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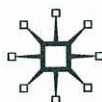
UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND REFORM

POLICY, FADS, AND EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

EDITED BY

HANS G. SCHUETZE, WILLIAM BRUNEAU, AND
GARNET GROSJEAN

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on autonomy and brought into question the organization and management practices employed in public universities. These were the conditions that the new governing elites from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), found themselves in during the 1980s, as they embarked on a mission to define a new agenda and develop policies to steer the course of higher education. The neoliberal era and the perceived pace of political liberalization, combined with the democratization of the Mexican political regime, had an impact on the field of higher education, and enabled government intervention in the sector (Acosta 2004).

The old governance model was preoccupied with the governability of the institution, rather than the institution's performance. The state adopted a watchful, but distant, attitude toward public universities. At that time, the relationship between state and universities was based on trust on the one hand, and the provision of resources and other government support as well as the recognition of universities' autonomy on the other. This formula allowed the universities to benefit from the increase in financial resources and resulting infrastructure that were established to meet the demand of increasing numbers of students, brought about by the massification of higher education during the 1960s and 1970s (Fuentes Molinar 1991; Murayama 2009). In some programs and institutions this was accompanied by an expansion of the number of faculty members and administrative workers.

In general, the old governance model relied on the following elements:

- 1) Relationships were based on political negotiations rather than on established policies;
- 2) There was weak state interventionism with a high degree of university autonomy;
- 3) A concern for the overall legitimacy, efficiency, and stability of universities rather than educational governance (the institutional management of actions and results).

The transitional model between the old and the new governance began as early as 1978 with the enactment of the *Law for the Coordination of Higher Education*, and the constitutional recognition of autonomy in the third constitutional article.¹ On the basis of these two legislative instruments, the federal government and the higher education institutions, through the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), began to negotiate on a national system for the planning of higher education and the consolidation of self-governing practices of public universities. This double regulatory effort was hampered from the outset by an "essential tension" (Kuhn 1991, 46), between the freedom of universities to define their expansion policies on the one hand, and the need of the state to coordinate the actions among autonomous universities on the other. These conditions

gave rise to the National Permanent Planning System of Higher Education (SINAPPES), a complicated regulatory mechanism that involves the participation of different government agencies and different higher education institutions at different levels of competence (Rodríguez 2007). Not unexpectedly, three decades after its creation, the results are judged inadequate and, in many ways, contradictory (Kent 2009). Reasons for this apparent lack of success are explored below.

The "new" higher education governance model was based on the assumption that the policies would

- 1) Increase the role of the federal government in the design, operation, and implementation of public policies with the objective of bringing coherence to the public higher education system by increasing federal control and supervision.
- 2) Recognize that, as the core of higher education, public universities were part of the problem rather than the solution, so they were considered a priority focus for the new policies.
- 3) Acknowledge that university governing bodies (university councils) felt burdened by federal demands, so developed types of institutional adaptation designed to thwart public policies.

Implementation of "new governance" policies had a direct impact on government administration and university management. New management schemes, styles, and patterns were introduced and took root in institutions. Politicization and bureaucratization became the central mechanisms of the schemes of coordination of administration and academic life. However, in each case, attempts to introduce new management procedures turned into a complex mixture of academic and bureaucratic interests that created new tensions and conflicts.² In these circumstances, one can begin to see the emergence of a new institutional complexity, marked on one hand by a confrontation between different logics of institutional performance, and, on the other, by the influence of external factors that restrict and shape the institutional behavior at different levels.

In this altered context, the management and administration of resources became a strategic area for institutional action. An emphasis on control and regulation created tensions, interactions, and conflicts that overpowered the relations among the different university sectors (de Vries and Ibarra 2004). The strengthening of the policy management structures of the universities became the method of transformation, following Burton Clark's (1998) model of the "innovative university" or "entrepreneurial university." The strengthening of the structures of centralized management and strategic decisions for the institutional change increased tensions in university governance. The university central government's choice to federal policies depend on whether they

Chapter 10

Federal Policies and Governance of Universities in Mexico, 1990–2010

Adrián Acosta Silva

Over the past two decades major changes have occurred in the way government intervenes in the regulation, coordination, and behavior of the national system of Mexican higher education. These changes can be categorized in three areas: (1) the continued emphasis on the assessment and accountability, (2) a new focus on efficiency and quality of higher education, and (3) establishment of a mechanism to coordinate the national and subnational university systems. I argue that this indicates a change in the governments understanding of the role of higher education and explains the introduction of a new policy paradigm and policy instruments (Braun and Merrien 1999). This chapter may help to explain how the change in the “belief systems” has affected actors in the different national contexts, particularly in the area of institutional management and governance of systems and institutions.

