and *groups of stakeholders* therefore emerge as the key categories in our investigation, and they are given greater or lesser prominence in the analysis of legal texts and the gathering of survey data.

3.2 The analysis of legal texts

For this analysis, we have decided to look at the most recent version of the legal texts regulating the operation of nine Swiss cantonal universities[6] (Geneva, Lausanne, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Berne, Basel, Zürich, Lucerne, and Saint-Gallen)[7], and to compare it with the version previously in force. It should be noted that this analysis deals only with the nine "cantonal" universities, and not with the two Federal Institutes of Technology[8]. The reasons for this are the following. First, the legal standing of the Federal Institutes of Technology is fundamentally different from that of cantonal universities. Federal Institutes of Technology fall within the purview of federal authorities, and the notion of the "state" and "civil society" applying in their case is therefore different Second, Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, though endowed with a strong and centralized presidency, are made up of fairly independent units (called "institutes").

A comparison between these two versions with respect to specific *acts of governance* reveals the direction in which a change has occurred in terms of the degree of influence of different stakeholders on these particular acts of governance.

In order to highlight change, in the first step, we extracted from legal texts the information on the "Changes in the appointment and composition of EoS", the "Nature of change in the extent of competencies", and the "Magnitude of change in extent of competencies[9]" for each EoS. The resulting matrix provides a bird's eye view of the evolution of the role of key EoS in each university, but to the extent that it is mostly a reformulation of provisions contained in legal texts, it only goes part of the way in interpreting the role of the social and institutional actors that this study intends to investigate. To estimate how these roles have changed, a second two-way table was designed, focusing on the *stakeholders' formal presence, or representation,* in a given

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[6] The recently created Università della Svizzera italiana having been omitted owing precisely to its youthfulness.

[7] For an overview of higher education in Switzerland, see *Vision* (theme issue 12/1997).

[8] Two branches are located in Zürich (ETHZ) and Lausanne (EPFL).

[9] A simple seven-point scale with the following values was adopted: -3: suppression of the EoS; -2: significant decrease; -1: minor decrease; 0: status quo; +1: minor increase; +2: significant increase; 3: creation of EoS.

EoS [10] (and, by implication, as depicted by the first table, the extent of their competency). Finally, we infer from the proceeding steps how the influence of different groups of stakeholders has changed with respect to different acts of governance as a result of the latest round of reforms. On the basis of information retrieved from legal texts, values are entered into the matrix in two versions: one reflecting the positions of stakeholders *before* and *after* the latest round of reform at each institution. This lends itself to two types of convenient graphical representations, allowing for inter- and intra-institutional comparisons. The horizontal axis represents the group of stakeholders' *current* level of influence (as reflected in their representation in various EoS), while the vertical axis represents their *previous* level of influence. The values in the *ex ante* and *ex post* matrices can be combined to define points in the graph space. An in-depth analysis of these legal texts would have required an accordingly *legal* analysis. This, however, is beyond the scope of this study, and our investigation does not claim legal expertise. Rather, our goal is to identify general patterns (if any) in the evolution of university governance by focusing on the influence of given groups of stakeholders on specific *acts of governance.*

3.3 Questionnaire survey

Looking at legal texts offers only a "theoretical" picture of change in university governance in Switzerland, and provides circumstantial evidence about the actual or perceived presence of responsiveness and responsibility in it. In order to get closer to these core issues of the study, it was decided that a questionnaire would be sent out to (i) university rectors, deputy rectors, presidents, and vice-presidents, including those who had held this office over recent years; (ii) all Faculty deans; (iii) all heads of intra-university research institutes; (iv) a 40% sample of all the (approximately) 2,500 tenured university professors, generating an *ex ante* sample of some 1,000 persons.

The type of information being sought, however, needed to be quite different from what was investigated in the case of legal texts. The main reason for this was that the individuals surveyed might not have been well acquainted with the formal changes that had affected their institution as a result of reform. There was a major risk that their evaluation of the institutions' capacity to demonstrate responsiveness and responsibility would be obfuscated by confusion about what actually had, or had not changed. In addition, it was not always clear whether respondents would be sufficiently well-informed to tease apart *formal* change from *actual* practice, and asking them to evaluate changes in responsiveness and responsibility at both levels separately would have resulted in a highly complex and rather unwieldy survey instrument.

As a consequence, we chose to short-circuit these problems by asking respondents to evaluate their institution's capacity to be responsive, responsible and accountable under the current (post-reform) arrangement.

