A "Flagship University" for Luxembourg?
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The range of external demands placed on universities has grown significantly over the course of the past quarter-century. Beyond their traditional teaching and research functions, higher education institutions are increasingly viewed by policymakers and wider stakeholder communities as necessary motors of social and economic development. The novelty of such external engagements should not be exaggerated. Universities have never been the "ivory towers" so often decried by their critics. Historically entwined with the education of clerical and secular elites, universities have further often been key players in processes of nation-building. The institution's professional and vocational dimensions have a similarly well-established pedigree. Many prominent US research universities, for example, owe their origins to the Land-Grant Acts of the latter part of the nineteenth century, which donated federal lands to fund the creation of institutions that would "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life."

Yet, though universities have always been closely connected to the world beyond their gates, both the scope and the intensity of those connections have assumed a qualitatively different dimension in the recent period. Different forms of globalization have substantially transformed higher education institutions. On the one hand, the higher education sector has itself been reshaped by an "academic globalization," whereby once comfortably placed national institutions find themselves increasingly challenged by the growing presence of global rankings exercises and international benchmarking. On the other hand, "economic globalization" and the shift towards "knowledge economies" in post-industrial states have increasingly put pressure on universities to contribute to national competitiveness in global markets.

Commentators have advanced a plethora of institutional models to explain and guide this transformation. A rich and insightful literature has grown up around accounts of "the global university," "the global research university," "the new research university" and "the entrepreneurial university" – to name just a few.[1] For the present purpose, however, we will principally focus on the model of the "New Flagship University" as a means to frame a discussion of the development and potential future

reform of the University of Luxembourg. Clearly, no single model can capture the full contradictory complexity of the contemporary university, nor can it aspire to be perfectly applicable to any particular (national) case. Nevertheless, the relatively open-textured New Flagship model provides an interesting prism through which to view our own unique situation, seeking to build a new and expansive institutional model on the bedrock of a traditional academic core.

The New Flagship University

The concept of the New Flagship University is most prominently associated with the Berkeley higher education scholar John Aubrey Douglass.[2] In presenting the flagship model, Douglass is particularly concerned to present an "alternative narrative" to the "World Class University" (WCU). The WCU model, in Douglass' account, is concerned only with its place in global rankings, and as such is argued to have developed a distorted incentive structure that focuses only on a limited range of research activities at the expense of wider institutional missions. The New Flagship University, in contrast, strives for excellence across a broad spectrum of teaching, research and public service, and structures itself accordingly.

The idea of a flagship derives most immediately from the operation of many state university systems in the US. Flagship universities are those at the summit of tiered state systems, which typically encompass a range of institutions running from two-year community colleges through to the research-intensive flagships. Enjoying a privileged position within the system and endowed with (comparatively) greater resources, flagships are also generally expected to assume specific responsibilities as regards the overall shaping and development of the system. If originally rooted in the specific US context, Douglass is nonetheless careful to highlight the international reach and broad applicability of the model. Flagships may be identified in many national university systems, where one or more select institutions clearly assume leading and leadership roles, however grudgingly this might be accepted by those institutions in apparently less privileged positions.

Following Douglass, the New Flagship University is defined by seven characteristics. It is *comprehensive*, conducting research and teaching across a wide (though still selective) range of subjects. It is *broadly accessible*, recruiting students and staff from

across all segments of national society and internationally through selection processes based on clear meritocratic principles. The institution is engaged in *educating the next generation of leaders*. It enjoys *a high degree of autonomy* and has *a strong, evidence-based management capacity*. Finally, the New Flagship University is characterized by *a broad economic engagement* and by playing *a leading role in relation to the wider higher education system*.

Literally, of course, a flagship cannot exist in the absence of a convoy of other "ships" (other higher education institutions). This semantic quibble should not, however, obscure the essence of the model. As the sole public university in the country, vested with a broad remit, the roles required of a flagship university are in the University of Luxembourg's DNA. Our own institutional mission tightly corresponds to the model's vision of a comprehensive and accessible institution strongly engaged with its immediate environment and having the means to play a leading national and international role in education and innovation. The guiding principles set out in the University's ten-year strategic framework[3] – a research-mindset, an entrepreneurial spirit, openness to diversity, respectful collaboration, quality assurance and transparency – map easily on to the most important and dynamic characteristics of the New Flagship University. Given this fit, the central question is that of what can we learn from the New Flagship model as regards key issues of, respectively, institutional mission and institutional governance.

