



Convergent or divergent Europeanization? An analysis of higher education governance reforms in France and Italy

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Abstract

This article comparatively examines the higher education reform pathways of France and Italy. Using a scheme of empirical indicators, I focus on the divergent and convergent developments in these two countries, which played a pioneering role in the Europeanization of higher education. While France has consistently moved closer to a market-oriented model, legacies of academic self-rule were initially strengthened in Italy, before recent reforms aimed to crack down on academic power abuses. To explain these policy pathways, I pursue a dual theoretical argument by linking institutional isomorphism with historical institutionalism.

Points for practitioners

The article examines the changing structures of higher education management and administration in France and Italy. It focuses on the new roles attributed to the state, university leaders and external stakeholders, and addresses whether both systems have converged on a market-oriented paradigm. I explain how and why various new competitive steering instruments were introduced. The analysis should be of interest to both scholars and practitioners due to its focus on new power arrangements in quality assurance, university administration and research governance.

Keywords

Europeanization, France, higher education governance, internationalization, Italy, marketization

Introduction

Research has increasingly addressed whether intense transnational interlinkages have triggered changes in higher education (HE) policies (Martens et al., 2010;

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Vögtle et al., 2011). In particular, since the Bologna Process was launched in 1999, strategies to make European HE institutions more efficient and transparent have spread throughout Europe. This article examines the HE reform pathways of two initiators of the Bologna Process – France and Italy – both of which have undertaken significant reforms driven by Europeanization, globalization and overarching public sector reforms.

I first explore how Europeanization and internationalization may stimulate policy change and present three HE ideal-types. The case studies show that highly different governance models initially evolved in these two countries despite their pioneering role in the Europeanization of HE, manifest internationalization effects and a strong desire for policy change. While France consistently moved closer to a ‘market-oriented model’, legacies of ‘academic self-rule’ were initially strengthened in Italy. To explain these different pathways, I link institutional isomorphism with historical institutionalism. Policy change is conceived as a tug of war between international reform stimuli and historical legacies and actor constellations. Against this background, I show how external isomorphic pressures were channelled through historical institutions, leading to different outcomes, before recent reforms partially chipped away at academic self-rule in Italy.

‘Soft governance’ and Europeanization: mechanisms of change

Faced with high drop-out rates, graduate unemployment, long study durations and brain-drain, European governments seemed no longer capable of meeting 21st-century HE policy challenges. In 1998, the ministers responsible for education in Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain agreed in the so-called Sorbonne Declaration to harmonize the architecture of European HE systems. Initiated one year later, the Bologna Process established a European platform for the joint coordination of HE matters with the aim of harmonizing study structures, promoting academic mobility, expanding quality assurance and increasing university autonomy (Witte, 2006). Additional objectives such as broadening stakeholder-ship, enhancing the social dimension and promoting employability were included later.

Unlike other Europeanization processes, the Bologna Process is based on ‘soft’ governance mechanisms as national policymakers voluntarily set common standards as benchmarks for national reforms. However, recent research has shown that intense transnational communication can trigger significant national policy change – even without binding sanction mechanisms (Vögtle et al., 2011). As Bologna is primarily concerned with study structures and quality assurance, the question emerges as to how it may impact HE governance. First, it can be seen as the European response to other change-promoting developments, such as the knowledge society, demographics, stagnating economies and globalization. Second, national decision-makers are increasingly under external pressure to increase the attractiveness of their HE systems. Subsequently, Bologna may be exploited

by policymakers to legitimize domestic reforms exceeding its original scope. Third, the European Commission has become an important HE player (Batory and Lindstrom, 2011) and explicitly advocates market-oriented instruments, such as funding diversification, business–HE linkages and university autonomy (European Commission, 2006). Particularly noteworthy are its efforts to link Bologna with the Lisbon Process, which aimed to make the European Union (EU) the world’s ‘most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy’ by 2010 (Martens et al., 2007: 9). Finally, Bologna has further institutionalized ‘*governance by comparison*’ (Martens et al., 2010) with its benchmarking activities and prompted policymakers to focus on international rankings.

I argue that *institutional isomorphism* (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) is well-suited to explain contemporary reform dynamics. Accordingly, the quest for legitimacy (and not efficiency) is the main driver of domestic reforms. To secure their survival, organizations align themselves with norms perceived as successful in their organizational environment. Instead of developing their own solutions, they strive to enhance their legitimacy through policy emulation. A tightly knit environment like Bologna can promote the diffusion of policy models (e.g. market-oriented HE instruments), while the transnationalization of HE has exerted isomorphic pressures on policymakers to justify their HE systems amid international scrutiny and competition.

However, domestic institutions are also decisive for national reactions to international stimuli. *Historical institutionalism* assumes that policy developments are strongly conditioned by embedded legacies and structures (Hall and Taylor, 1996). The historical-institutional context can substantially influence the direction and speed of national reactions to international pressures. Global trends may be ‘digested’ differently in varying contexts, whereby interest constellations (e.g. the role of the academic community, state steering capacity) and opportunity structures can be crucial.

