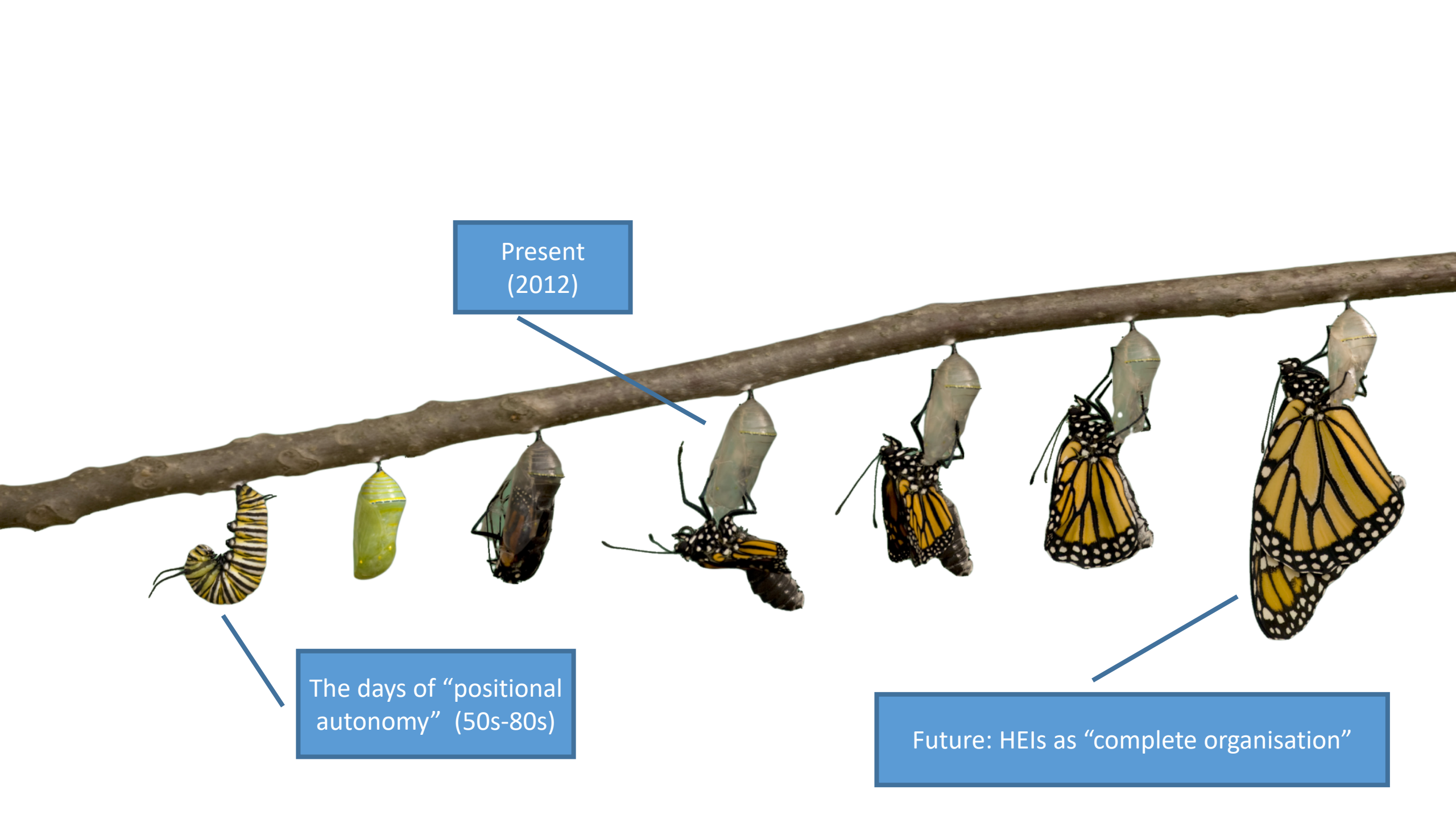


The study of the Universities under Transformation in Europe (TRUE project).