[10] The degree of influence of a group of stakeholders is assigned as follows: 0: none; 0.5: weak; 1: moderate; 1.5: medium; 2: significant; 2.5: dominant (but not exclusive); 3: exclusive.

Another important aspect of the survey is that it explicitly focuses on *actual practice*, not on the way things are supposed to happen according to formal rules. The real interest of the information supplied by professors lies in what it reveals about actual practices, and how these practices are viewed.

As regards the topics to be addressed in the questionnaire, they need to focus on decisions where responsiveness, responsibility and accountability can, in principle, be exercised. This requires structuring the questionnaire in terms of *acts of governance*. Owing to the vast number and heterogeneity of such acts of governance, it would have been impossible to aim at exhaustiveness. As a consequence, three broad groups of acts were identified, and broken down into more specific questions, which do not superimpose perfectly with the acts of governance examined through legal texts. These three groups are the following: (A) the appointment to tenured positions, spanning the entire process from the definition of a job profile to the final selection of a candidate; (B) the creation, modification or retrenchment of courses, programs, syllabi and research and teaching units; (C) the allocation of funds in the yearly university budget.

The questionnaire is a "difficult" one as questionnaires go, because it refers to the three principles investigated, namely responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability, and is couched in terms of the manifestations of these principles in specific acts of governance. These three principles, which are fairly common currency in specialist's research, are not necessarily familiar to all university professors. In other words, there is a certain degree of risk involved in issuing questionnaires structured in terms of these concepts. Nevertheless we were interested in the respondent's evaluations of whether existing practices are capable of ensuring that these principles are actually respected in university governance. For this reason we decided in favor of an uncompromising questionnaire, trusting the ability of the best minds in the country to acquaint themselves with these notions, if only because they could be expected to relate so directly to their professional practice. We endeavored to minimize the risks of misunderstanding by explaining, in an accompanying letter as well as on the cover page of the questionnaire, the meanings of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability, as well as their relevance to the problem of university governance.

4. Formal changes in the structures and procedures of governance in Swiss universities

4.1 Evolution of decision-making power

In this section, we shall focus on diagrams that emphasize our interpretation in terms of changes in the relative power of different groups of stakeholders with respect to the three acts of governance. These are: "appointment to tenured professorships", "choice

of rector" and "adoption of yearly budget"[11]. Although the acts of governance considered here represent only a fraction of the myriad decisions made in university governance, they do cover some of the most important ones.

With respect to these acts of governance, the current balance of power in university governance, at least in formal regulations laid out in legal texts, indicates that the Swiss academic system is one in which power is shared between tenured professors and the state, while civil society has a limited voice, and students, practically none at all. It is of course a difficult thing to venture an overall evaluation of the shifts in the balance of power resulting from the recent wave of reforms. However, at the risk of oversimplifying what obviously is a very intricate set of patterns, the following statements can be made:

- The **state** remains a strong actor with respect to the adoption of the yearly budget; its role tends to increase with respect to the choice of university rectors, and to decrease with respect to the appointment of tenured professors.
- The role of **civil society** remains, by and large, a limited one, with no discernible trend as regards the appointment of tenured professors, and modest increases with respect to the choice of university rectors and the adoption of the yearly budget.
- Tenured university **professors** have a modest role in budget matters, but a strong influence on the choice of rectors and on the appointment of their peers; their influence regarding the budget remains constant, while it tends to decrease with respect to the choice of rectors, and to increase as regards the appointment to tenured positions.
- The role of **students** is by and large a negligible one, particularly with respect to budget matters and the appointment of tenured professors; no significant change can be detected, although new regulations contain an inkling of increasing influence with respect to the choice of university rectors.

Moving on to an even higher level of generalization, we could sum up by saying that the groups of stakeholders with significant power (the state and tenured professors) have kept it, while the groups of stakeholders with little power (civil society) or no power (students) fare no better than before, although a marginal change benefiting civil society may be detected. In view of the above results, one may be tempted to conclude that the achievements of the latest round of reforms (with possible exceptions such as Basel) are rather meager, which opens the question of the actual political intentions underpinning those reforms, as well as the extent to which the university system is actually susceptible to change. Before drawing such inferences, however, let us recall that the above only pertains to "formal" structures and procedures, and that "actual practice" may depart from them to a significant extent. This point will be taken up, using survey results, in the following section. Before doing so, however, it is useful to focus on the question of the formal decision-making power of top-level university authorities, that is, the rectors themselves.

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[11] A more extensive discussion of the concepts used in the study and questionnaire, as well as a larger selection of results, are available in Grin, F., Harayama, Y. and Weber, L., 2000.

