The transformation of governance in the Mexican public university: a pending subject*

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Resumen

Una verdadera transformación de la universidad pública mexicana debería pasar, necesariamente, por la transformación de sus formas de gobierno, se analiza cómo el desarrollo que ha experimentado en las últimas décadas no se ha visto acompañado por la modificación y mejoramiento en este aspecto, lo que se ha traducido en reformas truncas o incompletas, con importantes efectos no deseados y que, en muchos casos, no han logrado las transformaciones propuestas. Se ilustra con base en las respuestas que un grupo de 73 académicos de un total de 35 universidades dio a un cuestionario semiestructurado, que muestra la persistencia de un modelo de gobierno autoritario, antidemocrático, que se opone a la participación de la comunidad y que, a final de cuentas, es contrario al supuesto espíritu que movió a las políticas de modernización.

Abstract

Assuming that a true transformation of the Mexican public university should necessarily entail the renovation of its forms of government, we discuss how the development, that the public university has experienced in recent decades, has not been accompanied by modifications and improvements in governance. This has resulted in incomplete reforms, with undesired effects and, in many cases, without achieving the desired changes. This is illustrated by the responses to a semi structured questionnaire, applied by telephone interview, to a group of 73 scholars belonging to a total of 35 universities, showing the persistence of authoritarian and undemocratic models of governance that discourage the participation of the community, and therefore, run against the supposed spirit that inspired the policies of modernization.

Palabras clave:
- Gobierno Universitario
- Universidad Pública
- Autoritarismo
- Subsidiariedad

Key words:
- University government
- Public University
- Authoritarianism
- Subsidiarity

Introducción

Against the backdrop of accelerated growth in enrollment, after numerous, lengthy and expensive labor and political conflicts, and amidst persistent shortages of all sorts: human, material and financial resources, around 1990, the Mexican public university system[1] embarked on a major effort to effectively improve its performance.[2]

From that point on Mexican higher education has undergone a period of major expansion and diversification,[3] public higher education institutions in particular, have been pushed to adopt an "evaluation culture" and, in general, to "modernize" their structures. For example, substantial portions of the annual federal budget destined for the public higher education system are allocated by the means of special or extraordinary funds that the institutions have to compete for through projects and institutional evaluations as well as being subject to specific programs. Thus, through funding policies associated with performance evaluation, the federal government has exercised, in spite of the rhetoric of university autonomy advocates, a decisive influence on the development of Mexican higher education institutions (Mendoza, 2002; Ordorika, 2003).[4]

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[1] In Mexico it is a tradition to refer to the group of institutions that perform tasks relevant to higher education as a 'system' (Taborga and Hanel, 1995. However, if in formal terms we mean a system as an integrated whole, comprised of diverse and specialized elements, processes and structures, in interaction with its membership and operating rules defined around a common purpose or function, we can hardly speak of a true Mexican higher education system. While acknowledging this, for the purpose of this paper, following tradition, we will refer to the system of public higher education as sets of institutions that under the terms of the Higher Education Sub-Secretariat (SES) of the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP), Mexican Public Universities are defined as State and Federal Public Universities. For a review of the classification of the SES of the Mexican higher education institutions see: http://ses4.sep.gob.mx/wb/ses/educacion_superior_publica (in Spanish). For a discussion about the problems of classification and systematization of the huge variety of tertiary education institutions in Mexico, see Galaz (1998).

[2] In 1996 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) handed over a report on the status of secondary and higher education in Mexico to the country's authorities. In its diagnosis, the report emphasizes the highly heterogeneous, complex, fragile, loosely coupled and rigid set of institutions of secondary and higher education. "A system that is not integrated and does not allow for the horizontal mobility of students, through different forms of coordination with the educational authorities and different legal systems, and a significant growth of the private sector (five times higher than the public sector), with a high concentration of enrollment in social and business sciences." The report also noted that "the weight of scientific and technical training is modest for Mexico's current state of economic development." (Comunicado 032 by the Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación; May 2000).