In Mexico, three dominant “models” of university governance can be distinguished: (1) the “old” governance model, that was in place from the late 1920s to the end of the 1970s; (2) the “transitional” governance model, developed in the 1980s; and (3) the “new” governance model that emerged during the 1990s and extended into the twenty-first century. The old governance model was based on two basic principles, the obligation of the state to provide public resources to universities, and the autonomy of the university to distribute the resources (Levy 1987). These principles structured institutional management practices for many years, based on a combination of the models of academic, bureaucratic, and political coordination of such resources. The massification of higher education and the economic crisis ended the university’s hold

choose to follow the structures constituted formally in each university, thus generating a growing tension between legitimacy and legality of the decisions with the efficiency of policy management.

Federal Public Policies in Mexico, 1990–2010: General Effects on University Governance

The federal policies of higher education in Mexico during the last 20 years (1990–2010) can be described as *modernization policies* (Kent 2009). In university governance terms, modernization means: (1) the intervention of federal government agencies into ordinary and nonordinary university budgets; (2) design and implementation of several programs about merit pay mechanism for university professors, accreditation studies programs, institutional evaluations, and advisory of general institutional performance of public universities; and (3) decreased autonomy and academic freedom (Acosta 2009).

Our project, which produced the data we draw on here, was named “The Governance of Public Universities in Mexico.” Funding for the study was provided by the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT), the federal organization that funds scientific research in the country. Our task was to review five institutional cases (Universidad Veracruzana [UV]; Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla [BUAP]; Universidad de Guadalajara [UG]; Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez [UACJ]; and Universidad de Sonora [USON]), between 1990 and 2010, to identify three specific focal points: (1) the relationships between institutional, academic and administrative actions, and the federal programs; (2) institutional university changes in management fields; and (3) changes in the procedures and rules of political sphere on university structures (for comprehensive information on the study see Acosta 2009, 21–62). According to the central hypothesis of the project, I argue that these factors determine the orientation and the quality of processes of institutional change in the public universities in the study.

Any process of institutional change is determined by external as well as internal factors. Among the external factors are public policies. How these policies are designed and implemented must be highlighted, as they play a role in the process of reconfiguration of institutional structures and practices. The logic that underpins federal policies combines a demand for financial accountability with claims of administrative efficiency. It further suggests that governmental control of academic autonomy will stimulate the production of indicators, processes, and quality assessment procedures. In our study, federal policies acted as restrictions, as they had a tendency to establish “policy networks” of different magnitude and consistency.³ The “internal” political

dimension involves the stakeholders and highlights the political strengths that trigger the modification of the structures of governance and institutional governability in each university. This “inner life” defines the magnitude and orientation of the changes in the political sphere of the universities, since it concentrates and sorts out, formally and symbolically, the political practices of a university (political rules, procedures and leadership, and political styles).

The Effect of External Forces on University Governance

For historical reasons in Mexico and Latin America, public policy has been understood fundamentally (and almost exclusively) as government action. The centrality of the state, and the role of the government machinery in responding to citizens’ demands (through unions, political parties, and different types of associations), fostered dependence of social and civil organizations on the state. Dominated by patronage, privileges, or patrimonial practices, these actions strengthened a political formula based on corporate arrangements and an economic formula that legitimized state intervention in the market. The constitution of nationally popular authoritarian or semidemocratic regimes began to operate under the authority of a clearly “state-centralized” matrix (Messner 1999), in which the functions of social welfare were segmented rather than universalized. This “government” profile of public action in a context of low autonomy of social organizations and politics, explains the concentration of power and resources (financial, symbolic, and material) within the state elites. However, public action was “colonized” at different times by social and political forces. Some of these forces emphasized decisions, others issued ultimatums (external or internal to the government that include the demands of international organisms as well as the strength of the national and civil society), some put more emphasis on institutions, while others emphasized social classes and pressure groups. In the absence of an institutional democratic framework of power relations, the political or economically organized forces were those that determined, up to a certain point, the action of the state.

