

Exploring the relationship between institutional and professional autonomy: a comparative study between Portugal and Finland

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Autonomy has been at the core of the University since its creation and it has always been greatly cherished by academics. Nevertheless, autonomy has been constantly redefined over time, contextually and politically, as the influence of the Sate (and even the Church) in Higher Education (HE) systems has been changing. In the last decades, all over Europe, welfare states have been reconfigured as the role of governments has been limited to supervision, leading to an increase in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) autonomy. However, this is also accompanied by an increasing institutional accountability, which is said to question academics' professional autonomy.

In this study, we analyse the relationship between institutional and academic autonomy in HE by comparing Portugal and Finland. Our interest was to analyse the extent to which political attempts to increase institutional autonomy are perceived by academics as possibly leading to changes in their professional autonomy.

By crosschecking the literature review with document analysis (mostly legislation) and conducting 47 interviews to system and institutional key actors of both

Portuguese and Finnish HE systems (See Table 1) it became clear that the way both governments try to rhetorically enhance institutional autonomy is very similar. In both countries there is an increase in institutional financial and management autonomy (Law 62/2007 in Portugal and *Yliopistolaki* 558/2009 in Finland), but this comes with an increase in state steering and control mechanisms. As a result, academics tend to feel a decrease in their professional autonomy. However, internal segmentation of the profession is a relevant variable in the analysis of perceptions on professional autonomy because individual academics are affected differently. In fact, there are no homogeneous perceptions within academics group in each country concerning professional autonomy. The new organisational models are reconfiguring power relations inside academia, and that the position academics have in this new order influences their notion of being able to influence organisational decisions. In other words, this comparative approach allows the conclusion that within the context of reconfiguring universities' governance and management models, internal segmentation seems to be a relevant variable when analysing professional autonomy.

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TABLE 1
PTM/FTM: Portuguese/Finnish Top Management (rectors, vice-rectors, pro-rectors and external members)
PMM/FMM: Portuguese/Finnish Middle Management (deans and heads of departments)
PA/FA: Portuguese/Finnish academics (full-time professors who may hold management duties)
PT/FT: Portuguese/Finnish Technostructure (administrative staff).

System Level			Institutional Level				Total
			Top Management	Middle Management	Academics	Technostructure (Administrative staff)	
Portugal	6	University	6 (PTM)	4 (PMM)	6 (PA)	3 (PT)	19
Total							
Finland	6	University	4 (FTM)	5 (FMM)	3 (FA)	4	16
Total							35
Total interviewees	12		10	9	9	7	47