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Redefinition of the relationships between academics and their university

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Abstract: This paper primarily deals with the relationships between academics and their university in European countries. The aim of this paper is therefore not to produce new results but provide a synthesis of the main trends that can be identified from the literature and then suggest what can be borrowed from sociological theories to highlight the on-going evolutions. The first section of the paper reviews the main results to be drawn from previous research on this issue and focuses on the management of academic careers and the management of academic activities at the university level. The second section suggests alternative interpretative frameworks to be borrowed from sociological theory in order to complete the already existing research and develop new perspectives to explain and interpret these changes in the relationships between academics and their institutions. Four perspectives are successively explored particularly useful here: a sociology of work; a labor market perspective; an analysis in terms of careers and trajectories and finally considerations about the traditional tension between organizations and professions.

Key words: academic profession, organizations and professions, sociology of work, work relationships, academic careers, academic work.

In his book on the third professionalism, Eliot Freidson (2001) clearly opposed three ideal-typical ways of performing activities: the market, the bureaucracy and the profession. As all ideal-types none of them exists in a pure form. On the one hand, academics share the five defining elements constitutive of a profession according to Freidson (2001: 180): “a body of knowledge and skill [...] based on abstract concepts and theories [...]; an occupationally controlled division of labor; [...] an occupationally controlled labor market [...]; an occupationally controlled training program [...]; an ideology serving some transcendent value and asserting devotion to doing good work than to economic reward. But on the other hand, there are not completely immune from forms of control linked either to rational-legal bureaucracy and free market.

Academics for instance always developed their activities in organizational structures, called universities. This mix between professional power and autonomy on the one hand and bureaucratic features on the other, led Henry Mintzberg (1979) to describe universities (but also hospitals or courts) as professional bureaucracies. The strengthened institutional autonomy provided to universities by recent reforms as well as the introduction of various managerial practices in these institutions led many authors to conclude to the victory, or at least the domination of managers over professionals (for instance, Deem, Hillyard and Reed 2007).

In parallel, some authors argue that the intensification of the relationships between universities and their stakeholders led academics to become more aware of but also more sensible to their “clients” and to be submitted to market forces. Authors like L. Leslie, S. Slaughter or G. Rhodes (Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) even described this evolution as the rise of academic capitalism.

The academic profession is thus simultaneously affected by bureaucratic and market forces because of important changes as state-university relationships are transformed (Bleiklie et al. this issue), new steering instruments are introduced (Reale this issue) and funding processes are redefined (Lepori, this issue) by public authorities, the EU aims at influencing the transformation of the European Higher Education and Research Area (Margheles, this issue), the institutional environment of universities is always more pluralistic (Frolich et al. this issue) and institutional strategies become more important (Enders et al. this issue). The aim of

this article is to identify issues to be tackled in order to understand the impact of these various levels of change and to suggest perspectives that could help studying and understanding them.

Because the TRUE project first focuses primarily on universities in Europe, this article will primarily deal with the case of European countries. The emphasis on higher education institutions in this project furthermore led me not to deal with the transformation of the academic profession in general but to shed light on the specific issue of the relationships between academics and their university¹. Two main dimensions seem of special interest at the university level: the management of academic careers and the management of academic activities. After identifying the changes these two dimensions are experiencing, some analytical perspectives will be suggested to understand them and also to somewhat renew the way we generally analyze the academic profession. The aim of this paper is therefore not to produce new results but provide a synthesis of the main trends that can be identified from the literature and then suggest what can be borrowed from sociological theories to highlight the on-going evolutions.

1. The transformed relationships between academics and their institution

This is a complex issue because, from a statutory point of view, the academic profession is by no means harmonized from one country to another. From the French situation where academics are civil servants depending on the states and managed through national procedures, to the US situation in non for profit private institutions where the faculty staff is employed and managed by the university, there is a whole range of cases and specificities varying from countries to countries but also among types of academics (full time *versus* part time, casual *versus* permanent staff, etc.). Furthermore, as shown by Alvin Gouldner (1958 and 1959), even with the same status individual strategies and feeling of affiliation may vary from one person to another, from the “cosmopolitans” who first of all feel committed to their discipline to the “locals” who have developed specific assets and are first of all true to their institution.

