

## **Change in university governance structures; varieties in the executive trends**

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### **Introduction**

Over the last decades many national reforms have been initiated in Europe with the aim to strengthen the executive capacity of public universities. The reform agendas had a number of items in common, including the enhancement of institutional autonomy, the professionalization of institutional leadership and administration, and the introduction of more competitive, performance oriented funding models. All these items have been studied from various perspectives, including a public management (Ferlie et al. 2009) and a policy analysis perspective (de Boer et al. 2017), as well as from the perspective of the contribution of universities to economic growth and competitiveness (Ploeg and Veugelers 2008). An item that featured prominently on the reform agendas, but has received less attention in academic studies is the development of more executive intra-university governance structures. An underlying reform assumption was that a more executive governance structure would allow each university to use its enhanced strategic leadership capacity for developing into an integrated organizational actor (Krücken and Meier 2006), which would be able to identify a relevant and fitting niche in increasingly competitive national and international higher education landscapes.

In a number of respects, the new governance structures that were introduced at European flagship universities have been more controversial than the other reform items. At the University of Amsterdam, for example, students and staff protested in 2015 against the economically driven governance practices at the institution. Their demands included enhanced democratization of university governance, greater transparency of the university's finances, and an end to risky financial and property speculation with university funds. While the protests in Amsterdam were unique in many respects, at the same time also at other European research universities worries and skepticism about the nature and impact of the new governance structures could be observed. This raises a number of questions about the changes that have taken place in the governance structures at European universities, the processes through which these changes have taken place, and the controversies surrounding the changes and their (assumed) impact.

In this article we report comparative research findings and we will discuss changes with respect to university governance structures in six comprehensive universities included in the Flagship project, that is, the universities of Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Oslo, Vienna, and Zürich, as well as KU Leuven. We will start with presenting an analytical framework for our discussions and interpretations, followed by a brief overview of the main national university reforms. For the comparative analysis of the university governance structures we have identified and used four different dimensions, that is, the internal democratic nature of the governance structure; the external involvement in university governance; the level of centralization of decision making authority in the university; and the concentration of authority in an individual leadership position versus authority in a collective body or

spread over various collective bodies. These dimensions will allow for a comparative interpretation of the changes in governance structures, but they will not be used for determining which university governance practice is best. The article will also not discuss the consequences of the changes in governance structures for the performance of the universities.

The research questions addressed in the article are accordingly:

- What are the main features of university governance structures in European research universities?
- How can the impact of university reforms in the area of intra-institutional governance structures be accounted for in theoretical terms?

### **Analytical framework: the importance of filters in university reforms**

How can the potential impact of far-reaching university reforms be interpreted? In the 1980s and early 1990s there was a wide-spread assumption linked to public sector reforms identifiable in the academic literature, that is, reforms can be expected to lead to a global convergence in university governance structures (see, e.g. Goedegebuure et al. 1994). In a more general way this is also the basic assumption of the world polity approach (Meyer et al 1997), which argues that global norms affect states and institutions resulting in the homogenization of cultures and organizations around the world. This includes national education reform agendas which are argued to be influenced by a 'global script'. However, this focus on convergence and homogenizing effects of global norms has been challenged, and there are clear indications that university reforms have led to more diversity instead of convergence (Christensen et al. 2014).

Our approach rests on a combination of two theoretical traditions drawn from institutional scholarship that underline the filtering of generic public sector reform models (cf. Pollitt et al. 2004). First, such models we can expect to be reshaped and adapted by national traditions in public sector governance and established institutional arrangement in national political-administrative systems, that is, generic governance models are subject to a *national* filter. We would expect to see differences between national systems in how internal governance reforms are enacted. Second, we argue (Gornitzka and Maassen 2014) that the institutional sphere that European universities make up creates a *sector* specific buffer against external normative pressure, functional adaptation to socio-economic changes and attempts at political design (March and Olsen 1989; March and Olsen 1995). A 'sector filter' can be assumed to keep the established values, attitudes and arrangements in place for how governance is undertaken within each university. Sector specific 'inheritance' comes before the import of general modernization trends and before political choice. An institutional theoretical governance approach implies that there are relatively clear and consensual understandings with respect to who are the appropriate actors for governing a university, what are effective and fitting modes of governance, and what are relevant rules (formal and informal) for how interactions should take place between the academic and the executive spheres. Attempts at replacing institutionalized governance arrangements and practices with governance structures taken from other sectors or institutional spheres, or from international 'best practices' can be expected to be met with sectoral defense responses and major conflicts (Olsen 2007: 28). A 'sector filter' than implies that sector

specific characteristics and issues lead to variations in how major university reforms are enacted also within national systems. This is caused by sector specific traditions, and institutional features and arrangements that have clearly affected the nature, process and impact of reforms, and the balance between political control and institutional autonomy also in other sectors than the university sector, such as health care (Lægreid, Opedal et al. 2005), prisons, or social security (Pollitt et al. 2004). This argument is related to what Pollitt and colleagues refer to as a task specific path dependency model (Pollitt et al. 2004, 18), although societal *sector* or institutional sphere signifies institutions that are defined by a broader set of tasks with fairly stable identities that are historically embedded. These two types of filters can help us make sense of the differences between governance structures between universities and the potential gaps between the overall governance template that we can assume is dominant at the level of reform rhetoric and the governance structures that are in place within universities.