From these differing angles, this article examines how transnational pressures have influenced French and Italian HE governance. However, it is often difficult to disentangle internationalization/Europeanization effects from domestic reforms. As part of the public sector, HE has also been targeted by administrative reforms aimed at decentralization and accountability. I therefore assume that internationalization/Europeanization effects may feed into parallel domestic reforms and distinguish between the pre-Bologna and post-Bologna phases in the empirical analyses. This enables us to assess whether intensified transnational communication has added new reform dynamics. The analysis is based on process tracing (George and Bennett, 2005) through the analysis of HE legislation, policy documents and national press articles. The findings were enriched by primary and secondary sources, including interviews with education unions and university representatives. Policy developments were traced between two benchmark years – 1998 and 2013 – which enables us to cover all major HE legislation, including the more recent reforms in Italy.

Ideal-types of HE governance

To comparatively trace policy changes, I distinguish three governance models (Clark, 1983; Dobbins et al., 2011; Olsen, 2007). In the *state-centred model*, universities are state-regulated institutions with limited autonomy. As reflected in Clark's (1983) triangle, the role of the 'academic oligarchy' and markets is limited. The state functions as a 'guardian' and actively influences internal matters, such as curricula, admissions, funding, quality assurance and university–business relations (Neave and Van Vught, 1991). The state engages in *process control* to ensure that universities meet national priorities (Olsen, 2007). State-centred systems generally take an *input-based funding approach* by linking funding to staff and student numbers. The state allocates itemized funds, while institutions have little monetary discretion (Jongbloed, 2003: 122). Quality assurance is generally based on the *ex ante* plausibility that institutions have the capacity to carry out programmes.

Many current reforms are labelled as 'marketization', which strengthens university management and focuses on the economic utility of knowledge (Olsen, 2007). Market-oriented models are based on the assumption that universities function more effectively when operating as economic enterprises (Clark, 1998; Marginson and Considine, 2000). Hence, HE institutions are the result not of state design, but rather entrepreneurial institutional leadership. Ideas based on New Public Management (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000) and private enterprise (e.g. performance-based funding) purportedly foster rapid adaptation to new opportunities (Ferlie et al., 2008). High autonomy enables university management to strategically define study programmes and admission conditions and to appoint staff, often in consultation with academic and external stakeholders.

However, marketization does not imply the retreat of the state as it often functions as an 'evaluator' through quasi-governmental quality assurance bodies (Neave, 1998) and sets incentives for competition and transparency (Olsen, 2007). The state generally provides lump-sum funding, often at a reduced level (De Boer et al., 2007). This increases the budgetary discretion of universities but makes them financially dependent on donors and tuition.

The model of academic self-governance or 'oligarchy' (Clark, 1983) is marked by weak university management and professorial dominance (De Boer and Goedegebuure, 2003: 215). Founded upon Humboldt's principles of intellectual freedom, it is based on a state–university partnership in which policy frameworks are collectively negotiated by academics and governments. The state remains a potent actor through planning and funding regulations but exerts little authority over teaching and research. Socio-economic demands are generally not reflected in academic profiles and student placement. Instead, universities are committed to the search for truth through intellectual freedom – regardless of its utility or political convenience. Another crucial characteristic is the professorial chair system in which powerful chair-holders engage in 'collegial' academic governance (Clark, 1983: 140) and can block initiatives of the government or university management.

To empirically differentiate these ideal-types and measure policy changes, I present a scheme of indicators developed with colleagues (Dobbins et al., 2011) (see Table 1). The categorization comprises central governance dimensions and the allocation of autonomy between the state, HE management, the professoriate and external stakeholders. Like Clark (1983), I assume that HE systems have three main centres of gravity: the academic profession, the state and the market (as reflected in competitive, entrepreneurial governance instruments). Thus, the ideal-types are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather reflect different thrusts of power in university decision-making, funding, evaluation and personnel management.¹

France: more state, more market and more Humboldt?

Historical context

Historically, France has operated a highly centralized HE system (Musselin, 2001), which was characterized by two seemingly paradoxical phenomena until the 1960s: state-centredness and structural compartmentalization. The strong centralization of HE was reflected in a uniform legal framework, degrees and content (Aust and Crespy, 2009: 926), while its fragmentation was reflected in the absence of multi-disciplinary universities. Research was concentrated in *grands établissements* and national research centres, while the compartmentalized *facultés* were overshadowed by prestigious *grandes écoles*.

The 1968 *Loi Faure* strengthened universities as overarching institutions. However, their autonomy regarding funding, personnel and substantive matters remained limited. Nevertheless, Musselin and Paradeise (2009: 22–23) argue that an overemphasis on centralization would be short-sighted as faculty representatives have also ‘co-administered’ the system through close ties with the Education Ministry. Despite their proximity to the bureaucracy, academic interest groups in France are relatively fragmented. Different affiliations (*grandes écoles* or the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS)) and the stark distinction between research and teaching staff have the effect that the academic community seldom defends its interests as a collective block.

