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Responsiveness, responsibility and accountability: an evaluation of university governance in Switzerland

Six-Nation Education Research Project (SNERP)

Research supported by the Federal Office for Education and Science

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Summary presentation

This study has been carried out as part of the Six-Nation Education Research Project (SNERP), which brings together the following countries (in alphabetical order): Germany, Japan, the People's Republic of China, Singapore, Switzerland and the United States.

Each of the six participating countries has taken the lead in one project in the broad field of education research, with particularly emphasis on the governance of education systems or on the links between education and economic life. At the same time, the five other countries were invited to take part in the project led by the sixth. In practice, participating countries selected one or two projects in which they felt a particular interest. Although Switzerland's project focused on *Vocational Training and Education*, strong interest was expressed there for the project on *Higher Education* steered by Japan. Consequently, the Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science (OFES/BBW) decided to fund the present study.

The following pages constitute the report originally presented to the Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science. The present version is organised as follows: Chapter 1 presents the concepts of "responsibility", "responsiveness" and "accountability" which are crucial to the elaboration of our research question. Chapter 2 discusses methodology—in particular, the operationalization of the analytical concepts in order to make them amenable to research on the pressing issues of university governance in Switzerland. Chapter 3 surveys changes in the formal structures and procedures of governance in Swiss Universities. Chapter 4 presents a selection of the results of a questionnaire survey on higher education, addressing three major issues in university governance: appointments to tenured professorships, the creation of interdisciplinary programs and degrees, and the allocation of budget resources. Chapter 5 contains a comparative overview of the priorities of reform in university governance from the perspectives of Switzerland, Japan, and the United States.

It is important to note that this study is not intended as a detailed descriptive account of the Swiss higher education system (such accounts already exist, and some are quoted in the reference section); nor is it a general essay on the broad (even daunting) question of university governance in a time of change. Rather, it is intended as an attempt to relate a set of very fundamental questions of university governance (which can only be formulated using theoretical concepts) and the actual practice of every day decisions made in university governance—as it were, an exercise in bridge-building.

Much of this research is based on the results of a survey. In the latter, we chose *not* to ask relatively simple (though usual) questions of positive facts or normative judgements; rather, we asked respondents to answer questions already couched in terms of the fairly complex notions of "responsiveness", "responsibility" and "accountability" used throughout. Our focus on these questions reflects our conviction that some fundamental change is required for Swiss universities to rise to the challenges of university governance in the twenty-first century, and that some debate on these issues is a necessary condition for this to occur; on this basis, it will then become possible to engage in more targeted reforms about specific issues in university governance (for

example, quality control in teaching, improved transparency in decision-making, inter-university co-operation in research, linkages between university and community, etc.).

We wish to thank the Federal Office for Education and Science of its financial support; the University of Geneva for providing the research team with the necessary research infrastructure; Erik Verkooyen, Monica Engheben and Michel Joye for their research assistance and preparation of the data base; and anonymous professors who have agreed to take some of their time to fill out our questionnaire. We also take this opportunity to thank in advance colleagues and other experts (whether in the context of the SNERP or not), whose comments and suggestions on this report will, of course, be greatly appreciated.

FG, YH, LW
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1 Background to the research question

1.1 Introduction

It has now become commonplace to say that, on the eve of the third millenium, higher education is confronted with major challenges, and that 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 *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 contents 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 a renewed sense of responsibility of higher education to help social actors make sense of 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.

There is an extensive scientific literature on these challenges as well as on current, predicted or recommended changes, whether in broad terms or in relation with the situation of specific institutions (on theoretical aspects of the phenomenology of change, see e.g. Conrad, 1978; for a discussion of the sources and conditions of change, see e.g. Clark, 1983; for a recent overall assessment, see e.g. Dill and Sporn, 1995); Baldridge and Deal (1977: 80) already observed that “change or innovation is a topic constantly discussed in the educational world” while Clark (1983: 82) points out that the university is “heavily resistant to change, but somehow also produces revolutionary change”. The issues raised in the plentiful scientific literature¹ are, in turn, reflected in a variety of documents produced by, or on behalf of, government services responsible for university education (in the case of Switzerland: e.g. Conseil Suisse de la Science, 1993; Kleiber, 1999), as well as by international organizations where various stakeholders of higher education are represented (e.g. UNESCO, 1998; Collective, 1998; see also Hirsch and Weber, 1999, for a recent integrative overview; Weber, 2000).

Given this abundance of literature, it would only be moderately useful to add to it by attempting yet another analysis of the challenges and changes confronting higher education.

Quite apart from the difficulty of addressing an extremely broad topic, it must be stressed that it is a highly complex one. 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 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 (admittedly, a far-reaching one in itself), which can subsequently branch out in a variety of directions. In other words, rather than to deduct such a question from an extensive analysis of higher education in a context of

¹ Selected references on “Postsecondary adaptation” collated by Gumport *et al.* (n.d.) list some 600 entries.

change, we immediately position our research questions in terms of an issue we consider to be of importance. The issue in question is the relationship between the *responsiveness* of universities to social demand in a broad sense, and their *responsibility* towards society, in the context of *university governance*. We subsequently address subsets of these core questions, as these present themselves in the course of the investigation.

Chapter 1 aims at positing the building blocks of this procedure. It is organized in follows. In Section 2, we briefly review the challenges generally (if not systematically) confronting higher education in most affluent “northern” countries. In Section 3, we focus on the two core issues of “responsiveness” and “responsibility”, assess their importance in the broader context of change in higher education, discuss their interdependence, and introduce our central research question: the joint recognition of responsiveness and responsibility, in a context of change, in the governance of universities, particularly the management of higher education. Section 4 discusses some results already available in the literature and pertaining to our research question.

1.2 A brief overview of challenges

An overview of the challenges that higher education² has to grapple with on the eve (now at the dawn) of the third millennium looks quite different depending on the level of generality at which it is positioned. In what follows, we refer in part to the very general framework used in some of the working documents drafted in preparation for the UNESCO’s *World Conference on Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century : Vision and Action* (Paris, October 1998), and in part on Cameron and Tschirhart’s (1992: 100) characterization of post-industrial environments as agents of change, with unpredictability, turbulence, resource scarcity, competitiveness and periods of declining resources. It should be clear, however, that more precise issues can be fitted into the items listed below. Most books concerned with university change start out with a list of some kind; see e.g. Schuster *et al.* (1994: 4). Clearly, what counts as a “challenge” is also dependent upon the missions assigned to higher education; this is another fundamental question that we do not delve into; for a discussion, see e.g. Muller (1977) or Allen (1988).

The concept of challenge is a fairly general one, yet it allows for categories. We have identified three broad categories, namely those that are related to *social demand*, to *constraints* and to *opportunities*. It must be clear, however, that these categories are proposed for expository convenience, and that actual “challenges” do overlap.

² In this paper, we shall eschew any discussion of the nature of higher education, and conform to the UNESCO definition adopted in 1993 : higher education includes “all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments, that are approved as institutions of higher education institutions by competent state authorities”. However, within the confines of this definition, we will focus on universities (ISCED 6 and 7) as a *subset* of higher education institutions. In other words, we specifically exclude “non-university tertiary education” (ISCED 5). This implies that, with respect to the Swiss education context, currently emerging *Fachhochschulen* or *Hautes écoles spécialisées* will not be included in this study. The chief reason for focusing on traditional universities is not that we wish to stress some intrinsic differences between them and *Fachhochschulen*, but rather the simple fact that the latter are only beginning to exist. This makes them unsuitable objects for an investigation of how their governance responds to change.

Social demand

Social demand influences education, research, and other functions of universities, and has implications regarding the relationship between them.

1/ Increased demand and unprecedented expansion

The demand for higher education among the public at large has been increasing at a rapid pace. Increased demand is related both to a rise in the percentage of young people wishing to earn high-level professional skills and to the steadily mounting interest in continuing education from adults who already are in gainful employment on the labor market. In the long term, enrollments are, of course, also influenced by aggregate demographic figures, which go a long way towards explaining the rise from 13 million to 82 million students worldwide in the 35 years to 1995. In the Swiss context which is our chief concern in this research, a decline in the number of students has been observed in recent years (OFS, 1996); however, figures pertaining to “traditional” universities can give a misleading view of the long-term trends affecting *postsecondary education* as a whole. The creation of “technical universities” (*Fachhochschulen*) and the inclusion of student enrollment in these institutions into the aggregate enrollment figures are very likely to result in a pattern of long-term growth.

Higher education must therefore prepare itself to deal successfully with these increasing numbers.

2/ Increased strategic importance of knowledge in modern societies

Over recent years, the role of learning and knowledge in the everyday socio-economic life of actors has been steadily increasing. This evolution plays itself out both at the individual and at the societal level, implying that “higher learning and research now act as essential components of [the] cultural and socio-economic development of individuals, communities and nations” (UNESCO, 1998: 1). Technological innovation is a major cause of this increased role of knowledge, which directly impacts on what universities are expected to provide (Dill and Sporn, 1995), while also creating “a climate of hyper-turbulence in these institutions” (Cameron and Tschirhart, 1992: 88).

Higher education is expected to rise to the challenge of its increased importance in social and political life, in connection with rapid and pervasive technological innovation.

3/ Diversification of demand regarding the range of instruction provided

In connection with the preceding points, the range of courses that universities are expected to provide has also been expanding. Just like the preceding one, this evolution is fuelled by technological development that constantly expands the overall scope of human knowledge as well as the depth of specialized expertise required to master the technical sides of a large number of trades and professions.

Clark (1995: 159) captures the essence of the problem by writing that “the ongoing professionalization of many occupations foretells that not only are more graduates going on to job markets, but that more different types of graduates are being prepared for more diverse occupational specialties. Knowledge expansion [...] produces [...] a growing array of disparate bundles of knowledge.” A growing number of trades and professions makes use of technical competencies, which have to be acquired and maintained. Universities (in particular in the United States) have tended to respond by adapting their offer; “Higher education has become increasingly consumer-driven” (Gumpert, Ianozzi, Shaman and Zemsky, 1997: 83).

All this results in a mounting differentiation or even heterogeneity of the activities taking place at universities, even *within* the two classical core missions of the Humboldtian institution, namely, teaching and research; Clark (*op. cit.*, 159) states that “from differentiation comes fragmentation that leads to systemic problems of integration and coherence”.

Higher education must be prepared to encompass a broadening and deepening range of subjects and to offer appropriate courses of instruction in them, and yet ensure the integration and coherence of its activities.

4/ Questioning of the relationship between teaching, research, and additional functions required from higher education institutions

Precisely because of the broadening range of demands put to universities in terms of teaching skills that can be immediately put to use on the labor market, higher education institutions are forced to reconsider the respective weight of their traditional missions and the relationships between them. Traditionally, universities are expected to engage in teaching and research, where the latter feeds the former, and vice-versa.

This vision of the university is not necessarily hegemonic, and Allen (1988) points out that according to some authors, teaching can be seen as *not* directly connected to research. In such a case, university teaching should aim at synthesizing knowledge produced by research, in addition to providing (professionally) “useful” skills.

However, universities are also being assigned additional functions, such as (i) being an agent of public or state science policy; (ii) being a center of services (such as health services) to the surrounding community; (iii) being a social center in itself, contributing to the quality of life of the community, region or state where it is located; (iv) contributing to education to citizenship; (v) maintaining cultural heritage and providing symbolic means to express identity; (vi) advancing social justice, with regard to social class, gender and minority status.

Though this list of missions is probably not exhaustive (it could actually be extended indefinitely by breaking down each of the above missions into more specific goals), it is enough to show how varied and complex the role of the university in society has become.

Higher education must find a coherent balance of activities and adopt structures that are compatible with the maintenance of such balance.

5/ Increasing public scrutiny over access conditions

Precisely because the importance of its position in society has been increasing, the issue of access to university education has acquired increased saliency. This issue is admittedly of less importance in continental Europe, including Switzerland, where a *maturité* or *Abitur* is normally sufficient to secure access to higher education. However, a drift towards more or less overt forms of *numerus clausus* in some medical schools suggests that successful completion of secondary education may soon no longer be a shibboleth. Entry conditions, by contrast, are a major issue in other education systems, such as that of the partner country of this study, i.e., Japan.

A strong case can be made that the universities of the future should not be content with deciding (with little regard for how their decisions will be perceived among the public at large), whom to admit and whom to keep out, and can do so only if they are prepared to be accused of compromising their social responsibility.

Unless admission procedures are regulated from the outside (meaning, presumably, by the state), universities are beholden to come up with workable, efficient, and socially aware principles of admission.

Higher education must define rules of access that are compatible with an effective discharge of its broad missions while taking account of the increased importance such decisions can have on the life chances of students and potential students.

6/ Increasing responsibility as independent, leading actor in society

Various segments of society increasingly look to universities to play several interrelated roles that practically no other instance is in a position to play.

First, the university is expected to retain a guiding role at many levels: as the repository of social values such as intellectual probity, the selfless quest for knowledge, and an ethical use of knowledge.

Second, the university, as a concentration of brain-power covering most areas of human knowledge, is expected to function as a watchtower or outpost from where scientists peer into the future, to inform society of impending changes and help governments, business firms and citizens prepare themselves for these changes. In times of social, moral and ethical disruption, universities are meant to take an active leadership, not just by providing information and analysis with a predictive flavor, but also by suggesting broad policy orientations that conform to social values.

Universities have a responsibility towards societies confronted with far-reaching changes; they must take a leadership in the assertion of core intellectual and ethical values providing guidelines for social and political action.

Constraints

7/ Reduction of financial state support, alternative sources of revenue and academic independence

Financial support from the state for universities has been cut practically everywhere. The result is a generalized “fiscal constraint with attendant demands for cost containment and accountability” (Gumpert and Pusser, 1996: 1). In institutions themselves, these constraints take the form of budget cuts, program reduction and retrenchment. While some trimming was initially conceivable without direct harm to academic activities themselves (by targeting administrative costs that had been steadily rising over time), this point has long been passed, with the direct consequence that universities are expected to do as much as before (if not more) with less resources.

This is a problem in itself, which underscores the difficulties associated with reliance on public funding. However, the strategies that have been developed to solve it do, in turn, raise new questions. Quite apart from compensating the loss of tax-based financing by increasing tuition (something which raises equity issues, depending on what accompanying measures are adopted), universities have stepped up their activities as providers of expertise, for a fee, to private (corporate) and public (administration) actors, and as partners in ventures with business. While this may finance research activities, the latter are usually of the applied rather than fundamental kind, and this strategy raises the question of the university’s independence *vis-à-vis* these new “clients”.

Higher education must find ways to finance its activities adequately with generally reduced public (unconditional) support, while maintaining its independence towards outside actors financing research work, as well as financial accessibility for students.

8/ Calls for increased (and demonstrated) efficiency and accountability

In stride with budget cuts, program reduction, retrenchment (not in the system as a whole, which is expanding, but *within* institutions), etc., universities are increasingly being asked to demonstrate productive efficiency and financial responsibility. Beyond the admonition to do “more” with “less” (which is essentially defined in terms of broad outputs), calls for efficiency and accountability emphasize the precise workings of processes internal to the university. The latter are therefore required to move from a conceptual to a practical interpretation of what “effectiveness” and “accountability” actually mean. To a large extent, these characteristics of university operations are expected to be met in the administrative, rather than purely academic areas of its operations. The practical difficulties, however, are no less daunting, and raise all the problems encountered whenever “effectiveness” and “efficiency” are invoked (that is, no matter in what context). Sometimes, recourse to the private sector (by outsourcing some activities to auxiliary firms; see e.g. Gumpert and Pusser, 1997) is seen as a shortcut to effectiveness and accountability; but there again, it is far from certain that such changes have no effect on universities’ capability to fulfill their missions.

Universities must develop appropriate re-engineering procedures for achieving effectiveness and accountability, in their actual operations, without jeopardizing any of their missions.

9/ Explicit requirements regarding internal democracy

In line with their (predominantly) humanistic traditions, universities are now expected to conform to certain norms of democracy. The democratic tradition of universities is actually quite old, but recent changes affecting higher education tend to result in a concentration of power. Preserving and deepening democracy in higher education requires some re-configuring of internal organizational structures in order to give all stakeholders (first and foremost students) appropriate representation.

At the same time, reduced financial support requires allocative efficiency, which is often interpreted as implying little else than cost-reduction; cost-reduction, in turn, may require the centralization of decision-making power in hands of university authorities (usually, Rectors or University Presidents); such concentration of power, however, may turn out to be in direct opposition with the goal of internal democracy.

The re-configuring of universities' internal structures must combine the often conflicting goals of managerial efficiency and internal democracy.

10/ Splintering of university education

The provision of higher education is less and less the preserve of an established and finite set of institutions. The virtual monopoly of traditional universities is being challenged by new colleges, not to mention a bevy of institutions catering to the needs of the adult, working public requesting continuing education. Cameron and Tschirhart (1992: 88) observe that "more money is now spent on postsecondary education outside colleges and universities than inside them". In other words, universities will increasingly find themselves in competition with each other — a trend which can be interpreted as an added constraint on their operations. A significant degree of competition traditionally exists in countries like the United States. In the case of Switzerland, the structural resources of universities usually are not a direct function of the number of students they can attract, of the scientific productivity or fame of its Faculty, etc. This, however, is likely to change in the future. In other words, splintering is linked to increased competition, and be interpreted as a constraint; it can also be seen as an opportunity — which ties into the next category of challenges. Added competition can have the beneficial effect of prodding universities to worry a little more about their general profile, academic innovation, scouting for talent, etc.

Universities must reexamine their self-representation as the chief (or sole) providers of higher education; this includes developing a vision of higher education where providers are increasingly varied; this also represents an opportunity to pay more attention to innovation in course contents and lines of research

Opportunities

11/ Increasing importance of fast-changing information technologies

As shown in the preceding paragraph, the challenges confronting higher education are not only a matter of increased (and often conflicting) demands from society, combined with reduced resources and sharper competition for them. Change also creates opportunities. In the realm of higher education, the most exciting opportunities probably have to do with the development of information technologies, opening the way for the setting up of virtual universities. For example, distance learning can be made considerably more flexible and hassle-free by resorting to the internet and electronic mail. This, of course, has far-reaching implications for teachers, whose role will increasingly be that of a tutor.

Information technologies deeply affect the operations of universities, and their potential for bringing about change is far from spent. But this also greatly expands the range of things universities can do, and how they do it. Actual and probable transformations resulting from increased use of information technologies must be taken into account in the governance of universities.

1.3 Responsiveness, responsibility and accountability

Some of the challenges presented in the preceding section are not new. However, looking back on this list, it is difficult to escape a feeling of dizziness. Seldom has any institution been required to meet so many challenges, each of them so demanding and specific in its implications, all at the same time. The state itself, of course, is one of those institutions that has to discharge a large number of complex duties, but the latter do not seem to be socially defined in such an exacting manner. Furthermore, the state apparatus normally enjoys the use of a wider range of instruments (not to mention statal authority itself) to act upon the situation; by contrast, the universities have much more restricted courses of action at their disposal.

It is also the case, however, that the university is one of the oldest surviving institutions of western history (although it has also appeared in other parts of the world, that is, outside the western socio-cultural tradition). It is actually older than the modern state, and has shown an extraordinary capacity for adaptation and change. I. It is precisely some of the aspects of this *capacity for change* that lie at the core of our research project.