A posteriori reflections

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78th CGHE Seminar



Present
(2012)

The days of "positional
autonomy" (50s-80s)

Future: HEIs as "complete organisation"

Presentation is about:

- Introduction of what TRUE was
- Scientific debate and contribution
- Methodological reflections
- Some empirical findings in the topic of “evaluation as a driver of change” (a chapter of the book “Managing universities” edited by Lepori, Enders, Bleiklie)



What the “TRUE” was

- European Science Foundation (around 2010-2013)
- 8 groups:
 - Kassell (Kehm-Krügen)
 - Cipes-Porto (Magalhães-Veiga)
 - Bergen-NIFU (Bleiklie)
 - USI (Lepori)
 - Science Po (Musselin)
 - CHEPS (Enders)
 - CNR (Reale)
 - Bath (Huisman)

Primary (and secondary) data

- 26 institutional reports from open source (stats but especially institutional legal framework, strategy, etc.)
- In-house collection of “formal autonomy” description by country
- A common survey to all senior managers and middle managers of these 26 HEIs
- 8 qualitative case studies (one by country): 10-20 in depth interviews to key informants of current managerial practice

The discourse in the literature in Europe

- The arose of the institutional autonomy (Aghion et al. 2008; Estermann et al. 2011) as in trade-off with positional autonomy (Neave 2012)
- The “Evaluative State” in Europe (Neave & van Vught 1991)
- Are HEIs becoming “complete organisations” (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Brunsson & Olsen 1997)?
- The myriad of national “NMP” versions put in place {for national descriptions of reforms in English: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/national-description_en }
- How does the *steer* of the national system work? (also how a system is steered from a system without agencies, into one with agencies) (Reale & Seeber 2011; Magalhães et al. 2016)
- The quest for monitoring and assessing the “truth” about “governance of HE in the making”: actual implementation, actual post-reform status quo.

Any European common pattern out of all this process of change?

- European Countries are not transforming into a unique Country or “one people” (no *ex pluribus unum*). Europe remains a babel of peoples, in a perennial search for balance of power
- European Countries decided to establish a common structure:
 - All Countries had to reform themselves according to Bologna process (i.e. Ba+Ma ; ECTS; etc.)
 - An easier reform would have been to keep things as they were – adding only a common translation (i.e. international ISCID codes)
- Extra common forces commanded reforms:
 - Strong Isomorphism in adopting the British model
 - Lukewarm Isomorphism in referring to the neoliberal US model
 - The strength of global rankings
 - Financial difficulties in keeping the post-WII Welfare States
 - New political claims of accountability and value for money

The novelty and the success

- Both qualitative and quantitative research design (tentative mixed method design)
- Strong emphasis on institutional dimension and its governance
- In comparison with other typical international projects, each national team did not deal with the national context, if not for data collection. Each team was “the expert” of some topic, and each was free to use all the data to make comparisons.
 - This unleashed a strong potential
 - The “common paper” ([Seeber et al. 2015](#)) sounds like a publication in physics (26 authors).
 - The borders of the participants are not always clear
 - Though cross-team co-authorships are still not fully exploited

Some limits



To measure means to compare;
To compare means to compare:
vulnera in quaestionibus



- TRUE assumed equivalence of governing bodies: the Italian Senate was compared with the Portuguese Senate (no terms of comparisons with Norway, where Senates do not exist).
- TRUE assumed that different nominal bodies had not to be mixed. 5 different sets of questions arose with only some questions in common for all ([annex](#))
 - Gender was not included
- TRUE mission was to trace changes (with the past), without having many information about the past (and no planned sampling in the future)
 - It was the first study with this design
 - Few questions asked a trend in comparison to 5 or 10 years previously
 - The change was supposed to be traceable in the present as stand alone (e.g. new Statutes in Italy pursuant Law 240/2010)
- The idea is that NPM, neo-liberal HE etc. is transforming the way HEIs are “managed”, which implies that scholars pass from being self-organised into managed employees...
 - but scholars out of governing bodies have not been interviewed (e.g. Full professors have not been asked about if they lost or gained any decision making power)

Novacula Occami



Lex parsimoniae:

Frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora.