As a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s, the restructuring and adjustment processes of the national economy of the region, and the movement toward the democratization of the political regimes, the relations between the state and the broader society changed dramatically. After the reforms of the “first” and “second” generations, the topic of public coordination went from the centrality of the state to schemes controlled by the management of public policies, or new public management (Aguilar Villanueva 2006). Political restructuring was accompanied by a gradual dismantling of traditional

corporate enclaves, and new social and political organizations appeared in the field of public action. After a cycle of mobilizations and conflicts of different types and scope, the democratization of the Latin American political regimes led to a change in traditional political management and the emergence of pluralist dynamics in the policy-making process.

Trust is a particularly pertinent topic to be considered in education policy making. According to the Mexican experience of recent years—as well as for higher education at the international level—mistrust has been the driving force of most of the policies and public programs implemented in higher education (de Boer 2002). The importance attributed to assessment and quality policies, located at the center of the new model of public interventions in the sector, arose mainly from a need to monitor and control the administrative and academic practices of public universities. This explains the overregulation phenomenon that characterized the public higher education system in Mexico in the early 1990s.

The distinction between ordinary and special public financing began in the 1980s during a time of economic and financial crisis in universities, which allowed the strengthening of federal funding to universities. This implied a strengthening of the intervention and regulation capacities of the federal government and its respective agencies in the field of university higher education, science, and technology (Acosta 2002). The 1990s witnessed a consolidation of this tendency to concentrate federal power. As a result, the traditional autonomy of the university changed, weakening the capacity of universities to determine their own orientation and processes, and strengthening the government's ability to manage the system using the strength of the "check-book."

The effects of these changes on governability and university governance schemes foreshadow a permanent tension in that, while the academic and administrative capital of public universities show a growing tendency, there is stagnation, or even a reduction of university social capital. For example, while programs are authorized, and a greater number of qualified or renowned professors are incorporated (see the Academic Personal Improvement Program [PROMEP] Profile and the National Researcher System [SNI]),⁴ the number of research publications increases, and greater quantities of International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) national and international certified administrative processes are boosted; yet, the trust between professors and students and the authorities seems to weaken. Under these circumstances, the notion of a "university community," which operates with academic autonomy and which, for a long period of time, has promoted interuniversity cooperation practices, has been replaced by practices that favor competition rather than cooperation; thus, trust, the university's social capital, tends to weaken.

Universities in the Age of Quality and Assessment

One of the features of the "new policies" in Mexico's higher education is clearly federal government activism. At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, within the context of Salinas's presidency (1989–1995), a symbolic, political, and practical need for a more active federal role in the transformation of higher education institutions was identified. This need was felt particularly in the public university sector. Until Fox's presidency (2000–2006), federal education agencies had launched a set of initiatives directed to produce changes in public universities. Acting with the power of the purse, rather than ideological provisions, policies, or regulations, the federal government established many of the rules under which changes and budgets were allocated to each portfolio. At the same time, the government used the general paradigm of accountability to introduce the concept that universities are "institutions of public service" (Braun and Merrien 1999, 13–14). As part of what may be called government neo-interventionism in the field of higher education (Acosta 2002), different mechanisms were established to assess, test, and improve the quality of processes and outcomes.

This new federal interventionism has many effects. One of them is the modification of the notion of university autonomy. After a long period of self-governance, autonomy of management and budget decision making, and academic self-determination, became synonymous with university autonomy (Levy 1987). A significant transformation of this autonomy occurred at the beginning of the 1990s based on changing budget conditions and implied transformations in the university organization and management. One major change had to do with technical, academic, and financial decisions taken by each university. The diversification of federal financing gave rise to a professional bureaucracy dedicated to the management of resources. This bureaucracy began to influence the decision making of the university rectors, increasing the tension with the traditional university government bodies. However, the forms of coordination imposed or negotiated with the public universities implied a "soft" reform of the autonomous practices of public universities that introduced overregulation of academic and administrative work to university organization and academic staff.

However, the major impact of this new interventionism has to do with the way federal resources shape or induce changes in the behavior of academics. This is an area of immense interest that needs be explored further. The demands to increase the quality of university higher education is interpreted from the federal bureaucratic language, as the demand for full-time qualified academics holding graduate, preferably doctorate degrees.⁵ This demand led

to the creation of ad hoc programs in public universities, directed toward improving the academic qualifications of their academic staff. This stimulated a flourishing market of specializations, and short-term master's and doctorate degrees offered by private universities of each region. These postgraduate programs are designed to accommodate the time constraints and capacities of the "clients," in general professors teaching at local public universities. This resulted in the proliferation of academic programs of questionable quality that have a secure and growing market, since full-time professors in public institutions are now required to have a graduate degree.