4.2 The evolution in the role of university rectors

The rector, as an individual actor, may have more or less personal importance; in several universities, what really matters is the "rectorate", that is, a team of top-level decision-makers comprising a rector and colleagues variously designated as vice-rectors or pro-rectors. In what follows, the term "rector" will be used to denote either set-up, it being understood that it represents the highest hierarchical unit within the university.

In order to get an overall view of the evolution of the rectors' role according to formal texts, we have examined the nature of the change defining their position in the structure, as well as attempted to identify the most notable changes affecting the extent of their competence; finally, we have graded the importance of this change on a five-point scale[12] (theoretically). As before, we warn the reader that this grading is based on our overall assessment of the evolution of their role, and that it is not intended as an exact measure, but as a highly compact summary of modifications presented in sometimes arcane legal texts.

Overall, the pattern is one of minor gains in formal power in the university structures, although the precise extent of these gains is difficult to assess on the basis of legal texts. What power gains are made by rectors is largely due to an overall tendency towards increased university autonomy, reflecting a partial departure from the traditional state-run model, and these gains do not necessarily remain in the hands of rectoral teams, since they in part trickle down within the university structure.

Given the focal role of rectors in university structures, it is hardly surprising that this role should be modified by changes in legislation. In other words, the striking fact is not so much that changes in their role have occurred in two out of three universities; rather, it is the modesty of these changes that could lead us once again to question the actual political intentions underlying recent reforms. The overview of competence changes with respect to three acts of governance presented in the preceding section has shown that the strong stakeholders in the university system remain, apart from the state itself, tenured professors. By contrast, other stakeholders only made marginal gains. Hence, it is likely that the competence of which the state divested itself, and which is not transferred to or retained by the rectorate, eventually finds its way to the level of professors or, in some universities, to a small group of professional managers with no academic involvement. Generally, the balance of power, as reflected in legal texts, did not change markedly, and autonomy gains were apparently not monopolized by rectors.

[12] The five-point scale is defined as follows: "-2": major influence loss; "-1": minor influence loss; "0": no change; "+1": minor influence gain; "+2": major influence gain.

5. Results from the questionnaire survey

5.1 General sample profile

Given the difficulty of the questionnaire, we regard the response rate in excess of 25% as acceptable, yielding a final sample of N=263. Nevertheless, there are only a limited number of cases in which elaborate statistical treatment would have been possible within reasonable intervals of confidence. For this reason, only simple statistics are presented.

We have introduced from the start one important distinction among respondents, by breaking them up into three groups:

- Group A: made up of professors who currently hold or have held a position at the rectoral level (usually, as rector, vice-rector or president);
- Group B: made up of professors who hold or have held a position at an intermediate level in the university hierarchy (e.g., as Faculty dean or Department chairperson);
- Group C: made up of all the rest (namely, professors who have never held either type of office).

Group B is the largest, with 164 respondents[13]; this must not be interpreted as the sign of a quirk in hierarchical structures, which actually are duly pyramidal, but as the normal consequence of rotating department chairmanships; at some point or other in his or her career, a professor will almost unavoidably serve as department chairperson. By contrast, current or past experience at the rectoral level is much less frequent.

The distribution of respondents is commensurate with the respective size of universities, allowing us to view the sample as an adequate reflection of the target population. The majority of respondents (55.9%) had been employed at the same institution for 15 years or more; 33.1% between 5 and 15 years; and 9.5% for less than five years. This apparent age bias reflects the fact that over recent years, the relatively low numbers of professors retiring has restricted the number of new hirings. In keeping with the above, 54% of the sample is aged 55 or more; 43% are aged between 40 and 55; 1% are under 40; this distribution also reflects the issue of the conditions of access to tenured positions - which for the past 15 years have rarely been awarded to applicants who had not reached their mid-forties. Over 91% of respondents were male; this probably still falls slightly short of the actual over-representation of men holding a tenured professorship, since according to late 1998 figures, 175 professors out of a total of 2,585 (6.8%) were women[14]. Generally, despite the fact that mailed self-administered questionnaires allow practically no control over the representativeness of the final sample, the resulting structure is an acceptable

[13] Both groups A and C contain less than 100 observations (46 and 53 respectively). When interpreting the breakdown of these sub-samples with respect to one question or another, we have used percentage terms in order to avoid cumbersome expressions such as "12 respondents out of 53 say..." It is clear, however, that this is a liberty taken for stylistic purposes only.

[14] Figures supplied by the Federal statistical office.

image of Swiss university professors. Let us now move on to their views on university governance[15].