How then can we expect change in university governance structures to take place as a result of reforms? Three additional arguments can be derived from the institutional literature (Gornitzka and Maassen 2014), that is, change at critical junctures induced by crisis, routine adaptations, and temporal sorting. The first argument is that reforms follow a pattern of punctuated equilibriums and major transformations occur at critical junctures produced by major shocks and crises. This argument refers to a specific reform change pattern: reforms evolve as a discrete rather than continuous process (Peters, Pierre et al. 2005). In addition, at an ideational level paradigmatic change is argued to take place as a result of external shocks, while outside such major reform episodes only marginal and incremental change occurs (Hall 1993: 279). Following this line of argumentation, in the context of university governance reforms we should be able to observe a main pattern where systemic crises and exogenous shocks define critical junctures that become path breaking, followed by a period of stasis in governance arrangements.

The second argument is anchored in the academic literature on the organizational basis of government reforms and suggests that reform induced change can take place outside path breaking events, while still being non-trivial and transformative. Here it is argued that change takes place incrementally through routine adaptations (March 1981; Brunsson and Olsen 1997: 42-44). Of particular interest to the study of reform induced change is policy layering as a form of gradual yet transformative change (Thelen 2004: 35). New reform items are implanted onto existing layers of arrangements. The latter is particularly likely in situations where existing institutional arrangements are highly change resistant, with political environments being reform prone (Mahoney and Thelen 2010), a condition we can assume is particularly relevant for the university sector.

A third perspective is reform induced change as affected by timing of events. Borrowing from insights of decision-making behaviour, this implies that “things are connected by virtue of their simultaneous presence or arrival” (March and Olsen 1984: 198-206; March 1994). For the study of diverging reform impacts, this is potentially relevant since policy makers in national systems are highly unlikely to experience the identical confluence of reform opportunity, pay attention to similar policy problems and available solutions as well as contingent events. This opens up for diverging reform implementation trajectories and outcomes of reform processes even across countries that are systemically close.

In the sum the three arguments read as follows:

1. In periods of external crises and shocks national governance reforms lead to major transformation followed by stability.
2. 'Routine adaptation': National governance reforms' impact takes place gradually in the form of routine and layering – change is possible, but in slow motion
3. 'Timing:' National governance reforms can be understood as the coupling of policy solutions and problems because of their temporal proximity rather their means-ends linkage.

In order to address the validity of these arguments, we will briefly reflect upon university governance reforms in a number of European countries. We underline that we are not concerned with the systemic effects the governance reforms have had.

### **Methods and data**

The examination of changes in university governance structures draws on the research project on European Flagship universities. In this project it was studied how major research intensive universities (referred to as 'Flagships') interpret and use institutional autonomy internally. Comprehensive Flagships in eight European countries, that is, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, were involved in the project.

We identify what characterizes the case institutions' internal governance structures on the four main dimensions on the basis of analyses of documentary evidence. As concerns the timeframe of our study, the main emphasis is on presenting present day characteristics of the case institutions' governance structures at the central level, that is, at the time the study was undertaken. Yet, the dynamics, direction and level of change are teased out using informant interviews from the universities covered in this article to analyze the actual practice of governance in these two areas, both core aspects of university life (see table 1). In order to identify and summarize the main patterns we scored each institution's governance structure at the central level on a simple scale from 1 to 3 for each of the main governance dimensions: democratic nature; external involvement; centralization of decision making authority; and concentration.

The project represents our interests in contributing to a better understanding of the universities' internal structures and processes, and how changes in these have affected the internal academic life. We had a special interest in the departmental level, given that there is relatively little empirical data available on the research intensive universities' internal governance dynamics. The four academic areas we included in our departmental level studies were: chemistry, psychology, public health, and teacher education. In the case studies we focused on personnel policies and research management.

### **National 'HE governance reforms**

All six countries included in this article introduced one or more major university governance reforms since 1985 (see table 1), with the 1990s and the 2000s being a particularly intensive reform period. We also note that parallel to the increased attention paid to reforming the governance of higher education at the national level, the EU also zoomed in on the need for reforming the governance of

higher education. This emerged in particular in the aftermath of the launch of the so-called Lisbon Strategy for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world (Chou and Gornitzka 2014, p.114) and the revision of this strategy (Winckler 2012). The European Commission’s agenda for the modernization of universities (Commission 2006) promoted governance reforms of universities as a technical question of how to address the management deficit within these institutions and the need to improve the strategic capacity and strengthen university leadership (Olsen 2007). The ideas of university governance cherished in this agenda chimed with a global script and several of the reform items were already pushed in national agendas. Yet, any further attempts of the Commission to spearhead a common European reform agenda met with high-level national resistance and since then issues of university autonomy, governance and funding have been practically left out of the Commission’s modernization itinerary (Winckler 2012: 243).