The appointment of Lionel Jospin as Education Minister (in 1988) heralded a phase of reforms that impacted the relationship between universities, the state and their socio-economic environment. Particularly noteworthy is the instrument of *contractualisation*, which prescribed that 5–10% of university budgets be funded by four-year performance-based contracts with the state. This strategy called on universities to draw up development plans, leading to a more active role of university presidents and management in defining and implementing negotiated objectives (Musselin and Paradeise, 2009: 28). However, compared to universities in Northern European and English-speaking countries, French universities still enjoyed only very limited autonomy.

Table 1. Three HE governance ideal-types

	State-centred model	Market-oriented model	Academic self-governance
University decision-making			
Dominant decision-maker	State	University management (and external stakeholders)	Community of scholars/professional chairs
Dominant management approach	Bureaucratic	Strategic, entrepreneurial	Collegial
Sets admission conditions, size of institution	State	University management	State/university (negotiated)
Patterns of control and quality evaluation			
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry	(State or quasi-governmental) Accreditation/evaluation bodies	Self-evaluation by university, academic peers
What is controlled?	Academic processes	Quality of academic products	Quality of research output, publications
When does evaluation occur?	Ex ante	Ex post	Not systematized
State control instruments	System-design	Incentives for competition, quality improvements	Legal, financial framework
Financial governance			
Main funding base	State budget (university budget part of state budget)	Competitive and diversified	State budget (with own university budget)

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

	State-centred model	Market-oriented model	Academic self-governance
State funding approach	Itemized (low budgetary discretion for universities)	Global budgets	Mixed type (high budgetary discretion for university)
Allocation method	Input-based (objectives defined by the state)	Output-based (objectives defined by university)	Input-based (objectives negotiated by state and universities)
Personnel autonomy			
Recruitment of high-level academics	State-appointed	Elected by faculty/university management	Elected by professoriate
Professional background of rectors/presidents	Public administration	Management	Scholar/chair-holder
Participation of academic staff in administrative management	Limited	Moderate	High

Transnational communication as a driver of policy change?

Has the transnationalization of HE provided new reform stimuli, and, if so, what role did historical institutions play? After a successful simplification of the previously highly complicated study structures (Witte, 2006), the Education Ministry energetically further pursued its reform thrust. Although not specifically linked to Bologna, the *loi de modernisation universitaire* aimed to grant universities more autonomy and increase their accountability. Based on the principles *autonomie des enseignements* (teaching autonomy) and *autonomie de gestion* (administrative autonomy), the reforms would have brought French universities closer to the market-oriented model by granting them lump-sum budgets and enabling them to set objectives. However, it was ultimately postponed after bitter resistance from student unions – although the intended university self-management capacities were much smaller than in most European countries. It was argued that universities must remain within the public sector as they would otherwise be exploited by enterprises for labour-market training (Witte, 2006: 295–296; also Interview FR-1, see Appendix 1).

Hence, internal and external reform pressures were initially insufficient to topple historically embedded governance traditions. Nevertheless, strong pressures persisted for education policymakers to legitimize French HE internationally, in particular, France's poor performance in university rankings.² In the Shanghai and *Times Higher Education* rankings, French institutions were seldom among the top 100.³ Although the explanatory power of international rankings remains disputed (Dalsheimer and Despréaux, 2008), the continuously weak French performance proved to be politically explosive (Baty, 2010). These bundled factors – Europeanization, international rankings and competitive pressures – created a common discourse on the necessity of a stronger alignment with the governance models of HE policy 'forerunners'. Subsequently, a 'reform hypothesis' spread throughout the ministerial bureaucracy under Nicolas Sarkozy, namely, that university performance correlates directly with autonomy (Sarkozy, 2007). The 2007 HE Law (*Loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités* (LRU)) thus explicitly aimed to increase university autonomy in order to ensure that France has the best universities in Europe by 2012 (MESR, 2007).

The law heralded significant changes to HE governance, which largely constituted a breach with state-centrism. For example, universities were granted far-reaching personnel autonomy to create new short- or long-term teaching, research, administrative and technical positions without state approval and to negotiate contracts no longer bound to state-regulated salary levels (Art. L954-3 of LRU 2007). Unlike previous line-item budgeting, allocated funds are now only divided into three broad categories – operating, personnel and investment expenditures – so that universities administer lump-sum budgets (Art. L712-9 of LRU 2007).

Particularly noteworthy is the reconfiguration of internal university structures. Inspired by Anglo-American practice, a new governance model was 'imposed' on universities in order to assure their capacity for action. Its centrepiece is a smaller

conseil d'administration, whose membership structure is defined by the state: it should consist of 24 to 36 members (instead of the previous 60),⁴ of which approximately 40% are lecturing researchers (*enseignants-chercheurs*). Another innovation is the co-agenda-setting power granted to external stakeholders, of which at least one must be a head of a leading enterprise, while regional representatives (2–3), students (approximately 1/5) and administrative staff (approximately 1/10) are also included (Art. 7 of LRU 2007).