[3] Along with public sector efforts to increase coverage of the system that led to the creation of the cultural and technological universities, the higher education private sector has grown significantly, in an uncontrolled, unregulated and random manner (Muñoz et al., 2004). Such growth may not only be explained as the result of an increased presence of educational supply, but also as the consolidation of a sector of alternative providers in areas of training, integration and mobility dynamics, as well as developments in trade liberalization negotiations on services, among which education is included in ways and at levels in which competition opportunities exist for individuals, as is usually the case for higher education (see Rodriguez Gómez, 2004).

[4] There are many programs created in this sense, the proliferation of acronyms, completely unintelligible to the uninitiated reader, comes from these new funding policies associated with organizational performance. These include: the FOMES (Fund for the Modernization of Higher Education; PROMEP (Programme for the Improvement of Teaching); PIFI (Comprehensive Program for Institutional Capacity Building); PIFOP (Comprehensive Program for the Promotion of Graduate Studies), as well as CONACYT 's sectoral programs. For an analysis and discussion of these policies, along with the programs that generated them, as well as the complex impact they had on higher education institutions, see Ibarra (2001), López Zárate (2001); Ordorika (2004) and more recently Díaz-Barriga (2008).

By 1960 there were about 78 higher education institutions that served slightly more than 78,800 students, with about 10,800 faculty (mainly teachers) of which full-time contracts were practically nonexistent. Yet by 2004 there were 2,047 institutions, with an enrollment of about 2,384,900 students and over 251,700 faculty, of which about 28% were working full-time (Galaz *et al.*, 2007).

Amidst the huge quantitative transformation of higher education institutions; the substantial changes that today are occurring simultaneously in both, the role of universities in society and the demographic recomposition of their students; the demands for university research and services to become more relevant; as well as the costs of education and the availability of public funding. In addition to all of this, the university faces new challenges and pressures that may not be effectively overcome if, indeed, the mechanisms by which institutional decisions are made are not reformed to allow institutions to respond effectively to the changing environment of today. The possibility of achieving this has one prerequisite: the redesign of its governance (Benjamin and Carroll, 1998).

In this paper we depart from the assumption that the transformations experienced by the Mexican university in recent decades have not reached their forms of government, which has resulted in truncated or incomplete reforms, with significant and undesirable effects, which in many cases have failed to achieve changes or transformations in line with the importance and principles of the Mexican higher education system. Similarly we argue that meanwhile the problem of the real transformation of university government is not addressed we run the risk that the implementation of new policies promoted, such as expansion of coverage, may remain only as good intentions or, as has happened with the policies promoted in recent years, produce unintended consequences that may even go against the originally planned direction.

Governance in Mexican public universities[5]

Approaches for its study

As a result of the sheer size and multiplicity of functions, the great heterogeneity of stakeholders and the intricate web of relationships among them, as well as the diversity of intermediary bodies that have risen as part of an accelerated and disorderly growth, the contemporary university has become a complex organization, for which analysis requires appropriate conceptual categories (Ordorika, 2002).

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[5] In general, Mexican higher education institutions can be classified into three types depending on their form of government. On the one hand we have the federal and state institutions with constitutionally granted autonomy which allows them, in principle, to govern themselves (these forms of government are mainly the ones we refer to in this paper), on the other hand we have government institutions which are appointed directly by external government agencies which may or may not allow the involvement of the institution's faculty, and finally, private institutions which may or may not have faculty participation in their forms of government. (A brief characterization of the forms of government of Mexican higher education institutions in Spanish can be found in Galaz *et al*, 2009).

In general, we can say that there is no single, accepted definition of the concept of university governance (see Galaz, 1996). The historical perspective shows how, even over time it has changed its meaning (Metzger, 1989). In Mexico, following the taxonomy proposed by Knowles (1978), the study or analysis of higher education institutions governance has been approached from two broad perspectives, that refer to the content of different levels or decision-making structures: the academic and the "administrative/managerial." The first refers to aspects such as what should be taught, by whom and how should teaching be conducted, who should be taught, as well as how and who may develop the academic plans and policies (Smyth, 1978). Moreover, there is a second way of approaching the analysis of university governance, that encompasses the management or coordination of general budget allocation processes, strategic planning, relations with other social, educational and political institutions, as well as overall administrative aspects. Using Cowley's approach (1980) as a base, the term academic can be applied in a general sense to refer to an academic (university) government and the social control of academic institutions (universities). From this perspective, there are two levels of social control: the political and the operational.