Another dimension of this "new university autonomy" in the academic field has to do with the behavior of the professors and researchers in the universities. During the implementation of merit pay policies, the professors established strategies to access resources associated with these programs. This generated practices of simulation, cooperation, and productivism by universities to accumulate scores according to the indicators proposed by the programs. In these circumstances, the "bribery for incentives" set up a scenario in which strictly academic exchanges were subordinated to the pragmatic interest of accumulating the highest indicator score in the quickest time possible (Acosta 2004). The original process of accumulation of academic capital does not suffice to transit the merit pay programs, thus we can observe a growing tendency toward productivism managed by the individuals themselves. Little by little, the university began to feel the effects of the "all mighty bureaucracy," the old Weberian curse.

Another consequence of the new state interventionism is an obsession for control of inputs, processes, and results of government actions in higher education. This obsession and its respective institutional translations led to a dramatic increase in the time required to fill out forms, reports, institutional evaluations, self-evaluations, indicator production, documents, meetings, workshops, and seminars. Highly sophisticated programs, methodologies, and focuses support the activism of the government and university bureaucrats and are driven mostly by local and international consultants (Ibarra 2005). Much of this has to do with accountability, (the paradigm used by the federal government to advocate its activism), with the bureaucratic control over universities and academics.

In this context, amid the effects of public policies, a contrasting framework of different specific-institutional contexts has emerged (Álvarez and de Vries 2010). Therefore, while federal government agencies have increased their degree of influence in the decision making of the universities, the "degree of academic, financial and administrative freedom" of universities has diminished proportionally. While the demand for accountability has resulted in rigorous management of institutional information, it has also meant that the construction of data and information needs to be specific to universities. The return of strategic planning to the field of university management has also

meant a strengthening of the ranks of the middle- and upper-level bureaucracy, which is in contrast to the academic level. These tensions and contradictions provoke a climate of mistrust between bureaucrats and academics, leading to an increase in "transaction costs" involved in the implementation of federal programs across the country. In other words, widespread mistrust is a side effect of government action on university management.

State Public Universities: Transition from Traditional Arrangements to Federal Rules

There is an increase in resistance to the changes based on quality policies that employ measures of efficiency, legitimacy, stability, without the intervention of university management. The pressure and demands of the federal government upon public universities, encoded in terms of a new public policy paradigm, established a set of limitations, and incentives to foster institutional university change.

Beyond the contradictions, inconsistencies, or inefficiencies of the federal policies, the effects on management style and governance of public universities are important to analyze. Overall, in Mexico's public universities, policies and politics determine the styles of management as well as the operational modes of the university governance. The central logic behind these transformations is a pragmatic approach, adaptable to the demands and proposals of federal programs. Incentives can involve additional financial resources, institutional recognition through multiple accreditations, and quality certifications of academic programs, teacher training programs, and research processes. This involves the creation of different structures to support the central management of universities, particularly the strengthening and expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus and increases in staff to support the rector and key administrative leadership positions. The "strategic" and "integral" management of resources and decisions has changed the traditional governance bodies of public universities, which now play a more passive role in determining institutional priorities regarding the development of policies and resource allocation.

In this framework, a new group of administrators and institutional practices emerged as strategic stakeholders of the policy and university management: the experts of university management. They have become experts in process with specific expertise in handling instruments, tools, and relations to provide university rectors with the power to negotiate and communicate with federal agencies, local and private funds, and recognition providers related to accreditation and quality assessment. They have the "management power," which makes them similar to bureaucrats and traditional university politicians and they occupy leadership and institutional management positions in various

areas of the administrative structure of university government. The expansion of the university bureaucracy and the differentiation of a managerial elite in the institutions are indications of the importance that these new stakeholders have acquired in the life of the university and, more generally, of the rise of a new managerial class. The changes have meant a silent but steady erosion of the meaning and scope of autonomy of public universities. It is a low-conflict transformation, but certainly powerful in the sense that, in a relatively short time, universities have learned to play under new rules of assessment and competitiveness, by adapting quickly to comply with programs and standards that are not subject to the decision of the traditional organs of university governance such as academic councils, and board of trustees. Money, recognition, and prestige now govern the changes in institutional behaviors.

In the five cases examined in the study: UV, BUAP, UG, UACJ, and USON, it was possible to discern differences in the institutional responses toward change. The differences were caused by the local environments of the universities, as well as their sociohistorical trajectories and characteristics of their internal political games, their rules and the structure of political action, both in formal and informal environments. While in two cases (UG, BUAP), certain "post-bureaucratic" management models were consolidated, and political governability models were structured. In another case (USON), it was possible to see how new management methods met with resistance in the traditional university governance structures. In two other cases (UV, UACJ), there was a split between the management styles and traditional political modes of the structures of the university government.