Following the market-oriented paradigm, the LRU reform also considerably strengthened university presidents, who are now elected by absolute majority by the *conseil d'administration* (Art. 6 of LRU 2007). While the majority of *conseil* members are elected through university elections, university presidents now have the authority to personally designate external *conseil* members. With the strengthening of executive leadership, France is thus formally converging on the Anglo-American model (Dobbins and Knill, 2009). Particularly striking is the – at least on paper – omnipotent position of the president, who has the authority to employ (non-professorial) staff on a terminable or indefinite basis and pay performance bonuses (Art. 19 of LRU 2007). Moreover, they can veto recruitment decisions that are not based on national professorial recruitment procedures (Art. 6 of LRU 2007).⁵

Empirical indicators of policy change

How do the governance reforms in France match up with our empirical indicators? Regarding *university decision-making*, a contradictory picture emerges (see Table 2). The expansion of state evaluation of research performance and the state's imposition of the *conseil d'administration* are important signs of increased governmental steering. However, universities have also been significantly enhanced as collective actors. This reconfigured relationship breaks with the historical tradition of procedural control by the Education Ministry. Instead, with its more selective, performance-based approach, the state is empowering universities to develop strategies to increase their international visibility. As key actors in the increasingly research-oriented universities, researchers (*enseignants-chercheurs*) have also assumed an increasingly important role, so that we can simultaneously speak of a stronger orientation towards Humboldtian principles and a 'reawakening' of the academic profession (Musselin, 2009: 195). This trend was reinforced by a recent law⁶ (in 2013) that requires universities to partner or merge with non-university research institutes and to coordinate joint research activities, while also requiring the state to define a national research strategy.

Hence, France can be characterized as a mixed type for our indicator 'dominant decision-maker' as new forms of polycentric governance have emerged with the stimulation of market forces and research capacities by the state. Although the state still defines institutional parameters (e.g. university admissions), the reform of the *conseil d'administration*, greater external stakeholdership and new powers for university presidents reflect more multipolar policymaking.

Table 2. French HE in transition

	1998	2013
University decision-making		
Dominant decision-maker	State (via networks with academic community)	State University management Academic profession External stakeholders
Dominant management approach	Bureaucratic, collegial	Bureaucratic, collegial → strategic, entrepreneurial
Sets admission conditions, size of institution	State	State
Control and quality assurance patterns		
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry	Quasi-governmental evaluation body
What is controlled/evaluated?	Academic processes	Quality of academic products/research output, publications
When does evaluation occur?	Ex ante	Ex post
State control instruments	'System-design'	'System-design' Incentives for competition and quality improvements
Financial governance		
Main funding base	State: university budget part of state budget	State: university budget part of state budget
State funding approach	Itemized (little financial leeway for universities)	Global budgets
Allocation method	Input-based → output-based (objectives defined by state and university management via contractualization)	Input-based → output-based (objectives defined by state and university management via contractualization)
Personnel autonomy		
Dominant role in recruitment of high-level academics	State	State/university management
Professional background of rectors/presidents	Academia/public administration	Academia/public administration → can have management background (de facto from academia/public administration)
Participation of academic staff in administrative management	High	Moderate

Note: An arrow reflects a currently ongoing movement in the indicated direction.

Regarding organizational structures, universities have visibly taken a more entrepreneurial approach. The quality assurance system has also experienced significant changes. The Bologna Process inspired the creation not only of a new agency (the *Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur* (AERES)⁷), but also new instruments (e.g. external evaluation, bibliometric indicators). Following European trends, the evaluation agency includes international members and increasingly applies ex post criteria. The 2013 HE Law also introduced the state accreditation of HE institutions.

Regarding *financial governance*, moderate policy change has occurred, which only partially resulted from Europeanization/internationalization processes. Contrary to most European countries, where public HE funding is shrinking, the opposite has occurred in France: state funding was considerably boosted and tuition fees were rejected. Nevertheless, universities now administer lump sums and may procure third-party funds (Estermann et al., 2011). Domestic developments also resulted in a shift towards performance-based allocation. Since the 1990s, universities and the Education Ministry have jointly defined performance criteria through the *contractualization* procedure. This development was reinforced by the 2001 funding law for public institutions,⁸ which links funding allocation to performance criteria.

Concerning *personnel autonomy*, there is a clear market-oriented trend as the LRU reform delegates decision-making to university management. The *conseil d'administration* is no longer entirely dominated by academics due to the obligatory participation of external economic and regional stakeholders.⁹ While presidents must no longer officially be academics, they generally have an academic background. Yet, they now exert stronger authority over staff employment (Art. 19 of LRU 2007) than in many other European systems (e.g. Germany, Italy), even though promotion procedures for assistant, associate and full professors are generally still state-defined. The civil servant status of most high-ranking academics also poses limitations on presidents' authority (EUI, 2014).

What insights does the theoretical approach provide into the French case? Throughout the reforms, Europeanization and transnationalization increased the perception of France as an HE laggard and injected new policy dynamics. The state increasingly regarded itself as a catalyst for the emulation of perceived international best practice, for example, performance-based funding, qualitative differentiation and entrepreneurial governance. In line with isomorphic theory, keeping up with international competition became a new *leitmotiv* of governmental policymakers, as shown by the many references to international competition and the below-average performance of French universities (MESR, 2007).