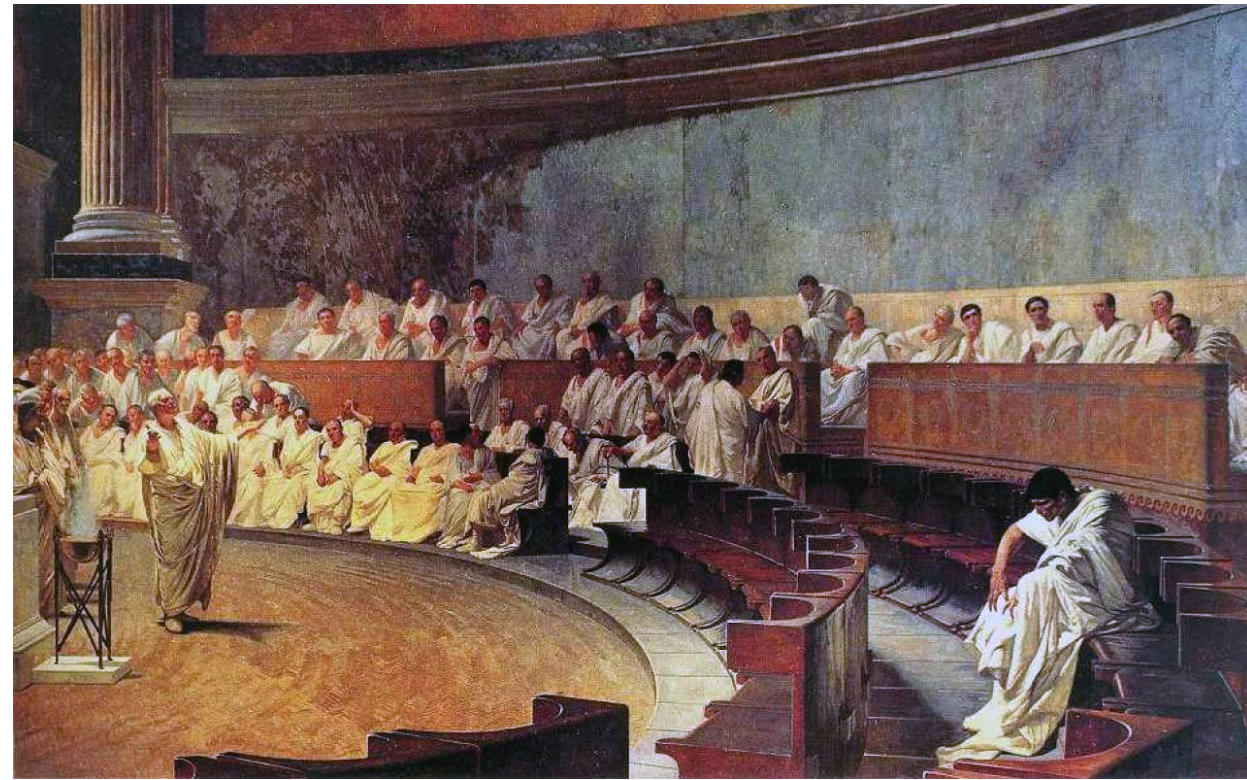
Around 50 questions for a grand total of around 700 variables are a waste of time for interviewees (and probably a reduction of valid observations)

Some a posteriori evidence:

For instance, Seeber et al. (2015) used a dozen of these variables, including factor analysis which is implicitly a technique to «synthetise» variables; Reale & Marini (2017) used around 20 of them; Marini & Reale (2015) less than 30 and summarised into less item.

“Mixed method” means mixing something

“Using multiple methods produces more valid results as the strengths of one method can offset the limitations of another method”
(Turner *et al.* 2015)



TRUE replicated the usual dispute between people who are true believers in quantitative stuff and those who are true believers in qualitative stuff

- The quantitative sect won
- By their own admittance (book presentation at CHER 2017), they ended to have the best publication with qualitative data (“Penetrated Heirarchies” in *Organization Studies*)

Going to findings: A specificity of chapter “The transformative power of evaluation”

- We combined the dataset questionnaire with national patterns derived from a parallel questionnaires sent to “experts” about many features of *institutional autonomy* in the 8 respective countries (“formal autonomy”).
- “Formal autonomy” data can weight the answers by governing bodies’ about “real” managing powers and leeway. ([link](#))
- Country data are like parameters in international HEIs survey, but they might be just like an ordinary variable in the dataset composed by interviewees as observations
- We tested if HEIs are scattered by nation. This was to be considered an evidence of creation/presence of the institutional autonomy
 - Bleiklei et al. (2015) would call it “penetration of hierarchies” as a reshuffle of power in academia