Institutional Mission

In his presentation of the New Flagship University, Douglass defines the mission of the institution in relatively broad terms, encompassing: the cultivation of a "productive learning and research environment," "the creation of new knowledge and preservation of the past," the "evaluation of society," "contributing to a more equitable and prosperous society" and the "advancement of individual human capabilities." Underlying these general (and overlapping) objectives, there is, however, a deeper mission, which is essentially that of seeking to balance the traditional roles of the university with the increasing external demands placed upon the institution. The overriding objective consequently becomes that of articulating an institutional mission that sustains and nourishes its distinctive "academic core," while

at the same time facilitating productive external engagements that build on and out from the core.

This institutional puzzle finds perhaps its most satisfactory formulation to date in the seminal work of Henry Etzkowitz on the "triple helix."[4] The triple helix puts forward a model of university-industry-government relations in terms intended to advance "mode 2 knowledge production," privileging the practical applications of scientific and scholarly work so as to facilitate technology transfer, the development of solutions addressing complex ("wicked") policy problems, etc. For Etzkowitz, the effective development of such relations requires comparatively deep forms of organizational learning across the three fields, in which each institution to some extent "takes the role of the other" – i.e. is prepared to draw lessons as to *how* things may done following a different organizational logic. Yet, though encouraging such potentially disruptive learning through the circulation of ideas and people, Etzkowitz also underlines the need for each of the institutions to maintain "their primary role and distinct identity." In the case of the university, this means that it must preserve its "fundamental role" as "an institution for the preservation and transmission of knowledge." This is all the more important as, for Etzkowitz, it is the university that remains the pivotal player in the triangle; it is the only organization primarily dedicated to knowledge production and, as such, provides the necessary creative matrix for the intrinsically unpredictable routes taken by genuine innovation.

The lessons as regards institutional mission are two-fold. A sterile opposition between the traditional and newer roles of the university is best avoided; institutions are better served by seeking to articulate their different missions in consistent and coherent terms. In seeking that articulation, however, the academic core that distinctively defines the university as an institution must be accorded primacy. First and foremost, universities must be and remain universities if they are to meet the full range of demands now placed upon them.

Institutional Governance

The complex articulation of these different roles focuses attention on the structures of institutional governance. Following Douglass, flagship universities typically have some form of "shared governance." This model implies a bicameral decision-making

structure in which authority is shared by a Board of Governors with overall responsibility for the management of the institution and a Senate or Academic Council more specifically charged with the primary responsibility for academic affairs (the exact nomenclature varies considerably). This is usually seen as the standard governance model in the Anglo-American university tradition. Governance arrangements of this type have also recently been adopted in many Continental European countries as well, generally as part of a process in which universities gain more autonomy relative to traditional forms of direct ministerial control, but with the creation of new mechanisms of accountability as a counterpart. More importantly in the present context, it is also this governance model that was adopted in the 2003 University Law creating the University of Luxembourg.

Although it has a much longer pedigree, the shared governance model rests on an underlying logic that fits well with the difficult, but crucial balancing acts required of a New Flagship University. The board, in this model, is responsible for the overall steering of the institution. It assumes the role (whether or not the term is used) of a "trustee," with ultimate responsibility for longer-term institutional viability and vitality. While there is considerable variation in the exact composition of boards, at a minimum a majority of members will be external to the institution. As such, the board is a crucial point of contact between the institution and its wider societal environment. It should act a two-way conduit, reciprocally providing for the effective representation of wider interests within the university and acting as an advocate for the university to the wider community.

The Senate or Academic Council is the other part of the governance equation. This is the embodiment of academic self-governance, with academic faculty members making up at a minimum the (large) majority of members. Under the ultimate authority of the board, this body typically will have the principal responsibility for teaching and academic programs (including admissions policy), while further having significant input as regards policies concerned with the employment of academic faculty in particular and the strategic development of the university more generally.