The study of what has been called university governance is relatively new and we generally find two main approaches.

On the one hand there are studies that emphasize the administrative processes, managerial or directive, that "refer to processes of technical and instrumental nature in the university's decision-making arena" (Casanova, 1999: 14). For some authors, the study of the specific ways in which the institution is organized and conducted to achieve its essential purposes –referred to as the management of the university– has not been awarded due importance; at least not until, in the context of increasing resource constraints, government intervention in university affairs exerts strong pressure towards the search for procedures to achieve higher quality. At this point management becomes one of the "foci of the agenda" (De Vries and Ibarra, 2004). The university management studies tend to be defined under an "administrative" scheme (Casanova, 1999) and have basically been influenced by theories originating in the public and rational organizational decision making, where evaluation and strategic planning have become two of its basic intervention tools.

Another way to approach the study of university governance is departing from conceptualizing universities as spaces of political dispute. A central problem in this case is the analysis of, along the lines Foucault described, the ways in which power is distributed[6] together with the participation of actors in institutional decision making, both internally and externally. Thereby focusing mainly on the analysis of the university's forms of government and

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[6] One of the most influential contemporary writers in the study of power has undoubtedly been the French sociologist Michel Foucault. In his work the concept of "governance" has been considered one of the key concepts (Allen, 1991) or "deranging term" (Keenan, 1982: 36). It plays a decisive role in his analysis of power in several ways: it offers a vision of power beyond the perspective that focuses either on consensus or violence, it establishes a relationship between the technologies of the self with technology rule, the constitution of the subject in the process of state formation and, ultimately, it helps to differentiate between power and domination (Lemke, 2000).

power structures, and about who or what group should have the power to make decisions, ignoring or overlooking a specific analysis of the decision-making processes and their effects, intended or unintended (Ordorika, 1999, De Vries and Ibarra, 2004).

It is in this context that the term "university governance" is used to identify the combination of organization and management processes in the higher education domain (Reed, 2009), the distribution and exercise of power and authority, as well as the relationships between stakeholders in institutional life, their different strata and the different levels at which decisions are made (Hartman, 1992, Casanova, 1999).

In this paper, whenever we refer to university governance we do so from the conceptualization and analysis of this second approach. In this sense when referring to university governance we can encompass both processes and procedures, we can speak about groups of power and authority, as well as actors or levels. Governance and authority in the contemporary university are exercised at various levels and in each of them authority acquires different meanings and significance (Clark, 1993).

Similarly, from this latter point of view we may refer to university governance from two interdependent, yet distinct, perspectives. On the one hand we have the internal institutional arrangement or organization through which authorities achieve and maintain their existence, legitimacy and effectiveness; and on the other, the various institutional arrangements that allow the institution to set and adjust its relationships with other institutions belonging to the same system, as well as with the state and the society in which it is inserted (Brunner, 1989). Consistent with this approach, analysis and works on university governance are organized based on this dual notion: that of internal aspects and the institution's linkages with the social environment and its relationship with the State.

Change in the forms of university governance: a pending subject

Notwithstanding the documented growth of Mexican higher education, it should be noted that in general the changes achieved were brought about from the perspective of the university as a research institution, creating this model on the design basis of prevailing funding policies, with all the benefits and consequences or undesirable effects this implies (Ordorika et al, 2009). Concomitantly, governance structures have not been substantially changed and forms of government featuring many authoritarian traits remain prevalent,[7] which in a sense have acted as an impediment to the participation in decision making relevant to the institution's steering by university stakeholders, thus preventing a real and profound transformation of the institution, becoming, a de facto obstacle to the full achievement of the public university's objectives.[8]

In this sense there are relevant data, such as that recently obtained through the RPAM survey (Galaz et al., 2008) which found that only about 52% of full-time faculty at public higher education state institutions and 37% at federal public institutions, believe that the general working conditions at their institutions have improved since they began their academic career to date, while 19% and 29% of academic respondents from state and federal institutions, respectively, believe conditions have in fact deteriorated. That is, despite the growth of higher education which we referred to above, about a quarter of all full-time faculty in higher education institutions of this type considered that working conditions at their own institutions have not improved.