However, the historically fragmented nature of the academic landscape also proved crucial. The institutional separation of researchers and lecturers, the affiliation of elite researchers with the CNRS, and the lack of an assertive rectors' organization made it difficult for the academic community to collectively counter the reforms. A reform-averse movement of university researchers known as *Sauvons la Recherche* did actively press back against the new quality assurance

measures (Interview FR-2, see Appendix 1). However, with arguments over global legitimacy, coherency, visibility and performance, the Education Ministry was able to garner support from many academics involved in co-administering HE within the ministerial bureaucracy, who, in turn, pushed back against the protesting organizations (Soulé, 2007). Moreover, other influential university staff not involved in the administration of the system exerted little significant resistance to the governance reforms as they were implemented step-by-step with the *contractualisation* procedure. Finally, the capacity of the French executive to divide and reshape the organizational landscape proved crucial. Specifically, the state promoted the growth of two reform-oriented student unions (*Promotion et Défense des Étudiants* and *Mouvement des Étudiants*) as counterweights to the primarily leftist unions (Interview FR-3, see Appendix 1). The government also engendered a new organization of university presidents¹⁰ in an attempt to increase the influence of its potential political allies, that is, actors whose clout was enhanced by the reforms. Thus, the state has visibly clung to its traditional role of an ‘HE designer’ despite the new market-oriented policy instruments.

Italy: the outsmarted state?

Historical context

Italian HE also displays considerable top-down state steering (Esposti and Geraci, 2010). Like in France, universities as overarching institutions were overshadowed by the compartmentalized faculties and only became autonomous collective actors over the past few decades. Nevertheless, Italian HE is frequently compared to German HE due to the powerful professoriate (Clark, 1977). With two centres of power – the academic chairs and the state bureaucracy – the system remains a mystery for many observers. For some, it is the centralistic bureaucratic model *par excellence*, in which universities are essentially the product of state ‘design’ (Tocci, 2009). Others view Italian universities as bastions of academic ‘barons’ (Manghi, 1987), which have taken on their own inner life. Against this background, Clark (1983) and Capano (2011) describe Italian HE governance as a unique variation of the academic oligarchy model in which the design of academic programmes and system parameters (e.g. admissions, institutional structures) is largely based on ministerial guidelines, while internal personnel matters are regulated by ‘academic guilds’ (Capano, 2011: 12).

The Italian academic community differs in another crucial aspect from its French counterpart. Although chair-holders are highly fragmented and individualistic in terms of research specializations (Clark, 1977), their collective organizational capacity is significantly strengthened by the lack of a large non-university HE sector (such as German *Fachhochschulen*) or other elite institutions (like French *grandes écoles*), and the concentration of research and teaching within universities. This gives them greater clout when asserting their interests vis-a-vis the state than institutionally fragmented French academics. Beyond the mistrustful relationship

between academics and state bureaucrats, university management structures are marked by a distinctive tradition of 'democratic representation' (Capano, 2008; Giglioli, 1979). Italian universities take extensive efforts to include representatives of all faculties and institutes in decision-making. This has resulted in very large university senates and slow decision-making.

Despite the stability of many system features, Italy experimented early with new governance approaches. In the late 1980s, the state aimed to more effectively balance governmental regulation and academic self-administration by emulating numerous British New Public Management reforms (Moscati, 2001: 118). The state withdrew from the detailed regulation of university matters and granted them more autonomy, which was linked to greater accountability.

In the 1990s, the state introduced additional market-oriented mechanisms, such as global budgets and performance-based funding (Moscati, 2001). Universities were authorized to levy tuition fees, but they could not exceed 20% of the state's share of funding. They were also required to establish so-called *nuclei di valutazione*, which conduct internal performance evaluations under the supervision of a national coordination agency¹¹ (Berning, 2002). However, their implementation was slow due to the complex university decision-making structures and the resistance of the professoriate. Thus, the state was unable to sanction weak-performing institutions or to modernize them from the outside.

Transnational communication as a driver of policy change?

Similarly to his French counterpart, then Education Minister Luigi Berlinguer took a 'European detour' to realize his reform project (Witte, 2006). As co-organizer of the Bologna Conference at the oldest Italian university, Italy was one of the main initiators of the Bologna Process. However, were the effects of transnational communication and interlinkages as strong as in France?

Regarding study structures, 'soft Europeanization mechanisms' had a significant transformative impact. Despite smaller implementation difficulties (Moscati, 2009), Italian universities quickly introduced new Bologna-based study structures.¹² The Italian government saw Bologna as a broader stimulus for a system overhaul (MIUR, 2009), through which it would abandon its dirigiste governing approach and provide universities with new competitive and quality-related incentives (Capano, 2008).

