

## **Croatian academics' evolving "relationship" with university governance and management: A decade long changing nature of individual and socio-organisational patterns**

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### **Theoretical framework/Definition of concepts**

Academic authority in Croatia has been distributed as in most of continental systems - a combination of state bureaucracy and academic oligarchy (Clark, 1983). As in most countries in the region, almost every decision is still made either in the responsible Ministry or at the level of faculty, as each is a university constituent. The role of the central university administration is therefore relatively weak. Croatian universities, fragmented into powerful and independent faculties, are not able to implement principles of university autonomy, governance and management easily and without difficulties so we can argue that Croatia fits into the group of countries with "self-regulation in difficulties" (Sanyal 1995). Past decade has brought many changes and challenges to the higher education sector overall, and to Croatia in particular, as the country has entered the European Union and therefore started to (re)shape many of its national and institutional acts, policies and practices, including those governance and management related ones.

### **Methodology**

This article addresses changes in governance and management practices in Croatia relying on two time series data sets observed - the CAP study from 2009 and the most recent APIKS study from 2018. Specifically, the aim is to determine whether there are differences in the academics' perceptions of their own influence in shaping key academic policies, as well on their perception on governance and management practices in institution with regard to the following variables: year of conducting research (CAP 2009/APIKS 2018), gender (M/F); rank (early career researchers /experienced academics/seniors) and finally s discipline (STEM/BHASE), as these are the fundamental predictor variables in studies on the academic profession.

For the purposes of this paper we analyse the following variables. For the construct of governance and management practise we used variables: "At your institution there is... Good communication between management and academics (F3\_3), A top-down management style, (F3\_4), and Collegiality in decision-making processes (F3\_5)". For the analysis of their respective influence on key academic policies we used the following variable: "How influential are you in helping to shape key academic policies at your institution: At the level of the department or similar unit (F1\_1), At the level of the faculty, school or similar unit (F1\_2), and on the institutional level (F1\_3)". Several factorial (2x2) ANOVA were conducted to test the effect of the year of research (APIKS, CAP) on the change in attitudes towards the variables in relation to gender, rank and discipline.

## Data analysis

Preliminary results indicate that the year of study, gender and rank are more often statistically significant predictor variables, while discipline was statistically significant only in interaction. For example, influence in shaping key academic policies at the department level was lower in BHASE academics in CAP in comparison to BHASE academics in APIKS, and at the level of faculty STEM academics perceive more influence in APIKS in comparison to STEM academics in CAP. Also, BHASE academics more often in APIKS than in CAP agree that there is good communication between management and academics. These analyses support the hypothesis that the year of research is a moderator variable between discipline and analysed variables. On the other side, at department level and faculty level female academics, juniors/early career

researchers, and APIKS participants in comparison to men, senior academics and CAP participants tend to agree less that they have influence in shaping key academic policies. Also at the institution level, junior/early career researchers in comparison to senior academics tend to agree less on their influence, while APIKS academics more often than CAP academics agree that they have influence at the institution level. Year of study and rank have a main effect on the estimation of level of communication between management and academics, and collegiality in decision-making processes where APIKS academics and senior academics more often tend to agree that communication is good and that there is a collegiality in decision-making processes in comparison to CAP academics and junior researcher.

## Conclusion

A decade-long changing nature of individual and socio-organisational patterns and practices related to governance and management in the higher education sector in Croatia seems to be strongly (re)shaped by the “new” European context. Delicate nuances like the mentality and organisational culture of universities and their faculties - shaped throughout the years of functioning under a strong state tradition and influence - are equally strong factors affecting the implementation of new acts and policies. However, first preliminary results indicate that Croatian universities and its academics are moving forward and towards more autonomy and decentralisation in academic governance, while the “relationship” between Croatian academics and university governance and management has been evolving into one with more perceived influences.