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[7] After the Revolution, the Mexican political system acquired the main traits of an authoritarian political regime, with an ambiguous ruling ideology, restricted political competition, limited citizen participation and one-man leadership. Traditionally, authoritarian regimes are defined based on four essential characteristics (Bobbio *et al*., 1986): restricted competition or limited political pluralism, vaguely defined ideology, lack of political mobilization, and the exercise of power through specific leadership that is poorly defined but has predictable limits. However, the Mexican authoritarianism has presented a set of features which distinguish it from other authoritarian political systems. Among these is its *presidentialism*: the exercise of power concentrated in a single person, highly centralized, subordination of legislative bodies to the Executive Power, replacement of institutional loyalties for personal loyalties and the exercise of meta-constitutional attributions (beyond those granted by law). Additionally it has presented a fundamental feature, *corporativism:* the incorporation of the masses or the State subordinate sectors through corporate organizations. In another paper we have already developed the thesis that, by extension, using definitions of classical political science, in the case of UNAM's political regime and its organization of university governance, emanating from the 1945 organic law, it has indeed been an authoritarian, presidential and corporativist system, made in the image and likeness of the *corporativist* presidential authoritarianism, which was in its boom, expansion and consolidation phase, at the time of the passage of this internal law. Similarly, the model of UNAM's government became the reference point for the design or redesign of the forms of governance of state public universities, thus extending the authoritarianism to which we refer (Ordorika, 1996, and Ordorika in preparation).

[8] The notion of the "public university" has changed over time. In certain circumstances it is identified primarily with the government subsidy granted to institutions, in others, with the degree of control exercised by the State on the training and research agenda, and in others, with the capacity and ways to respond by public universities to projected demands from society, the market and the political sphere. Notwithstanding this possibility of multiple interpretations, there is a widespread view that the public university's primary mission is to provide answers to the needs and problems of its social environment, as well as to the search for and advancement of knowledge itself. The training of young people for life and work in various fields, the scientific and technological research, the preservation and enrichment of culture, the promotion of the humanities, literature and the arts, are the areas where the institution should respond to the relationship with society at large and the individuals within it. In this sense there is also a widespread perception that the purposes of public universities are in conflict with government policies that promote a model of university in which the benchmark is the performance of world-class universities (see Ordorika *et al*, 2009).

Similarly, data from the same RPAM survey show that at most 12% of scholars from federal or state public institutions consider that academics are themselves involved in the processes of appointing authorities at their institutions.

In the same vein, and illustrating the point that HEIs forms of government and administration have not changed substantially in the sense of stepping away from authoritarian models, these same results also highlight the general opinion of around 55% of faculty on the presence of a vertical management style, the existence of complex administrative processes (45%), the presence of collegiality in decision-making in only 41% of cases, and only 39% of scholars think that communication between the administration and faculty is good.

The following results, also taken from Galaz *et al.* (2008) report, somehow confirm that despite the changes that Mexican public higher education has undergone, encouraged primarily through federal funding, improving the quality of many of the administrative processes, which are derived from the forms of government, still shows a meagre development: only 32.5% of scholars surveyed believe that their institution puts more emphasis on the quality of the processes than on the indicators of such processes, and less than 30.8% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that in their institutions there is an efficient and timely management of resources for research.

In line with our argument about the need for forms of university governance in which other stakeholders: faculty and students, have a greater role, the answers to questions relating to participation in the institutional life of faculty from state and federal public institutions, between 46% and 49% of respondents consider that the lack of participation in institutional life represents a real problem.

Only about a third of respondents stated they were informed about the latest developments in the institution, and only between 39% and 43% believe that senior officials exercise competent leadership.