As announced in the introductory section of this chapter, our goal is not to propose a general, integrative analysis of the changes required or of how higher education institutions can achieve them. Rather, we wish to focus on one aspect of the process of change, which 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 above in terms of two concepts : responsiveness and responsibility. On the one hand, universities are expected to be *responsive* to society's needs. These pertain, as we have seen, to rising enrollments, diversifying course contents, increasing of the range of courses offered, guaranteeing economical and transparent operations, safeguarding 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 fundamental aspects of quality of life. Meeting these multifaceted 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*, which may not be fully captured by its operations as a responsive institution. Because society is changing, it needs references and frames for social, political and economic debate, 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, higher education must exercise its sense of responsibility *vis-à-vis* society, by adopting solutions that maintain and reassert the intellectual, ethical and social values on which it is built. This reassertion precisely constitutes one way of exercising its 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 change.

Responsiveness and responsibility are present, at some degree of 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, in order for the university to be truly accountable 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 institutions of higher education, 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*.

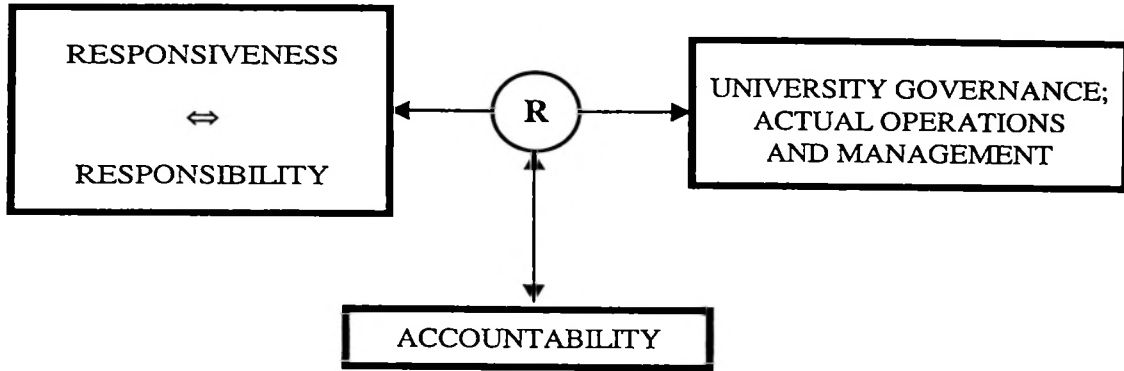
In this study, “accountability” is largely synonymous with “transparency”, but implies a little more than generic transparency; specifically, the notion of accountability includes two conditions³:

- ✧ 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 play), and to redress things whenever it is found that this is not the case.

³ Different authors stress different aspects of “accountability”; see e.g. Berdahl and McConnell (1994).

Our central research question can be represented in a diagram (Fig. 1.1):

Fig. 1.1: Core Research Question



Clearly, our research focuses on the relationship R, in which the problem of guaranteeing accountability (particularly through transparency) is also contained. This gives rise to the following set of questions :

- 1) How do higher education institutions collect and absorb information which they subsequently use to adapt their operations (e.g., prerequisites for graduation or course contents)?
- 2) Which (internal) procedures do higher education institutions follow to arbitrate between conflicting social requirements regarding their activities?
- 3) Which (internal) procedures do higher education institutions follow to arbitrate between the responsiveness principle (i.e., meeting some or other component of social demand) and the responsibility principle (i.e., exercising their leadership role and asserting values of which they are the chief social repository), when these two principles appear to conflict with each other?
- 4) Which structures exist to perform the university's functions, while also following sound principles of governance?
- 5) Is the satisfactory fulfillment of these principles a purely internal issue of higher education institutions, or is it explicitly or implicitly negotiated with other stakeholders in society at large?

Clearly, this set of questions is far from exhaustive; however, it fleshes out some of the core characteristics of universities' *capacity for change*. Nevertheless, our investigation is not prompted solely by the strictly analytical interest of these issues. This research also aims at contributing to the efficient governance of higher education institutions 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, in turn, gives rise to a second set of

questions, pertaining not so much to *positive* processes and structures, but to normative stands about them:

- 6) How do stakeholders judge existing processes and structures in terms of their capacity to achieve responsiveness and responsibility in a context of change?
- 7) Do stakeholders diverge in their views about the re-engineering and re-structuring required?
- 8) Which kind of re-engineering of processes is required to enable higher education institutions to perform these functions to satisfaction?
- 9) Which kind of re-configuring of structures is required to enable higher education institutions to perform these functions to satisfaction, and to meet jointly the principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability?
- 10) 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 *best practice of university governance* in a context of change.

There is a considerable literature on change from the perspective of organization theory (that is, without necessarily referring to the particular context of higher education), with several classics such as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) or Drucker (1988), and a growing amount of literature on higher education that examines change (e.g., several contributions by Clark, various years).

However, looking at these two strands of literature, it quickly becomes apparent that the question asked in this study, though it certainly is germane to the majority of higher education reforms, is quite a specific, even novel one. 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 higher education reform; the reciprocal fact that universities also have *responsibilities* towards society (which are not fully captured by their responsiveness role) is also recognized (although such acknowledgement tends to be more visible in documents emanating from international groups representing high-level university authorities — see e.g. 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 (particularly in the context of change), 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.

However, several pointers and useful concepts can be found in the literature. In particular, Clark (1983) discusses change as it is influenced by existing structures and organizations, including the symbolic side of the latter. This is relevant to our study, to the extent that capacity for reform (made necessary, if nothing else, by outside pressures giving rise to the challenges listed in Section 2) is likely to be constrained by existing university structures, some of which display strong resistance to change (Clark, 1983: 182, quoting Hesburgh, describes the university as one of the most traditional

institutions in society — hence the paradoxical nature of its sometimes “revolutionary” effects).

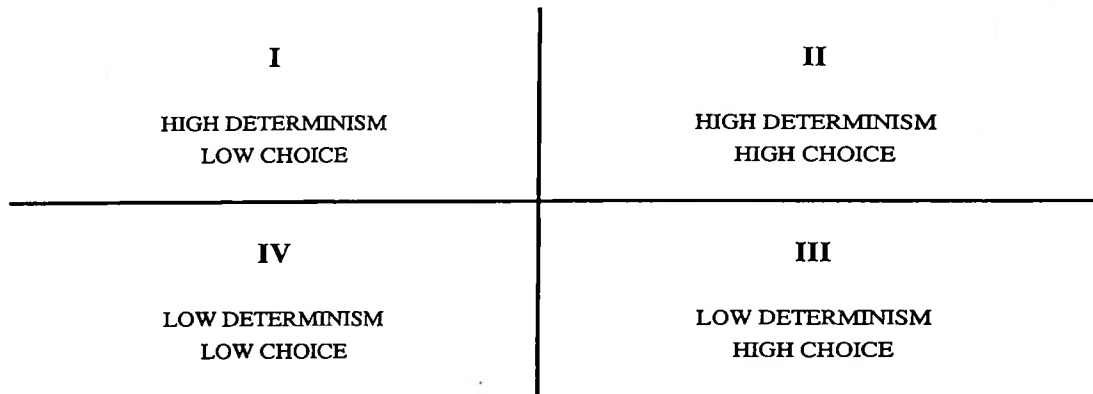
Conrad’s theory of academic change asks what change actually is and how it comes about. His focus is on the “conditions under which, or the degree to which ‘sources of change’ are influential upon those who make the decision about whether change will or will not occur” (1978: 337). Emphasis is put on processes and the role of actors organized as interest groups within the institution. Again, it is more than likely that universities’ capacity for change, including with respect to the specific problem of demonstrating responsiveness and responsibility, depends crucially on the behavior of these actors.

Clark as well as Conrad therefore tend to emphasize internal dimensions (structures and processes within organizations), while Cameron and Tschirhart (1992), whose starting point is the “turbulence” brought on by post-industrial environments, examine how the latter affect organizational effectiveness in higher education. Their empirical investigation (also drawing on earlier work by Cameron, 1984) tests the role and relevance of three major *strategies* (“domain defense”, “domain offense” and “domain creativity”) and of five major types of *decision processes* (“participative/collegial”, “rational”, “bureaucratic”, “political” and “organized anarchy”). Specific combinations of strategies and decision processes can prove more capable than others of ensuring efficiency. In the context of our study, efficiency would not be defined in the same terms as in Cameron and Tschirhart’s paper; rather, it would be defined in terms of successful arbitration in cases where responsiveness and responsibility appear to point in the direction of incompatible, or even mutually contradictory courses of action by the university institutions. Nevertheless, it is possible that the strategies and decision processes identified by Cameron and Tschirhart are relevant in our context as well⁴.

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985), though not referring to the case of higher education, have proposed a useful set of interrelated concepts that help understand *adaptation*. They start out from the idea that adaptation should not be seen as the result of *either* strategic choices by the institution, *or* a deterministic reaction to changes in the environment of an organization. Rather, these two sources of adaptation should be combined as two continuums, giving rise to four archetypal situations. These can be represented in a four-quadrant diagram (Fig. 2), where the vertical axis denotes (from bottom to top) increasing determinism or increasing influence of outside factors, while the horizontal axis denotes (from left to right) increasing capacity for deliberate strategy elaboration and decision-making :

⁴ Cameron and Tschirhart conclude that domain offense strategies (investing and expanding in domains of strength, rather than strengthening weak areas), combined with participative decision processes backed up with a measure of bureaucratic and political processes, seem best able to ensure efficiency — as defined in their context.

Fig. 1.2: patterns of adaptation to change



(from Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1985)

Locating institutions of higher education along these two axis (and hence closer to one archetype) is likely to prove heuristically helpful in analyzing universities' capacity to be responsive and responsible in the context of change. Clearly, recent years (and the associated emergence of the challenges listed earlier) can be interpreted as a move upwards along the vertical axis (more pressures from the outside that determine what universities can or cannot do, must or mustn't do). Presumably, enhancing the efficiency of university governance requires re-engineering and re-structuring that bring about a move to the right, that is, towards situations where institutions are capable of devising strategies and making decisions in order to discharge their duties more effectively.

Frackmann (1995) proposes a detailed analysis of coordination mechanisms and information flows in universities, and of how these affect the efficient discharge of their missions, particularly in terms of quality assurance. He stresses the role of "confidence" in the operations of increasingly autonomous organizations, and this is likely to be an important ingredient in the re-engineering of processes.

Gioia and Thomas (1996) focus on the role of identity and image in top-level university management using data from 372 colleges and universities in the United States. They show that identity and image are "key to the sensemaking process", that is, to how decision-makers interpret the situation of their organization, its changing environment, and their position within it. There can be little doubt that these subjective dimensions are central to the arbitration between responsiveness and responsibility. In particular, because the degree to which these twin goals are achieved generally is *not* formally enshrined in measurements of university performance, the subjectivity of actors will play an accordingly important role. If ensuring responsiveness and responsibility requires, as we assume it does, an evolution in stakeholders' representation of the role of universities, and if Gioia and Thomas (1996: 371) are correct in stating that "it is unlikely that a change in image can be sustained without an associated change in identity", then the concepts developed in their "categorical analysis" are relevant to our investigation.

The concepts mentioned in this section certainly do not constitute an exhaustive list of those which our study can profitably cull from the existing literature. More of them may emerge as relevant as our investigation progresses; in addition, there is little

doubt that this investigation is in stride with the large array of new questions emerging in higher education research (Clark, 1996). Nevertheless, one key observation is likely to remain essentially unchallenged, namely, that 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 to this type of research.

However, one assumption will be made at this point, one that structures the way in which information material is to be gathered. Our assumption is that a key ingredient which makes it possible to combine the *principles* of responsiveness and responsibility may well be this trendy, yet somewhat elusive notion bandied about in the public service sector since the early eighties, namely, “accountability”.

Accountability is often proclaimed, in quasi-liturgical fashion, as if it had illocutory virtues. Yet its actual meaning remains hard to explain. Our assumption, will be that appropriate resolution of the conflict between the responsiveness and the responsibility principles in university governance *requires* accountability. If this assumption is confirmed by the empirical work, the latter will then also serve to get a better understanding of what accountability really means.

2 Methodological aspects

2.1 Introduction

As the overview in Chapter 1 has shown, the literature on university governance has identified the notions of responsiveness, responsibility, and accountability, mostly in the context of wide-ranging social change and the challenges that higher education must face as a consequence. However, there is little in the way of analyses of how these principles are combined in university governance. As to the notion of accountability in university governance, it has gained increasing attention as part of a larger trend abetted by the popularity of notions of efficiency, often enshrined in the “new public management” paradigm; however, analysis has accorded comparatively little attention to the operationalization of these notions.

Rather, such operationalization seems to have been investigated mostly in the perspective of responsiveness, for example in the study of entrepreneurship in universities (Clark, 1998), and “responsibility” is either mentioned as a vague framework condition (sometimes as a mere afterthought), or it may be overlooked entirely.

The reasons for this state of affairs could be discussed in theoretical terms at some length, and would probably require consideration of at least two issues: the ideological climate within which university reform is usually advocated and analyzed, and the epistemological difficulties involved in operationalizing these notions, particularly “responsibility”. However, this theoretical discussion, though interesting in its own right, would exceed the scope of this study. In addition, having established, in Chapter 1, the relevance of the concepts of responsibility and responsiveness, our prime aim is to evaluate their empirical meaning. This leads us to move on directly to an attempt to assess their presence (and the degree to which their importance is acknowledged) in Swiss universities. To this end, data had to be gathered and interpreted with respect to the notions of responsibility and responsiveness as defined in Section 3 of the preceding chapter.

In the absence of literature articulated in terms of the three analytical concepts of our study, there was no set procedure to guide us in the empirical research, and a procedure needed to be expressly devised for this purpose. The aim of this chapter is to present it; as such, it can be seen as a first attempt at operationalizing “responsiveness” and “responsibility” in the governance of Swiss universities confronted with change. The challenge is to bring together the concepts of governance, change, responsibility and responsiveness in such a way that information about their interaction can be retrieved from the observation of Swiss universities. This observation, in turn, relies on two types of sources: written materials on the governance of universities as contained in legislation, by-laws and ordinances regulating the operations of universities and survey data collected by way of a questionnaire to be sent out to a certain number of actors in the Swiss university system.

In the subsequent sections, the mutual articulation of the analytical concepts with respect to these three forms of information gathering is presented. This articulation requires step-by-step presentation, not only because it captures the essence of the operationalization mentioned above, but also because it yields the terms of which the examination of legal texts is couched, as well as the organizing concepts of the questionnaire.

It should be clear from the above that this report is not intended as a descriptive account of the Swiss education system (as can be found in Manidi, 1994), since we put more emphasis on an analytical perspective, which attempts to place concepts such as responsiveness and responsibility at the center of the approach. This report is also distinct from contributions to the problems of university policy in Switzerland (e.g. the recent report of the State Secretary for Science and Research; see Kleiber, 1999), if only because it contains no recommendations. In the spirit of the Six-Nation Education Research Project (SNERP), this report aims at bridging fundamental issues with very practical ones, while paving the way for useful international comparisons—here, on questions of university governance.

2.2 On the notions of change and what change has affected

We are interested in governance in the context of change, and hence in the way in which governance itself changes to reflect macro-level societal change. Pinpointing change requires an identification of “before” and “after”.

More precisely, if some university reform has taken place, some structures and procedures for university governance existed *before* the change, and other structures and procedures existed *after* the change — except, of course, in the case of specific structures and procedures left unaffected by reform. Although one could choose to examine the reasons for and the origins of these changes, our focus is on their *effects* and, more specifically, on whether these changes have enhanced responsibility and/or responsiveness in university governance.

The next problem is to define *what* change may have affected. So far we have been referring to “structures” and “procedures” — if only because these analytical constructs are frequently encountered in the literature on organizations, including higher education. However, it quickly became apparent that they would prove impractical in this study, for the following reasons.

First, “structures” and “procedures”, though conceptually clear in general terms, are extremely difficult to identify effectively. In the case of structure, for example, each institution has either a Rectorate (in the case of Universities) or a Presidency (in the case of the Federal Institutes of Technology). How then should one define the “change” that may have affected them? One could focus on the way in which Rectors or Presidents are appointed, or on the duration of their terms, or on the extent of their competencies as set down by the law; all these, one can immediately observe, refer to *actions*, that is, to things that the structure does (or “is done to”) rather than to the structure itself.

Then there is a problem of comparability: structures can be extremely different from one institution to the next, and there is a large degree of arbitrariness involved in deciding that two *different* structures between two distinct universities actually come down to one and the same thing. For example, some universities are structured in Faculties which are, in turn, subdivided in Departments; others, though they also have the Faculty structure, do not have Departments, but a collection of Chairs (each of which typically includes one professorship with a varying number of assistant positions attached), which may be regrouped in more or less tightly-knit “Seminars”. If one is to decide that a Department at university X is comparable to a Seminar at university Y, there is little basis for doing so other than the tasks that these elements of structure perform — again, what they *do*, or what “is done” to them.

Third, the question arises of the number of structures and/or procedures that should be investigated. In the context of a limited pilot study such as this one, only a small selection of structures and procedures could be treated, which implies that these should be chosen very carefully in order to capture as much as possible of the responsibility and responsiveness actually exercised in the governance of universities. Given the heterogeneity of structures and procedures between different institutions, it would be very difficult (short of a near-exhaustive investigation of these structures and procedures) to come up with a selection that would capture the locus of enough responsiveness and responsibility while also allowing for a comparison between universities.

Finally, given the structural and procedural complexity and heterogeneity of institutions, it would be perilous at best to make an arbitrary selection of structures and procedures across universities and still hope in all cases to have captured the essentials of governance issues that universities are confronted with.

Change affects structures and procedures, but characterizing them, in final analysis, must be based on the identification of what actors *do* (or of what *is done* to them), the shortcut to the questions at the core of our study is provided by the notion of “acts of governance”. To the extent that responsibility and responsiveness 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 responsibility and responsiveness 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” (which will sometimes be referred to as “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 Presidence) 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. The six elements of structure used here are presented in Table 2.1 (Section 2.3).

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 position changes as a result of reforms are a further indicator of the degree to which responsibility and responsiveness are actually practiced. These stakeholders (civil society, including business and public opinion; the authorities—or the state; professors as a professional corporation⁵; students and non-tenured research and teaching staff) can be defined in sufficiently broad terms that they can be assumed to represent relevant groups across specific contexts, and still constitute relevant components of the analysis.

Acts of governance, elements of structure and groups of stakeholders therefore emerge as key categories in our investigation, and they are given greater or lesser

⁵ In this context, the word “guild” could be quite appropriate.

prominence in the various stages of the gathering of data. In the following sections, we describe the methodology adopted:

- ❖ in the analysis of legal texts, which focus on elements of structure and stakeholders;
- ❖ in the gathering of survey data, which uses questionnaires organized around acts of governance;
- ❖ in the interviews, we emphasize the relationship between change affecting elements of structure on the one hand, and the exercise of responsibility and responsiveness in acts of governance on the other hand.