**Table 1: Overview of main national university governance reforms / Laws**

	Year of governance reforms	Focus of governance reforms / Laws
The Netherlands	1985 / 1997	Autonomy and Quality (White Paper 1985) University Governance Organization (Law 1997)
Belgium/Flanders	1991 / 2013	Comprehensive University Law (1991) Comprehensive higher education law (2013)
Switzerland	1998	Comprehensive Law for University of Zurich
Austria	2002	University Organisation and Governance Law
Denmark	2003	University Autonomy and Governance Law
Norway	2003/2005	Comprehensive White Paper (2003) / Comprehensive HE Law (2005)

As indicated, these reforms have been discussed extensively in the academic literature (see, e.g. de Boer et al. 2017). Therefore it suffices here to present a brief overview of the main features these reforms have in common (in line with the global script approach). In general the underlying reform agendas promote the following changes with respect to the intra-university governance structures.

- a. Replacement of democratic councils by executive boards. The vision underlying the democratization of university governance structures in Europe assumed that the performance of the university would be improved by reducing the power of the professors, and enhancing the involvement of non-professorial academic staff, administrative staff and students in university governance. The result was that in the university governance changes introduced after the 1960s decision making power was concentrated in democratically elected, representative councils. This power implied that all major decisions, e.g. in the budget and personnel areas, of the university leadership (the rectorate and equivalent) had to be approved by one or more democratic councils (or equivalent). The university reform agendas problematized the representative democracy nature of university governance by pointing to the low participation of the university population in internal governance elections, the long time it takes to come to decisions in democratic universities as a result of conflicting norms and objectives (Olsen 2007: 30), and the lack of interest in organizational efficiency and effectiveness issues in the democratic governance bodies (Boer and Stensaker 2007).

The change promoted by the reform agendas was to introduce executive boards in the university as the main decision making body thereby either abolishing democratic councils, or radically changing their mandate from decision making to advisory.

- b. Increased formal external involvement in university governance. The democratization of the university was first and foremost anchored in the vision of the university as an organization of which the operations and dynamics should be governed internally, without any direct external involvement (Olsen 2007: 30). As a consequence, the democratic post-1960s university councils did not have any external members. Recent university reform agendas are very concerned about the weak relationship between the university and society, and see as a solution for this problem the formal inclusion of external representatives in governance structure structures, at all relevant levels and in all relevant boards and other bodies.
- c. Centralization of formal decision making power. In the post-1960s university governance structures authority was distributed widely throughout the university, both vertically (across governance levels) and horizontally (across various bodies and councils at the same level). Recent reform agendas referred to this characteristic as fragmentation, and problematized the lack of coherence and integration in university decision making. The proposed solution has been referred to as the need for strong, professional leadership that can develop the university into an integrated organizational actor that will be able to take strategic decisions for the university as a whole (Krücken and Meier 2006).
- d. Shift from collective to individual responsibility. In the university governance structures emerging after the 1960s authority and decision making responsibilities were concentrated in collective bodies at all relevant levels. The constitutive logic of these bodies consisted of handling conflicting norms and objectives through bargaining, creating alliances and reaching majority decisions (Olsen 2007:30). Recent reform agendas emphasized the resulting lack of personal commitment and responsibility, and a lack of attention for university interests in university governance. As a consequence the agendas promoted to shift decision making power from collective bodies to individual leaders.

When looked at in detail there are obviously variations in the formulations with respect to proposed changes in university governance structures in the national reforms presented in table 1. However, overall the reform agendas and new laws are in general in line when it comes to the change direction they promote for university governance structures along these four governance dimensions: from democratic to executive, from purely internal to mixed internal/external, from spread and decentralized authority to authority centralization, and from collective bodies to individual responsibility.

In the next section we will use these four dimensions for giving an overview of the changes in the university governance structure of the six universities included in this article.

## **University governance structures: main features**

### *A. University of Copenhagen (KU)*

Founded in 1479, KU has about 40,000 students and 9,000 employees. In 2014 its total budget was over 1 billion EUR.

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: The Danish Autonomy Law (2003) replaced democratically elected bodies (Councils) by a central university Board. This Board has important formal powers, including the approval of KU's budget. An adaptation of the 2003 Law in 2011 re-introduced certain democratic principles, but in a very modest form. This concerns especially the principle of co-determination. The law encourages universities to make sure that the staff and students will be heard and can express their views in important governance issues. KU introduced after 2011 councils at the department level. These councils are according to Flagship project data referred to as being only a hearing and information body with no real power. In addition to these councils KU has an institutional senate and at each faculty an academic council. These are advisory bodies, with the senate advising the rector on various issues such as budget, KU's '*målplan*' (strategic targets) and the institutional development contract. The senate meets 2-4 times per year and consists of representatives from the academic faculty councils.

Overall we interpret KU as having an executive governance structure with a weak to moderate democratic orientation, that has been strengthened somewhat since 2011.

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: The central university Board at KU has a majority of external members (6 external versus 5 internal), which includes at KU the external chair of the Board. The latter is formally not required, since the university bylaws indicate that the members of the Board elect the Board's leader from amongst themselves.

The rector is appointed by the Board, based on procedures determined by the Board itself. There is no formal demand that the rector has to come from within KU, but in practice it will be very unlikely that the procedures used by the Board will result in an external candidate. The pro-rectors are selected by the rector (on the basis of a specific procedure), and have to be approved by the Board.