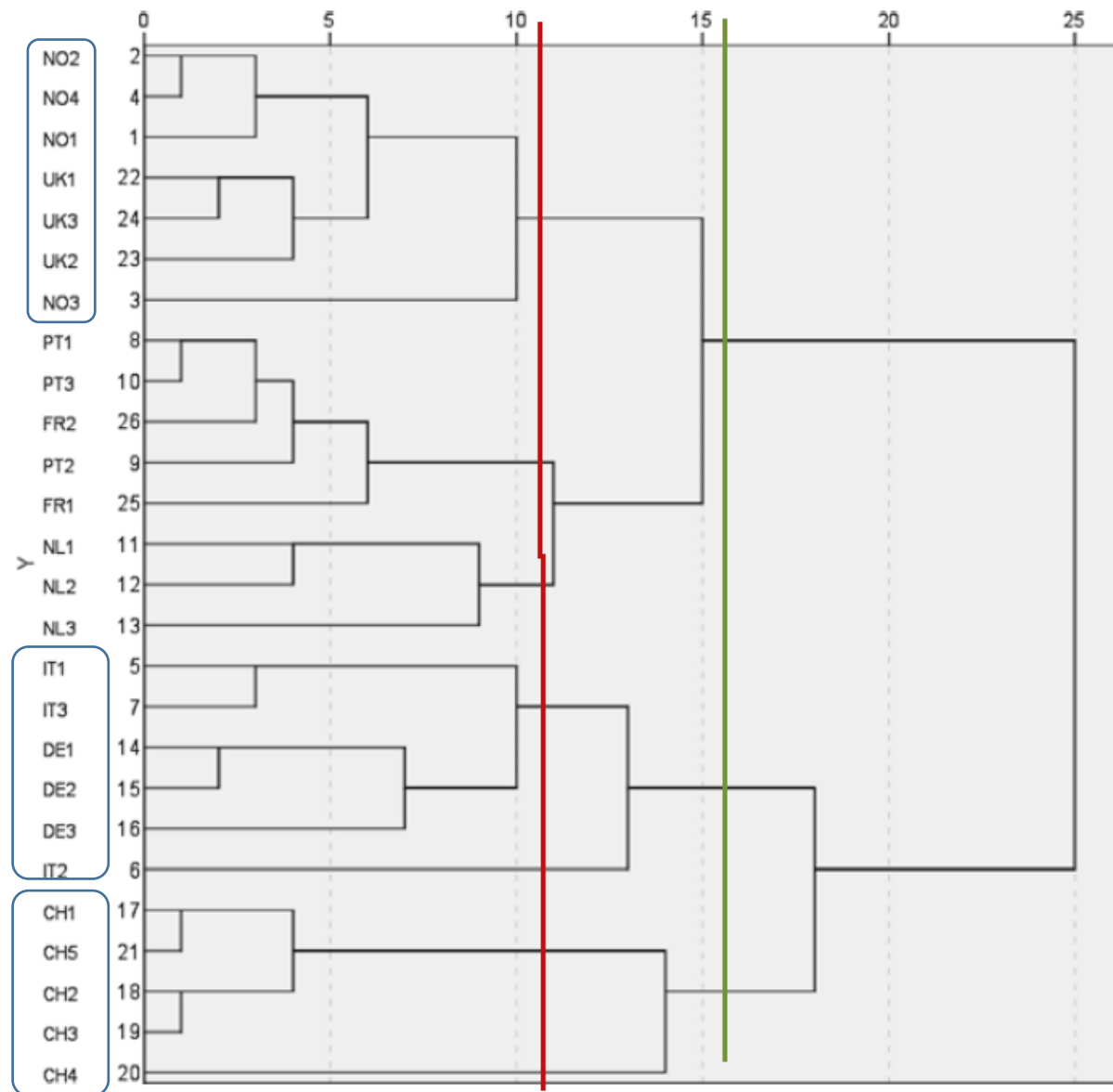


Fig. 5.1 Dendrogram of the hierarchical cluster analysis of all the variables introduced in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3. *Source* Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

Table 5.5 Characteristics of the hierarchical : descriptors for four groups (selection of discriminating variables in constructing the clusters)

<i>Cluster^a</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Country of HEIs	NO, UK	FR, PT, NL	DE, IT	CH
AU (institutional autonomy)_total	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
AU_teaching_internal	Low	Very Low	High	High
AU_research_external	Very High	Low	Medium	Very High
DMP at Top-M level (evaluation of individuals)	Low	Very Low	High	High
Influence of accreditation	High	Very High	High	Low
Evaluation producing efficiency and efficacy	High	High	Low	Low

^aThe list of variables presented in the table is less than the full set used in the analysis, concentrating on those that are mainly responsible for the clustering. For a larger display, see Annex 1

Source Own elaboration from TRUE dataset

So what? Could we answer research questions?