In regard to institutional performance, it is difficult to demonstrate a direct relationship between the administrative and organizational reforms of university governance and the improvement of institutional academic performance. It is possible, at the system level, to observe a period of expansion and diversification of the national system of Mexico's higher education however, it is difficult to define clearly whether this was due to new federal policies or if it was a response to the limited growth of student numbers, or to the effects of the extension of the obligatory nature of basic education decreed in 1995 (which involved incorporating high school studies into the Mexican basic education cycle). Moreover, the expansion of higher education was mainly due to the explosive growth of private educational institutions. This unregulated expansion was a response, on the one hand, to the demands of a new consumer market, and from the inability of the public sector to absorb the demand on the other. This hypothesis could explain the systemic effects of public policies in the last number of years.

At the level of public universities, there are not many elements that show a positive association between university reforms and improved institutional performance. We notice a deliberate government attempt to improve the infrastructure, human resources, expansion of college enrollment, and the collection

of data as indications that the intervention is working. We still do not have a qualitative comparison to determine whether students that graduate from public universities have more professional success now than in earlier periods, or if college students have developed better learning habits than previous generations.

Conclusions

It is undeniable that Mexico today has better-funded public universities than in the decade of the 1980s, however, they are now forced to comply with the demands and goals of the federal government. We also have more- and better-qualified faculty members today. The number and percentage of full-time professors has increased, and there are academic bodies at different levels and degrees of consolidation in all public universities.⁶ However, we do not know if this has significantly raised the quality of teaching, research, and student services in Mexican public universities. Today, we have more scientists (in terms of belonging to the NSI) than ever before in the history of Mexican higher education, and more college professors registered in the database of PROMEP. But, we do not know how those figures affect university teaching, or how they contribute to the development of new researchers (Álvarez and de Vries 2010). The university's role in cultural extension and diffusion—both historical functions of Mexican public universities—have also become neglected because of federal policies.

Based on the evidence above, I contend that efforts by the government to create a new style of educational governance at the university level have been largely unsuccessful. Attempts to incorporate New Public Management theory in Mexico's higher education system have had contradictory and uncertain results. We can, however, observe a trend toward greater federal government control over institutional performance of public universities. But, greater government control does not necessarily mean better coordination of the system. The addition of new stakeholders in the management of resources and programs (House of Representatives, private consultants, and accreditation bodies) have politicized and bureaucratized the management of public resources. And, it remains unclear whether this reform process has improved the performance of institutions in the Mexican higher education system.

NOTES

1. Both the *Law for the Coordination of Higher Education* and the third constitutional article configure the normative framework of the higher education

system in Mexico. The law attempts the coordination of federal government into the public universities system, and the article recognizes the autonomy of universities and the relationship between the state and the higher education system.

2. For "complex mixture," I refer to the themes and critical issues of institutional agendas in public universities: budgets negotiations between federal government and universities leadership, academic changes, labor relations, institutional accountability, evaluation process, merit pay programs for academic personal, and changes of universities governance.
3. "Policy networks" means the building of advocacy coalitions in each institutional case to engage in the reform process and to implement change and adaptation decisions following the rules of the policies of federal agencies. In some cases, university leadership adjustment was easily undertaken according to the new rules of the game (Veracruzana, Ciudad Juárez). In other cases, the public universities made "negotiation adjustments" with federal agencies (Sonora, Puebla). In some cases (Guadalajara), the implementation game implied a new form of university leadership, created according to the critical reform process of the new federal policies (Kent 2009; Acosta 2009).
4. PROMEP began at 1996 and focused on academic qualifications and performance of full-time professors in public universities. SNI was established in 1984 and focused on the scientific and research production of all higher education institutions in Mexico.
5. In fact, one of the six-year strategic subprograms has been the "Perfil Promep," designed to recognize individual professors with graduate degrees from different universities. And the "Desired Profile" of this program considers a doctorate degree as the "maximum degree of qualification." The professor evaluated at this level will receive a "one-time" financial support of 40 thousand pesos, to be used to buy computer equipment, office furniture, or literature.
6. In PROMEP terms, there are three types or levels of "academic bodies" in public universities: (1) *consolidados* (consolidation level), (2) *en proceso de consolidación* (toward consolidation process), and (3) *en formación* (at training level).

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