Overall we interpret KU as having a moderate external involvement in its central governance structure, with, amongst other things, a large minority of internal representatives in the Board, and the practice that the rector and pro-rectors are internal.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: The central KU Board has the responsibility for, amongst other things, the approval of the annual financial report and budget proposal by the rector; the development contract with the Minister; determining KU's regulations and procedures; and guaranteeing the co-determination possibilities of staff and students in important decisions. This implies that the Board has a rather general supervisory and approval role, with a relative large direct set of responsibilities for the rector and his team. The Board is not expected to interfere directly in areas such as personnel affairs and research management.

In KU's practice the rector has delegated a number of responsibilities to the deans, including in personnel policy decisions. The general frames and guidelines are determined by the rector, but the deans have the implementation and decision-making power (within the delegation model of KU).

Overall, KU has a moderate to weak level of centralization compared to the other universities in the Flagship sample.

4. Level of individual responsibility: The Danish University Law of 2003 marks a rather radical shift from collective to individual leadership roles and responsibilities in the operative management structures and practices of KU. At the same time the governance practices at KU and the 2011 adaptation of the 2003 Law have strengthened somewhat the collective dimension in the university's governance. Nonetheless, compared to the other universities KU has a strong level of individual leadership roles/functions in its governance structures, instead of collective leadership bodies.

#### *B. University of Amsterdam (UvA)*

Founded in 1632 UvA is one of the oldest universities in the Netherlands. In 2010 it had over 32,000 students and almost 3,000 academic members of staff.

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: The situation at UvA is special since at the moment of the investigation its two central governance bodies were joint governance structures with the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (*Hogeschool van Amsterdam / HvA*). The first of these is a supervisory board (in Dutch: *Raad van Toezicht*), which can be compared to a Board of Trustees in US universities. The second is an executive board (in Dutch: *College van Bestuur*), which can be compared to a rectorate in other continental European universities. The executive board has the day-to-day management responsibilities for the institution. It consisted at the time of the investigation of the rector of UvA and the rector of HvA (jointly responsible for academic affairs), plus the president (responsible for strategic management issues) external and the vice-president (comparable to a head of administration).

The university is currently trying to do justice to the student (and staff) demands for more democracy. For this purpose an internal committee for Democratization and Decentralization has developed a number of proposals for changing the university's governance structure. UvA's staff and students could express their opinion about the proposals of the committee in a referendum taking place December 2016.

The referendum is expected to lead to a number of changes in UvA's governance structure. Until that time UvA has next to the two Boards two Central Representative Advisory Bodies that are required by Law in order to secure the participation of staff and students in university governance. They can be divided or integrated, and UvA has decided to have two separate bodies. The first is the so-called Works Council, consisting of 16 members representing university staff (strikingly none of the current members is a full professor), the second is the Central Student Council, the main central body for students for participating in decision-making at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). Its 14 members are elected from the seven faculties by means of a district system. These two councils operate separately, but meet regularly for discussing issues of joint interest.

Next to these formal advisory bodies, UvA has a number of non-formal advisory bodies, including the Central Executive Council (CBO), which is the executive consultative body and comprises the members of the Executive Board and the faculty deans. In addition, UvA has decided to set up a senate, even though it is not legally required to do so. As described on the university's website<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/organisation/organisation>



The Senate is an advisory committee charged with providing the Executive Board with solicited and unsolicited advice on the main ideas of the UvA's policy with respect to teaching and learning, research and the pursuit of scholarship, and the related student and personnel policies.

The senate regulations were adopted by the University Executive Board (and approved by the supervisory Board) in 2013; it states that the members of the senate should be full professors employed by UvA. It consists currently of 12 professors, incl. the chairperson.

Overall UvA has an executive central leadership/management structure with a moderate democratic character, consisting of two formal representative bodies, and important informal bodies. An interesting element in the democratic structure at UvA is the separation in their advisory role in various bodies between the university professors (senate), the other staff (works council) and the students (their own council).

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: UvA's supervisory Board has seven members, which are all external, including the external chair of Board. The Board's members are appointed by the Minister of Education and Science, based on nominations by the University. The rectorate (or executive board) consists at the beginning of 2017 of all in all eight members, including the chairman of the board, the rector of UvA and the rector of HvA. All members, including the chairman and the two rectors, are appointed by the supervisory Board. All members of this board can be internal or external. In appointing the members of the executive board the Supervisory Board has to involve the 'university community', formally (through the two formal advisory bodies) and informally (amongst other things in the composition of and procedures for the search committees). Overall we interpret UvA as having a strong external involvement in its university governance structure, including an external supervisory Board, and external members of the rectorate/executive board.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: UvA's Supervisory Board is charged, amongst other things, with:

- a. appointing, suspending, dismissing and determining the remuneration of the members of the Executive Board;
- b. approving the budget, annual statement of accounts, annual report and Strategic Plan;
- c. monitoring the lawful acquisition and the purposeful and lawful allocation and use of the government grant;
- d. appointing an accountant to report to the Supervisory Board;
- e. monitoring the structure of the quality assurance system;
- f. accounting for the execution of tasks and the exercise of powers on a yearly basis in the University's annual report.