- Hp1:
the more the pressure of external evaluation, the more senior and middle managers report negative effects as organisational outcome
- Hp2:
if evaluation has a *controlling* function, the decision making process becomes more distributed across the tiers of the HEI
- Hp3:
the more there is (institutional) autonomy in a specific domain (i.e. teaching and/or research), the more transformative the respective domain will be at organisation level

So what? (from the text of the chapter)

The paper tested three propositions, of which the first is not confirmed by the data. This is the particular proposition that the academics active at the central government and middle management levels will perceive greater negative effects, as external evaluation increasingly impacts on decisions regarding the distribution of vital resources. The data instead confirm the second proposition, which is that when evaluation is used for controlling purposes, it has differing transformative effects on the levels of internal government (central, middle managers), distributing the decision-making power so as to mitigate the concentration in the hands of the central bodies. In other words, the data show that regardless the managerial or collegial orientation in the university, both hierarchical levels can have strong decision-making power over evaluation, a finding that is consistent with the literature on universities as 'non-complete' organizations.

As to the third proposition, research and teaching evaluation exert different influences between universities, contributing to shape their institutional configurations; the strength of the types of evaluation can be explained by the formal autonomy granted to the universities (at national level) over the types of evaluation themselves.

Formal institutional autonomy emerges as far as external evaluation is reckoned to transform the governance of universities, rather than any features at the institutional level.

Potential for the future

- A great potential in panelising the study, repeating the study in the same HEIs, plus new others in other countries: completing the West and having some from Eastern Europe, provided:
 - questionnaire is reformulated keeping some of the same exact questions and erasing many others
 - at least professorial ranks are included
 - a “formal autonomy” desk research is duplicated
 - someone will get the money...
 - ... and someone will deliver the (team of) team leadership

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NEW LABEL	B	S	R	CA	MM	Wording
ACTOR_INF	∅	∅	25	29	27	To what extent do the following actors influence university strategies?
B2	2	∅	∅	∅	∅	To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your role as a university board member?
B24	24	∅	∅	∅	∅	With whom do you coordinate, meet, etc.?
B25	25	∅	∅	∅	∅	How would you describe your role as a university board member?
B27	27	∅	∅	∅	∅	What drives the importance of each of the following factors?
B3	3	∅	∅	∅	∅	How important is it for you to work as a member of the following committees?
B4	4	∅	∅	∅	∅	To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your role as a university board member?
B5	5	∅	∅	∅	∅	To whom is it most important to report?
B6	6	∅	∅	∅	∅	How long has the following committee been in existence?
B7	7	∅	∅	∅	∅	Which of the following factors is most important for the success of the university?
...	•	•	•	•	•	...
Count of "∅"	78	86	91	71	74	

- **117 different questions out of 5 questionnaires of circa 50 Qs each over 18000 possible combinations**
- **around 700 variables in the dataset**
- **Less than 50% of the questions of each questionnaire had at least a common question in one of the other 4**
- **3/117 same questions in 5 questionnaires**
- **2/117 same questions in 4 questionnaires**
- **16/117 same questions in 3 questionnaires**
- **18/117 same questions in 2 questionnaires**
- **78/117 (66.7%) unique questions in only one of 5 questionnaires**

Formal Autonomy: some variables

Name of variable	Label of the variable	# of values	Dimension
V01	FREE TO DECIDE ON LEGAL STATUS	3	Legal
V02	FREE TO APPOINT ACADEMIC STAFF	3	HR Management
V03	FREE TO DETERMINE SALARIES	4	HR Management
V04	FREE TO DETERMINE PROCEDURES FOR ASSESSMENT INDIVIDUAL STAFF	4	HR Management
V05	FREE TO DETERMINE PROCEDURES FOR ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS	4	HR Management
V06	FREE TO DETERMINE HOW TO SPEND PUBLIC GRANT	3	Financial
V07a	ESTIMATE AVERAGE PROPORTION OPERATIONAL GRANT	Continuous	---
V07b	ESTIMATE AVERAGE PROPORTION TUITION FEES	Continuous	---
V07c	ESTIMATE AVERAGE PROPORTION THIRD PARTY FUNDING	Continuous	---
V07d	CATEGORISED PROPORTION OPERATIONAL GRANT	4	---
V08	FREE TO BORROW FUNDS ON CAPITAL MARKET	3	Financial
V09	FREE TO BUILD UP RESERVES	3	Financial
V10	FREE TO CHARGE FEES BACHELORS	4	Financial
V11	FREE TO CHARGE FEES MASTERS	4	Financial

Dimensions (groups of variables)	No. of variables
External Governance	2
Financial	11
Funding	16
HR Management	4
Internal Governance	3
Legal	2
Policy	10
Steering Instruments	20
Total	68