To gain the acceptance of the academic community for the new study structures, the state increased the funding and personnel autonomy of universities. For example, new rules for appointing professors were introduced. Previously, the ministry organized centralized appointment procedures (*concorsi*) for full and assistant professors (Berning, 2002: 56). In the early 2000s, however, universities were empowered to decide autonomously when state *concorsi* should be organized. During the appointment procedure, two to three suitable candidates were selected by faculty representatives. This created new incentives for universities to initiate as many *concorsi* as possible in order to accommodate their own personnel.

Accordingly, several candidates could be deemed qualified, even though the number of state-funded professorships remained limited. Hence, many universities felt compelled to appoint their own candidates, who came in second or third place in national *concorsi*. Thanks to previously introduced lump-sum budgets, universities could use funds specified for so-called 'entrepreneurial activities' to appoint their own candidates to professorships (Capano, 2008; also Interview IT-2, see Appendix 1). After all, it was generally much less expensive for universities to promote their own personnel from one level to another than to recruit from outside the university.

In the mid-2000s, the state counteracted this development by reducing the number of qualified candidates. At first sight, the state seemingly succeeded in restricting the universities' 'self-appointment practices' and limiting the power of the professoriate. However, the professoriate's influence was inadvertently reinforced by a parallel development. Due to budget cuts, the *ricercatori* status of aspiring researchers was abolished in 2006. Instead of accepting their migration abroad, many universities felt compelled to appoint the *ricercatori* to professorships with their investment funds (Capano, 2008). Subsequently, the number of full professorships has increased by over 50% since 1998 (CNVSU, 2009), which – in line with the historical model – reinforced academic dominance on governing boards. Originally intended to increase university autonomy, this reform resulted in a system of mutual, collective in-house appointments (Capano, 2008; also Interview IT-2, see Appendix 1), to the extent that approximately 85% of appointments to full professorships and approximately 75% of assistant professor appointments were in-house (CNVSU, 2009).

The professoriate's historically strong position also enabled it to pull the state's reform efforts in its desired direction at many universities. Drawing on Anglo-Saxon and Northern European models, the state advocated the reconfiguration of the university governing board known as the *consiglio di amministrazione* (administrative council). Similarly to the British Board of Trustees or German *Hochschulrat*, the *consiglio di amministrazione* was supposed to function as a counterweight to powerful academic senates. The reconfigured *consiglio* was given decision-making authority over universities' structures and regulatory framework. They were intended to devise strategic development and investment plans for all faculties, institutes and research centres, and to oversee academic quality (Boffo et al., 2008).

In reality, however, a development took place at many universities that one could best describe as the 'duplication of historical institutions'. In strong contrast to the French *conseil d'administration*, the Italian *consiglio di amministrazione* initially remained a large academic-dominated body (Interview IT-1, see Appendix 1). Drawing on the tradition of 'democratic representation' (Clark, 1977), the new structures were initially characterized by the strong presence of students and all faculties. Thus, in terms of function and structure, the *consigli di amministrazione* largely coincided with academic senates at most universities. Due to this 'bloating' of decision-making structures, one could argue that Italian academics largely

exploited calls for entrepreneurial university management to further reinforce existing academic-dominated institutions (Interview IT-1, see Appendix 1). This resulted in a novel form of academic ‘bicameralism’ in which the professoriate still played the dominant role (Capano, 2008). The coexistence of two decision-making bodies with a similar structure and composition led to tedious decision-making processes and preference aggregation (Capano, 2008; Moscati, 2012; also Interview IT-2, see Appendix 1). Other authors also stress the weak influence of external stakeholders on university governance (Boffo et al., 2008; Donina et al., forthcoming).

Thus, Italian universities initially doubled down on core elements of the ‘academic oligarchy’ model in the 2000s. Contrary to France, where relatively linear policy change towards the market-oriented model occurred, Italian HE fell into a spiral of centralization, decentralization and recentralization. This lack of continuity is also reflected in the 2010 Gelmini Law,¹³ in which the state explicitly alluded to broader European HE developments to realign the system.

The Gelmini Law is viewed as the government’s attempt to better balance state intervention and university autonomy and to curb purported abuses of academic autonomy (Ricolfi, 2009). Professors are now obligated to meet teaching requirements and to create more attractive, long-term prospects for young academics. The Gelmini Law also stipulates that 30% of state funds be allocated on a performance basis by 2014, though criteria for performance evaluations are not clearly defined (Art. 4 of Gelmini Law 2010). Importantly, it seeks a compromise between centralized and decentralized professorial appointments as it introduces a new procedure through which an initial selection of outstanding academics is made at the national level, and then universities can choose among those considered eligible (Art. 18 of Gelmini Law 2010).

The Gelmini Law also enforces significant structural modifications on universities based on the principles of simplification, institutional uniformity and functional differentiation (Regini, 2014; Rinaldi, 2011). Specifically, it creates a standard framework for university governance, with six bodies: rector, senate, *consiglio d’amministrazione*, internal evaluation unit, board of auditors and a general director (D’Archivio, 2013; Donina et al., forthcoming). Importantly, the functions of the senate and *consiglio di amministrazione* are to be differentiated: the *consiglio* now assumes financial and strategic management, while the senate deals exclusively with pedagogical and substantive issues (Arts 2h, 2n and 2o of Gelmini Law 2010). Breaking with the historical tradition of large decision-making bodies, *consiglio* membership is capped at 11 seats, including student representatives. In line with its French counterpart, it must consist of a minimum number of lay members (generally three), while each university may choose whether the *consiglio* is chaired by the rector or an external member (Capano, 2014; Donina et al., forthcoming). Contrary to France, the Gelmini Law maintains the academic senate as a core governing body, but – in partial breach with the historical tradition – caps the number of senate members to 35 (Art. 2f of Gelmini Law 2010).