This implies that the Supervisory Board has a rather general supervisory role, with a relative large set of direct responsibilities for the rectorate/executive board. The Supervisory Board is not expected to interfere directly in areas such as personnel affairs, and research management.

In UvA's practice the rectorate has delegated a number of responsibilities to the deans, including in the area of personnel policy. The general frames and guidelines are determined by the Supervisory

Board (in close consultation with the rectorate), but the deans have the implementation and decision-making power (within the delegation model of UvA).

Overall, UvA has a moderate level of centralization compared to the other universities in the Flagship sample.

4. Level of individual responsibility: The Dutch university governance system has a 'collective' tradition since the democratization process from the 1960s. This has changed for the deans in the 1997 university governance Law, but even at the faculty level there is still a collective dimension in the governance practices. Nonetheless, there is room for more concentrated individual power, even in the collective governance bodies, but within the Dutch university traditions a strong individual leader has to be 'checked and kept in control' by collective bodies. At UvA this is also taking place through the informal university leadership team (rectorate plus deans) and the senate. Therefore, compared to the other universities UvA has a relatively modest emphasis on individual leaders over collective bodies in its governance structure.

#### B. *University of Zurich (UZH)*

Founded in 1833 UZH has about 26,000 enrolled students and over 5,000 staff and is the largest university in Switzerland.

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: The central institutional governance structure at UZH consists of 4 bodies. It resembles a balanced executive – democracy structure with the university board on the one hand and the senate on the other, and the rectorate responsible for the operative management. At the same time, the UZH Board consists only of external members, and the senate is dominated by full professors. In addition, the fourth formal body in the governance structure is the extended rectorate (called *Erweiterte Universitätsleitung*) which consists of the five members of the rectorate as well as all deans, representatives from the non-professorial staff, students, and in a non-voting, advisory role, representatives from the non-academic staff, central administration.

The senate is an institutional advisory body, consisting of all professors, plus a small group of non-professorial academic staff, students, and in a non-voting role also non-academic staff. Its main role is to nominate to the Board the rector and pro-rector candidates, while it can also propose to dismiss the sitting rector/pro-rectors. In addition, it is to advise the Board on all important UZH matters. UZH's central governance structure also includes a number of independent bodies, but they can be regarded as administrative units, instead of governance bodies.

Overall UZH has a central governance structure with a moderate democratic character, consisting of the Board and the Senate, which are in a kind of authority balance with each other, and the rectorate plus extended rectorate responsible for the operative management. What is striking at UZH is the strong position of the full professors in the university governance structure through their membership and dominance of the senate. The consequence is a relatively low level of influence of the non-professorial academic staff and students, and the almost complete lack of formal influence of the non-academic staff.

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: the university board currently consists of seven members, who are all external, and appointed by the Cantonal government. The current chair of the Board is the DG Education of the Cantonal Education Ministry, who is an ex-officio member of the Board. The five members of the rectorate (rector, three vice-rectors, and the Director of Finances, Human Resources and Infrastructure) are appointed by the University Board, and it is very unlikely in the current governance structure at UZH that the rector is coming from outside the university. The composition of the extended leadership body (rectorate plus deans and representatives of staff) is partly an internal matter since the deans are elected within their faculty. The university Senate is a relatively strong internal advisory body with a strong dominance of professors.

Overall we interpret UZH as having a rather strong external involvement, especially through the external Board, its authority, and the government involvement in appointing the Board members. Additional special feature is how external involvement in central governance bodies are organized separately from bodies through which internal staff access the governance structure.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: The UZH Board has a specific, comprehensive, rather detailed and far-reaching formal executive role, with a number of responsibilities, for example, in the area of personnel policies, that are not found among the responsibilities of the other Flagship universities' Boards. At the same time the central governance structure has an extensive set of checks and balances between external and internal executive responsibilities and internal academic interests. Also because of the relatively strong involvement of the deans and the full professors in central university governance practices, the level of centralization at UZH compared to the other universities in the Flagship sample can be interpreted as moderate.

4. Level of individual responsibility: university governance at UZH is strongly characterized by interaction and negotiation among external and internal, as well as executive and academic bodies and interests. In this strong individual leadership and responsibilities, like for example at KU, is less prominent than the collective character of the various bodies in the governance structure. Therefore, compared to the other universities UZH has a modest to relatively weak emphasis on individual leaders over collective bodies in its governance structure.

### C. *University of Vienna (UoV)*

Established in 1365. With more than 90,000 students and more than 9,000 staff and approaching 530 Mio EUR in revenues it is the largest university in Austria.

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: The Austrian University Autonomy Law of 2003 marked a rather radical change in the overall organizational structure as well as the governance structure of UoV, in the sense that the traditional bottom-up, democratic model has been replaced by a more executive model. The central governance structure now consists of a rectorate, a university board and a senate. The rectorate consist of four members (rector plus three vice-rectors), the Board consists of nine members (four members elected by the Senate, four members appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science, and one member elected by all other

eight members), and a senate being the main representative body in the new governance structure (consisting of nine professors, four non-professorial academic staff, one non-academic staff member, and four students). These three bodies are closely linked. For example, the Board determines the procedures for the selection of the rector at the proposal of the senate; and when it comes to the actual selection of the rector, the nomination by the senate has to be approved by the Board.

