



RÉSEAU D'ÉTUDES SUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR



University Missions: Reconfigurations, Interplay, and Contradictions

4TH RESUP international conference

Conference venue: French Institute of Education

Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon

11-13 December 2014, Lyon, France

Conference presentation

RESUP is a France-based scholarly association which aims to develop the study of higher education and research. Multidisciplinary in scope, the goal of RESUP is to advance this field of study by fostering and bringing together contributions from a wide array of disciplines, such as sociology, history, education, management, economics and political science. RESUP is currently chaired by Christine Musselin, from CNRS and *Sciences Po*, the Paris institute of political studies. RESUP benefits from the support of the Conference of University Presidents, a professional association of leaders of higher education institutions in France.

Following previous colloquiums held in Paris (in 2007 and 2011) and Lausanne (2009), RESUP organizes an international conference in Lyon, France, from 11 to 13 December 2014.

The conference will be held at the French Institute of Education, a department of ENS de Lyon, one the four French *Ecoles Normales Supérieures*.

Aiming to address some of the most heated debates in the field of higher education and research, the theme of the 4th RESUP international conference will be **University Missions**. Given its cross-cutting nature, this topic invites observation from many angles and temporalities. They may range from the study of controversies regarding the aims of academic institutions to the analysis of how these missions are translated into the day-to-day work of faculty members. We encourage the study of the higher education and research field in all its diversity, that is, by looking at both public and private institutions, vocational or general tertiary education, as well as basic and technological research institutes.

Submission of abstracts and full papers

Paper proposals (approx. 800 - 1,200 words) should follow the guidelines of the submission form (see attached document) and must be sent by email to resup.lyon@gmail.com.

Deadline for the submission of abstracts is June 16th. Acceptation of papers will be notified to authors by the 15th of July. Full papers (max. 7,000 words) will have to be sent by the 15th of November to resup.lyon@gmail.com.

RESUP Young Scholar Award

RESUP will give a “Young Scholar Award” to a recently graduated PhD (in the last 3 years before the date of the conference). Eligible conference participants who wish to compete for this award must mention it in their submission. To be considered for the award, papers should be single-authored.

Coverage of conference and accommodation expenses

No conference fees will be charged. We will cover hotel expenses for one contributor per paper (2 nights for France and countries close to France, 4 if you have a more than 7 hours flight). Lunches, dinners and coffee-breaks are offered to all authors.

Conference organization committee

Jérôme Aust, researcher in political science, Paris Institute for political studies, Center for the sociology of organizations, CNRS.

Julien Barrier, assistant professor of sociology, Ecole normale supérieure de Lyon, French Institute of Education, CNRS research unit “Triangle”.

Emmanuelle Picard, assistant professor of contemporary history, Ecole normale supérieure de Lyon, French Institute of Education, CNRS research unit “LARHRA”

Call for papers and conference subthemes

Providing education for the masses, training high-level researchers, facilitating students' integration into the workforce, generating and publishing new scientific knowledge, fostering local economic development, commercializing research... Such are the missions given to higher education and research institutions. They are diverse and often ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory. In many respects, this multiplicity and ambiguity are not new: they are likely even intrinsic to the contemporary university, after the image of the "multiversity" theorized by Clark Kerr as early as the 1960s. The university is a composite institution due to the diversity of its users and uses, its pedagogical and scientific objectives, and its aims (Kerr, 1963/2001). However, the expansion of the student body, the growing weight of different external stakeholders, and the leading role given to academic institutions in the development of a "knowledge economy," all seem to have further diversified university missions and thus, by the same token, increased the contradictions, dilemmas, and paradoxes they face.

To address these reconfigurations and the tensions they raise, conference participants are encouraged to submit papers dealing with one – or more – of the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1. Investigating work, practices, and uses: higher education and research institution missions in practice

The goal of this first sub-theme will be to investigate the missions taken on by higher education and research institutions (hereafter abbreviated HERI) by looking at the practices of collectives and individuals who enact them daily: academics, administrative staff, students... We will investigate the practices of these actors through the lenses of the norms, social contexts, and institutional orders which shape them, by revealing the processes and mechanisms which contribute to their definition, regulation, and reconfiguration.