The observed tendencies of the reforms

In general, it can be said that governance reforms that may have taken place in public universities in Mexico have been mainly due to changes in processes and the solution of purely administrative or managerial issues; whereas the definition of the type of problems, academic and social, which solutions the university should be addressing, as well as the emphasis on certain solutions, remain outside the scope of participation or decision making for its key players. The new forms of governance that have emerged under new public policies in higher education stand out for their bureaucracy, displacing decisions from collegiate bodies to special committees, and the increase in managerial positions (De Vries, 1996, 2001), while now the "academic-administrative" official is the main actor in the decision making that profoundly affects institutional life.

In the best of cases, it appears that the public policies implemented to improve higher education have determined the abrupt transition from a bureaucratic corporatist model to a strategy that has turned the individual and isolated effort of scholars into the axis of the new administrative organization of the Mexican university. Furthermore, according to authors such as Ibarra (1999), these new policies have sought to modify the traditional dependent behavior, steering it towards sterile automation, which reflects the absence of the reflective and organizing capacity of scholars, as well as other actors in institutional life. In turn this generates yet different authoritarian structures and relationships, without substantially modifying existing ones, which hiding under the guise of autonomy have served to further strengthen the same elites, that have held political power at institutions since long ago.

Going back to some of the concepts used by Garcia (1999) to characterize these changes in the Mexican university and their impact on the academic trajectories of its actors, we can state that institutions have transitioned – without any analysis of its unwanted side effects– from the traditional model of inclusion of the university community (either students or scholars) that characterized the vertical bureaucratic coordination of universities, to one of predominant exclusion of those who do not meet performance indicators –which are attributed universal and necessary value–, without any real transformation of the vertical and authoritarian mechanisms of institutional decision making that have traditionally characterized the Mexican university.

Although much has been said about the need for a more modern administrative management, in line with the times and policies (De Vries, 2001), in reality, many efforts have been directed only at improving the coordination of different already existing administrative bodies and strengthening the central structures. In the end what has come to prevail is the steering by experienced pundits, embedded in structures more in tune with external influences than with the real needs of the institution, generating multiple bureaucracies constantly changing procedures and making adaptations.

Scholars' view on the forms of governance prevalent in Mexican public higher education

Regardless of the level of analysis of their governance, we must bear in mind that universities are complex systems, with interests and governance structures –and specific features derived from these– sometimes, resulting from very specific local situations, making it hard to model or describe them in terms of a unique and dominant model common to all institutions (Pusser, 2003).

However, here we present an analysis carried out on the answers that a group of 73 scholars, belonging to a total of 35 universities, gave to a semi-structured questionnaire applied via telephone interview. This exercise sought to obtain information on the opinion that scholars have on various aspects of university life, including the governance structures that prevail in

public universities in Mexico (Ordorika, Ramirez and Martinez, in preparation). These findings show –despite the great diversity or heterogeneity of conditions present in the institutions studied– the persistence of an authoritarian and undemocratic model that discourages or opposes participation from the community and, therefore, on the whole, it is contrary to the supposed spirit that inspired modernization policies: the transformation and real improvement of higher education.

In a general manner we can highlight some of the commonalities found in the perceptions of scholars who participated in this study:

a. There is a widely held view among academics interviewed that higher education institutions have experienced, in recent decades, many changes in many different ways. Commonly, these changes are attributed to the implementation of public policies adopted by the federal government. In general, the community perceives itself as alien to the implementation of these policies, in many cases, these policies are seen as a real imposition, where the institution's leadership has played a major role; in these cases community participation has been marginal and restricted to issues related to the daily routine and the very short term. Although in the opinions of a large number of scholars a negative, critical or skeptical tone can be perceived in their references to the changes that have occurred over recent years in their institutions, it is significant that, at the same time, changes are strongly present, quikkly recalled, and even in some cases referred to with a certain degree of pride ("The university has changed or is changing," "Many negative things of the past have been left behind").

b. It is also noteworthy that of the lists of changes offered in recent years in the institution, there are few and marginal, if any, references to changes in governance. This aspect is not listed in the "institutional agendas".

