

Holistic admissions is an art and a science. It allows universities to make decisions based on students' academic and personal backgrounds, experience, and potential. Reviewers need special expertise and experience to ensure a fair and transparent admissions process.

Such professionalism in college admissions has yet to take root. Faculty members are still key drivers for both policies and practices in holistic admissions. Currently, holistic admissions are quite limited. Faculty members are able to remain involved with the whole selection process. This raises the question of whether or not they will have the capacity to remain as involved when the percentage of holistic admissions reaches 30—as recommended by the Japan Association of National Universities.

The introduction of holistic admissions is going to bring tremendous changes to universities: measuring the implications of introducing holistic admissions, reviewing ideas on *gakuryoku* and fairness, professionalizing college admissions, adapting organizational structure, and reexamining the admissions system as a whole. However, these challenges may turn into great opportunities. High schools and universities are shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered teaching and learning in order to prepare high school students for holistic admissions and allow a more diverse student body to be admitted to college. This will have a positive impact not only on college admissions, but also on education in high schools and universities as a whole.

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## Creating National Champions in France: A Little Less *Égalité*, a Little More *Sélectivité*?

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Few universities can claim such an animated history as the now defunct University of Paris, split in 1970 into 13 autonomous universities following the May 1968 events. Two of its “successor” universities, namely Paris–Sorbonne University (Paris IV) and Pierre and Marie Curie University (Paris VI), have vowed to spur a return from the ashes by

merging and becoming a single, multidisciplinary institution. The merger should be understood within the French context, as well as within the broader European trend of mergers aiming to consolidate higher education systems, provide economic gain, and enhance the position of higher education institutions (HEIs) in global rankings.

The French context is characterized by an unclassifiable higher education system that nonetheless presents elements of a hierarchical binary higher education system, ever since Napoleon established the prestigious *grandes écoles*, predominantly selective, hyperspecialized, small, vocationally oriented institutes of higher technical or business education. On the other side of the binary divide, many universities present the unusual characteristic of being specialized institutions, having undergone structural reorganizations after 1968 and dismemberment along disciplinary lines. The reunification of historic universities has been a government priority in recent years, following a trend of mergers observed in Europe since 2005.

One of these mergers is the rebirth of the “old” Sorbonne University, expected to take place on January 1, 2018. The *Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings (2018)* placed Paris IV at rank 197 overall, while Paris VI was ranked 123rd. These specialized universities score higher in their disciplines: in the 2017 QS World University Rankings by Subject, Paris IV reached the 26th position for its arts & humanities course offerings, while Paris VI claimed the 55th spot for natural sciences and the 94th place for life sciences & medicine. What can we expect from the merger of these two leading specialized universities, and the establishment of a large multidisciplinary institution, claiming the history and academic pedigree of one of the oldest universities in the world?

### RECENT EUROPEAN TRENDS

Mergers are often framed by governments as a way to rationalize and consolidate higher education sectors, while reducing duplication in course offerings and, as a result, costs. Furthermore, they increase scale, notably of research outputs, and can enable HEIs to perform better in global rankings. Research by the European University Association suggests mergers became more prevalent beginning in 2005, with Denmark and Estonia setting the trend. In Denmark, the number of institutions decreased from 12 to eight. In Estonia, the University of Tallinn absorbed eight surrounding institutions, and the number of HEIs in the country decreased from 41 to 29 between 2000 and 2012.

### MERGERS AND THE CREATION OF NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

France followed suit in 2008, through the € 5 billion *Opération Campus* that sought to promote up to 12 centers for research and education, then known as *pôles de recherche*

*et d'enseignement supérieur* (research and higher education hubs) or PRES. These centers were discontinued in 2013 and replaced by *communautés d'universités et établissements* (communities of universities and HEIs) or COMUE. The flurry of difficult-to-translate French acronyms did not help make these associations or their potential implications better understood abroad. In 2011, the founders of the Academic Ranking of World Universities in Shanghai informed the French government that they would not officially rank the PRES as the government had been hoping for. Only HEIs that had legally merged into single institutions were considered eligible for the ratings scale.

#### INITIATIVES FOR EXCELLENCE

Roughly, from that period onward, France has encouraged consolidation, promoting mergers between multidisciplinary universities, specialized universities, and *grandes écoles*, notably through its ambitious Initiatives for Excellence (IDEX) program, launched in 2010. This program is part of a nationwide *Programme d'investissement d'avenir* (PIA), or Investment Program for the Future, which aims

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to increase French competitiveness and growth. The decision to allocate € 7.7 billion to the first eight university clusters selected by the program was equivalent to a Category 5 hurricane within the traditionally egalitarian French higher education system—the French government has traditionally avoided any policy of explicit differentiation between universities.