5.2 Appointments to tenured professorships

The first set of questions focused on the procedure for appointments to tenured professor positions; respondents were asked to evaluate the *actual* (as opposed to *formal*) degree of influence of fifteen "actors". Not all of them are of equal relevance, and we only report results for eight of them, namely students, professors in the department in which the position is to be filled, the department chairperson, professors in the faculty to which the department is attached, the faculty dean, an internal committee (irrespective of its actual composition), the rector (or president), and political authorities[16].

Seventy percent of all respondents concurred that students exert a low influence or no influence at all on the decision-making process. Interestingly, it is respondents from group B, those who are likely to be most constantly involved over the various stages of an appointment procedure, who are the most outspoken in this respect. Only a quarter of respondents (in which group B is under-represented, and group A slightly over-represented) assess students' influence as "average". It is also interesting to note that the influence of the untenured research and teaching staff is barely higher (rated by most as "low to average" instead of "nil to low").

Summing up the ratings for the top two levels of influence, we find that the real wielders of power are department professors (that is, an appointee's future colleagues), of whom over 70% of respondents said that they exerted a determinant or high influence; they are closely followed by the professors of the faculty concerned (68.8%); by contrast, a department chairperson or faculty dean only rated 42% and 34% respectively. Appointment committees fall somewhere in between: those defined as internal get a cumulated rating of 55% and committees bringing together persons from within and outside the university 48%. Rectors have much less say (only 29%). This is still a bit more than political authorities.

The picture that emerges is one in which professors are firmly in control of choosing their peers. This, of course, raises the question of whether this allocation of roles can be seen as appropriate, in particular with respect to the three principles of governance placed at the center of this study.

As regards **responsiveness**, the overall judgment is one of moderate satisfaction: only 22% of respondents view of current practices as "not at all" or only "a little" capable of ensuring responsiveness; 37% evaluate this capacity as "average", and 34% as "good" or "very good". No strong discrepancies appear among the evaluations of our three categories of respondents, although groups A and B (made up

[15] Here we present our results on two acts of governance namely "Appointment to tenured professorships" and "Allocation of budget resources".

[16] The relevant authority is the cantonal government in the case of cantonal universities, and the federal government in the case of the Federal Institutes of Technology.

of people who are or have been in decision-making positions) seem more pleased with the system than members of group C, who are slightly more critical.

The evaluation is better when it comes to guaranteeing **responsibility**. Only 17% of respondents viewed the system's performance in this respect as poor, 31% considered it average, and just over 45% thought it good or very good. There again, there are no major divergences of opinion between respondents, although members of group C are somewhat more critical.

However, not all respondents are so sanguine when it comes to assessing **accountability**. Almost 30% regarded the system as "not at all" or only "a little" capable of guaranteeing accountability; a little less than 27% considered the performance "average"; and just over 40% found it "good" or "very good". This bi-modality disappears if results are reported in terms of the five original ratings, where exactly a third of the total sample gave the system a "good" rating; however, we may interpret these figures as indicating the presence of an actual split among university professors in their views on the university's transparency. This suggests that accountability is an issue of particular relevance.

We also examined the role of different selection criteria. Publications are unanimously recognized as a selection criterion of "strong" (64.7%) or even "determinant" (28.5%) influence. Pedagogical abilities are considered important, although only 5.7% of respondents viewed them as playing a "determinant" influence, 32.7% thought this influence "strong", and 41% "average". No manifest differences of opinion among respondents from different categories emerged. Our data also indicates that stays at foreign universities are viewed quite unanimously as a selection criterion with "average" (35%) or "strong" (45%) importance. However, candidates' experiences in management (for example, of a research center, of research teams, or of some other educational institution) is considered by 29% of respondents as being a criterion of "average" importance, while over 63% recognize that such abilities play a weak or zero role in the selection of candidates!

An applicant's scientific network - that is, the density and frequency of his or her scientific connections, as may be evidenced by a record of joint research projects, the capacity to attract research funds, the occurrence of co-authorship in one's list of publications, etc. - could be expected to be a very important selection criterion. As it turns out, respondents ascribe a much lower importance to this factor. Only 34% view it as a "strong" or "determinant" criterion; the bulk view it as having "average" importance (43%). No major difference between categories of respondents can be detected.

Finally, the very delicate question of "personal support" was asked. In asking this question, we were aiming at the role of typically non-transparent procedures, which may include the unofficial phone calls made by some actors in the system (for example, more influential professors) on behalf of one particular candidate. Over a quarter of the sample confessed that such practices could play a "strong" or "determinant" role in an appointment procedure; 31% ascribed it of "average" importance; and 38% thought it had no importance.