c. In general it is possible to detect in the views expressed a feeling of marginalization by the "community" on relevant institutional decision making. Similarly there is some skepticism on the role and relevance of the institutional life of collegiate bodies. It is a general perception that whenever these bodies of collegiate representation show greater concerns regarding strategic decisions in the steering of the institution, the community involvement will be minor or irrelevant. The mechanisms of bureaucratic, administrative and political control exerted on representatives of the community are greater as the importance of institutional decision-making by the collegiate body on an issue increases.

d. A view that is gaining strength among academics, however, is that many issues relating to academic life have been increasingly decided upon by the collegiate bodies concerned, which as a result of policies introduced by the federal authorities, have been significantly strengthened (aside from being manipulated or co-opted by the institution's own authorities).

e. In general, there is a negative perception (in some cases very negative) of university governance forms and mechanisms. The perception of the Rector as the university's main authority, occupying a highly political position, usually exercised without institutional checks and balances, and in an authoritarian and imposing manner, is still very common among our scholars. This vision is complemented in a somewhat contradictory manner with a favorable opi-

nion that a significant portion of respondents expressed, about the figure or image of the Rector, who is personally seen as being close to the community, with a good understanding of the problems the institution is facing, and open to comments and suggestions.

f. A similar opinion or perception is held about the University Board or equivalent body. There is a distinction between the honor, respect or recognition (academic, scientific, professional or social) of its members (everyone has a positive opinion of them), but the Board itself, as a collegiate body or decision maker, is viewed with suspicion or mistrust. It is accused of being undemocratic and making decisions despite the interests of the community, the "genuine" interests of the institution. By far it seems that this anti-democratic, and therefore negative character of the University Board has more to do with the origin or manner in which its members are designated, than with the function for which this collegiate body was generally instituted.

g. A similar process of delegitimization is observed in the references to bodies such as the University Council or equivalent bodies. The inefficiency that can be attributed to this collegiate body is mainly due to the interference of other authorities (for example, the Rector) in the appointment of community representatives, the manipulation of decision-making, either structurally (mostly authorities appointed) or through co-option or bought off community representatives. Another aspect that was identified as being very negative for the life of collegiate bodies is the perception of their use by single authorities as a means to legitimize their proposals, or to make sense of community agreements derived from previously made decisions, without true consideration for the needs of the institution, as expressed by the community.

It is possible to conclude that the prevailing pattern in much of the governments in public higher education institutions in Mexico, as it is referred to in the responses of scholars interviewed, can be characterized to a greater or lesser extent as authoritarian, whereby it promotes no community involvement in key decision making for the institution. This conclusion does not deny or dispute the unquestionable reality of positive changes that have taken place in these institutions on many aspects. What we want to make clear here is the fact, unquestionable as well, that changes in Mexican public universities have not been accompanied by changes in their governance and even, in some cases it seems that not only have the practices of the old Mexican authoritarianism survived, but there is even the impression that in some institutions these negative traits have been exacerbated.[9]

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[9] This feature of university governance –and not its concomitant transformation through the new modernizing winds brought about by globalization– has also been referred to for other Latin American universities (see, e.g., Garcia 2005). Parra (2004: 667) even states that in these governments "formal organizational structures and management systems that are rigid, centralized and immobilized by their own power struggles prevail, yet they somehow continue to be an opportunity to access privileges and certain forms of loyalty controls."

The debate on public university governance

Recent references to university governance mention that as a result of external demands to increase competitiveness, quality, prestige, administrative and financial efficiency at institutions, there has been a subordination, sometimes justifiable, of the active participation of collegiate bodies, to the intent of central authorities; a net reduction of institutional autonomy; and a concentration of power under the rationale of the professionalization of academic administration or management (Dridiksson, 2002, Galaz and Viloria, 2004).