2.3 Approaching change in university governance through the study of legal texts

The study of legal texts is a fairly standard way of examining university governance, as well as possible changes in modes of governance as a result of reforms. Actually, this type of exercise is quite frequently carried out by individual universities or in a comparative perspective; in Switzerland, such studies have considered either the overall combination of structures and procedures (e.g. Manidi, 1994) or specific decisions (e.g. Grin, Metzger and Grüner, 1997). Given that a number of substantial changes have taken place since the very extensive study commissioned by the Rectors' Conference, it was considered desirable, if only to be able to rely on up-to-date background information, to reexamine legal texts with particular attention to change.

University authorities were therefore asked to supply all the legal texts concerning them, in particular the respective *University Acts* ("Loi sur l'Université"; "Universitätsgesetz") and corresponding by-laws, both in their current and previous version. In this context, "previous" refers to the version that was in force prior to the most recent reform or wave of reforms. It must be remembered that, owing to the highly decentralized nature of the Swiss university system, where education remains by and large within the purview of Cantons, such laws are part of cantonal legislation; they must, however, be compatible with Federal law.

In order to highlight change, the information extracted from these documents was organized in the following two-way table:

Tab. 2.1: Change in Swiss universities as reflected in legal texts

Element of structure considered (EoS) ↓	Changes in the appointment and composition of the EoS	Nature of change in the extent of competencies of the EoS	Magnitude of change in extent of competencies
EoS maintaining links with non-university community (e.g. "Academic Council")	A1	B1	C1
EoS maintaining links within the university (e.g. "University Council")	A2	B2	C2
EoS reserved for tenured Faculty members (e.g. "University Senate")	A3	B3	C3
EoS carrying top decision-making power (e.g. University Rector or President)	A4	B4	C4
EoS bringing together limited number of actors with decision-making power within the university (e.g. Council of Faculty Deans)	A5	B5	C5
EoS with decision-making power at the Faculty level (e.g. Dean, Faculty Council [within a Faculty])	A6	B6	C6

While the number of "elements of structure" could have been more or less, the six EoS listed above constituted a good compromise between case-specific precision and cross-institutional generality, and lend themselves to a comparison of institutions in Switzerland.

The contents of cells in columns 2, 3 and 4 (containing cells "A", "B" and "C") require a few words of commentary. Column 2 contains a brief characterization of the change in the appointment and composition of the respective EoS. In the case of the University of Geneva's *Academic Council*, for example, there is major change, since this body was actually *created* by the 1995 reform. Column 3 mentions the nature of the changes in the extent of the competencies that this body enjoys. Again in the case of the University of Geneva's *Academic Council*, it *approves* the University's *general policy plan* previously developed and/or approved by the Faculties, the Rector and the University Council (in this order); it *transmits* the University's specific *development plan* to cantonal authorities; it must *approve* the *budget* submitted by the Rector; and it *advises* cantonal authorities on the *creation and retrenchment* of programs and chairs. Clearly, if only because this body did not exist before the reform, this represents a massive *increase* in competencies, which will be evaluated accordingly in Column 4. Quantification of the degree to which competencies have increased or decreased in an extremely delicate exercise, so it was decided to keep it as light as possible.

As a consequence, a simple seven-point scale with the following values was adopted:

- 3: suppression of the EoS as a result of reform;
- 2: significant decrease in extent of competencies of EoS;
- 1: minor decrease in extent of competencies of EoS;
- 0: status quo;
- +1: minor increase in extent of competencies of EoS;
- +2: significant increase in extent of competencies of EoS;
- 3 : creation of EoS.

The resulting matrix provides a bird's eye view of the evolution of the role of key EoS in each university; this is a useful proxy of a representation of structures and procedures as they have changed over time, but to the extent that it is mostly a reformulation of provisions contained in legal texts, it only goes part of the way in the interpretation of the role of social and institutional actors which this study intends to investigate. This latter task requires us to venture into an estimation of how these roles have changed.

To this end, a second two-way table was designed, focusing on *stakeholders' formal presence, or representation*, in a given EoS (and, by implication, as depicted by the first table, the extent of their competencies). The two-way table is shown in Table 2.2, where each cell contains a value ranging from 0 to 3 (half points allowed) assigned to the degree of influence of a group of stakeholders as follows:

- 0: none;
- 0.5: weak;
- 1: moderate;
- 1.5: medium;
- 2: significant;
- 2.5: dominant (but not exclusive);
- 3: exclusive

Tab. 2.2: Representation of groups of stakeholders in elements of structure of Swiss universities

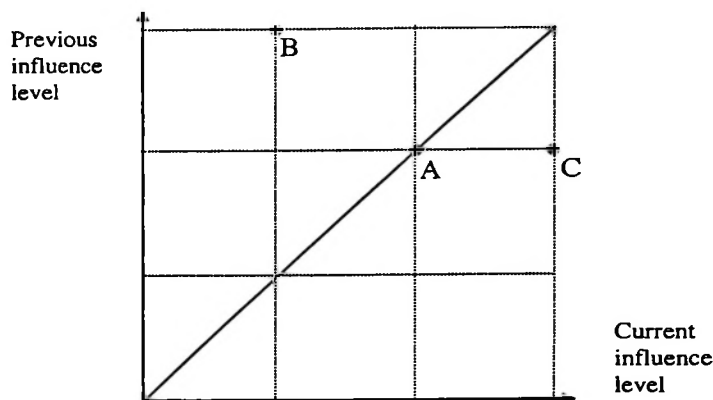
Group of Stakeholders → Element of structure considered (EoS) ↓	Cantonal Authorities	Civil society (business and general public)	Tenured Professors	Student body and non- tenured staff
EoS maintaining links with non-university community (e.g. "Academic Council")	E1	F1	G1	H1
EoS maintaining links within the university (e.g. "University Council")	E2	F2	G2	H2
EoS reserved for tenured Faculty members (e.g. "University Senate")	E3	F3	G3	H3
EoS carrying top decision-making power (e.g. University Rector or President)	E4	F4	G4	H4
EoS bringing together limited number of actors with decision-making power within the university (e.g. Council of Faculty Deans)	E5	F5	G5	H5
EoS with decision-making power at the Faculty level (e.g. Dean, Faculty Council [within a Faculty])	E6	F6	G6	H6

On the basis of information retrieved from legal texts, values are entered in 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 representation, 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. Since both axes use a three-point scale, the values in the *ex ante* and *ex post* matrices can be combined to define points in the graph space, as shown in Fig. 2.3 below.

Fig. 2.3: Representing change in the influence of stakeholders



Clearly, a point such as A (on the first diagonal of Fig. 2.3) indicates that the degree of influence of a particular group of stakeholders has remained unaffected by the change in legislation. Its influence is deemed “significant”, a fact reflected in its position at level 2 both before and after the reform. By contrast, point B denotes a sharp drop in influence from level 3 to level 1, while point C shows an increase in influence from level 2 to level 3.

If A, B and C represent *different* groups of stakeholders within *one* university, a diagram such as 2.3 will provide a bird’s eye view of the direction in which power and influence have tilted as a result of reform (at least in theory); if A, B, and C represents the *same* group of stakeholders at *different* institutions (say, universities A, B, and C), such graphs will show whether reforms have tended to go in the same direction in all universities (which would mean that all points will be found in the same area of the graph) or if opposing evolutions can be observed (in which case we would end up with a very scattered set of points).

An in-depth analysis of these legal texts would have required an accordingly *legal* analysis. This, however, is much beyond the scope of this study, and our investigation has no claim to 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”. Another reason for not attempting a formal legal analysis of these texts is that the “acts of governance” are, by definition, complex ones that *subsume* or combine many decisions which can be legally spread over different actors and technically broken down into separate decisions, which could not be analyzed in their institution-specific detail. Evaluating “who does what” with respect to “acts of governance” requires us to make methodological decisions, and to pass judgement about particular decisions and their importance in the overall “act of

governance". For example, the procedure which ends up in the adoption of a yearly budget goes through several stages, some of which are purely formal, whereas others imply a much stronger influence on the structure of expenditure and revenue of the university. It is therefore our (subjective) judgement that *as part of a complex act of governance* such as deciding how much the university should spend on what, legal texts pertaining to the inner workings of an institution indicate that one or another group of stakeholders does (or does not) exert significant influence⁶. In short, our "reading" of legal texts is an *interpretive* one, and as such, it is open to discussion. As indicated before, our chief aim was to see if any general patterns in terms of governance (as distinct from narrowly legal prerogatives) would indeed emerge.

The results of our examination of legal texts are presented in Chapter 3 of this study.

2.4 Questionnaire survey

Looking at legal texts offers only a "theoretical" picture of change in university governance, and provides circumstantial evidence about the actual or perceived presence of responsibility and responsiveness 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 but had in the meantime returned to a normal professorship position; (ii) all Faculty deans in Switzerland; (iii) all heads of intra-university research institutes; (iv) a 40% sample of all the (approximately) 2,500 tenured university professors in the country, generating an *ex ante* sample of some 1,000 persons.

The type of information to be sought, however, needs to be quite different from what was investigated in the case of legal texts. The chief reason for this is that individuals surveyed cannot realistically be expected to be well acquainted with the formal changes that have affected the structures and procedures in their institution as a result of reform. In an ideal environment of full information (meaning, in this context, that this information would actually have been absorbed and understood by respondents), it would indeed have been logical to ask them questions about whether such changes had, in their view, positively or negatively impacted on the institutions' capacity to demonstrate responsibility and responsiveness. However, there was a major risk that their evaluation of this capacity (which remains the chief concern of this study) would be obfuscated by confusion about what actually had, or had not changed. In addition, it is not always clear that respondents would be sufficiently well-informed to tease apart *formal* change from *actual* practice, and asking them to evaluate changes in responsibility and responsiveness at both levels separately would have resulted in a highly complex and rather unwieldy survey instrument.

As a consequence, we have chosen to short-circuit these problems by asking respondents to evaluate their institution's capacity to be responsible, responsive and accountable under the current (post-reform) arrangement, allowing them, of course, to comment on whether the current arrangement should be seen as an improvement on the previous one with respect to these criteria, and to make suggestions for further reforms that would enhance their institution's capacity to behave in a spirit of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. Hence, whereas our analysis of legal texts focuses on

⁶ The list of legal texts used is provided in the appendix.

change rather than responsibility and responsiveness, the reverse holds true of the survey.

Another important aspect of the survey is that it explicitly focuses on *actual* practice, not on the way things are supposed to happen. First, as pointed out above, it may be unrealistic to assume that professors actually know the formal rules. Second, the formal rules being retrievable directly from the legal texts themselves, the real interest of 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 responsibility, responsiveness and accountability can, in principle, be exercised. This requires structuring the questionnaire in terms of *acts of governance*, as theoretically defined in Section 2 of this chapter. 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.

Each group of questions contains three main “blocks”. The first block is made up of objective questions, e.g.: “What is the respective degree of influence of group of actors X on act of governance Y?” (where X can be groups of stakeholders as well as elements of structure, and Y can be “short-listing of candidates for a tenured position”). Answers are expressed along a five-point scale ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (discretionary). Another example is “How important is criterion W in act of governance Z?” (where criterion W can be a candidate’s international reputation, and act of governance Z can be the final decision to appoint one of the candidates short-listed).

The second block is made up of three subjective evaluation questions; these address the extent to which the current structures and procedures, in the respondent’s judgement, allows the institution to be responsive, responsible and accountable. Again, answers are expressed along a five-point scale.

Finally, space is left in the third block for the suggested changes. Respondents are first asked which stakeholders should, in their opinion, be given more or less power to influence the group of “acts of governance” considered. A list of 15 stakeholders (plus an added blank line for an additional type of stakeholder that a respondent might like to mention) is provided, and a respondent may indicate if, in his or her opinion, “students” or “assistants” should be given more or less say, or if their current level of influence should remain unchanged. Respondents are then asked to indicate if this proposed change in influence is meant, in their view, to favor responsiveness, responsibility or accountability — more than one answer, of course, being possible.

The questionnaire was administered in French or German, according to the language region in which the university of a particular addressee is located. Only addressees teaching in the bilingual university of Fribourg/Freiburg received the questionnaires in both versions.

The questionnaire is, indeed, 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 (under these or similar designations) are fairly common currency in specialist research, are not necessarily familiar to all university professors, despite the fact that they are arguably central to the operations of the institutions from which they draw their salary. In other words, there is a certain degree of risk involved in issuing questionnaires structured in terms of these concepts.

An alternative could have been to ask *prima facie* simpler questions about acts of governance, and then to *interpret* the answers in terms of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability, which would then have been confined to an underground role. However, this would have created another type of risk, linked this time to the meaning we would have been led to assign, in terms of these three principles of university governance, to the answers given about the acts of governance themselves. Furthermore, we were also interested in respondents' own evaluation of whether existing practices are capable of ensuring that these three principles are actually respected in university governance. For all these reasons, 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 can be expected to relate so directly to their professional practice. We have endeavored to minimize the risks of misunderstanding by explaining, in an accompanying letter as well as in the cover page of the questionnaire, the meaning of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability, as well as relevance to the problem of university governance.

Given the difficulty of the questionnaire, we regard as acceptable the response rate in excess of 25%, yielding a final sample of N=263. Survey results are presented in Chapter 4 of this study.

3 Formal changes in the structures and procedures of governance in Swiss universities

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, we have discussed the methodology of this research; we now move on to results, and little additional detail is required regarding the production of these results, apart from the necessary caveats.

As regards the “formal changes in structure” (and procedures), these could have been approached in different ways. As indicated in Section 3 of the preceding chapter, we have decided to look at the most recent version of the legal texts regulating the operations of nine Swiss universities (Geneva, Lausanne, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Berne, Basel, Zürich, Lucerne, Saint-Gallen—the recently created Università della Svizzera italiana having been omitted owing to precisely to its youthfulness—and the two branches, located in Zürich and Lausanne respectively, of the Federal Institute of Technology)⁷, and to compare it with the version previously in force. A comparison between the latter and the former version 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.

It should be noted that this chapter deals only with the nine “cantonal” universities, and not with the two Federal Institutes of Technology. The reasons for this are the following. First, the legal standing of the Federal Institutes of Technology is fundamentally different from that of other universities. Federal Institutes of Technology fall within the purview of federal authorities, and the notion of “state” applying in their case is therefore a different (and unique) one. Second, if only because of the nature of the political constituency corresponding to the government level competent for them, the notion of “civil society” is also a different one. Third, Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, though endowed with a strong and centralized presidency, are made up of fairly independent units (called “institutes”), most of which specialize in applied or fundamental scientific fields. The relative independence of these institutes restricts the role of “horizontal” internal coordination bodies found in other universities. In short, in the case of the Federal Institutes of Technology, the scope for inter-university comparison with a view of identifying overall patterns of change in the *formal* governance structures in Swiss universities would have been limited, and the relevance of the exercise debatable: the Institutes truly are a world of their own. For these reasons, their case is not discussed in this chapter devoted to the study of *formal* structures; however, they will of course be integrated in the study of the *informal* procedures developed in the following chapter.

Our interpretation of formal decision-making structures in the nine cantonal universities is summarized by three sets of tables and diagrams.

The first set describes the presence of different elements of structure, as they appear in the formal texts, with respect to several acts of governance, namely, appointments to tenured professorships, creation and change of programs and degrees, and the allocation of financial resources (Section 3.2). Since we are interested in formal

⁷ The following abbreviation system will be used in tables and diagrams: Geneva: GE; Lausanne: LS; Neuchâtel: NE; Fribourg: FR; Berne: BE; Basel: BS; Lucerne: LU; Zurich: ZH; St. Gallen: SG; Federal Institutes of Technology: ETHZ (Zurich campus) and EPFL (Lausanne campus). For an overview of higher education in Switzerland, see *Vision* (theme issue 12/1997).

elements of structures only to the extent that they allow us to identify the role of stakeholders, this section is confined to a brief and descriptive account of the formal allocation of decision-making power in Swiss universities. The second set (Section 3.3) indicates how the influence of each group of stakeholders has changed as a result of the most recent of reforms, whether the latter pertain to the inner workings of the university, or to its position with respect to other social institutions—in particular the state. The groups of stakeholders considered are: (i) civil society (including business), which can be represented in decision-making bodies in different ways; (ii) the state (meaning, in the Swiss case, cantonal authorities, except for the two Federal Institutes of Technology, which are under the purview of federal authorities); (iii) tenured professors; and (iv) students. Finally, because of their specific (and generally growing) role in university governance, the case of university rectors will be addressed in a separate section at the end of this chapter (Section 3.4).

It is important to recall that, since these “stakeholders” (civil society, the state, tenured professors, and students) are generally not mentioned *as such* in legal texts, we have used the concept of “elements of structure” (EoS) as a bridge. Elements of structure are formally constituted bodies in the university system (for example, an Assembly of professors belonging to the same Faculty, such as “sciences”). Legal texts normally indicate the composition of such bodies in terms of groups which, directly or indirectly, correspond to our groups of stakeholders.

In other words, our investigation requires a three-step procedure: in the first step, we identify relevant elements of structure, focusing in particular on their position within the system (including their very existence), and on the change in the competencies that these bodies enjoy; in a second step, we focus on the relative position of groups of stakeholders in the respective elements of structure; finally, we then infer from the preceding steps how the influence of different groups of stakeholders has changed as a result of the latest reform or round of reforms.

This type of analysis is necessarily very case-specific, since the decentralization of the Swiss university system, as well as the historically grounded specificities and idiosyncrasies of each university, make for considerable variability, and details will not be presented here; to a large extent, the work amounts to filling out the tables presented in Section 2.3 of the preceding chapter. Nevertheless, the tables and diagrams that encapsulate these successive steps are available in a separate set of background documents that can be obtained from the authors.

3.2 About the “elements of structure” and the selection of “stakeholders”

As noted above, “elements of structures” (EoS) can be very different from one university to the next, which has impelled us to focus on a limited number of EoS’s found (under varying designations) in most institutions. Given the variability between them, some of these EoS’s do not exist some universities, while others are specific to some. The main EoS’s *mentioned in the legal texts of the respective Swiss universities*, and considered in our investigation are the following:

- ✦ a body variously named “Academic Council” (GE, LS), “University Council” (NE, BS, ZH, SG), or Senate (FR), whose main function is to be a bridge between the University and the outside, normally state authorities and civil society;

- ✦ a body such as the “University Council” (GE), “Senate” (LS, BE, LU, ZH, SG), “Plenary Assembly” (FR), “Rectoral Council” (NE), or “Regency” (BS), whose main function is to be a link within the university structure;
- ✦ the Rectorate or Presidency of the University (all universities);
- ✦ Faculty-level decision-making or coordination structures (all universities);
- ✦ other bodies, usually found in either one of two categories: structures whose membership is restricted to tenured professors; specialist administrative or organizational authorities, usually instituted in the universities that have undergone the most far-reaching type of reforms.