One additional question asked whether the relative importance of selection criteria was stable (suggesting clear "rules of the game", as should in principle be the case), or whether it was liable to change from one case to the next. Over 50% of respondents admitted that such change was possible. Interestingly, a majority of group A respondents gave a negative answer, while the other two groups thought otherwise. The contrast is particularly sharp with group C respondents, among whom less than a third thought that selection criteria were stable. This result, of course, raises serious questions in terms of principles of governance in the actual practice of universities, particularly in terms of accountability.

We then asked respondents if the relative importance of these selection criteria, in actual practice, allowed the university to apply principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. The answer is moderated.

Just over a third of the sample viewed selection criteria as enabling the system to respond "well" or "very well" to be **responsive**; another third thought the system merely "average" in this respect; and a little over a quarter thought the performance decidedly poor. There are no major differences between respondent categories, although group C respondents tended to be more critical, while rectors tended to be most pleased. It should be noted that it can be particularly difficult to evaluate, from *inside* the system, its responsiveness to the outside, which may in part explain the discrepancy between respective perceptions.

As was the case earlier, the system gets a better rating with respect to its capacity to be **responsible**. 45% of respondents viewed its performance as "good" or "very good", 33% as "average", and 16% as "low" or "nil". Clearly, responsibility is not, at present, perceived as the weak spot in the system; however, some divergence of opinion among categories can be observed. Among group C, only 28% were pleased with the performance, and more than a quarter found it "poor" or "nil", whereas almost 57% of rectors and presidents appeared pleased with the university's capacity to resist pressures, and a mere 2 out of 46 individuals considered this capacity to be "low".

Again, the system received its lowest ratings with respect to **accountability** (39% of respondents viewed its performance as "good" or "very good", 28% "average", and 28% "low" or "average"). However, these overall assessments reflect the opinion of group B. By contrast, 54% of rectors considered the relative importance of selection criteria, in practice, delivered accountability "well" or "very well"; among professors in group C, 40% thought the system performed "low" or "nil". Two general patterns can be noted. First, the university's capacity to deliver responsibility and, to a lesser extent, responsiveness, is certainly inadequate but not abysmal; by contrast, its ratings in terms of accountability is poor; accountability therefore emerges as a priority issue in future reforms. Second, the higher up in the university hierarchy, the more pleased respondents are; conversely, professors who do not and have not held decision-making posts in this hierarchy tend to be consistently more critical.

5.3 Allocation of budget resources

Our set of questions regarding the procedures for budget allocation within the university, being of a more technical nature, has given rise to less divergence of opinion among categories of respondents and to a higher non-response rate. We shall therefore confine ourselves to a discussion of three of these issues: the relative degree of influence of different groups of actors in budget allocation for current expenditures and small investments, referred as "allocation of budget"; the relative importance of criteria used in this allocation procedure, along with respondents' judgments on their appropriateness for ensuring responsiveness, responsibility and accountability; and their judgment on the adequacy of current arrangements regarding the overall autonomy of their institution in terms of guaranteeing that these three principles are respected.

The first set of questions reviews the respective influence of different groups of actors, this time on the definition and adoption of an operational budget that amounts to a decision regarding its allocation. An overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) concurred that students' influence is "weak" or "nil", and almost as many (83%) said this is also true of untenured research and teaching staff. In contrast to other acts of governance, this is an area in which professors have (in their professorial capacity) relatively little say (department professors' influence is considered "weak" or "nil" by 43% of respondents and faculty professors' influence by 36%). Department chairpersons' influence is also rated as "weak" or "nil" by 36% of respondents. The dean has more say; his or her influence is rated as "determinant" or "major" by 42% of respondents. However, for most of them, the real power is in the hands of the rector or president: 40% of them consider his influence to be "strong" and 25%, to be "determinant". In the view of most respondents, the state only exerts limited direct control, in the sense that the influence of authorities is rated as "strong" or "determinant" by 35% of them, whereas 39% consider the influence of the state to be "low" or "nil".

As regards the capacity to guarantee **responsiveness**, only 19% of respondents consider that this allocation of influence is satisfactory, while 33% view it as somewhat capable or not at all capable of doing so. On this count, a strong discrepancy can be observed between rectors or former rectors, who are less critical, and professors of group C (only 4 respondents out of 53 consider the system appropriate). As always, the system's capacity to guarantee **responsibility** is evaluated slightly more positively, but the overall ratings are not markedly different; ratings regarding the capacity to be **accountable** are marginally worse. On both items, however, respondents of group C are much more critical of the system's performance.