This subtheme calls to mind, first and foremost, the study of academic work (Musselin, 2008). We seek to understand how, in academics' work and careers, the different missions given to HERIs are stitched together. Beyond an analysis of the different facets of the academic trade and its changing face – both in its content and the way its work is organized – we will endeavor here to look at how different academic activities are linked and the tensions and contradictions they raise. Our hypothesis is that this is discipline-dependent, but is also tied to an individual's career stage and the institutional context. While the balance between teaching and research appears crucial, we would like to broaden this analysis to all the different activities taken on by academics. For example, a number of studies look at the effect of the rise of the "third academic mission" (Etzkowitz, 2003) on research, but it is rarely looked at in terms of how it affects teaching duties. These questions could also benefit from an analysis of the increasing professional segmentation of the individuals involved in carrying out these missions, in particular the growing burden on non-tenured faculty, who may even be assigned specialized tasks.

In the same vein, we could also look at the formalization, codification, and standardization of academic work, carried out, for example, via the production of best practice references, quality norms, and assessment mechanisms. These can indeed be both bearers of specific representations of academic work and vectors for the (re)definition of HERI missions. Here, we would like to address the emergence of these kinds of initiatives and, in return, their impact on academic practices.

In addition, we are witnessing a rise in managerial logic within HERIs, which goes hand in hand with the emergence of new administrative roles (in fields such as human resource management, controlling and planning, quality assurance, technology transfer, etc.), but little research has looked at *professional administrators* themselves and their practices (Krücken, 2011). Above and beyond their role in implementing new institutional management and governance forms, the professional interests, practices, and norms conveyed by these actors may also affect the way institutions envisage and conduct their missions. In particular, we could investigate certain characteristics (especially training) of these categories of actors, in order to comprehend the positions they defend and the practices they develop. More generally, the goal here is to understand the interactions between support staff professionals and faculty members. In particular, we might question the hypothesis of a hybridization of practices, in light of Whitchurch's analysis of the emergence of "third space" professionals blurring the traditional boundaries between administrative and academic spheres (Whitchurch, 2012).

In a similar fashion, university missions could be investigated from the point of view of user practices, particularly via the notion of "student work" (Coulon, 1997). This brings to mind, in particular, the challenges universities face in providing education for the masses, with the accompanying diversification of the student body and of teaching duties. For example, we could look at how different segments of the student population use – to what extent and with what effect – devices for learning or professional integration. Does the way these devices are used lead to their goals and/or meaning being changed? It would also be relevant, in this respect, to look at how lifelong learning initiatives are appropriated, and also how changes can be induced through the use of remote learning devices, in their more traditional forms or in more recent forms, such as MOOCs (massive open online courses) or SPOCs (small private online courses). This topic calls on us to contextualize these practices and assess the impact of their development: we welcome papers that look, for example, at what extent the characteristics and practices of different student groups affect the way academics and academic institutions see their missions. In the same vein, in a context marked by increasing demands for professionalization, it would be relevant to not limit ourselves to a study of practices or student trajectories, but also to look at the way both public and private employers are implicated in training programs. In our eyes, it is crucial to give a historical perspective to these issues: professional training plays a key role in debates on higher education today, but this calls to mind age-old debates on the way curriculums are organized and the legitimacy of certain disciplines within the university, one example being the discussion of the role of professional schools in American universities in the early 20th century (Veblen, 1918/1954).

Conference sub-theme 2. Governing academic missions: steering devices, management instruments, and assessment tools

This second sub-theme focuses on funding instruments (block grants, project funding, contracts...), managerial devices (accounting, time sheets, total cost calculation...), and evaluation tools (rankings, benchmarking, research assessments...).