Overall UoV has a central governance structure with a moderate to strong democratic character.

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: the University Board has a balanced composition with four external and four internal members, and one member appointed by the other eight. The rector is nominated by the Senate and appointed by the Board. The vice-rectors are selected by the rector, and their appointment has to be approved by Board. It is very unlikely in the new governance structure that UoV's rector is coming from outside the university. The Senate is a relatively strong internal 'checks and balances' body, with all members elected by UoV's staff and students.

Overall: UoV has a rather weak to moderate external involvement, with a strong internal body (Senate), a balance between the internal and external members of the Board, and a rectorate that consists of internal members.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: The UoV Board has a rather general supervisory role, with a relative large, explicit set of responsibilities for the rector/rectorate. The Board is not expected to interfere directly in areas such as personnel affairs and research management. In UoV's practice the rectorate is rather powerful, especially in personnel and budgetary matters. Since 2003 the departmental level does not have a formal governance status anymore, and the deans work closely with the rectorate in most governance areas. The third central body, the Senate, is an important decision-making body with respect to various educational matters.

Overall, UoV is characterized by a moderate to strong level of centralization compared to the other universities in the Flagship sample.

4. Level of individual responsibility: The Austrian university governance system has a 'collective', bottom up tradition which has been moderated through the 2003 Law. The rector is rather powerful, and is supported by the vice-rectors instead of forming a team (as is the case at Dutch universities). Also the deans are rather strongly 'controlled' by the rector.

Overall, a combination of a balanced executive vs democratic, representative governance structure, with a strong operative management body 'in between'. Therefore, compared to the other universities UoV has a moderate emphasis on individual leaders (that is the rector) over collective bodies (Board and Senate) in its governance structure.

#### D. *University of Oslo (UiO)*

Founded in 1811, UiO has about 27,000 students and about 6,000 staff FTEs. Its total budget is currently approaching 8 billion Norwegian Krone (around 850 mio EUR).

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: The Norwegian Higher Education Law of 2005 provided the foundation for a more executive university governance structure. This includes the introduction of a university and a Faculty Board. However, in the Norwegian context the democratic dimension in the governance structure is still of great importance. As a consequence, the universities have a large autonomy in the framework of the new Law to decide themselves about the nature of their governance structure. UiO has decided to continue having an elected rector, as well as elected deans, while each department can decide whether they want to have an elected or appointed department head. UiO's Board consists of eleven members, that is, the rector as the head of the Board, four external members (two appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science and two by local and regional authorities), three representatives of the academic staff, one representative of the non-academic staff, and two students. An important leadership function at UiO is the university director who is formally responsible for all non-academic matters. The university director is appointed by the university Board. The rector and pro-rector are elected by staff and students (four year terms).

Overall we interpret UiO as having a governance structure with a moderate to strong democratic orientation, expressing itself, for example, in the decision to work with elected (academic) leaders at the central and faculty levels, and in the strong representative component in the composition of the University Board, as well as the Faculty Boards.

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: the composition of the UiO University Board (as well as the Faculty Boards) represents a basic Norwegian societal value of aiming at governance involvement of all relevant actors and groups without any of these being able to dominate in the governance practice. The external members of the central UiO Board have the same number of seats as the academic and administrative staff combined, while students have two seats which will allow them to address issues for their constituency in a meaningful way. The rector as the 'independent' leader of the Board can play a decisive role in case the other 10 members of the Board cannot come to an agreement. Further, while it is formally possible according to UiO's administrative regulations that the rector can be an external candidate, it is in the current circumstances very unlikely that an external candidate will be nominated to be part of UiO's rector election process, let alone that an external candidate will be elected.

Overall: UiO has a rather weak to moderate external involvement, with a balanced composition of the University Board, and a rector who is an elected, internal leader of the Board as well as the rectorate.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: Formally UiO's Board is responsible for the strategic development of the institution's academic activities, as well as for making sure that the university operates within the legal framework conditions determined by the government. The latter role is of importance since UiO is contrary to the other universities in the Flagship project still state owned, instead of an independent, self-owned public corporation. While the Board is UiO's highest decision-making body, the rector and university director are responsible for the day-to-day management of the institution. When it comes to the institutional governance practices the UiO Board has delegated a large number of responsibilities to the Faculty and Department level, making the institutional governance structure rather decentralized in practice.

Therefore it can be concluded that UiO's level of governance centralization is weak to moderate compared to the other universities in the Flagship sample.

4. Level of individual responsibility: Institutional governance at UiO is characterized by a relatively strong Board formally representing both the interests of the owner (the Norwegian state), and the interests of the university population. In this governance structure the day-to-day responsibilities are centrally divided over the rector (and pro-rector) and the university director. However, at the faculty and departmental levels the dean and head of department are responsible for both academic and administrative affairs. At all three governance levels boards with internal and external members are adding an executive and a democratic dimension to the institutional governance practice.

Overall, UiO's governance structure, compared to the other universities, has a moderate emphasis on individual leaders (rector, deans and heads of department) over collective bodies (boards at all levels) in its governance structure.