Regarding the criteria used for allocating resources, 80% of respondents considered that the budget of the previous year was a strong or determinant factor in explaining the allocation adopted for the current year, without notable differences among respondent categories. The persuasiveness of arguments put forward to justify a particular distribution, however, seems to be much less important (considered as a strong or determinant factor by less than a third of respondents). One factor deserving

this rating, for 52% of respondents, was "power balance": some players are more influential than others, and it is striking that 29 out of 46 rectors or former rectors acknowledge the role of this factor. A clear majority of group A also considered the personal negotiating skills of heads of units (faculties, departments, etc.) as factors having a strong or determinant influence, whereas only a little over a third of the two other categories of respondents thought so. This suggests that, from their pivotal position, rectors hold a fairly different view of how money is allocated - incidentally, it suggests that other members of the university community, if they wish to orient budget decisions in a direction they regard as advisable, would do well to hone their negotiating skills.

By contrast, the actual needs of different units within the university appear to represent a much less relevant factor (only about a quarter of rectors saw them as having a strong or determinant role). Long-term strategic planning carried out by the institution as a whole was also seen as a secondary determinant of expenditure patterns; however, centralized strategic planning carried out at the rectoral level was recognized as somewhat more important, though not by much. On this particular point, a sharp contrast emerges between rectors (22 out of 46, or almost half, think their role strong or determinant) and rank-and-file professors (only a quarter of see things the same way).

Budget cutbacks in lean times can be adopted according to very different criteria. About three fifths of respondents assigned a strong or determinant influence to "across-the-board" budget cutbacks disregarding actual needs; group B respondents seemed particularly critical in this respect; for almost half of the respondents, the distribution of cutbacks was strongly, or in a determinant way, the result of a passive (or adaptive) response to events with a financial incidence (the case in point being the normal retirement of professors that frees up financial resources). Finally, the distribution of cutbacks may reflect a targeted retrenchment plan, and almost half of the rectors or former rectors considered it as a strong or even determinant influence in making the decision, but barely more than a fourth of rank-and-file professors believe this - group B respondents falling somewhere in between.

Almost 40% of respondents considered the relative importance currently given to these criteria, in the actual functioning of their institution, to be somewhat or completely unable to ensure **responsiveness**; far fewer considered the arrangement to perform "well" or "very well" in this respect; again, rank-and-file professors were particularly critical. The system's capacity to demonstrate **responsibility** gets a better rating, albeit with the usual strong contrast between groups A and C. All three groups of respondents were dissatisfied with the system's capacity to be **accountable**: overall, 16% thought it performed "well" or "very well" in this respect, while more than twice as many (43%) thought it performed "poorly" or "not at all"; as in most cases, respondents from group A were least critical, while those from group C were particularly dismissive in their evaluation.

Generally, the procedures that determined (at least informally) budget allocation decisions are evaluated rather critically, with only lukewarm support from those (rectors and former rectors) who wield more influence in this respect. We found

only limited evidence that rules and procedures for budget allocation were recognized as appropriate methods for engineering change in higher education institutions. This opens up a whole range of questions pertaining to the type of innovations that could be introduced in order to move from reactive budget allocation techniques (which many respondents criticized for their short-termism and their vulnerability to power-plays) to more targeted ones, in which budget decisions, in addition to favoring appropriate allocation of resources in terms of responsiveness and responsibility, would also become an instrument of accountability.

The last set of results in this section concerns respondents' overall evaluations of the degree of institutional autonomy of the system, particularly in terms of its capacity to deliver responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. The issue of autonomy is an important one in Swiss higher education, which is currently moving away from an essentially state-controlled system to one made up of universities operating as more independent legal entities - with corresponding decisional autonomy in the management of universities. Some universities (e.g., Basel) have already gone much further in this direction.

Five criteria were used in our questionnaire to characterize a university's degree of autonomy[17]: its formal legal status; the university's leeway to set professors' salaries (and possibly to differentiate between them); the management of the university's buildings (which can belong to the state and be designated, by the latter, for use by the university, or be owned by the university); the extent to which the university budget is integrated into the state budget (normally, the corresponding cantonal budget) or completely separate from it; and the frequency of direct intervention by the government (e.g., local education ministers) in the governance of the university. Ratings were given on a five-point scale.