Tab. 3.1: Selected elements of structure in Swiss universities

MAIN FUNCTION	DESIGNATION*	FOUND IN
Links between university and state and/or civil society	Conseil académique	GE, LS
	Sénat	FR
	Conseil de l'Université, Universitätsrat	NE, BS, ZH, SG
Intra-university links	Conseil de l'université	GE
	Sénat, Senat	LS, BE, LU, ZH, SG
	Senatsausschuss	SG
	Assemblée plénière	FR
	Conseil rectoral	NE
	Regenz	BS
	Fakultätsversammlung	BS, ZH
	Erweiterte Universitätsleitung	ZH
Faculty level authorities or coordination bodies	Conseil de Faculté, Fakultätsrat	GE, LS, FR, NR, BE
	Conseil des Doyens	LS
	Décanat, Dekanat	GE, LS, NE, LU
	Doyen, Dekan	FR, BE, ZH
	Abteilungskonferenz	SG
Other	Verwaltung	LU
	Planungskommission	BS

*: The “rectorate” (or university presidency) is not mentioned in this table, since it appears in every one of the institutions surveyed.

Table 3.1, though *not exhaustive*, is enough to give an idea of the high degree of variability between Swiss universities. It must also be pointed out that the actual make-up of each body can be very different (in terms, for example, of student representation), and that the way in which their influence has changed as a result of the latest round of reform is also very different⁸. In order to abstract general patterns, from such a heterogeneous population, it is not possible to refer to EoS's themselves. The relative representation of groups of stakeholders (which are encountered in all universities) is therefore used as a means to assess the change in their influence, taking into account

⁸ Summary tables for each university are available from the authors.

their weight within formal elements of structure (see Chapter 2), whose role is explicitly mentioned in legal texts.

In order to arrive at an assessment of overall patterns and to allow for a comparison between universities, it is important to move on from the level of “Elements of Structure” to that of “stakeholders”. The correspondence between these levels is shown in Table 2.2 (Chapter 2). However, since much of this research makes use of the notion of “stakeholder”, our specific choice of stakeholders requires some commentary, even though the principle of using stakeholders as an analytically relevant actor has already been discussed in the preceding chapter.

As noted earlier, the groups of stakeholders referred to are the state, civil society, tenured professors, and students. Civil society and students are groups whose relevance is fairly clear and does not require further discussion at this stage; however, the role of the other two groups must be pointed out, since it reflects specific power structures within the Swiss academic system.

First, the importance given to the state as an actor in the field of higher education reflects the fact that in the Swiss university context (as in other European countries and in Japan), its role has always been, and now remains, a central or even near-monopolistic one, contrary to what can be observed in the United States.

Second, the importance of “tenured professors” as stakeholders (as well as the fact that one of the acts of governance analyzed is precisely the *appointment* of candidates to tenured positions) reflect 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 university⁹. 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 less perspectives, let alone guarantees, of future academic employment. Hence, a major 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.

Third, 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 untenured lecturers and researchers have little, if any, secure job perspectives; they also, by and large, enjoy no more influence in university governance than students themselves.

⁹ “Tenured” means, in this context, holding a work contract without explicit time limitation, or a specified duration which is normally renewed automatically at regular intervals, up to retirement age.

3.3 Evolution of decision-making power

We now turn to the evolution of the decision-making power of stakeholders in Swiss university systems.

In this section, we shall present only diagrams that emphasize our interpretation in terms of changes of the relative power, of different groups of stakeholders with respect to different acts of governance. In other words, we focus on stakeholders, but alternative emphases are also possible. For example, we could focus on the acts of governance themselves, and see how, within each particular university, the relative position of each group of stakeholder has changed; alternatively, we could focus on each university separately, and evaluate how the role of all four groups of stakeholders has changed. Since this study is part of a project that stresses international comparisons, the specific features of Swiss universities as such is of less relevance, and we have therefore decided to prioritize readings of our data in terms of stakeholders (namely: civil society, the state, professors and students), because the latter make sense in other university contexts.

For each of the ten universities considered¹⁰, we report below results on the three following acts of governance: **appointments of professors to tenured positions**; **the choice of the university rector**; and **adoption of the yearly budget**. This choice of acts of governance is constrained by the fact that, to the extent that we were primarily interested, at this stage, in formal decision-making, only those acts of governance that are readily identifiable as such in legal texts are relevant.

Civil society

Let us now begin by looking at the role of “civil society”, which is summarized by the three panels in Fig. 3.2. The concept of civil society is admittedly a broad one, but it can be said to represent an important stakeholder, in that modern governance (in several domains of public policy extending well beyond higher education) increasingly recognizes the legitimacy of citizen’s association, as well as the relevance of developing ties between the academic and the business worlds; in some cases, religious institutions also have a say.

The role of civil society in the **appointment procedure to tenured professorships** is not new, in that the “outside” has, for a long time, been represented in one or another of the appointment committees involved in the vetting process of candidates. The fact that such representatives are not self-appointed but usually picked by state authorities does not detract from the fact that, *in the formal procedures being examined here*, they should function as truly independent voices of civil society. The latter’s overall influence, however, is moderate or limited, if only because such representatives have a minority presence in the various committees involved in the procedure. Yet again, considerable inter-university variation can be observed, with a not insignificant role for civil society in Lucerne, Basel or St. Gallen, and a moderate or negligible one in the other universities. When it comes to assessing change, the overall pattern is one of stability—that is, the formal role of civil society in the appointment of tenured professors does not seem to have been much affected by reform, with the notable exception of Basel, where its role has markedly increased.

¹⁰ The Federal Institute of Technology is regarded as one institution, although it has independent campuses in Lausanne and Zürich, because the regulations applying to both are identical.

Moving on the **choice of a rector**, we can observe (as in the case of the state), a much stronger homogeneity of Swiss universities. Generally, civil society play a very limited role, although it is slightly more important in Geneva and St. Gallen. However, a univocal pattern of change does emerge. Even though the influence of civil society has not changed in Lausanne, Berne, Lucerne and Basel (where it officially exerts no influence), as well as in Neuchâtel and St. Gallen (where its influence is secondary), its role increases in Fribourg, Zurich and particularly Geneva.

Turning now to the formal role of civil society in establishing the university's **budget**, it comes as no surprise that its role is a limited one, presumably reflecting a widely-held view that civil society's input is relevant in decisions that give the university a face (be it that of professors or a rector), but that more technical questions such as budget-related ones should be left to practitioners and specialists. With the exception of St. Gallen (a university that has a tradition of close ties with the business community), the role of civil society is negligible.

Fig. 3.2: Influence of civil society on:

1. Geneva
2. Lausanne
3. Fribourg
4. Neuchâtel
5. Bern
6. Basel
7. Lucerne
8. Zurich
9. St. Gallen

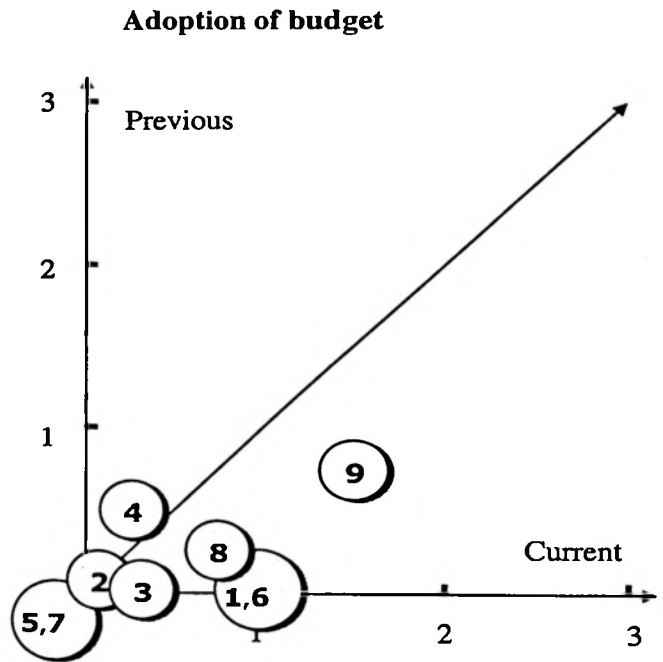
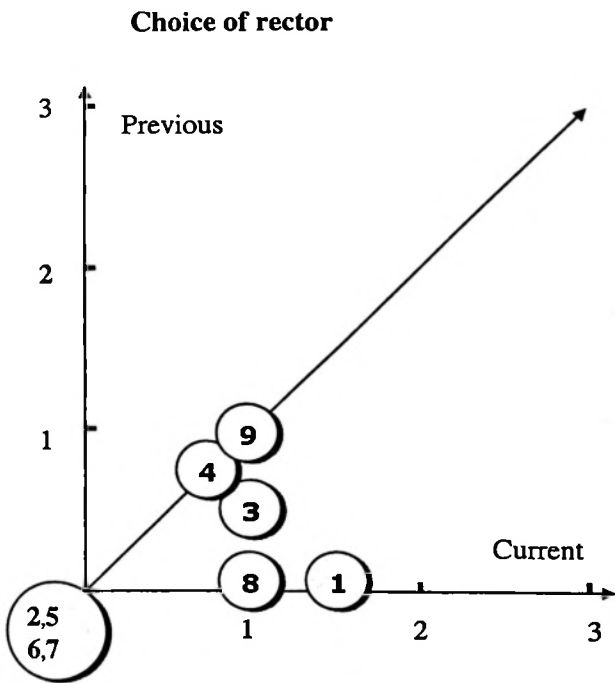
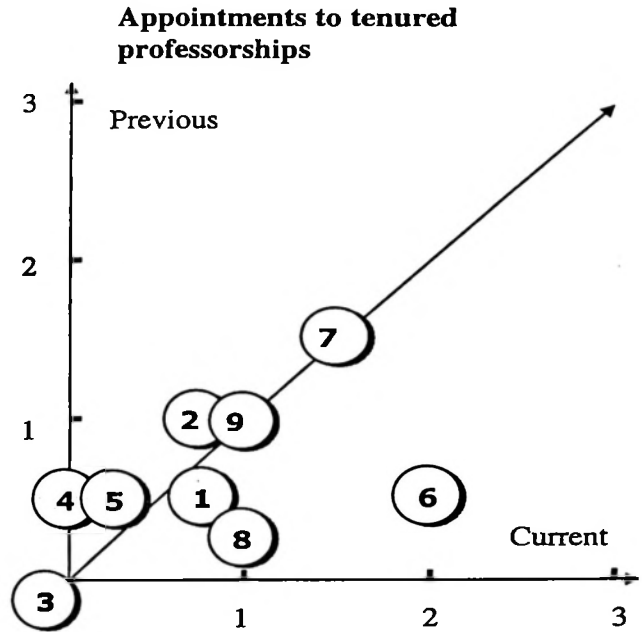
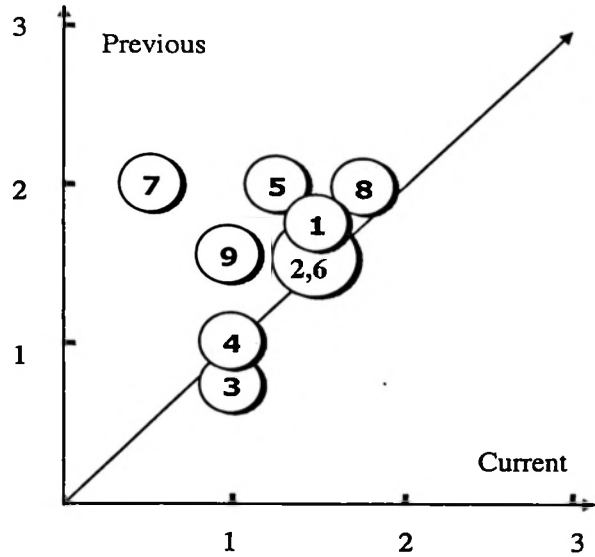


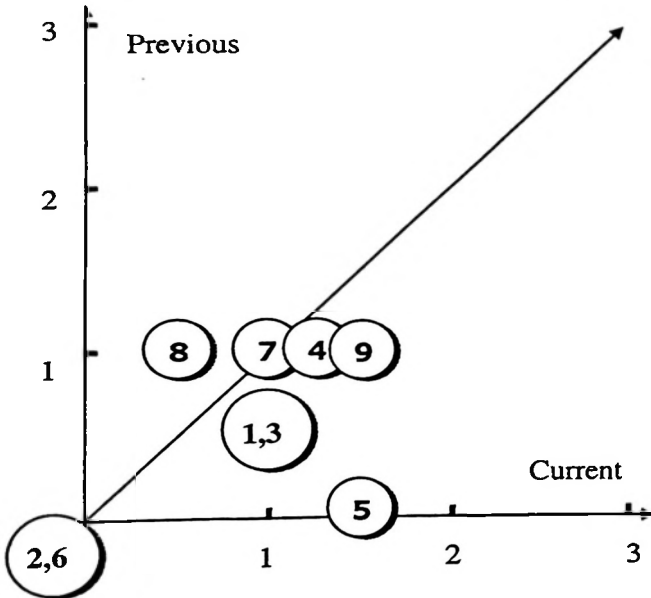
Fig. 3.3: Influence of the state on:

- | |
|---------------|
| 1. Geneva |
| 2. Lausanne |
| 3. Fribourg |
| 4. Neuchâtel |
| 5. Bern |
| 6. Basel |
| 7. Lucerne |
| 8. Zurich |
| 9. St. Gallen |

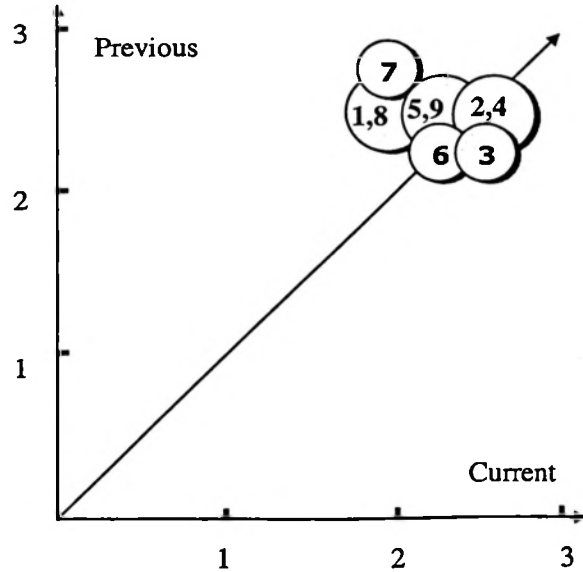
Appointments to tenured professorships



Choice of rector



Adoption of budget



The state

We now move on to a discussion of the role of the state. Its evolution is described in Figure 3.3, panels (a), (b) and (c).

As regards the **appointment procedure to tenured professorships**, it is clear the role of the state can be extremely different across universities. It is high in a clutch of five universities (Berne, Lausanne, Lucerne, Geneva and particularly Zurich), average in two (St. Gallen and Basel), and more limited in two more (Neuchâtel and Fribourg). However, the direction of change is more homogeneous: the general pattern is one of declining influence. This evolution is particularly clear in the case of the University of Basel, where a significant influence (to which 2 points on the 3-point scale was assigned before the latest round of reforms) has declined to a rating of 0.5. This decline can also be observed in Berne, Zurich, Geneva and St. Gallen. No significant change is noted in Neuchâtel, Lausanne and Lucerne; finally, a very modest increase in state influence seems to have appeared at the University of Fribourg.

The pattern looks quite different when we turn to the **choice of a University rector**. First, Swiss universities are less heterogeneous in this respect; second, the influence of the state is generally moderate or low.

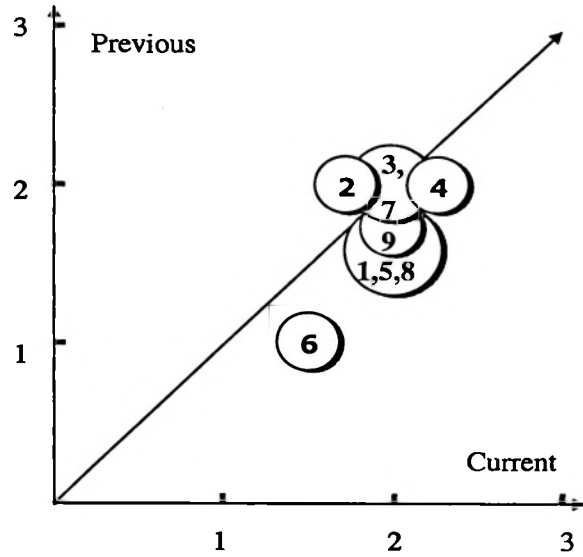
Swiss universities also are more similar in terms of the direction in which the state's role has changed: with the exception of Zurich (slight decline) and Lausanne, Basel and Lucerne (no change), the general tendency is one of rising influence of the state. This can also be observed in the case of the University of Berne, where the state is now responsible for appointing the rector, on the basis of a proposal by the University Senate.

Finally, Swiss universities display the highest overall degree of homogeneity, in terms of the influence of the state, when it comes to **adopting the yearly budget**. In all cases, its influence is very high, and inter-university variation is modest. Generally, no major change in this degree of influence can be observed, although a slight decline can be detected in the case of Berne, St. Gallen, Zurich and Geneva, and a more substantial one in the case of Basel. This case is a particularly interesting one, in that the role of state, as pointed out above, has decreased significantly with respect to the other two acts of governance considered here. Before moving on, it is important to recall, however, that the adoption of the overall budget is one thing, while the precise allocation of this budget within the university is quite another; this point is taken up in the next chapter.

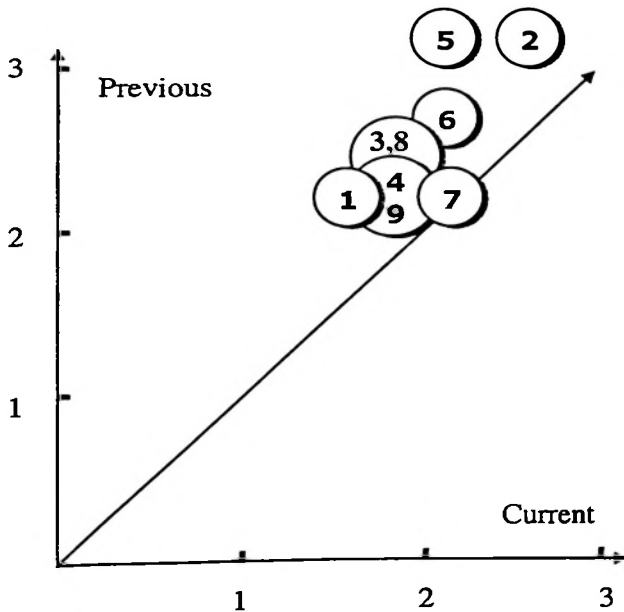
Fig. 3.4: Influence of professors on:

- | |
|---------------|
| 1. Geneva |
| 2. Lausanne |
| 3. Fribourg |
| 4. Neuchâtel |
| 5. Bern |
| 6. Basel |
| 7. Lucerne |
| 8. Zurich |
| 9. St. Gallen |

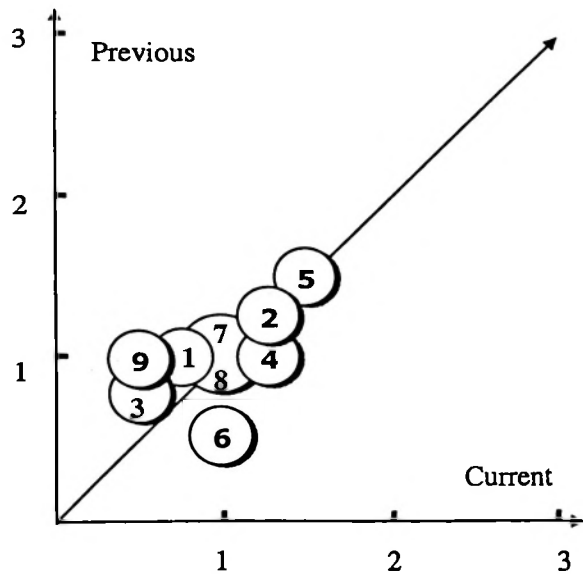
Appointments to tenured professorships



Choice of rector



Adoption of budget



Professors

Let us now turn to the examination of the influence of (tenured) professors.