The overall goal is to use these devices to investigate changes in university missions. Indeed, these instruments seem both to bear the traces of the changes underway, as well as be operators themselves of change. Let us first look at them as traces of change: the wide diversity of their promoters (governments, government agencies, the European Union, private institutions, HERIs themselves) and their multitudinous objectives (funding, ranking, assessing, measuring, monitoring) make them excellent points of observation of the tensions and contradictions that institutions and individual academics must face. These devices are also operators of these changes: the ways in which they shape the behavior of actors and institutions are multiple (creation of competition, competitive coordination, comparison, etc.), but these devices are by no means neutral. They carry a certain conception of what a university should be and guide actor behavior and institutional strategy by modifying the structure of incentives provided to them (Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2005). The research conducted on the Research Assessment Exercise, for example, clearly showed that these types of devices favor certain kinds of research over others (Campbell *et al.*, 1999; Mc Nay, 2003), certain types of institutions, and certain academic profiles (Morgan, 2004; Henkel, 1999; Taylor, 1995). By using these devices as a starting point, participants are encouraged to pay attention to the actors who define, promote, and implement them, thinking about the way these different devices interact and clarifying the ways in which they alter actor behavior. The following list is by no means exhaustive, but we propose the following three empirical areas for exploration.

The first area would be the genesis of these instruments, their circulation, and spread. A number of analyses have noted the reshaping of tools used to steer research and higher education (Lépori, 2008), but we know relatively little, with a few exceptions (Bruno, 2008; Kogan, Hanney, 2000), about the actors and coalitions behind these changes and the historical contexts in which they arose. How were these new devices designed? By whom? What role did members of the academic profession play in their development? What were the goals behind their promotion? In what ways were they inspired by models already in place in other institutional fields? How did these management devices and instruments circulate from one institution to another, from one government to another, from one field to another? What were their underlying conceptions of the university and the work of academics? What kind of opposition did they face? How did certain devices, such as rankings or benchmarks, contribute to framing questions on the agendas of decision-makers by revealing a specific representation of social reality and the place of higher education? An analysis of the genesis of these instruments and a keen look at how they spread should make it possible to clarify the

social and historical conditions surrounding their invention and the propagation of these new demands on universities.

By using the devices themselves as a starting point, we can use them to understand the conditions necessary for the implementation of these new governance techniques and the way they modify actor behavior. Previous research on instruments of public action have clearly stated that the instruments do not come from above as *deus ex machina*, but rather that they are mobilized by actors *in situ* who adapt and/or use them in unexpected ways (Lascoumes, Le Galès, 2005). This attention to the conditions necessary for implementation is ever more important, as HERIs play a key role in concretizing new requirements imposed on them. On the one hand, they have increasing autonomy in budget decisions, management of human resources, and training and research policies, while on the other, they must be accountable to public authorities, and thus they become themselves producers of new instruments, for example, time sheets, self-assessment requirements, or managerial accounting tools which transform how the activities of the HERIs, research institutes, and academics are understood. The papers in this subtheme might address, in particular, the interplay of these different public action instruments and how they can be a source of contradictory requirements, might reinforce each other, or even cancel each other out.

A third way to look at the relationship between these instruments and university missions would be to address the links between these new management devices and the norms of the academic profession. Often, these two are seen in opposition to one another: new management instruments are in conflict with the norms of the academic profession, since they reign in its autonomy by curbing collegiality or by putting its members on unequal footing. What has been addressed less frequently, however, is the way these policy instruments are rooted in the norms and values of the academic community. Indeed, many of these devices are effective precisely because they use professional academic norms to transform the academic profession. A number of assessment devices, for example, use peer review, but insert it into a series of specific rules and procedures which thereby transform it. We invite participants to reflect on the relationship between new management instruments and the norms of the academic community in all their complexity, in order to use them to understand the changes in the missions given to universities.

Conference sub-theme 3. Increasing societal demands for relevance: Promoting shifts in academic boundaries and hierarchies?

The changes in university missions go hand in hand with the reconfiguration of boundaries and hierarchies in the academic world, as universities are supposed to be more responsive to economic and social needs.

Our first question here is the following: what is the reality of the new imperative of commercializing research within the hierarchy of disciplines, both in terms of the new representations it creates and its effects on resource allocation? For example, this shift has led

the social justification for the social sciences and humanities to become a hotly-debated subject, as HERIs are called on to account for the social impact of their research. Its social benefits and impact thereby became assessment criteria for the British Research Excellence Framework. This calls us to look at how different disciplines take up these issues and if perhaps they may provoke differentiation within disciplines themselves. For example, a number of observers have highlighted the risk of the humanities becoming marginalized (Waters, 2008), but it would behoove us to tighten the focus, instead of using categories that are much too large to describe in detail the shifts that may be taking place in specializations within disciplines. In addition to paying attention to the epistemic properties of disciplines and their social organization (Whitley, 1984/2000), this analysis would benefit from taking into account the perspective of the internal dynamics of HERIs. In all European countries, the current context is marked by a rise in internal steering capacities of universities, thus, do the choices made within institutions contribute to amplifying or buffering these shifts? Are we witnessing a redefinition of the *relative position* of academic departments and disciplines within HERIs, based on their ability to adapt to these new activity norms?