Generally, respondents from group A viewed the university as much more autonomous from state authorities than the rest of the professors did (over half of the former group gave their institution a rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point autonomy scale; less than a third of the two other groups did so); for 80% of respondents, universities had no leeway in wage-setting; and for about half of them, it had little autonomy (ratings of 1 or 2) regarding the management of buildings. The evaluation falls in the same range (again, without significant inter-group contrasts) when it comes to the degree of budgetary autonomy (a little over half of all respondents considered this degree low or nil and less than 20% high, and approximately the same proportion gave it a mid-range value of 3). Finally, respondents had fairly similar views on the extent of state intervention in the running of the university (about 40% considering it as rare or exceptional and under 30% as frequent). Modest differences among groups of respondents can be detected, with a larger proportion of group B (and, even more so, group A) respondents assigning it a mid-range value of 3; by contrast, group C respondents tended to have more definite views, but they were, interestingly, fairly evenly split between those who thought the state intervenes frequently or rarely. For

[17] This question has more relevance for cantonal universities since the Federal Institutes of Technology are regulated by a common federal Act.

19% of respondents, **responsiveness** was served "well" or "very well" under the existing system prevailing in their university; 31% considered it performed "poorly" or "not at all"; as often before, rectors were least critical, and rank-and-file professors most critical of the current situation. The overall evaluation is better with respect to **responsibility** (where the proportion of rectors giving this positive assessment was twice that of rank-and-file professors); nonetheless, more than 28% of all respondents thought the system performed "poorly" or "not at all". Interestingly, the answers of the three groups are remarkably similar with respect to **accountability**; one third of the respondents considered the performance "average", one third thought the arrangement worked "well" or "very well", and one third, "poorly" or "not at all".

6. A comparative perspective

In this section, we shall present a comparative overview of the priorities of reform in university governance from the perspectives of Switzerland and Japan, on the basis of the report produced by Japan under the SNERP and of discussions that have taken place at a seminar organized by Hiroshima University and hosted by University of Tsukuba on February 24-25 2000.

The main issues raised in the Japanese study are the following. First, there is major outside pressure, whether from the government or from business, for universities to reform, and in particular to demonstrate more social contributions and international openness, to develop resource allocation procedures (both among and within universities) in which market-like mechanisms are put to use and to reinforce the cooperation between universities and industry. Concretely, in 1998 the University Council proposed several measures such as the reinforcement of the president's leadership, moving from a bottom-up style to a top-down style in university management, and the introduction of an external evaluation system. Also the transformation of national universities into "independent administrative corporations" (dokuritsu gyosei hojin) is under discussion.

The comparison between two countries on the evolution of governance structures and procedures can be summarized as follows:

The *role of government* is typically high in Japan, which has a strong Ministry of Education, and somewhat lower in Switzerland, where, as we have seen, education is decentralized, but local (cantonal) governments play an important role. The influence of government is declining in Japan, particularly as regards regulation, planning, coordination and general funding, but it is increasing with respect to targeted funding; the government also exerts a rising influence on universities through assessment exercises that reinforce competition among institutions. This pattern is quite different from the Swiss, where the role of the authorities has declined somewhat in terms of funding (with the relative share of other sources of funding being expected to increase). However, their role increased in the sense that authorities are taking steps to alter the playing field in order to induce universities to be more competitive and to plan their development in a coordinated, mutually complementary perspective.

One general feature emerging from the comparison with respect to the *role of different bodies in university institutions* is that Japan and, to some extent Switzerland, are clearly reforming, in the sense that hitherto "strong" bodies can see their influence eroding, whereas bodies that had comparatively limited influence are seeing their role increase. The tendency in both countries is to move toward strong presidential leadership, which could be considered a preliminary step for the improvement of university's responsiveness.

Regarding *budgetary matters*, two features hold in both countries[18]: previous budgets have largely determined current ones (there is a certain stickiness of expenditure which prevents swift reallocation of resources); accordingly, strategic development considerations only exert a limited influence on budget allocation. However, a significant part of the financial resources of Swiss universities continues to be in the form of line-item budgets (although this practice is undergoing rapid change); block grants and targeted grants tend to represent a more important part of funding for Japanese universities.

In general, as we have seen, many of the challenges that higher education has to deal with are the same. Universities are expected to cater to an increasing clientele with diverse needs and backgrounds, to offer a broader range of educational products, to keep up with technological development in both teaching and research, to reexamine their role in society, to be more open to outside scrutiny, to face competition from other providers of teaching (not to mention analytical and consulting expertise), to maintain their independence while at the same time acquiring more funding from non-government sources, and generally to do "more with less".