#### *F. KU Leuven (KUL)*

KUL is the largest university in Belgium. It dates back to 1425 and had in 2011 approaching 40000 students and well over 8000 staff FTEs. As is the case with the University of Oslo, KUL organizes rectorial elections every four years.

1. The internal democratic nature of the governance structure: KU Leuven has a very complex governance structure which is a reflection of the recent Belgian and Flemish history, in which Belgium changed from being a unitary to a federal state at the end of the 1980s. Flemish legislation concerning the governance structures of private universities, such as KU Leuven, grants them the right to define their internal structure. Even though this has caused some important differences in the governance structures among the Flemish universities, there are at the same time a number of common features. Each university's governance structure is based on the principle of a representation of all staff categories within the university as well as of the socio-economic and cultural sectors of society.

The Board of Trustees is KU Leuven's constituting authority. The very complicated and dense governance structure of the university consists of the following bodies: the Board of Governors; the Academic Council; the Special Academic Council; the Joint Executive Board; the Rector; the Managing Director; the Group Executive Committee and the Special Group Executive Committee; the Management Bodies of Faculties and Departments; the Kulak Management Bodies as well as the Management Bodies and Executive Positions responsible for KU Leuven's programmes at Partner University College campuses. The rector is elected by all academic staff with a minimum 80% contract at KU Leuven, as well as full professors (part-time) with a minimum 50% contract at KU Leuven. The rector's involvement and role in the various bodies of KU Leuven's governance structure illustrate the complexity and density of the structure: the rector attends Board of Trustees meetings in an advisory capacity; the rector is a member of the Board of Governors; in addition the rector chairs the Academic Council, the Special Academic Council, the Joint Executive Board and the University Council. As Chair the rector sets the agenda for their meetings, which he also convenes. Further the rector and/or one member of the Joint Executive Board, appointed by the rector, may at

all times attend in an advisory capacity meetings of the University's Management Bodies to which they are not invited by virtue of their office<sup>2</sup>.

Overall we interpret KUL as having a governance structure with a weak to moderate democratic orientation, expressing itself on the one hand in the election of the rector, and on the other hand in the limited participation of the university population in the election, and the appointment of many members of the various governance bodies and councils.

2. External involvement in the central university governance structure: Overall KU Leuven's governance structure is characterized by consisting of a large number of governance bodies and councils, that include a relatively large number of governance positions. This is, amongst other things, a consequence of the private, denominational nature of the university, which makes it necessary to assure a fitting balance between internal and external interests in the governance structure. For example, while the Board of Governors has a majority of external members, the regulations of KU Leuven prescribe that the rector has to be an internal full professor.

Overall KUL has a moderate external involvement in the University's governance bodies and councils.

3. Level of centralization of decision making authority in the university: KUL has an institutional Board of Trustees, as well as a large number of central governance bodies and councils. In addition, also the governance structure at the faculty and departmental level consists of various bodies and councils. The rector's formal involvement in many of the institution's central governance bodies, as well as the rather fragmented nature of the governance structure at the faculty and department level are not necessarily an illustration of the deliberate balanced nature of the institution's governance structure, but rather of the complicated, long history of the university and complex social, religious and political characteristics of its societal context.

Overall the governance structure of KU Leuven is characterized by a moderate level of centralization, combined with a rather fragmented decentral component in the governance structure.

4. Level of individual responsibility: Institutional governance at KUL is characterized by a large number of, partly overlapping governance bodies and councils at the central level, and a fragmented set of governance bodies at the faculty and departmental (and equivalent) levels. At the same time a number of individual staff members take various central positions in these bodies and councils. For example, the rector takes a central position in many of the councils and bodies, and the same goes for the chairman of the Board of Governors who is also chairman of the Board of Trustees, member of the University Council, member of the KU Leuven senate, and member of the Association KU Leuven General Meeting. Therefore KUL's governance structure has a rather unique combination of collective bodies and councils with a rather high level of individual governance authority.

### **The 'executiveness' of the governance structures - a summary of findings**

Using a simple score for the four governance dimensions, table 2 presents the main patterns identified above. The overall scores represent an attempt to tap the level of 'executiveness' of the

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<sup>2</sup> See for a detailed overview of all bodies and councils: <https://admin.kuleuven.be/raden/en/index>

university governance structure in the six case institutions. The lower the total score, the more executive the governance structure of European research universities

**Table 2: University governance structures' basic structural characteristics in practice: a comparative interpretation**

	Internal democratic participation	External (executive) participation	Centralisation	Concentration	Total score
University of Copenhagen	2	2	2	1	7
University of Zürich	2	1	1	3	7
University of Amsterdam	2	1	2	2	7
University of Vienna	3	2	1	2	8
KU Leuven	2	2	2	3	9
University of Oslo	3	2	3	3	11

The scores express the following:

*(Formal) internal democratic participation:*

1 = relatively low level;  
 2 = relatively moderate level;  
 3 = relatively high level of internal democratic participation.

*Centralisation of decision making authority:*

1 = relatively high level;  
 2 = relatively moderate;  
 3 = relatively low level of centralisation

*External (executive) participation:*

1 = relatively high level;  
 2 = relatively moderate level;  
 3 = relatively low level of external participation.