These reflections on academic hierarchies could be linked to an analysis of boundaries. Firstly, within institutions themselves: professional integration missions were the impetus behind the creation of so-called professionalizing curricula and programs, alongside and in competition with traditional curricula. Most often riding the coattails of pre-existing disciplines, changing only their aims, these new curricula may nonetheless redraw their boundaries and affect teaching practices. These changing boundaries could also be addressed by looking at the relationships between different kinds of institutions and the shifts in national hierarchies that might result from these changes.

Lastly, the question of boundaries could also be addressed from the angle of the *content* of knowledge produced and disseminated by HERIs. In the name of making academic knowledge more responsive to societal issues, we have witnessed increasing calls to “break down the walls” between disciplines, with transdisciplinarity presented as a key element in the creation of new modes of knowledge production s (Gibbons et al., 1994). These calls for inter- or trans-disciplinarity, whether borne by academics themselves or promoted in various policies , affect both research activities and curriculum development. However, simultaneously, a number of evaluation schemes focus on academic excellence. Journals with the highest impact factors showcase fundamental and disciplinary research and do little to encourage inter-disciplinary or applied work, which often has difficulties finding recognition in an academic space structured by disciplines and basic research. Similarly, developing teaching curricula that break out of disciplinary borders proves difficult, given that training programs are institutionalized along disciplinary lines. Thus, does the affirmation of new research and/or teaching goals go hand in hand with greater inter-disciplinarity in curricula development and in scientific practices? These questions could also be broadened to include the implementation of specific assessment devices for teaching activities in HERIs.

Conference sub-theme 4. Reform entrepreneurs and social movements in the remaking of university missions

Much research has been devoted to the implementation of higher education and research policies and their effects within HERIs. This is a theme which cross-cuts the three previous subthemes via an analysis of the consequences of reforms and institutional transformations. However, the creation and dynamics of these reforms have received less attention in the literature. In particular, the reforms undertaken in the last few years are the product of policies implemented by individuals and groups, whose morphology and recent transformations remain relatively unknown. Civil servants working at management level in ministries, political advisors, representatives of university executive boards, actors from advisory boards: all have played a leading role both in the production of discourse and policy, as well as in the implementation of renewed regulation modes since the end of the 1980s. Special attention should be paid to the creation of new discursive repertoires and the reconfiguration of traditional decision-making bodies.

Reform initiatives put forward by public authorities can also be looked at from the perspective of the protest movements they trigger. Recent years have indeed been marked by powerful protests against higher education reforms): for example, reforms regarding university autonomy in France, an increase in tuition fees in Great Britain and Quebec, and access to higher education in Chili. Without restricting ourselves to recent movements, we welcome papers addressing protest movements which might anchor themselves, for example, in social movement theory, or analyze debates and controversies surrounding university missions. The goal would be to investigate the emergence and structure of these movements – by looking, for example, at their disciplinary and/or institutional roots – as well as the visions of the university that drive them.

We might also be led to wonder about the specificity of these social movements. Do they bear sector-specific repertoires of collective action? Are protests regarding universities comparable to those observed in other sectors marked by the “professionalism” model (Freidson, 2001), such as the healthcare sector? More generally, in what ways are these movements connected to broader political questions, beyond the specific issues at stake in the higher education sector?

Finally, beyond protest movements in opposition to higher education reforms, participants are encouraged to look at movements which promote alternative models for higher education and research, containing an inherent critique or redefinition of university missions. In addition to the debate provoked by the publication of manifestoes in favor of “de-excellence” or “slow science”, we might also look movements such as UnCollege in the United States, which favors self-directed learning “outside the classroom” over traditional university studies.

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