University professors exert a strong influence on the **appointment of their peers**, where their role is indisputably stronger than that of the other three groups of stakeholders. With some modest degree of variation, all universities are grouped towards the far end of the diagonal on Fig. 3.4. It is not the case, however, that professors can make such decisions on their own, and their influence is actually moderate in Basel (as it already was before the latest round of reforms).

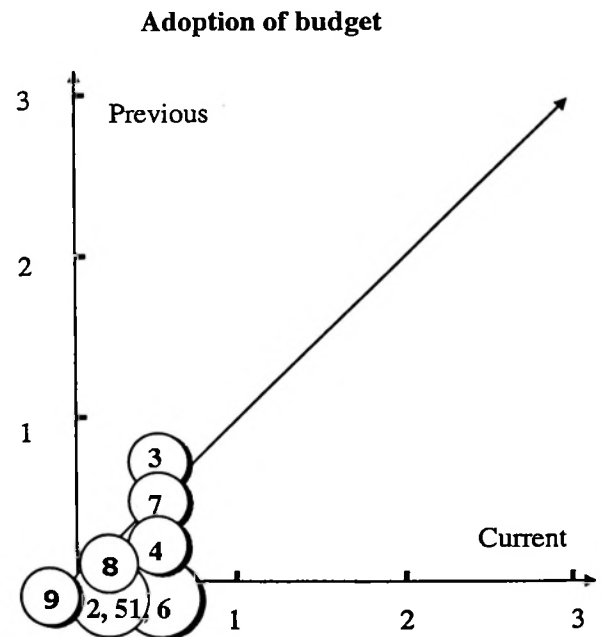
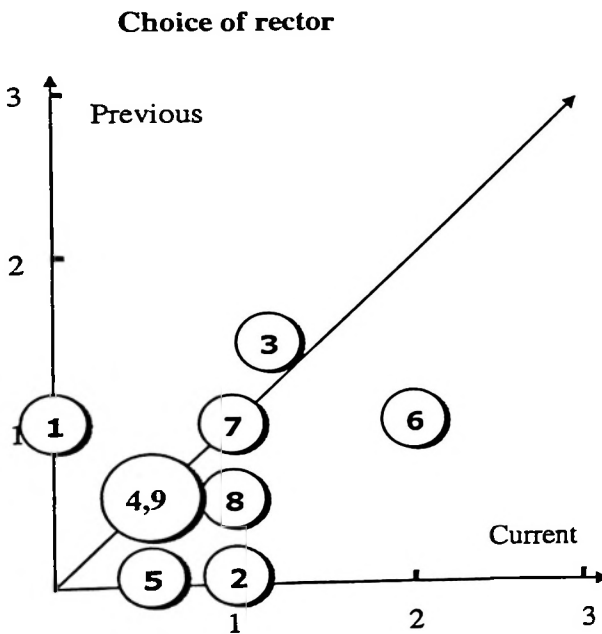
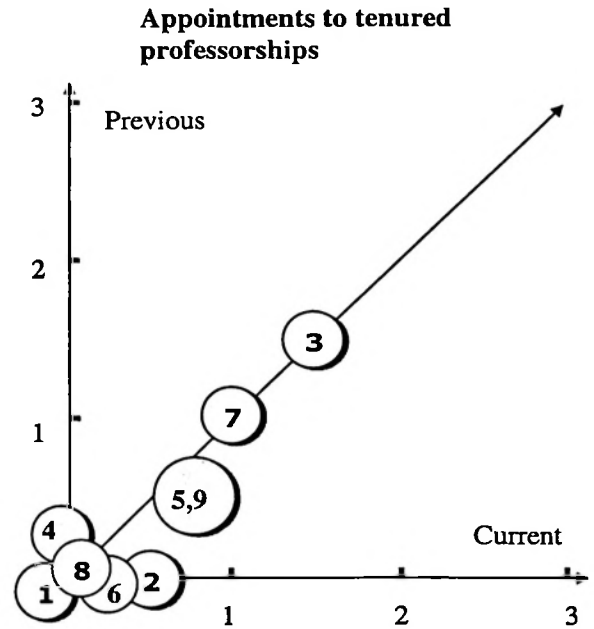
Nonetheless, recent changes in legal provisions in this respect reveal little change, or a slight increase in the power of professors, for examples in Geneva, Berne and Zurich.

Professors also play a traditionally dominant role in the **choice of the university rector**. Up until the recent reforms, they could make such a decision on their own in Berne and Lausanne, while their role was significant in all the other universities. Interestingly, the latest round of reforms reveals a generalized pattern of decline in their influence, albeit modestly so. Only the university of Lucerne has remained unaffected.

Finally, university professors play a modest or even restricted role in the **adoption of the yearly budget**. There is, of course, some degree of variation, with a greater influence in the case of the University of Berne, and a much more limited one in Fribourg. Clearly, this is one area in which state authorities, as shown above, maintain their determining influence. In the same way, no clear pattern of change emerges in this respect: professor's influence on budget decisions has remained by and large unaltered by recent reforms.

Fig. 3.5: Influence of students on:

- | |
|---------------|
| 1. Geneva |
| 2. Lausanne |
| 3. Fribourg |
| 4. Neuchâtel |
| 5. Bern |
| 6. Basel |
| 7. Lucerne |
| 8. Zurich |
| 9. St. Gallen |



Students

Despite the fact that teaching is universally recognized as one of the core missions of universities, if not its most important one, students play a decidedly limited role in university governance.

Let us consider first their influence on **appointments to tenured professorships**. With the exception of Fribourg, where one student representative sits on the *commission d'appel* (the committee in charge of the first round of selection), and where students can make up to 40% of the "Conseil de Faculté" (Faculty council) which, just like the rector and the cantonal government, has to endorse the proposal made by the *commission d'appel*, their influence is minor (Lucerne, St. Gallen, Berne) or zero (everywhere else). No significant evolution can be detected, apart from a somewhat cosmetic change in the university of Lausanne, where students' influence moves from "nil" to "very weak"—and which stands out because the recent reforms at Lausanne university have not resulted, otherwise, in any significant change in the appointment procedures.

As regards the **choice of the university rector**, the picture is more nuanced and diversified. While students' influence remains by and large modest, it is not negligible in Fribourg and Basel, and to some extent Lucerne. There has been change due to recent reforms, but it is not unequivocal: students' influence declines in Geneva, remains essentially the same in Neuchâtel, Lucerne and Fribourg, and increases slightly in Berne, Lausanne and Zurich; only in Basel does their influence reach a significant level.

Finally, decisions on the **yearly budget** are wholly outside of the power of students to influence; as shown in panel (c) of Fig. 3.5, their influence remains nil or very weak in all universities, and any changes brought on by the latest reforms has not resulted in any significant increase.

Overall assessment

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 can have 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.

Finally, 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 that actual practice may depart from them to a significant extent. This point will be taken up, using survey results, in the following chapter. 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.

3.4 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. We also chose to refer to university rectors in the masculine, since up to this time, all Swiss university rectors have been men, with one exception¹¹.

In order to get an overall view of the evolution of 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 competencies; finally, we have graded the importance of this change, on a five-point scale (theoretically) ranging from -2 to +2. 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 texts¹².

¹¹ Ms Verena Meyer, currently President of the Swiss Science Council, has been Rector of the University of Zurich for a period of four years.

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.

Tab 3.6: Evolution of rectors' influence

UNIVERSITY (DATE OF REFORM*)	STRUCTURE AT RECTORAL LEVEL AFTER REFORM	NATURE OF MAJOR COMPETENCE CHANGE, WHERE APPLICABLE	COMPETENCE CHANGE RATING
Geneva (1994)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 3 vice-rectors	Increased autonomy (Rector no longer supervised by Faculty deans)	+1
Lausanne (1994)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 2 to 4 vice-rectors	No change	0
Fribourg (1997)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 2 to 4 vice-rectors	Slightly more detailed listing of competencies, otherwise no change	0
Neuchâtel (1996)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 2 vice-rectors, 1 secretary general	Slightly increased control over financial resource allocation	+1
Berne (1996)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 2 vice-rectors, 1 academic director, 1 administrative director	Autonomy gain of the university in general, thereby increasing rectoral autonomy	+2
Lucerne*** (1996)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 1 pro-rector or rector-elect	Minor gains offset by devolution of competencies to Faculty deans	-1
Basel (1995)	1 rector, 2 to 3 vice-rectors and 1 university administrator**	Significant gains due to greater overall autonomy of the university; some power gains distributed inside	+2
Zurich (1998)	"Universitätsleitung" ("University direction") with 1 rector, 1 pro-rector and 1 administrative director	Mainly formal changes; body created in replacement of earlier "Büro des Senats-ausschusses"; more autonomy and decentralization	+1
St. Gallen (1988)	Unchanged: 1 rector, 2 vice-rectors	Unchanged	0

* Reform in main legal text only; date refers to year in which the law was passed.

** Previously: 1 rector, 1 pro-rector, 1 rector-elect.

*** Lucerne is a much smaller institution than all the others, with only two faculties (Theology; Philosophy and Human Sciences) and currently some 250 students; it is, however, recognized as a full-fledged university.

This information, arranged by universities, is summarized in Table 3.6. 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 their 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 faculty.

By contrast, other stakeholders only made marginal gains. Hence, it is likely that the competencies of which the state divests itself, and which are not transferred to or retained by the rectorate, eventually find their 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, does not change markedly, and autonomy gains are apparently not monopolized by rectors.

4 Results from the questionnaire survey

4.1 Introduction

The governance of universities in a time of change, whether in Switzerland or elsewhere, requires a capacity to respond to major challenges, which we have attempted to identify at the beginning of Chapter 1; we have then seen that a common thread running through them is that of the *principles* of university governance—as distinct from the university's *functions*. These principles are those of *responsiveness*, *responsibility* and *accountability*.

As noted earlier, such notions are complex ones; they are usually not mentioned in the legal documents that regulate university governance. In the preceding chapter, we have surveyed the previous and current state of legal texts, which has enabled us to get an overall impression of the *formal* allocation of power and influence among different stakeholders in the system (the notion of system being used here in a very general sense). However, if only because those texts are not structured with reference to the three principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability, they do not enable us to draw conclusions regarding the capacity of Swiss universities (or, more precisely, of the actors in the system whose actions amount to “governance”) to apply those principles in a time of change.

In order to address this question, it was necessary to acquire more specific information and to this end, to carry out a survey.

First, whereas many questionnaires often include a significant proportion of general questions which respondents answer in writing in two or three lines, our questionnaire contains mostly closed questions; most answers are given on a five-point scale (e.g. from “nil” to “determinant” degree of influence of *actor X* on some *act of governance Y*).

Second, where most questionnaires ask fairly simple or straightforward questions of fact or opinion, ours asks “difficult” questions, many of which specifically refer to the notions of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. Our main reason for this was that it would have been perilous to base the conclusions of the entire research with respect to responsiveness, responsibility and accountability on some interpretation, in terms of these principles, of answers given to much narrower and practical questions. Given the complexity of the issues at stake, it was almost unavoidable to ask questions at a certain level of complexity. Although difficult questions involve risks, our view was that those risks would remain in an acceptable range, given that respondents were all university professors, accustomed to handling complex ideas.

Response rates generally in the 3 to 8 per cent range for most questions. However, non-response rates occasionally exceeded 50% for one particular set of questions, which required respondents, after having made recommendations regarding the *direction in which changes in power balance were to be advocated*, had to state whether their recommendation aimed at improving responsiveness, responsibility or accountability (or any combination of them). This is admittedly quite far from a straightforward question, and the low response rate on them is unsurprising; consequently, these questions are omitted in this chapter.

Nonetheless, the survey provided us with a wealth of information, not all of which will be used here. We have selected questions which we viewed as particularly central in university governance (that is, those who amount to important *acts of governance*) and

we focused on the role of particularly important actors (which are slightly “disaggregated” versions of the “aggregate” stakeholders referred to in Chapter 3) and, in some cases, on the influence of particularly important criteria in decision-making, our assumption being that the extent to which these criteria do play a role are particularly telling symptoms with respect to the presence (or not) of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability.

Some of the results are presented using simple graphs for readability, other with basic two-way tables. Given the relatively low numbers of respondents (N=263), there is only a limited number of cases in which elaborate statistical treatment would have been possible within reasonable intervals of confidence, and at this stage of the analysis of results, only simple statistics are presented.

We have introduced from the start one important distinction among respondents, by breaking them up in three groups (which will subsequently be referred to as categories A, B, and C).

Group A is made up of professors who currently hold or have held a position at rectoral level (usually, as rector, vice-rector or president). Group B is 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 is made up of all the rest—namely, professors who have never held either type of office. As shown below, group B is the largest, with 164 respondents; 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 rectoral level is much less frequent (46 respondents only)^{13,14}.

4.2 General sample profile

This section is devoted to a general overview of the sample. As a general rule, all the information presented will be broken down by group (A, B, and C) as defined above.

¹³ Although group B numbers 164 respondents, both groups A and C contain less than 100 observations (46 and 53 respectively). Nevertheless, when interpreting the breakdown of these subsamples with respect to some question or other, 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 In what follows, we shall omit any discussion of confidence intervals. Such a discussion would make sense if we had a *representative* sample; simply by dint of having resorted to mailings (instead of, say, a random telephone survey), our sample cannot be expected to be representative in a statistical sense. Even though our list of addressees was generated through a random procedure (which enabled us to select 1,000 individuals among all professors in Switzerland), we have deliberately oversampled rectors and former rectors. However, we have no control over the *final* sample, and ours is obviously biased towards persons who have more time—or are more inclined—to answer questionnaires, or persons who do not have time and do not particularly enjoy answering questionnaires, but are willing to contribute their opinion out of a sense of civic duty. It is quite possible that persons possessing any one of the above characteristics are non-representative of the entire population of tenured professors with respect to their opinions regarding the questions asked. In short, representativeness can hardly be a relevant concern here, and instead of providing confidence intervals, it is wiser to accept from the start the limitations of this sample, but to state these limitations clearly. It is therefore useful to start with a general profile of the sample.

Tab. 4.1: Distribution of sample across universities

University	Group			TOTAL
	A	B	C	
Geneva	6	34	8	48
Lausanne	8	23	4	35
Neuchâtel	4	11	7	22
Fribourg	3	9	2	14
Berne	7	16	9	32
Basel	1	10	4	15
Zurich	4	26	14	44
Lucerne	2	3	1	6
St. Gallen	6	2	1	9
EPFL	1	9	1	11
ETHZ	4	13	1	18
n.r.	0	8	1	9
TOTAL	46	164	53	263
(in %)	(17.5%)	(62.4%)	(20.1%)	(100.0%)

This distribution of respondents is commensurate with the respective size of universities, allowing us to view of the sample as an adequate reflection of the target population. The majority of respondents (55.9%) had been employed in 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, briefly alluded to at the beginning of Chapter 3, 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 per cent of respondents were male; this probably still falls slightly short of the actual over-representation of men holding tenured professorship, since according to late 1998 figures, 175 professors out of a total of 2,585 (6.8%) were women¹⁵.

¹⁵ Figures supplied by the Federal statistical office.

Tab. 4.2: Distribution of sample across disciplines

Discipline	Group				
	A	B	C	TOTAL	(in %)
Fundamental and natural sciences	8	34	7	69	(26.2)
Medicine	3	21	13	37	(14.1)
Engineering	1	15	2	18	(6.8)
Humanities (Letters)	5	23	7	35	(13.3)
Law	3	12	7	22	(8.4)
Social sciences	11	17	7	35	(13.3)
Education sciences	2	6	1	9	(3.4)
Theology	7	6	3	16	(6.1)
Other	6	10	6	22	(8.4)
TOTAL	46	164	53	263	(100.0)

The distribution of the sample also reveals no sharp departures from the actual structure of the target population. 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 image of Swiss university professors.

Let us now move on to their views on university governance¹⁶.

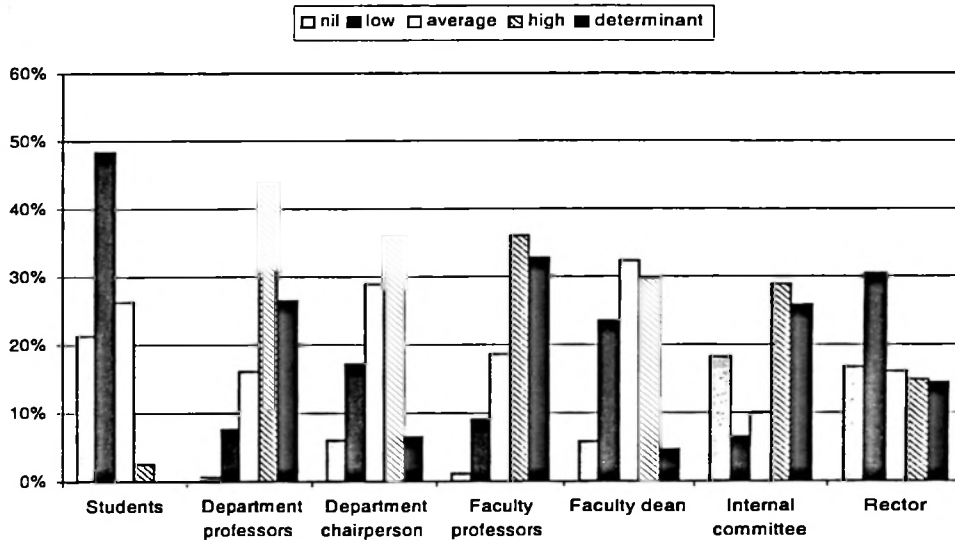
4.3 Appointments to tenured professorships

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” [A-1.1]. 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—which, in most cases, means a five- or seven-member team that makes up the government of the canton in which the university is located (in the case of the Federal Institutes of Technology, the relevant authority is the federal government). Results are presented in the form of charts, in which, for space reasons, the distinction is not always made between our three categories of respondents¹⁷.

¹⁶ For each topic, the corresponding question number in the questionnaire is indicated between square brackets.

¹⁷ However, the accompanying commentary often makes reference to these categories; let us therefore recall that category A is made up of professors who currently hold or have held a position at rectoral level; category B is made up of professors who hold or have held a position at an intermediate level in the university hierarchy; category C is made up of all the rest—namely, professors who have never held either type of office.