Particularly noteworthy is the position of the rector, who is still elected by full professors (and not the *consiglio*, with external membership) and then appointed upon ministerial approval. In an effort to crack down on academic abuses, the Gelmini Law reduces rectors' terms to six years (Art. 2d of Gelmini Law 2010), which may inadvertently make them less willing to exert strategic leverage and seek confrontation with academic peers. These circumstances – combined with substantial public budget cuts – constrain the leadership capacities of Italian rectors compared to French university presidents.

Empirical indicators of policy change

Due to recent developments, it is difficult to align the Italian system with the proposed empirical indicators. The Gelmini Law partially builds on existing regulations and contains an array of provisions that potentially contradict other public administration laws. Thus, the implementation process and its consequences remain uncertain. To arrive at an overview that is as precise and cautious as possible and to reflect the non-linear developments, the changes *before* the Gelmini reform are indicated *in parentheses* in Table 3.

Regarding *institutional structures*, Italian HE first fell back into academic self-rule as governmental attempts to introduce entrepreneurial governance approaches largely withered away in the entrenched collegial governance structures. The new autonomies for universities were largely 'captured' by the academic community, leading to the reinforcement of professorial dominance (through collective self-promotion and academic dominance of the *consigli*) (Interview IT-2, see Appendix 1). It remains an open question as to whether the government's efforts to strengthen and downsize the *consigli* will fundamentally change the internal governance logic. On paper, the reconfigured council represents a stronger separation of academic and strategic management. However, as indicated, shrinking state funding has left little leeway for managerialist approaches.

However, one area of high reform dynamics and increased state steering is *quality assurance*, even before the Gelmini reform. While the foundations were already laid in the 1990s with the establishment of *nuclei di valutazione* and the *Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario* (CNVSU), Bologna further institutionalized quality assurance structures and processes. By means of a newer evaluation agency – the *Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del sistema Universitario e della Ricerca* (ANVUR) – the state conducts *ex ante* accreditation of study programmes together with international experts. Interestingly, the state increasingly 'isomorphically' aligned the ANVUR with the French AERES in the late 2000s as it now also uses bibliometric data and peer review exercises for its research quality evaluations. On this basis, it has recently begun to issue biannual university 'report cards' and award prize funds to top performers. Moreover, the Gelmini Law increases the external accountability of the internal *nuclei di valutazione* as they must now consist of a majority of external members. Thus, the state increasingly views itself as an *evaluating state* (Neave, 1998) with a stronger focus on 'academic products'.

Table 3. Italian HE in transition

	1998	2013
University decision-making		
Dominant decision-maker	State/academic community	(State/academic community) → state University management Academic community External stakeholders
Dominant management approach	Bureaucratic, collegial	Bureaucratic, collegial
Sets admission conditions, size of institution	State	State
Control and quality assurance patterns		
Who controls/evaluates?	Ministry	Quasi-governmental evaluation body
What is controlled/evaluated?	Academic products	Academic products
When does evaluation occur?	Ex ante/ex post	Ex ante/ex post
State control instruments	'System-design'	Incentives for competition and quality improvements
Financial governance		
Main funding base	State (with own university budget) + tuition fees	State (with own university budget) + tuition fees
State funding approach	Global budgets	Global budgets
Allocation mode	Input-based → output-based	(Input-based) → output-based
Personnel autonomy		
Dominant role in recruitment of high-level academics	State/professoriate	(Professoriate) → state/professoriate
Professional background of rectors/presidents	Academia	Academia
Participation of academic staff in administrative management	High	(Even higher before Gelmini) → moderate

Notes: The changes before the Gelmini Law are in parentheses. An arrow reflects a currently ongoing movement in the indicated direction.

Regarding *financial governance*, the most important reforms had already occurred in the mid-1990s with the introduction of tuition fees and lump-sum budgets. However, the simultaneously introduced performance-based funding was rolled back,¹⁴ and then reintroduced by the Gelmini Law. Nevertheless, the lion's share of university funding is still based on input-oriented criteria and it remains uncertain whether Italian universities will develop an 'investment culture'.