*Concentration (individual versus collective authority):*

1 = relatively high level;  
 2 = relatively moderate level;  
 3 = relatively low level of concentration

The first striking main pattern concerns the absence of institutions practicing a pure executive governance model – none of the six institutions operate with a governance structure that is both highly centralized, concentrating to a high degree authority to the one holding the leadership office rather than the collective governance bodies, with little internal democratic representation and a high degree of external involvement in internal governance affairs. At the other end of the spectrum



one case institution has many features of a 'pure' non-executive' governance model, the University of Oslo.

Secondly, we see the continued presence of democratic participation within the central level. Consequently even universities with a strong executive turn and a clear shift in balance, continue to entertain some measure of internal democratic participation.

We also note that the three universities that are approaching most closely the executive model do not have identical executive 'profiles' - the mix of executive elements differ. When we compare these universities, we see that being 'executive' implies different governance practices.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

How to interpret the development of the university governance structures of the six universities included? Our approach to analyzing reform induced change opens up for the role of different filters that interpret and modify the national reform agendas that are inspired by global norms and ideas of good governance models.

Following the filter argument, we can clearly see the variety that both sectoral and national paths entail. The structures practiced are indeed 'variations on a set of reform themes'. It can be argued that a number of common features of the universities are in line with the 'global script' perspective. All universities have introduced a central executive Board, aimed at strengthening the relationship between the university and society. The latter is also expressed in the inclusion of a number of external members in these Boards. In addition, in all universities the formal day-to-day management authority of the rector has been strengthened. However, looking beyond these common features we can see that the implementation of the university reform agendas has resulted in a greater variety in governance structures. There are different mixes in the structure and interaction of governance bodies in the involved case-universities. However, these variations have not been caused by one or more external shocks. The closest to an external shock that can be observed was the radical change in the political order of Belgium at the end of the 1980s, shifting all governance authority for the universities to the communities, including Flanders. The consequence of this shock was, however, not a radical change in the university governance structure at KU Leuven, but rather a lack of radical change (Wit and Verhoeven 2000).

A more valid perspective for interpreting the diversifying changes in university governance structures is the routine adaptation (or path dependency) perspective. Especially the cases of UZH and UiO, and to some extent UoV, are in line with this perspective and show that in a stable socio-economic and political contexts university change is a process of layering where rather far-reaching changes in the legal framework conditions for the universities are absorbed in a flexible and adaptive way by the universities in question. One can argue that in these cases the university governance structure reform was adapted to the university, instead of the other way around. Examples of adaptation through layering can also be found at the other universities. For example, the layer of traditional values and attitudes with respect to decision-making about academic activities, which includes the practice of academic co-determination, was initially marginalized in many of the new executive structures and practices of the post-reform governance structures. However, these traditional values

and attitudes became of relevance again as the foundation for various types of criticism towards the executive governance structures. At UvA this criticism went so far that it culminated in student and staff protests that were in the end successful in adapting the executive governance structure. The adaptations have followed a sector specific path. This is also clearly visible in the norm of student participation in the governance structure – a kind of ‘client’ participation that is specific to the university/higher education sector and whose equivalent we would not find in prisons, hospitals or other public service institutions. This might seem a trivial or even inappropriate comparison, yet it points to a significant and constant aspect of ‘sector specificness’ that influences the governance practice within this institutional sphere (Olsen 2007). Moreover, we also see institutional specific dynamics where local adaptations produce variations, for instance, when it comes to whether new governing or advisory boards have mixed compositions, or whether staff, student or external participation in governance is organized in specialized collegial bodies. Or, as in the case of KU Leuven, local histories are visible as sediments in the governance structure.

The ‘sector filter’ perspective allows for an interpretation of the extent to which university change is in line with general national public sector reforms, or the extent to which a governance reform is transformed as it enters a specific university. This perspective is especially of relevance in Denmark where a national globalization agenda gradually developed into a university oriented reform with the aim to stimulate the adaptation of the Danish universities to this agenda’s intention of strengthening the global competitiveness of the Danish economy. The reform of KU’s governance structure shows the working of a ‘sector filter’, amongst other things, in the delegation by the University Board of a large number of responsibilities to the rectorate and the faculties. In this the University Board which has on paper a very strong central executive nature (not unlike the executive board of private companies), has in practice adapted to the traditional basic characteristics of the university and delegated power closer to the academic activities, instead of trying the control and steer them in more detail. Similarly, we could argue that the trend towards centralization we observed has nonetheless tended to be matched by arrangements, formal or informal, that include, for example, the deans in the central level governance of universities.

Finally the KU case also demonstrates the role of timing and temporal sorting in the sense that the globalization agenda to a large extent coincided with the implementation of the 2003 University Autonomy reform. At the same time, the 2003 Quality Reform in Norway did not coincide with a national globalization strategy. Unlike the Danish economy, Norway’s oil and fisheries dominated economy did not need a general ‘boost’ in the middle of the 2000’s. Therefore, even though it had some basic features with the Danish University Autonomy Reform in common, the for Norwegian circumstances rather far-reaching Quality Reform was implemented at UiO in such a way that, compared to the other five universities included, its governance structure was changed in a relatively moderate way.

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