In this type of arguments it is possible to find two assumptions. On the one hand, the idea that carrying out the necessary changes in higher education institutions had required strong leadership; externally crafted pre-defined decisions and projects; as well as acceptance and legitimization mechanisms to face relatively no direct internal obstacles or delays.[10] On the other hand, to consider "democratic" forms of university governance in which community participation was the focus in decision-making, on top of being time consuming and potentially conflictive, it was thought to be contrary to the supposed rationality and efficiency sought as the new models of university management.[11]

In these two assumptions we can see the basic reasons why despite the many measures implemented to modernize Mexico's public universities, the basic features of an authoritarian and vertical model have been left intact.[12]

However, this conclusion leads to more questions with multiple implications. On the one hand we have that, the possibility of implementing the measures applied in recent years, to influence the improvement of higher education, may have had a greater impact or may have achieved more profound and irreversible changes, that go beyond the traditionally used indicators; if, concurrently or as part of these measures, they would have sought to transform traditional governance systems, making the community intervene

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[10] In words of Ibarra and Rondero (2001), referring to the relationship between public policy and university governance: "It is necessary to recognize that we live in times of a governmentalized university, this bureaucratic corporation that has resorted to business ways of management, on which the terms of its performance are sustained. Its entrepreneurship, that is, their ability to govern by the means of leading their communities under certain explicitly defined projects, represents a strategic element, to the extent that there is no longer a protectionist state, which grants certain benefits in exchange for political loyalty, which is now presumably obsolete." This form of university governance that is modeled under neoliberal rationales, responds to what Ibarra (2001) himself refers to as the process of "corporatization" which is linked to the emergence of a new class of university authorities, that in principle, can be characterized by their improved administrative capacity and for the vindication of their right to direct the institution. As Ibarra and Rondero (2001) suggest: "They are indeed true Executives identified with the profile of the entrepreneur of excellence, that takes risks and assumes the consequences... Also, high authorities proclaim themselves as the only force capable of steering the change or directing major projects."

[11] In this sense Lopez's (2008) comments are illustrative: "The democratic functioning requires compliance with ways that take time for information, discussion and resolution... This leads to the impossibility of addressing and resolving academic issues in a timely manner or to respond to emerging or circumstantial issues. Thus it is convenient for university authorities, with their administrative apparatus, not academic, to make relevant decisions without consulting the university collegiate bodies."

[12] It seems that those who planned and implemented the policies responsible for the many changes already described, felt that the only way to implement them more or less immediately, and respond to the demands of international organizations urging the Mexican government to implement such policies, was through the authoritarian imposition of such measures, and what better way to carry this out than the authoritarian and vertical structure, typical of university governance. The federal education authorities took the risks and measured the costs for the successful implementation of the proposed policies to be distorted by the actions arising from university governments, clearly in contrast with the modernizing policies and contrary to the rationality and efficiency they were seeking.

in the definition of policies and measures, as well as to decide to take part in their implementation, operation and evaluation. [13]

This issue, moreover, implies the assumption that a better university governance is one in which the participation of the community, especially academics, has a more important role in defining the steering of the institution and the concomitant decision making, hence putting forward a more democratic vision of institutional life than the prevailing authoritarianism (see, e.g., Habermas, 1967).

However, we must bear in mind that the issue of what constitutes the best model for university governance, for achieving the goals of the public university, remains a pending issue. A model of governance that may be formally characterized as democratic, does not necessarily ensure a significant level of community participation. Moreover, the recent history of many democratic processes carried out in various countries and circumstances has produced the paradoxical result that the model of representative democracy has served to further the concentration of power, an issue that is opposed to the process characteristic of participatory systems of the decentralization of power, in principle one of the desirable characteristics of the university.[14]

Conclusions

Our argument implies the assumption that a deep and true transformation of the Mexican public university must necessarily tackle the transformation of its forms of governance.[15] But what should the nature of such changes be? Lopez (2001) raises these questions: Is democratic governance appropriate for higher education institutions? Would this form of government be extensible for these institutions? Under what conditions or what features of democracy should be incorporated into higher education institutions? And, outlining a possible strategy to answer these questions Lopez cites Gil (1990): "Apparently, the passion and enthusiasm with which we participate in the discussions (about democracy) is inversely proportional to the basic procedures of clarity and definition of the terms

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[13] For example, Garcia (2005: 94) says, referring to changes in Latin American universities, that the promoters of the reforms in not incorporating the participation of academics as one of the features of the reform, were in need of generating new instances of coordination, in the very old way of government central planning style, and by not incorporating an efficient form of organization (horizontal, interactive, decentralized), many of the proposed policies were weakened by the bureaucratization of their own procedures.