Adaptation to change also presents some common features across these two countries. These are:

- A significantly stronger role for university presidents, amounting to a centralization of power *within* the universities;
- A decline in the role of some "historical" bodies within universities, such as "Senates" or other bodies bringing together all the professors of a university;
- A declining influence of the authorities in budget matters, but stepped up government intervention regarding the framework conditions in order to modify the general context in which universities operate; this implies using incentive mechanisms;
- A more frequent use of evaluations, whether internal or external, and whether mandated by the authorities or undertaken by the free will of the institution;
- A general effort to increase the share of private funding to support university operations;
- A shift in the explicit or tacit rules about the respective positioning of universities, which results in sharper competition among them and, more generally, an increasing reliance on market-like signals to orient decisions.

[18] Regarding budgetary matters, only national universities were considered for the Japanese case.

7. Conclusions

In the light of the complexity of university governance as an object of study, and of the extreme variability of actual approaches to the practice of university governance - both among and within countries - there is little doubt that a sustained research effort in this area is a necessity. Although a growing amount of literature is available, the difficulties of university governance are such that stakeholders may still be insufficiently equipped to face current challenges.

The general public, as well as its elected representatives in public office, does not appear to have access to adequate information on the issues confronting universities. It makes it all the more difficult for society at large to express its preferences and to clearly voice its expectations *vis-à-vis* universities; this fact may, to some extent, contribute to explaining the increase in the overall pressure for introducing and institutionalizing assessment procedures. Of course, one might argue that market mechanisms provide a conduit through which preferences can manifest themselves. However, even if this may apply to some acts of governance, such as the range of courses offered as a response to apparent demand, it is clearly insufficient with respect to the internal organization of universities, particularly the need to be responsible and accountable. Responsibility may be described as the capacity to be responsive twenty years from now; mere adaptation to short-term demand cannot guarantee this capacity. As for accountability, it is predicated on the assumption that university governance plays by certain rules. Available evidence suggests that these rules can be muddled or confusing, leaving ample room for power plays in which well-placed individual actors can exert undue influence.

Within the university itself, the actors in charge of governing the institution (particularly rectors and presidents) do have access to most of the information required, even though the information that eventually reaches them may have been inappropriately filtered at various stages, thereby hampering their capacity to precisely assess the stronger and weaker points of their respective institutions. However, the demands placed upon them are such that it is far from certain that they have the necessary support (particularly resources for strategic analysis) to deal with them. In the context of increasing competition among universities for access to private and public funding, strategic positioning in promising scientific niches, and strategic decision-making for institutions, constitutes, in itself, a challenge, which is increasingly set to exceed in complexity those confronting the CEOs of major international corporations.

In order to meet the informational, analytical and strategic needs of very different types of shareholders, research is an incontrovertible necessity. We submit, however, that some directions of research may prove more effective in coming to grips with the complexity of the questions involved. Precisely because of the extreme case-dependency, it is doubtful that any particular set of measures will have universal applicability. For example, arguing across the board for "more market" in university governance may suggest ways to solve *some* problems in *some* contexts. This may, in particular, enhance universities' responsiveness. However, "more market" is a recipe

likely to fail in terms of responsibility, and there is insufficient evidence so far that it would greatly enhance universities' capacity to "play by accepted rules" (and to do so *verifiably*). Furthermore, what applies in a small, decentralized and multilingual country such as Switzerland may not be appropriate in a large and extremely homogeneous country (by international standards) such as Japan, and vice-versa.

It follows that the focus of our search for useful guidelines for university governance may have to be shifted. Instead of looking for the right *measures*, it may be wiser to look for appropriate *principles*. This would confirm the validity of an approach to university governance prioritizing principles such as "responsiveness", "responsibility" and "accountability". Of course, these three principles are, as such, open to debate, and they certainly lend themselves to further elaboration. Our goal in this study, however, is only to contribute to opening some avenues in this direction.

Finally, it is important for the debate on the future of higher education, also with respect to responsiveness, responsibility and accountability, to be as open as possible. As noted above, it is exceedingly difficult for social actors, particularly those who are outside formal academic structures, to obtain the necessary information, to weigh the issues, and to form and express preferences concerning university governance. To this end, the development of permanent public fora on higher education (for example in the form of regularly convened *estates general*) could constitute a useful element for the development of an *open culture of university governance* in the 21st century.

This, of course, raises more general questions of democratic governance far exceeding issues of higher education. Nevertheless, if only because higher education is such a centrally important player in modern societies, and is so deeply intertwined with their evolution, such questions cannot be ignored.

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