Regarding *personnel*, the pendulum initially shifted towards academic self-rule (contrary to France). Lump-sum budgets and greater personnel autonomy increased the professoriate's collective influence, not least because universities used funds primarily to appoint new tenured professors. The development was reinforced by the strong presence of academic and faculty representatives in the *consiglio* and senate. The impact of the Gelmini reform on personnel appears somewhat ambivalent. Contrary to France, it allows for more state intervention into personnel matters. Professorial appointments are now initially externalized to panels of state-appointed academics from other universities, before individual universities may then choose among candidates deemed eligible. Thus, universities do not fully manage recruitment processes according to their own priorities (Donina et al., forthcoming). Furthermore, while the Gelmini Law formally strengthens the entrepreneurial capacities of the *consiglio*, it leaves universities little authority over academic promotions as salaries are still set at the national level. Moreover, rectors, who generally chair the *consiglio*, are still exclusively recruited from academic ranks and – contrary to France – subject to six-year term limits. Therefore, they may be less interested in acquiring management skills if forced to return to their academic positions.

Conclusions

At least on paper, France largely succeeded in transforming its centralist governance model into a more market- and research-oriented model, while upholding numerous means for governmental intervention. By contrast, Italian HE first moved closer to the academic self-regulation model in many aspects. While the French government used its stronger leverage over the academic community to simplify and 'managerialize' university governance, the Italian government fell into a reform spiral in which the *status quo ante* became even more deeply entrenched – at least until the Gelmini Law. In its early attempts to align university governance with Northern European 'best practices', the state alluded to the HE buzzword 'autonomy' and relinquished control over diverse procedural matters. However, in most Italian universities, powerful academics frequently exploited the new rules to reinforce their dominance instead of establishing entrepreneurial governance structures. This unintended consequence is reflected in widespread in-house appointments and the 'institutional duplication' of academic senates with the *consigli di amministrazione*. After this initial divergence, the Gelmini reform pushed Italian HE slightly back towards both the market-based and state-centred paradigm, as reflected in the downsizing and strengthening of governance bodies, the broadening of external stakeholderhood, and the recentralization of professorial appointments.

What theoretical conclusions can we draw from the analysis? Strong isomorphic effects came to bear in both countries as policymakers aimed to align HE structures with North-western European models to increase their outward legitimacy. However, the empirical analysis revealed that historical institutions (e.g. the power of the professoriate, the fragmentation of the academic community, executive capacity) are critical in explaining different reactions to Europeanization. It became apparent that actors already privileged by the historical context – in France, the central government; in Italy, the professoriate – exploited internationalization/Europeanization processes to shape the new governance structures in line with their preferences. Subsequently, France experienced ‘state-imposed marketization’ and state-driven efforts to reshape the organizational landscape, while the Italian academic community initially ‘outsmarted’ the state and further reinforced institutions of academic self-rule. It remains to be seen whether powerful academics can exploit the institutional modifications stipulated in the Gelmini Law or whether it will have a long-lasting weakening effect on their collective clout. As for France, it is also still an open question as to whether and how the numerous formal changes will fundamentally change routines and standard operating procedures and fully replace pre-existing institutions.

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Notes

1. For detailed explanations of the indicators, see Dobbins et al. (2011).
2. The poor French performance is frequently explained by the fact that top research is generally conducted outside universities at the CNRS or *grandes écoles*.
3. In the 2003 Shanghai rankings, only one French university (*Paris-Sud*) was ranked among the top 100. In the *Times Higher Education* rankings, only one *grande école* (*École Polytechnique*) and no university ranked among the top 100. In the 2007 Shanghai rankings, French universities again ranked far behind their US and Northern European counterparts (Dalsheimer and Despréaux, 2008: 8).
4. The LRU law originally provided for 20 to 30 *conseil* members. Its size was increased to 24 to 36 members in 2013.
5. National competitions are organized by selection committees (*agrégation du supérieur*) to simultaneously recruit several university professors (EUI, 2014).
6. *Loi relative à l'enseignement supérieur et à la recherche*.
7. According to the 2013 Law (Loi n 2013-660), the AERES is to eventually be replaced by the *Haut conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*.
8. *Loi organique relative aux lois de finance*.
9. The new 2013 HE Law (*Loi relative à l'enseignement supérieur et à la recherche*) envisages a slight increase in the number of *enseignants-chercheurs* (now between eight and 16; previously between eight and 14) and external members (now eight; previously seven or eight) in the *conseil d'administration*.
10. *Conférence des chefs d'établissements de l'enseignement supérieur*.

11. The *Coordinamento Nazionale dei Nuclei di Valutazione delle Università Italiane* (CONVUI).
12. The previous four-year *Laurea* degrees were transformed into three-year Bachelor degrees, followed by two-year *Laurea Specialistica* degrees.
13. The law is named after the then Education Minister Mariastella Gelmini and officially titled: *Norme in materia di organizzazione delle Università, di personale accademico e reclutamento, nonché delega al Governo per incentivare la qualità e l'efficienza del sistema universitario*.
14. It was feared here that the performance-based funding formula would disadvantage smaller provincial universities.

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Appendix I: List of interviews

Interview FR-1: SUD Education – November 2012.

Interview FR-2: *Sauvons la Recherche* – November 2012.

Interview FR-3: *Promotion et Défense des Etudiants* – November 2012.

Interview IT-1: University management board member – La Sapienza – June 2013.

Interview IT-2: Assistant Professor – *Istituto italiano di scienze umane* – November 2014.