[14] As Lopera (2004) asks about the case of representation in university governing bodies: "What guarantees that the representatives of teachers, alumni and students in the different university councils, really reflect the sentiments of their communities when many of them may not even be aware of them?." In the same vein, Kandel (2003), based on the results of his survey, describes that: "the representative does not perceive the need to communicate the decisions made at the council meeting: when asked the question of whether he communicates decisions, or if there is a channel to inform his constituency about what took place in the daily process of the governing exercise, the majority of respondents say they do not feel the need to communicate with their constituencies, nor with the rest of the faculty to report on their activities as council members.

[15] In this regard, we agree with Lopez (2001) who argues that there is sufficient evidence to believe that the "form of government" is a variable that affects institutional governance, admitting that although it is not a sufficient condition for achieving institutional objectives (e.g. quality) but a necessary condition, and it would be highly unlikely that a higher education institution poorly managed (lacking governance, in the sense of his analysis) could ever prosper.

used," then Lopez proceeds to analyze and develop a classification of forms of governance in Mexican universities from a comparison with US universities, in the style of the typology of the three basic dimensions proposed by Baldridge (1971).

We believe this type of academic exercise to be important and certainly a major source of ideas and proposals;[16] however, the question of what form of government is most appropriate for higher education institutions, must be resolved primarily by the university community. The discussion and debate should take place within the institutions, with the stakeholders, with their own rules, and with or without representatives from other sectors of society. To prepare the proposal for the university governance from a mere academic exercise, and then pretend it should be implemented, is to repeat the mistake policy makers in higher education have already made in imposing their programs and measures: to exclude at all stages of the process the very participation of the university community. Self-regulation, even in terms of governance, is one of the features marked as desirable in the contemporary university.[17]

From this perspective the principle of subsidiarity should be brought into play, which is based on the full respect for the right of self-determination (understood in the broadest sense) of each and every one of the members of a social structure, which in turn, constitutes the foundation upon which the whole edifice of the dynamics of social interaction that we call participatory democracy may be sustained[18]

Finally, we consider the study of governance in Mexican public universities does not exhaust the issue of university governance in Mexico.[19] Although it is likely that many of the issues we have referred to as the dominant model of governance in Mexican public universities, are in many respects applicable to other types of institutions, we must remember that in our Mexico there is a wide range of tertiary institutions, that face many specificities in their organizational and operational forms of governance, which undoubtedly require particularized studies. However, we must not overlook the enormous importance of the public university in Mexico: it is part of the national project with a very definite social function: that being, the formation of intellectual and professional resources that the country needs, the dissemination and generation of knowledge which, among other things, is necessary for economic, political, social and cultural development.[20]

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[16] A number of works on university governance end with a section of specific and concrete recommendations on how this government should be.
[17] Garcia's (2005) opinion illustrates this point, when in another context, he discusses the situation in Latin American universities regarding the lack of involvement or participation of university actors themselves in the process of evaluation: "...Being that this involvement is critical to creating a culture of evaluation understood as collective knowledge building oriented toward institutional self-regulation, it is distressing that the model of participatory self-evaluation is the least present in the experiences of the region."
[18] See for example http://www.democraciaparticipativa.net/documentos/PrincipioSubsidiariedad.htm in Spanish
[19] In this final comment we present the argument "...When analysts of higher education address the phenomenon of power in institutions, most often they refer to public universities disregarding other groups of higher education institutions: technical institutes, research centers SEP-CONACYT, technological universities, higher technological institutes, teacher colleges or private institutions, which altogether serve more students at the national level than public universities" (Lopez, 2001).
[20] A figure showing the importance of this subsystem in Mexico is that about 65% of full-time faculty in the higher education system work at a public institution.

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