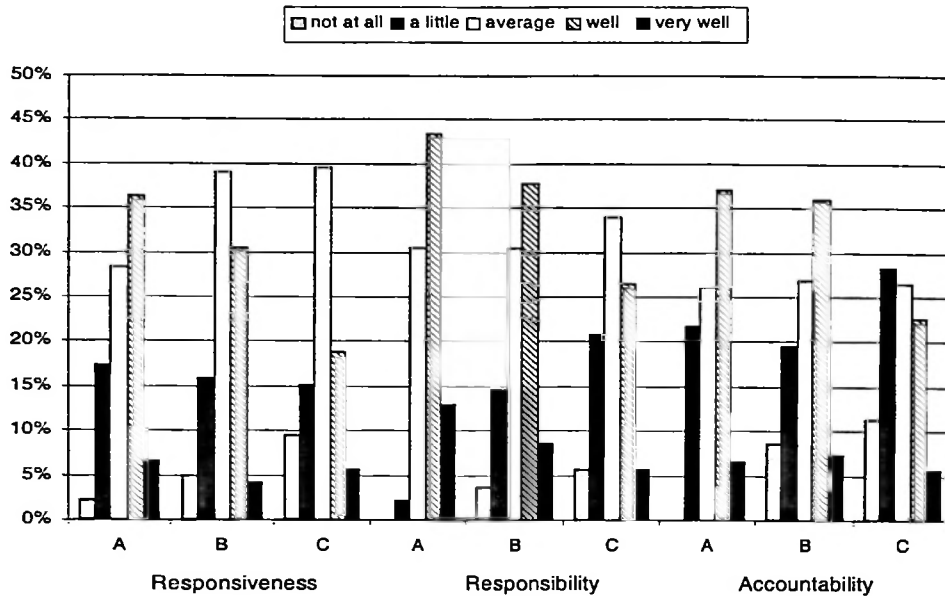
Fig. 4.3: Degree of influence of selected actors in appointment of tenured professors



As shown in Fig. 4.3, 70% of all respondents concur that students exert a low influence or no influence at all on the decision-making process. Interestingly, it is respondents from category B (current or former deans and department chairpersons, that is, those who are likely to be most constantly involved over the various stages of an appointment procedure) who are most outspoken in this respect. Only a quarter of respondents (in which category B is under-represented, and category A—rectors—slightly over-represented) assess students' influence as "average"; less than three per cent view this influence as "strong", but it is never considered a determinant one. It is also interesting to note that the influence of untenured research and teaching staff is barely higher: it is simply rated by most as "low to average" instead of "nil to low".

Summing 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 determinant or high influence; they are closely followed by the professors of the faculty concerned, with a combined rating of 68,8%; by contrast, a department chairperson or faculty dean only rate 42% and 34% respectively. Appointment committees fall somewhere in between: those defined as internal are said by 29% of respondents to exert a strong influence, and by 26% to have determinant influence (summing these two percentages, 55%); committees bringing together persons from within and outside the university get a cumulated rating of 48%, where respondents are evenly split between those who consider them to have strong or determinant influence. Rectors have much less say: only 29% of respondents ascribe them strong or determinant influence. This is still a bit more than political authorities, where only 22% of respondents recognize their influence as a major one.

Fig. 4.4: Appointments to tenured professorships: System's capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability



A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
 B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
 C: Other respondents

The picture that emerges is one in which professors are firmly in control of the choice of 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; responses to this question are presented in Fig. 4.4 [A-1.2].

As regards **responsiveness**, that is, the system's ability to adapt to the requests, expectations and demands more or less explicitly formulated by society at large, the overall judgement is one of moderate satisfaction: only 22% of respondents view 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 between the evaluation of our three categories of respondents, although groups A and B (made up 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**, that is, the university's capacity to resist to outside pressure (whether ideological artillery or mere fads) in order to keep asserting the university's special missions in society. Only 17% of respondents view the system's performance in this respect as poor, 31% consider it average, and just over 45% think it good or very good. There again, there are no major divergences of opinion between respondents, although group C, comprising people who

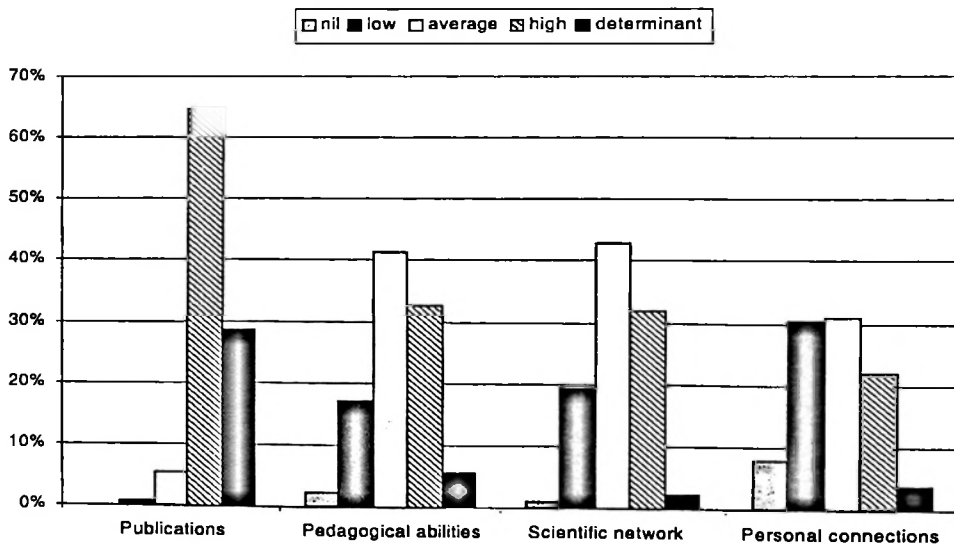
do not and have not held mid- or top-level decision making positions in the university, are somewhat more critical.

However, not all respondents are so sanguine when it comes to assessing **accountability** (which is defined in the questionnaire by stressing transparency as its main component). Almost 30% regard the system as “not at all” or only “a little” capable of guaranteeing accountability; a little less than 27% consider the performance “average”; and just over 40% find 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 gives 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—something that we could not detect in the case of responsiveness and responsibility. This suggests that accountability is an issue of particular relevance; we shall return to this point later.

We also examined, as distinct from the allocation of influence in appointment decisions, the role of different selection criteria [A-2.1]. Results are presented in Fig. 4.5.

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 view them as playing a “determinant” influence, 32.7% think this influence “strong”, and 41% “average”. No manifest difference of opinion between respondents from different categories emerge. Our figures (not shown on the chart) also indicate that stays at foreign universities are viewed quite unanimously as a selection criterion with “average” (35%) or “strong” (45%) importance. However, candidates experience 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 part in the selection of candidates!

Fig. 4.5: Selection criteria for tenured professors

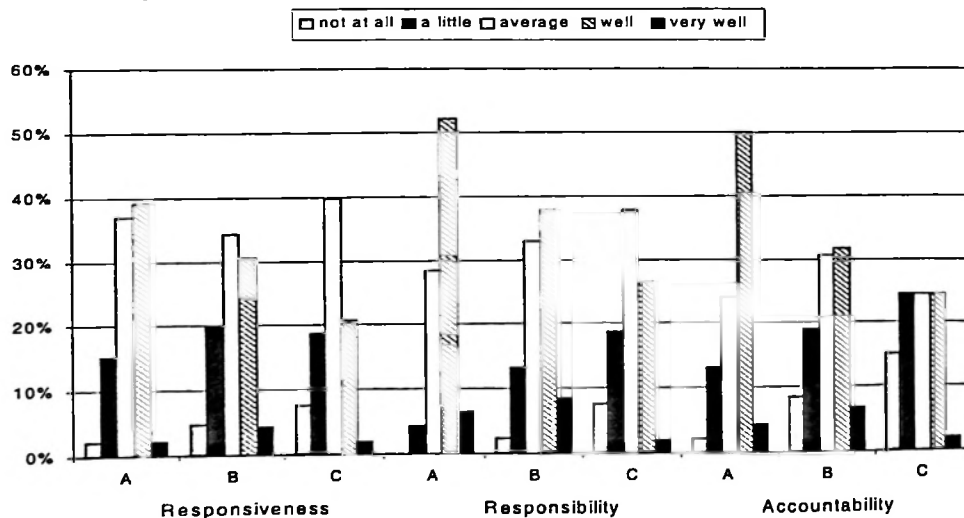


An applicant's scientific network—that is, the density and frequency of his or her scientific connections, as may be evidenced by a record of joint research projects with colleagues, the capacity to attract research funds, the occurrence of co-authorship in one's list of publications, etc.—could be expected to be a very important selection criterion, if not to the same extent, then at least in the same general way as publications. As it turns out, respondents ascribe a much lower importance to this factor. Only 34% view it as a “strong” or “determinant” criterion in an appointment procedure; the bulk view it as having “average” importance (43%), and over 20% thinks it has no or almost no importance. No major difference between categories of respondents can be detected.

Finally, the very delicate question of “personal support” was asked; through this question, we were aiming at the role of typically non-transparent procedures, which (as opposed to the previously listed criteria, all of which correspond to a priori justified concerns of the university) 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 “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 [A-2.3]. Over 50% of respondents admitted that such change was possible. Interestingly, a majority of category A respondents (rectors, vice-rectors, university presidents, etc.) gave a negative answer, while the other two groups thought otherwise. The contrast is particularly sharp with category C respondents, among whom less than a third think that selection criteria are 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.

Fig. 4.6: Role of selection criteria: System's capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability



A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
 B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
 C: Other respondents

There again, we asked respondents if the relative importance of these selection criteria, in actual practice, allowed the university to apply principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability [A-2.3]. The answer is nuanced, as shown in Fig. 4.6.

Just over a third of the sample views selection criteria as enabling the system to respond “well” or “very well” to society’s expectations, that is, to be **responsive**; another third thought the system merely “average” in this respect; and a little over a fourth thought the performance decidedly poor (the rest is made up of “don’t know” or “no reply”). There are no major differences between respondent categories, although professors not holding or never having held decision-making posts in the university hierarchy tend to be more critical, while rectors tend 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**, and to reassert the university’s duties and specific missions in society. 45% of respondents view 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 between categories can be observed. Among category C (non-holders of office in the university hierarchy), only 28% are pleased with the performance, and more than a quarter find it “poor” or “nil”, whereas almost 57% of rectors and presidents appear pleased with the university’s capacity to resist pressures, and a mere 2 out of 46 individuals consider this capacity to be “low”.

Again, the system receives its lowest ratings with respect to **accountability**. Although 39% of respondents view its performance as “good” or “very good”, 28% consider it “average”, and another 28% “low” or “average”. However, these overall assessments reflect the opinion of category B, that is, current or former department chairpersons or faculty deans. By contrast, 54% of rectors consider the relative importance of selection criteria, in practice, to deliver accountability “well” or “very well”; among professors in category C, only 26% thought the system performs well or very well, and 40% consider its capacity to guarantee transparency to be low or nil.

Two general patterns can be noted on the basis of the foregoing examination.

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.

4.4 Creation of interdisciplinary programs and degrees

The setting up of a new program leading to a degree (which, in the Swiss case, usually means at MA level) is a type of decision which directly calls into play the three principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. By expanding its offer, the university may be responding to a need expressed outside the institution, and demonstrate responsiveness; it may decide to offer a series of courses on a topic which it sees as its duty to provide, but which may run against the ideologically dominant orientations of the time, thereby showing its sense of responsibility; but in making any such choices, it must be transparent and held accountable—which means, for example, that the creation of a program must not have as its main objective that of pandering to the personal interests of powerful actors within the institution.

Our choice to focus on the case of an *interdisciplinary* degree is also deliberate and explained by the following reasons, which may not be specific to the Swiss case, but contribute to setting it apart from the North American one, and make the promotion of interdisciplinarity a rather awkward issue in Swiss university governance.

First, the general observation can be made that there may still be some confusion between “interdisciplinarity”, which implies regular and structured interaction between scholars, and “multidisciplinarity”, which may require little more than a juxtaposition of disciplines with little integrative effort, and interdisciplinary labels are sometimes pasted on programs offering little more than a collage of courses supplied by distinct departments.

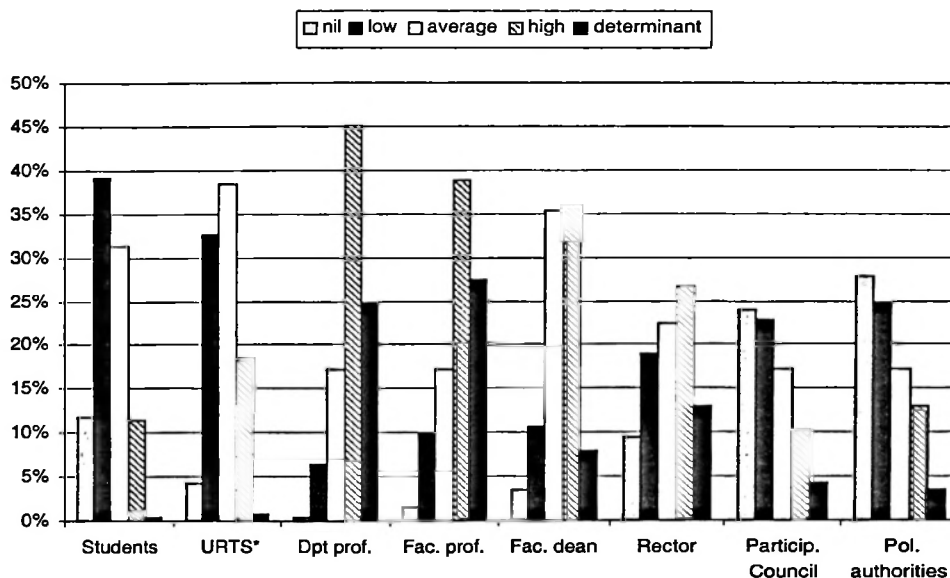
Second, actual support for the development of interdisciplinary research and courses remains financed almost exclusively through time-limited programs¹⁸; hence, it is very difficult for the system to identify, and take stock of, the emergence of interdisciplinary fields—let alone to support interdisciplinary research and teaching over the long-term¹⁹.

In this context, the “interdisciplinary” label of a degree may have to be interpreted with caution; it is not impossible that in certain cases, part of the rationale underpinning the setting up of such a degree would reflect the priorities of an individual actor wishing to develop his or her own interests (for example, through increasing his or her academic power base), rather than considerations of responsibility, let alone of responsiveness. More specifically, it is important to recall that traditionally, federal financial support to cantonal universities was not directly connected to the university’s ability to attract students (e.g., such support to universities reflected expenditure more than enrollment patterns, although the latter obviously affect the former; changes are progressively being introduced with the new Federal Act on Support to Universities). It follows that neither *ex ante* estimations of actual demand, nor *ex post* measurements thereof, can be assumed to be important factors to the extent that they are in North American universities.

¹⁸ This remark refers to public funding for research, as distinct from private funding, most of which is apportioned to corporate research laboratories.

¹⁹ Some features of the system tend to perpetuate the problem; this probably reflects the ongoing disagreements between a priori advocates or opponents of interdisciplinary endeavors, leaving unsolved the fundamental question of the *criteria* for deciding where and how far interdisciplinarity should be pursued.

Fig. 4.7: Degree of influence of selected actors in creation of new interdisciplinary programs with corresponding new degrees



Let us first look at the influence of various groups of actors on the decision to set up this type of programs (Fig. 4.7) [B-1.1].

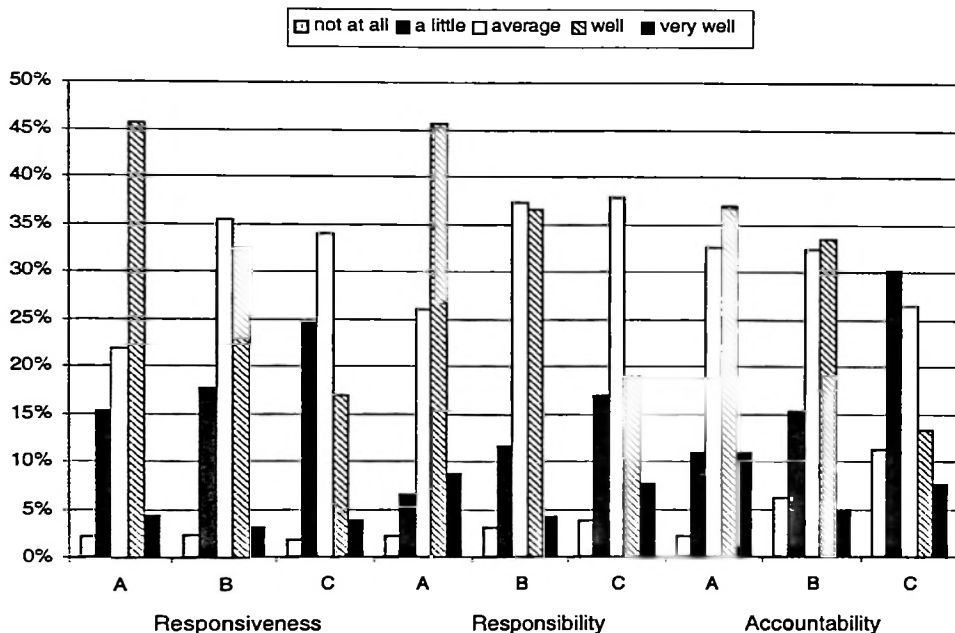
More than half of the sample admits that the influence of students is either “weak” or “nil”, 31% consider it as having “average” influence, and barely 12% consider it “strong” or “determinant”. The three respondent categories A, B, and C are in full agreement on this point. Non-tenured research and teaching staff, from whom a particular interest in investing in new research and new programs (as well as the personal availability to do so) can be expected, fare hardly better: for 37% of the professors polled, the influence of junior researchers and non-tenured colleagues is “weak” or “nil”; it is considered “average” by 38%, and “strong” by 18% (less than 1% view it as determinant). Again, there is almost no difference in the opinions expressed by our three categories of respondents. This type of results probably puts paid to any notion that, under the current system, the creation of interdisciplinary programs *responds* to demand. This is confirmed by the figures concerning participatory councils in which students and/or junior research staff are represented; the role of such councils is seen as “strong” or “determinant” by a mere 16% of respondents, and “weak” or “nil” by 52%.

Again, the actors who matter are department professors: for 70% of the respondents, their influence is strong or determinant; in this case, “department professors” does not necessarily mean that they come from *distinct* department, which raises further questions about how interdisciplinarity actually fares in the process. Department chairpersons, as well as faculty deans, for both of whose role is considered “strong” or “determinant” by some 43% of respondents, appear to wield less influence than the professors of the faculty, for whom the corresponding figure is 66%. The rector’s role in such matters also appears to be significantly less, with 40% of

respondents viewing his role as “strong” or “determinant”. Finally, political authorities clearly stay out of the matter: for 52% of respondents, their role is either “weak” or “nil”. These results suggest a very tight professorial control over the development of programs; it is reassuring, if surprising, to note that respondents overwhelmingly agree that “interference” in the procedure by “well-placed individuals” only plays a negligible role, if any at all²⁰.

We then examine whether this distribution of actual influence is, in the view of respondents, conducive to a responsive, responsible and accountable university governance (Fig. 4.8) [B-1.2].