A second wave of IDEX was launched in 2015. Two more recipients were nominated in 2016, and a final university cluster joined the club in 2017. Selected IDEX institutions are placed under intense scrutiny, and progress toward full mergers is reviewed regularly by an international panel that has the power to revoke the prestigious label. This happened to several university clusters, including the Federal University of Toulouse, in 2016, creating a political cataclysm in the region and forcing Prime Minister Manuel Valls to intervene and offer alternative, albeit reduced, funding to support the university.

#### EXPECTATIONS FOR THE “NEW” SORBONNE UNIVERSITY

The Parisian merger takes place within the framework of the IDEX program. The two universities are founding members of the “Sorbonne Universities” COMUE, which was awarded the IDEX label in 2012. The diversity of models among merged institutions—including the reunification of domestic universities and mergers that occurred abroad, such as in Manchester (2004) or Helsinki (2010)—will be beneficial.

The “new” Sorbonne University will initially comprise three core schools, namely humanities & social sciences, sciences, and medicine. Furthermore, it is expected that the University of Technology of Compiègne, north of Paris, will join, further expanding the disciplinary reach of the university to include a top ranked school of engineering. It is also hoped that Panthéon-Assas University (Paris II), initially a founding member of the consortium, will again join the new university as its Law School.

The new university has a coherent and comprehensive strategy, building on a history only rivalled by Oxbridge in Europe. Nonetheless, issues remain. Managing this mega-university of nearly 60,000 students, of whom 18 percent are foreign, 7,700 professor–researchers, 45 industry-sponsored research chairs, and 200 laboratories will be no mean feat. The predominantly law-oriented Paris II initially left the consortium because of tensions regarding autonomy and leadership—it preferred a standalone status, or the option of merging with another law university (Paris I), to avoid being subsumed into a larger organization dominated by Paris VI and the sciences. But rivalry between the disciplines has no place in today’s higher education landscape. As stated by the former French minister for higher education, Valérie Pécresse, “now we know that good research and good teaching means you need a multidisciplinary university” (2011).

#### CONCLUSION

Today’s global challenges cannot be solved by one country, one university, or one discipline. Interdisciplinarity, inter- and intrainstitutional collaboration, and international cross-border cooperation are essential to tackle global societal challenges and achieve the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.

France is now breaking with its egalitarian legacy. The gap between IDEX institutions and universities that were not selected for the prestigious program is widening. In the 2018 *THE* World University Rankings, the IDEX generally outperform other French institutions, with Paris Sciences et Lettres, ranked 72nd, taking the national top spot, while the IDEX-labelled university clusters of Aix-Marseille

(251–300), Bordeaux (301–350), Grenoble Alpes (301–350), Côte d’Azur (351–400), and Strasbourg (351–400) follow suit. Their ranking will no doubt still disappoint French civil servants and institutional leaders. Nonetheless, there is evidence that the IDEX are, slowly but surely, on the move.

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## Conflict of Interest in Eastern Europe: “Academic Capture”

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Lobbying public officials is a common and legitimate practice. However, it may also become an integrity concern, for instance when officials have a financial interest in the sector that lobbies them and for which they are responsible. In such cases, lobbying may amount to undue influence, promote conflicts of interest, and “capture” the decision-making process in ways that create undue advantage for specific individuals, institutions, or the sector at large.

In Eastern Europe, higher education providers, especially in the public sector, depend on the state in pivotal aspects of their operations such as funding, accreditation, closures and mergers, enrollment quotas, etc. The stakes are high and universities have good reasons for trying to influence the decisions of authorities through lobbying. They are also in a good position to do so, as they mostly work in proximity to national governments: universities have a mission to serve the public interest and supply the public sector

with the graduate workforce that it needs, and many have government representatives on their boards.

The research presented here reveals that in most countries of Eastern Europe, the close relationship between academia and the state is permeated by conflicts of interest, which manifest themselves in high-ranking public officials responsible for (higher) education being widely affiliated with universities on a for-profit basis. We call such affiliations “academic capture.” Both academia and the public sector are exposed to a risk of corruption every time academic institutions lobby for their legitimate interests and corresponding policy decisions are being taken.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST THROUGH “ACADEMIC CAPTURE”

Our data sets are based on publicly available evidence from the Western Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) and the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine). We looked at the affiliation of public officials responsible for higher education with universities, which seemed to be profit-seeking in nature; this included ministers and deputy ministers of (higher) education or the

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**The most common form of for-profit affiliation with universities by target group members is practiced by salaried staff in public universities.**

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equivalent; heads and members of cabinets or the equivalent; heads of departments for higher education; heads of external agencies operating on behalf of the ministries of (higher) education; and chairs and/or regular members of parliamentary committees on education.

An ongoing analysis of evidence from these countries is gradually revealing a situation in which a remarkably high share of these public officers have a profit-seeking affiliation with at least one university in their respective countries, or are expected to engage in one. Among officials caught up in a conflict of interest during data collection (the second and third quarters of 2016) were the ministers of education of Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Russia, and Ukraine. This is also true for some (Ukraine) or all the deputy ministers of education (in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Moldova, and Serbia), as well as for some members of the minister’s cabinets in Armenia and Ka-