Consistent with the New Flagship model, governance structures of this type seek to strike a balance that is both protective of a distinctive academic core and open to

wider stakeholder inputs. The delicate nature of this balancing exercise is well captured in the statement of principles of institutional governance issued by the US Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities.[5] While noting that "colleges and universities have many of the characteristics of business enterprises," the statement goes on to underline the many salient differences between the two. Not least, it emphasizes that "the 'bottom line' of a college or university has more to do with human development and the creation and sharing of knowledge…than with simply balancing the books, as important as that annual goal is." This in turn finds expression in the governance model where "by virtue of their special mission and purpose in a pluralistic society, colleges and universities have a tradition of both academic freedom and constituent participation – commonly called 'shared governance' – that is strikingly different from that of business and more akin to other peer-review professions, such as law and medicine."

It is this participatory model, in the association's view, that contributes to "effective institutional governance." The participatory model also sustains the university as an institution defined by its critical vocation, engaged with both societal criticism ("speaking truth to power") and self-criticism (organizational learning). This critical vocation, in turn, is the wellspring of much of the contemporary university's powerful capacity for innovation.

Conclusion

If richly illuminating the dilemmas of the contemporary university, neither the New Flagship model nor other potentially applicable university models offer a complete and detailed blueprint for institutional governance. Rather, they provide us with a series of key questions to guide our deliberations as we consider how best to balance the competing demands made on our own institutions in more concrete contexts. In this vein, the set of questions suggested below, drawing on the flagship model, is offered as a potentially useful initial framework as we consider reform proposals for the UL over the coming months and years.

Does the overall governance model provide for the sustainable development of the institution's academic core, while also allowing it to respond effectively to wider societal and economic demands?

Does the governance model provide for effective decision-making?

Are decision-making procedures clear and efficient? Do decision-making procedures provide for a level of transparency consistent with the accountability requirements of a large public institution? Are delegations of responsibility similarly clear and accountable?

Does the governance model provide for the appropriate representation of internal and external stakeholder interests?

Do decision-making procedures respect the principles of academic self-governance as regards the broad conduct of teaching and research? Are external stakeholder interests given adequate voice and place in terms consistent with the maintenance of the overall institutional autonomy needed to carry out the university's diverse missions?

Does the operation of the governance model foster a "culture of deliberation"?

Does decision-making take place in a form (and forum) that encourages the informed consideration of differing policy and strategic choices? Is decision-making broadly inclusive, both facilitating better decisions (through better information) and a deeper sense of institutional identification (through greater "ownership" of the choices finally made)? Do decision-making procedures contribute to fostering the development of a wider policy community actively engaged in discussing higher education issues?

The questions set out above evidently concern any comprehensive research university. Relative to this general template our context is, however, in many respects a unique one. As a still young university, operating in the absence of an established national university tradition and with colleagues coming from an exceptionally wide range of different national higher education systems, the University of Luxembourg is perhaps uniquely challenged in defining a shared institutional culture. Yet, that challenge offers corresponding opportunities to define a unique, internationally resonant institutional model. After an initial period of rapid and markedly successful expansion, the recent "crises" experienced by the University and the current discussions surrounding the reform of the University Law represent a critical juncture in the institutional development process. As often in adolescence, a degree of turbulence and self-questioning is perhaps to be expected. It is also this period of (real

and imagined) crises that is typically formative of our longer-term identity and our sense of our place in the world.

[1] Robert Harmsen, "The Challenges of the Contemporary University," in Michel Margue (ed.), *Université du Luxembourg, 2003-2013* (Luxembourg: University of Luxembourg), pp. 14-21. This article and further publications from the recently completed "Global-Uni" research project may be accessed at: https://wwwen.uni.lu/recherche/flshase/identites_politiques_societes_espaces_ipse/research_instituts/institut_de_science_politique/global_uni

[2] John Aubrey Douglass (ed.), *The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global Ranking to National Relevancy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016). Douglass set out the key tenets of the model in an earlier 2014 paper available through the Centre for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California, Berkeley: http://www.cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/profiling-flagship-university-model-exploratory-proposal-changing-paradigm-ranking

[3] *Strategic Framework for the University of Luxembourg, 2016-2026*. Available at: https://wwwen.uni.lu/university/official_documents

[4] Henry Etzkowitz, *The Triple Helix: University-Industry-Government Innovation in Action* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).

[5] Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, *Statement on Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance*, 26 March 2010. Available at: https://www.agb.org/statements/2010/agb-statement-on-institutional-governance