Fig. 4.8: Creation of programs and degrees: System's capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability



A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
 B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
 C: Other respondents

Overall, 35% of professors think that the current arrangement allows the system to **respond** “well” or even “very well” to society’s needs and expectations. However, there are significant discrepancies between the very positive assessment made by present or former rectors (50%), present or former department chairpersons or deans (35%), and

²⁰ Replies to this question, however, are difficult to interpret, since our questionnaire does not define the term “interference”; it may also refer to strong-arm tactics by “authorized” individuals (for examples, members of the faculty).

others (24%). Again, a higher hierarchical position seems to be associated with a much more sanguine view of the performance of the institution. Conversely, 27% of group C respondents (against only 17% of present or former rectors) find the current distribution of decision-making power to be essentially incapable of delivering responsiveness.

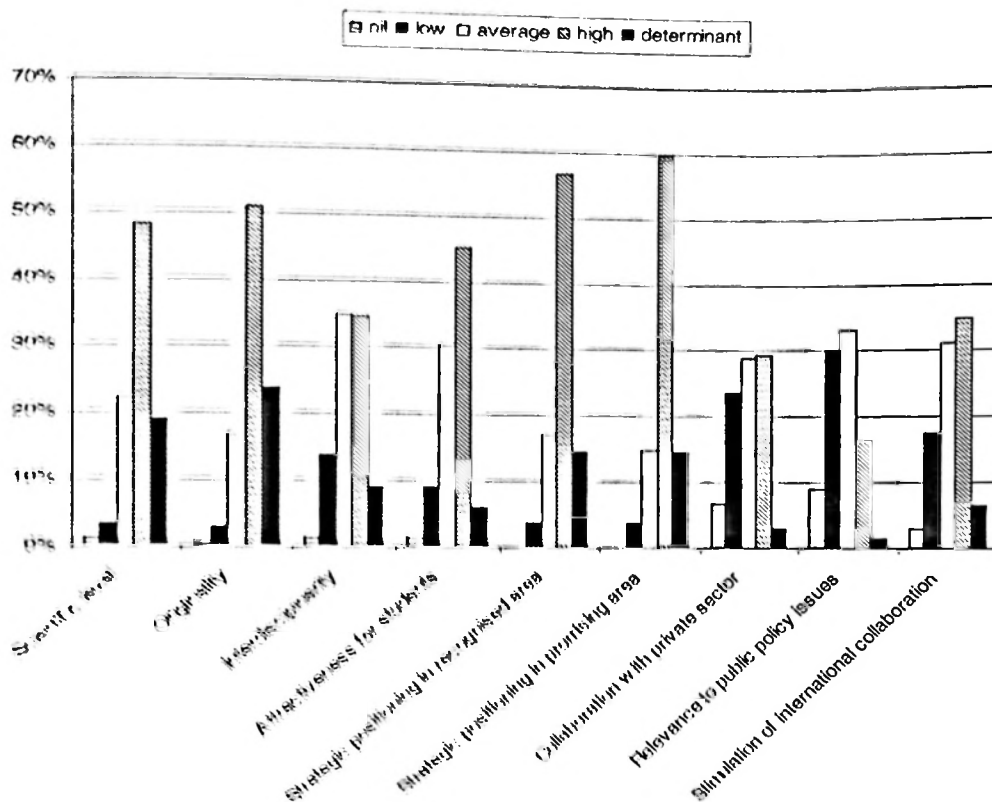
As regards the capacity to assert **responsibility** by withstanding pressure and fads, the overall satisfaction (with 40% considering the system to be performing well, and 35% viewing its performance as average) should not hide sharp differences between groups: whereas 54% of group A respondents (rectors) feel that the current allocation of influence in the setting up of new interdisciplinary degrees allows the university to demonstrate responsibility, and just 9% think its performance “low” or “nil”, only 26% of group C respondents (professors without hierarchical positions) view this performance as good or very good, and 24% see it as poor.

As before, the current arrangement is evaluated less favorably as regards its capacity to guarantee **accountability**. Still, 36% of respondents view its performance as good or very good, 31% as average, and 24% as weak or nil. But there again, there is a sharp contrast between the satisfaction of top-level university authorities (48% of respondents in group A consider that under the present circumstances, the university has a good or very good capacity to be accountable), and respondents in group C, of whom less than 21% share this view. Symmetrically, 13% of present or former rectors consider the system’s capacity to be accountable as weak or nil; 41% of the those without hierarchical position share this view.

We therefore find confirmation of the pattern observed before: the higher in the hierarchy, the more favorable to the current system a respondent is likely to be.

Just like applicants to a professorship, projects to set up an interdisciplinary degree are subjected to a vetting process calling upon a set of criteria, which include some attaching to the internal features of the project, and others to external features [B-2.1]. What, in our respondents’ opinion, is the actual importance of these criteria when making this type of decisions? Answers to this question are presented in Fig. 4.9.

Fig. 4.9: Creation of program and degrees: Importance of selected criteria



The intrinsic scientific value of the project (in the questionnaire, the scientifically "solid" or "well grounded" nature of the project are referred to) is a criterion with "strong" or "determinant" importance for two thirds of the sample; only 5% of respondents consider that this criterion has "weak" or "nil" importance. However, inter-group contrasts are striking. Whereas 37% of the 40 present or former rectors (that is, a ratio of 0.8) think that intrinsic scientific value is a strong or determinant factor, only 15% of 17 group professors believe so. Conversely, more than 28% of them consider that this aspect has a best "average" significance.

The originality of a proposal is a less contentious point: for some three quarters of respondents, irrespective of category, this indeed represents a criterion of strong or determinant importance.

The interdisciplinarity of a proposal is seen as having a "strong" or "determinant" influence on the decision to implement it by some 44% of the sample, whereas 35% think it has "average" importance, and 15% ascribe it "weak" or "nil" influence. Again, professors who do not and have not held hierarchical positions in the university are more skeptical, since only a third of them believe that the interdisciplinary character of such a plan really counts—whereas every other rector or former rector thinks so.

Attractiveness to students, which would be a major consideration in most North American universities, is seen as having strong (45%) or determinant (6%) importance.

by a little over half the sample, with negligible difference between categories of respondents. Nonetheless, 11% of respondents (also without notable inter-group difference) think that this factor has little or no influence on the decision to launch a new interdisciplinary program.

Strategic positioning in an *already recognized field* is viewed by an overwhelming majority as an important point; nonetheless, whereas over 78% of rectors see things this way, only 57% of professors of the C group share this opinion.

Strategic positioning in a *promising field* is considered as a criterion with “strong” or “determinant” importance by an even larger majority of 74% of respondents. We still note, however, that there is a major gap between rectors, 80% of whom believe that such considerations do play a major role, and professors of group C, among whom only 60% share this view; as for most other questions, professors holding decision-making positions at faculty or department level fall somewhere in between, but tend to be closer to rectors.

As regards collaboration with the private sector, particularly business, the total sample is quite evenly split in three segments: roughly one third see this as a criterion of “strong” or “determinant” relevance in the selection of a new program leading up to a new degree; another third ascribes it moderate influence (“average”); and the last third thinks it has little or no importance in the decision. However, we observe in this case a completely different pattern of opinions among respondents. Those who most believe in the importance of this criterion are rectors and the rank-and-file; by contrast, as many as 37% of faculty deans and department chairpersons view it as having negligible importance.

For most respondents, irrespective of group, the relevance of a program of study with respect to solving public policy issues is a factor that has rather low importance in deciding whether to launch it or not. Only 18% ascribe it high or determinant importance, 40% little or none at all.

Finally, the extent to which a new interdisciplinary program can foster international scientific cooperation is viewed by 41% of respondents as a factor with strong or even determinant influence, while a little over 20% thinks this does not count as an asset. Here again, a major difference in opinion is visible, in which decision-makers at the faculty or department level, for once, are much closer to rank-and-file professors than to rectors: whereas 63% of the latter state that fostering international collaboration is a strong or determinant decision factor, only 39% of deans and department heads think so, and a mere 30% of professors in the third group do.

Another set of results [also B-2.1] focuses not on the characteristics of a project itself, but on the characteristics on applicants. These results will not be commented in detail here, except to point out that depending on the characteristic concerned, any of the three categories of respondents is liable to give ratings that set it apart from the other two. Nonetheless, a general pattern is confirmed: by and large, former and present rectors profess a much stronger belief in the honesty of the system; this is shown by the fact that they usually ascribe a high significance to “legitimate” criteria (scholarly value, pedagogical abilities, scientific contacts, etc.); by contrast, rank-and-file professors appear to be much less inclined to think that decisions rest on such “legitimate” criteria as much as they should; theirs tends to be a more disillusioned view of the university when facing new ideas. Faculty deans and department chairpersons often fall in between, but this is not always the case. To wit, the influence of behind-the-scenes support to a project is considered strong or determinant by 43% of rank-and-file professors, 37% of rectors, and 33% of deans and department heads; of the latter, 23%

declare that the role of such support is weak or nil, while only 15% of both other categories think so. All groups of actors overwhelmingly admit (63% among rectors, 73% among deans and chairpersons, 79% among rank-and-file professors) that the criteria applied can vary from one case to the next, which raises embarrassing questions about the arbitrariness (and hence, potential un-accountability) of decision-making procedures [B-2-2].

It is therefore particularly interesting to look at the figures concerning the assessment by respondents of the appropriateness of current practices in terms of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability [B-3.1].

Some 37% of the sample think that current procedures perform “well” or “very well” in terms of allowing the university to be **responsive** to society’s needs. It should be noted, however, that this average covers wide discrepancies between the share of rectors giving this rating (42%) and the share of professors without hierarchical position who think the same way (23%). Here again, deans and department heads are closer to rectors.

A fairly similar pattern emerges with respect to the principle of **responsibility**. Though 35% of the total sample consider the current arrangement to perform “well” or “very well”, 43% of rectors think so, while only 28% of rank-and-file professors do; by contrast, 24% of the latter consider the system to be a failure (“low” or “nil” capacity to guarantee responsibility), against a mere 2 of the 46 rectors polled (which amounts, in relative terms, to 0.04).

As before, the system scores worst on **accountability**; 33% of respondents see it as performing “well” or “very well”, 23% as poorly or not at all. Again, major divisions emerge depending on hierarchical position: 35% of rectors give the “well” or “very well” grade, but a mere 17% of rank-and-file professors do. As was the case for responsibility, a large proportion (36%) of professors in group C consider the system’s capacity to ensure accountability as poor or nil; only 13% of rectors are quite so critical. A number of additional results report on the same sets of questions, with respect to changes in programs and syllabi [B-3.1 and B-3.2], as well as to retrenchment of programs and courses [B-4.1 and B-4.2]. The general thrust of answers given to these questions is similar to that of answers to the questions just reviewed, and for this reasons as well as for lack of space, they will not be discussed here; the results presented above are enough to sketch out some general patterns.

The first striking result is that the university’s performance in terms of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability is disappointing, in that it seems very vulnerable to practices that run contrary to the fulfillment of the university’s missions, or even at variance with the type of criteria it purports to use; what makes matters worse is that the university scores particularly low on transparency, making it all the more difficult to redress the balance. The result (apart from the undemocratic character of the institution) is that decision criteria that should play a major role actually don’t, whereas factors which, in principle, should not even come into play appear to be almost dominant.

As regards respondents’ judgement on whether current practice allows the university to be responsive, responsible and accountable, the fact that on most counts, barely more than a third of respondents think the system functions “well” or “very well”, while an almost equivalent proportion thinks the system functions “poorly” or “not at all” should be cause for concern; from the standpoint of the civil society, such a low performance is not acceptable, and the relative un-accountability of universities (or of the actors, within the university, who collectively hold the decision-maker power) only

makes matters worse. Pending further examination, a significant effort for increased accountability is a priority.

4.5 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 between categories of respondents. These questions address, in turn:

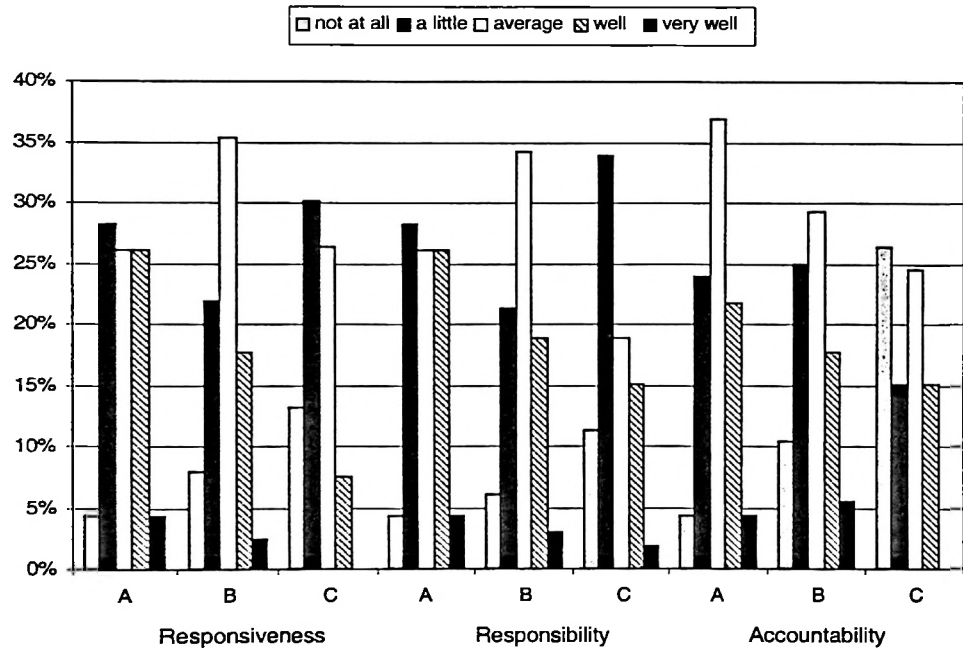
- ✦ The degree of influence of various actors on the allocation of budget resources between units (faculties, or, in the case of the Federal Institutes of Technology, between departments) through the university's operational budget [C-1.1 in the questionnaire];
- ✦ The criteria applied when deciding between possible allocations of resources between units [C-2.1];
- ✦ The actual budgeting techniques used regarding current expenditures, small-scale investments and salaries of teaching staff [C-3.1];
- ✦ The budget instruments used to facilitate the creation or the termination of specific activities (for example, the creation of new courses or the termination of some curricula) [C-4.1];
- ✦ The degree of actual autonomy of the university *vis-à-vis* political authorities [C-5.1];
- ✦ For all the above questions, an assessment of the current arrangement's capacity to guarantee responsiveness, responsibility and accountability in university governance is also asked [C-1.2, C-2.2, C-3.2, C-4.2 and C-5.2];
- ✦ Suggestions regarding desirable increases or decreases to the degree of influence that each type of actor should be granted in decision-making processes, with a view to guarantee responsiveness, responsibility and accountability [C-6.1].

For the most part, presumably owing to the more technical nature of these questions, there was a higher non-response rate (if only because some respondents may not be aware of the procedures in force in their institution regarding budget matters). 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 (but not the overall setting of the budget) for current expenditure and small investments [C-1.1], referred to below in shorthand as "allocation of budget"; the relative importance of criteria used in this allocation procedure, along with respondents' judgement on the appropriateness of these criteria for ensuring responsiveness, responsibility and accountability [C-2.1 and C-2.2]; and their judgement on the adequacy of current arrangements regarding the overall autonomy of their institution in terms of guaranteeing that these three principles (including in non-budget matters) are respected [C-5.2].

The first set of questions replicates those asked before with respect to other acts of governance: they review the respective influence of different groups of actors, this time on the **definition and adoption of an operational budget**, which amounts to a decision regarding its **allocation**. An overwhelming majority of those polled (90%) concur that students' influence is weak or nil, and almost as many (83%) say this is also true of

junior (untenured) research and teaching staff. By contrast with other acts of governance, this is an area in which professors have (in their professorial capacity) relatively little say: their influence is considered “low” or “nil” by 43% of respondents (in the case of department professors) and 36% of respondents (in the case of faculty professors). 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”—hence, the figure to be compared with those mentioned in the case of other actors is 65%. 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”.

Fig. 4.10: Allocation of budget



A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
 B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
 C: Other respondents

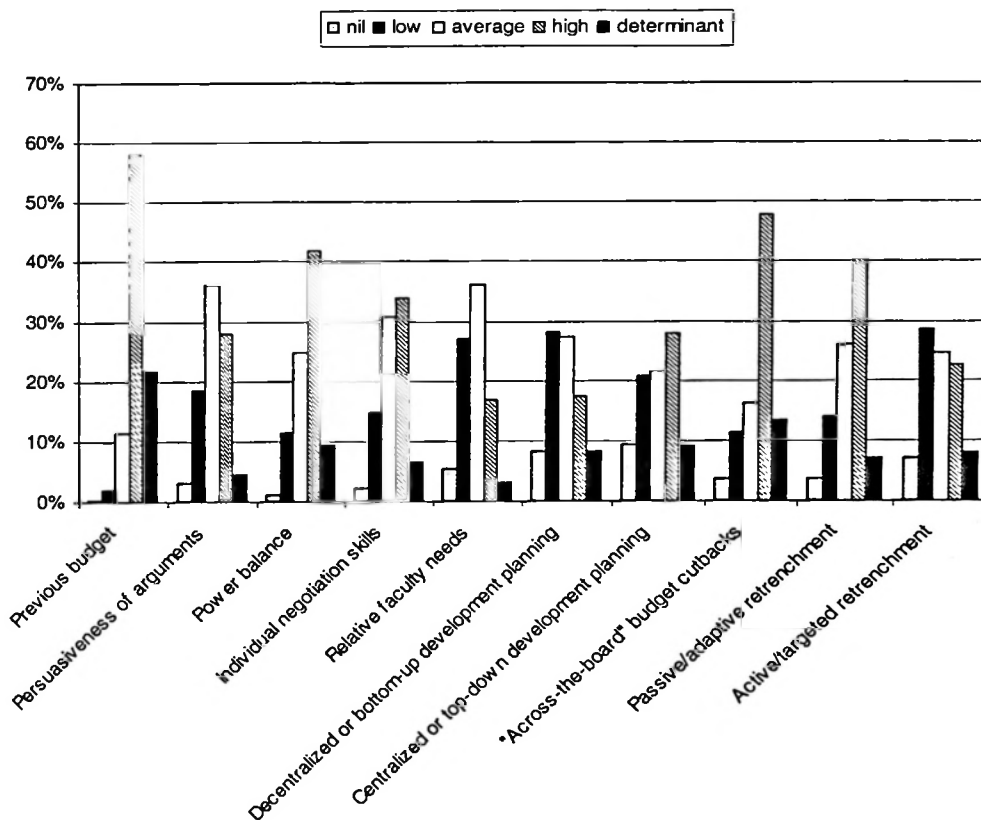
Fig. 4.10 reports on respondents’ evaluation of the appropriateness of the current distribution of influence in terms of ensuring responsiveness, responsibility and accountability.

As regards the capacity to guarantee responsiveness, only 19% of respondents consider that this allocation of influence is satisfactory, while 33% view it as little capable or not capable at all of doing so. On this count, a strong discrepancy can be

observed between rectors or former rectors, who are less critical, and professors of category C (who do not manage a faculty or department), where 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 category C are much more critical of the system's performance.

Fig. 4.11: Allocation of budget resources among units: Importance of selected criteria



Moving on to the issue of the criteria used for allocating resources (Fig. 4.11), we note that 80% of respondents consider the budget of the previous year to be a strong or determinant factor in explaining the allocation adopted for the current year, without notable difference between respondent categories. The persuasiveness of arguments put forward to justify a particular distribution, however, seems to be much less important, since less than a third of respondents view this as a strong or determinant factor; as it turns out, one factor deserving this rating, for 52% of respondents, is “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 the members of

this same group also considers 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 think 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 (and 20% of the total sample) see them as having a strong or determinant role in the decision. Long-term strategic planning carried out by the institution as a whole is also seen as a secondary determinant of expenditure patterns (about 37% of respondents consider this as a factor with weak or zero influence, and 26% as having strong or determinant influence); however, centralized strategic planning carried out at rectoral level is recognized as somewhat more important, though not by much. On this particular point, a sharp contrast emerges between rectors (22 out of 46, that is, almost half, think their role strong or determinant; but only a quarter of rank-and-file professors see things the same way).

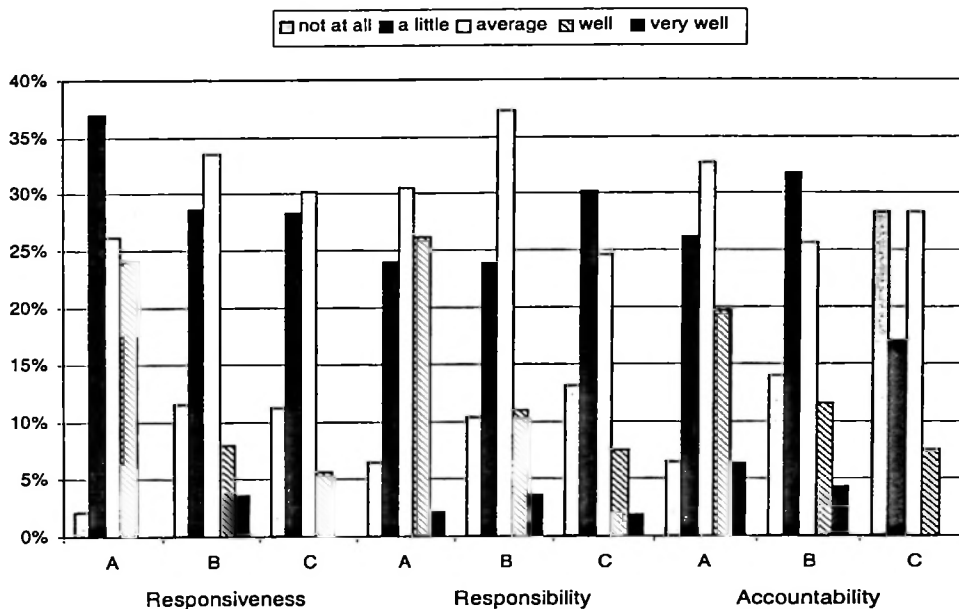
Budget cutbacks in lean times can be adopted according to very different criteria. About three fifths of the sample assign a strong or determinant influence to “across-the-board” budget cutbacks disregarding actual needs; faculty deans and department chairpersons seem particularly critical in this respect; for almost half of respondents, the distribution of cutbacks is 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, which frees up financial resources). Finally, the distribution of cutbacks may reflect a targeted retrenchment plan, and almost half of rectors or former rectors consider it as a strong or even determinant influence in the decision made; but barely more than a fourth of rank-and-file professors believe this—category B respondents falling somewhere in between.

In Fig. 4.12, we present respondents’ evaluation of whether the current import of those criteria allows the university to operate according to the principles of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability.

Almost 40% of respondents consider the relative importance currently given to these criteria, in the actual functioning of their institution, to be little able, or completely unable, to ensure **responsiveness**; far fewer (about 22%) consider the arrangement to perform “well” or “very well” in this respect; again, rank-and-file professors are particularly critical (only 3 out of 53 answered “well”, not a single one “very well”); at the same time, 16% of the total sample did not know, or declined to answer this question).

The system’s capacity to demonstrate **responsibility** gets a better rating (16% of respondents describing its performance in this respect with the terms “well” or “very well”), albeit with the usual strong contrast between category A (with more than a quarter agreeing with this good evaluations) and category C (with only 5 respondents out of 53 doing the same).

Fig. 4.12: Allocation of budget resources: System's capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability



- A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
- B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
- C: Other respondents

All three categories of respondents are dissatisfied with the system's capacity to be **accountable**: overall, 16% think it performs "well" or "very well" in this respect, while more than twice as many (43%) think it performs "poorly" or "not at all"; as in most cases, respondents from category A are least critical, while respondents from category C are particularly dismissive in their evaluation.

Generally, the procedures that determine (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 find only limited evidence to the effect that rules and procedures for budget allocation are recognized as appropriate methods to engineer 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 criticize for their short-termism and for their vulnerability to power-play) 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 chapter concerns respondents' overall evaluation 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 have been used in our questionnaire to characterize a university's degree of autonomy²¹: 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 in the state budget (normally, the corresponding *cantonal* budget) or completely separate from it; and the frequency of direct intervention by government (e.g., local education ministers) in the governance of the university. Ratings were given on a five-point scale. As indicated in the preceding chapter, universities can differ considerably from each other on any of these points.

Generally, respondents from category A view the university as much more autonomous from state authorities than the rest of professors do (over half of the former group gives their institution a rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point autonomy scale; less than a third of the two other groups do so); for 80% of respondents, universities have no leeway in wage-setting; and for about half of them, it has little autonomy (ratings of 1 or 2 on a five-point scale) regarding the management of buildings. The evaluation falls in the same range (again, without significant inter-category contrasts) when it comes to the degree of budgetary autonomy: a little over half of all respondents consider this degree low or nil, while less than 20% consider it high, and approximately the same proportion gives it 3 points on the five-point scale.

Finally, respondents had fairly similar views on the extent of state intervention in the running of the university, with about 40% considering it as rare or exceptional; and under 30% as frequent; modest differences between groups of respondents can be detected, with a larger proportion of category B (and, even more so, category A) respondents assigning it a mid-range value of 3 on the five-point scale; by contrast, professors from category C tend to have more definite views, but they are, interestingly, fairly evenly split between those who think the state intervenes frequently (17 respondents out of 53) or rarely (22 respondents).

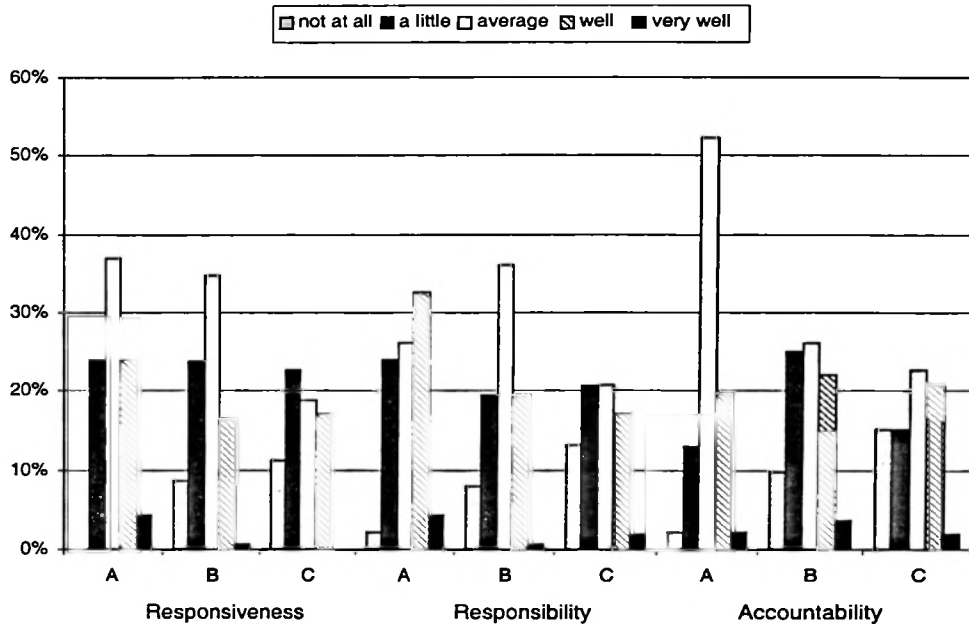
In Fig. 4.13, we report respondents' view of the existing arrangements in terms of its capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability in university governance.

For 19% of respondents, responsiveness is served "well" or "very well" under the existing system prevailing in their university; 31% consider it perform "poorly" or "not at all"; as often before, rectors are least critical, and rank-and-file professors most critical of the current situation. The overall evaluation is better with respect to **responsibility**, with 23% of respondents giving the arrangement a "well" or "very well" rating (where the proportion of rectors giving this positive assessment is twice that of professors from category C); nonetheless, more than 28% of all respondents thinks the system performs "poorly" or "not at all".

²¹ This question has more relevance for cantonal universities, since the Federal Institutes of Technology are regulated by a common federal Act.

Interestingly, the answers of the three categories of respondents are remarkably similar with respect to the **accountability** that the current arrangement allows; one third of the sample considers the performance “average”, one third thinks the arrangement works “well” or “very well”, and one third, “poorly” or “not at all”.

Fig. 4.13: Degree of institutional autonomy: System's capacity to ensure responsiveness, responsibility and accountability



- A: Respondents with present or former position at university-level management
- B: Respondents with present or former position at faculty or department level management
- C: Other respondents

5 Comparative perspective and concluding remarks

5.1 Summary of results on higher education in Switzerland

This report on the role of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability in the governance of the Swiss higher education system suggests that the record of universities in terms of these principles is somewhat patchy.

Our analysis of university governance starts with a list of the main challenges currently confronting higher education in general ; these challenges are also relevant for the Swiss education system. We have first tried to show that the corresponding problems of university governance can be usefully approached through the concepts of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. These are described as *principles*, as distinct from the *functions* that a university must perform to fulfill its *missions*. More specifically, responsiveness and responsibility are principles that can point to opposite decisions, and combining them appropriately requires the university to operate according to the principle of accountability. In this study, “accountability” is defined as “targeted” transparency, in that the beneficiaries of this accountability (the government, taxpayers, students, the public at large) must be identified, and that this transparency must, in particular, allow for checking that the university is transparent and *plays by certain rules*. These rules are, in essence, made up of socially legitimized criteria for decision-making.

Chapter 2 presents some elements of our methodology, and defines the set of concepts developed for this study (“elements of structure”; “acts of governance”; etc.). We then describe the way in which data have been gathered and processed, using first information from legal texts, and then information collected through a questionnaire survey with a sample of professors in Swiss universities.

Chapter 3 provides an interpretative overview of the formal distribution of decision-making power in Swiss universities, focusing in particular on the evolution in the allocation of this decision-making power resulting from the latest round of reforms (since over the 90s, all Swiss universities have been through more or less extensive changes enshrined in legislation). Results indicate, in addition to the already well-known heterogeneity of the Swiss higher education system, the still central role of professors, and the correspondingly weaker role (in relative terms) of three other categories of stakeholders, namely, the state, civil society, and students. A separate section on university rectors has confirmed that this latter group has made gains in decision-making power through the latest round of reforms, but that these gains are not major ones. The Swiss university system remains characterized by “shared governance”, in which decision-making power is distributed over different groups of internal players. It is important to stress, however, that because of the very fragmented structure of the Swiss higher education system, the distribution of power and influence among players is extremely case-dependent and that general trends can hide very diverse realities.

In Chapter 4, we present a selection of results from the questionnaire survey, focusing on three “acts of governance”, namely, appointments to tenured professorships, the creation of interdisciplinary programs and degrees, and procedures for the allocation of budget resources. In addition to ascertaining who, in practice (as distinct from the theory laid out in legal texts) holds decision-making power, the questionnaire aims at eliciting information about respondents’ evaluation of the performance of the system in terms of responsiveness, responsibility and accountability. Our results show that the system has a disappointing record with respect to responsibility and a not much better

one with respect to responsiveness; however, it largely fails in terms of accountability, indicating that there is much progress to be made for the system to be transparent and to actually “play by the rules”. We consistently get different evaluations of the performance of the system depending on the category of respondents (though all of them are tenured professors): by and large, rectors and former rectors are much less critical of the system than “rank-and-file” professors, that is, respondents who do not hold (and have not held in the past) a hierarchical position such as that of Faculty dean or Department chairperson. Deans and chairpersons usually evaluate the system more favorably than other professors, but less so than rectors. These contrasting views reflect the different individual responsibilities and experience of distinct groups of respondents; incidentally, they provide further illustration of the fact that university governance is a task of daunting complexity.

5.2 A comparative perspective

In keeping with the general design of the Six-Nation Education Research Project (SNERP), each of the six participating countries (USA, Germany, Switzerland, Singapore, the People’s Republic of China, and Japan) takes the lead for research on one topic, and invites other countries to join in, in order to facilitate cross-fertilization between country-specific questions and to generate comparative results²².

Japan had proposed the topic of *higher education* to the SNERP and accordingly taken the lead on SNERP research in this field; the countries that subsequently decided to join are Switzerland and the United States. Hence, the countries with which the Swiss case is being compared are Japan and the USA, on the basis of the reports produced by these countries (University of Pennsylvania, 2000; Hiroshima University, 2000) under the SNERP, and of discussions that have taken place at a seminar hosted by University of Tsukuba on February 24-25, 2000.

The concerns of the three participating countries are, of course, different, and they reflect not just the country-specific urgency of different challenges confronting higher education, but also the country-specific university cultures and framework conditions.

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 international openness, and to develop resource allocation procedures (both among and within universities) in which market-like mechanisms are put to use. These pressures translate into evaluation exercises, which have revealed that private universities are slower than national ones to react—possibly because, owing to their financial and administrative independence, private universities have more room to set their own agenda and priorities. It has been noted that the reform process itself requires significant material and human resources, sometimes exceeding the resources currently available.

As regards the USA, responsiveness to market pressures is a longstanding tradition. This of course applies directly to private universities, but public institutions are not immune from outside pressures, and these are made very palpable through budget cuts. Generally, the notion of “accountability” (which, in the context of the USA, appears to mean mostly “responsiveness” in terms of the “principles” used in the Swiss

²² On the general design of the SNERP, see e.g., Grin, 1997.

study²³), enjoys considerable popularity. Accountability can be demonstrated towards “primary customers” (students and their parents) as well as “secondary customers” (authorities and employers on the labor market). A clear majority of institutions report the existence of formal plans to increase accountability so defined, particularly towards government and regulatory agencies and students.

The international comparison between 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), somewhat lower in Switzerland (where, as we have seen, education is decentralized, but local (cantonal) governments play an important role) and, in general, lower still in the USA, where authorities have traditionally maintained a hands-off approach to higher education.

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 rising influence on universities through assessment exercises, which reinforce competition between institutions.

This pattern is quite different from the Swiss one, where the role of the authorities, which declines somewhat in terms of funding (with the relative share of other sources of funding being expected to increase). However, their role increases 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.

As regards the USA, the role of government authorities is declining in certain aspects of university governance (general funding, planning and coordination – which is being shifted from the federal to the state level), but rising in others: public universities tend to be more precisely regulated, targeted funding is on the rise, competition is being encouraged, and assessment exercises more important.

An equally contrasted pattern emerges with respect to the *role of different bodies in university institutions*, and it is most easily represented through a table (Table 5.1).

One general feature emerging from this comparison is that Japan and, to some extent, Switzerland, are clearly reforming, in the sense that hitherto “strong” bodies can see their influence erode, whereas bodies that had comparatively limited influence are seeing their role increase. By contrast, reform in the USA does not amount to a sweeping change in orientation, nor in new priorities. Rather, they largely reveal a “deepening” of the current inner logic of the system, with strong players reinforcing their influence, and secondary players being further sidelined.

As regards *budgetary matters*, there are significant differences between the three countries. Whereas 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 represent a more important part of funding for institutions in the USA and in Japan, where the institutional budget allocation process also is less centralized than in Switzerland. However, two features hold in all three countries: first, previous budgets largely determine 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.

²³ In the US report, “accountability refers to the extent to which a college or university considers itself answerable to the needs and expectations of its various stakeholders” (University of Pennsylvania, 2000: 2).

Tab. 5.1: Importance of elements of structure in university governance

	Japan*				CH		US	
	National & public		Private		Score	Trend	Score	Trend
	Score	Trend	Score	Trend				
Boards	NA		H	↓	Nil	↑	H	↑
President/Rector	L	↑	H	↑	M	↑	H	↑
Deans	L	↑	L	↑	M	↓	H	↑
Departments	L	↔	H	↓	M	↔	M	↓
Faculty Governance Bodies	H	↓	L	↔	L	↓	L	↓
Professors	H	↓	M	↓	M-H	↔	M	↑
General representative body	NA		NA		L	↓	L	↓
Education Ministry	H	↓**	M	↔	M-L	↓	L	↓

Influence level: H: high; M: medium; L: low; O: none; NA: not applicable.

Influence change: 1: rising; 0: unchanged; -1: declining.

** Distinction between "national & public" and "private" applies to Japan only.(the public sector includes municipal universities and prefectural universities)*

*** Direct control is declining and being replaced by an incentive mechanism.*

Given these sharp differences between countries, with respect to both their current position and their evolution, what are the commonalities, if any, that can be identified on the general plane of university governance in a time of change?

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 diversifying needs and backgrounds, to offer a broader range of educational products, to keep up with technological development in both teaching and research, to reexamine its 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 its 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 the three countries considered. Six general traits seem to hold, namely:

- [1] a significantly stronger role for university rectors or presidents, amounting to a centralization of power *within* the institutions
- [2] 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;
- [3] 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 higher education operates; this implies using incentive mechanisms;

- [4] a more frequent resort to evaluations, whether internal or external, and whether these are mandated by the authorities or undertaken of the own free will of the institution;
- [5] a general effort to increase the share of private funding to support university operations;
- [6] a shift in the explicit or tacit rules about the respective positioning of universities, which results in a sharper competition between them and, more generally, an increasing reliance on market or market-like signals to orient decisions.

5.3 The future of research on university governance

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 between 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.

This applies to different categories of social and institutional actors holding different stakes in higher education.

The general public, as well as its elected representatives in public office, does not appear to have access to a adequate information (particularly in a form such that this information can be easily processed) on the issues confronting higher education. It makes it all the more difficult for society at large to express its preferences and to clearly voice its expectations *vis-à-vis* higher education; 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, and thereby help to orient the course of action of universities. However, even if this may apply to some acts of governance, such as the range of courses offered (which can be made more responsive to apparent demand), it is clearly insufficient with respect to the internal organization of universities, particularly the need to be responsible and the need to be 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 regards 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 (and probably excessive) room for power play 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 assess precisely 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 between universities for access to private and public funding, strategic positioning in promising scientific niches, and absorption of fast-

developing information technology, strategic decision-making for institutions often numbering thousands of employees 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 order to come to grips with the complexity of the questions involved. Precisely because of the variability of contexts and issues (or, more precisely, their extreme case-dependence), 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 as defined in this report. 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* (which it may be futile to try to identify), 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 futures 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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