¹ This means that issues such as the relationships between academics and society, or the interactions between the academic profession and firms, or the role of academics in the policy making will not be addressed here.

Nevertheless and despite the high variety reflected by the eight countries under study, some common trends, raising similar questions can be derived from the existing literature. First, there is a clear trend towards the empowerment of universities as institutional actors. Second, and as a consequence, universities exercise more control over academic activities and academic careers. These common evolutions are not implemented the same way, at the same path, with the same intensity in these eight countries. The first conclusions published (Locke, Cummings and Fisher 2011) from the CAP study led in 18 countries (6 in Europe) clearly establish persisting variations and national specificities. Nevertheless, there is a common orientation in the many reforms and transformations described in recent publications on the European academic profession. Looking at these changes should not be understood as striving for a lost academic Golden Age, that probably never existed: the remarkable book of William Clark (2006) is there to recall us that rationalization in higher education began long before the end of the 20th century.

1.1. The empowerment of universities as institutional actors

Many authors writing on European universities converge to describe the organizational empowerment of these institutions (Krücken and Meier 2006; Musselin 2006; De Boer, Enders and Leisyte 2007; Whittlely 2009) and how they gained more maneuver in managing their staff. First, many competences and decisions previously managed by national or regional public authorities have been partially or completely transferred to higher education and research institutions². This impacted on the academic profession (Altbach 2000; Enders 2001) as the capacity in supervising staff and managing positions and academic careers (from recruitment to promotions and rewards) has been delegated to universities. The latter thus become responsible for closing, opening or redistributing positions, deciding whether positions should be opened for a senior or a junior, choosing whether an administrative position should be transformed into an academic one (or conversely), or transforming

² One could argue that this might better protect the academic profession from governmental interventions. Within the 20th century the interventions of the state on individual careers (mostly recruitment, and promotions) as well as the direct control over the content of academic activities considerably decreased. But until recently public authorities remained active in defining the scope of the professions (number of positions for instance) and its composition (how many historians, physicists, etc.). Such decisions are now in the hands of most European universities.

permanent positions into casual posts. The introduction of global budgets further opened opportunities for decisions and choices at the university level and allow for the transformation of payroll into operating budgets, and sometimes conversely, according to the institutional strategies of each university.

A further important transformation concerns the formal status of the academic staff. In Austria for instance, the newly recruited professors no more are civil servants (i.e. employed by the State) but are recruited on private contracts and thus employees of their institution. France is another interesting example for this: the new act of 2007, did not change the status of the French university professors but allows universities to recruit (within certain limits) academic and administrative staff on “public contracts”, i.e. long term or time limited contracts run by the university but not providing a status of civil servants. For this category of staff, universities can offer salaries or bonuses which are not dependent on the national salary scales and impose teaching duties that are different (higher) than for the civil servants.

In many countries (especially in Continental Europe) one observes the transformation of universities into internal labor markets instead of having a national vocational labor market (Musselin 2005). University leaders introduce merit-based salaries, contracts by objectives, advancement rules etc. and increase their influence over decisions pertaining to the development of academic careers, their level of incomes and the reward system.

At the same time, the increasing role of universities in the determination and the implementation of their own strategies, in the management of their budgets, their scientific policy and training programs, made them more present, more important and less escapable to their own members than in the past. Ignoring one’s institution strategy is more difficult: the level of interactions between each academic and his/her own university is simultaneously higher and more constraining. While I used to describe French universities as hosting-institutions not asking a lot from academics to which they did not offer a lot either (Musselin 2000 [2001]), this is less and less the case and formal rules (such as being affiliated to a research unit of his/her university), technical devices (such as information systems), new procedures (as the allocation of research budget by the academic council of the university and no more by the ministry) tightened up the relationships between each French academic and his/her institution. The same holds true in countries where these relationships were already less loose.

As a result and by many respects, the relationships between academics and their institution are redefined and this directly affects the management of careers and the management of academic work (Barrier 2010).

1.2. The management of careers

The shift in the management of careers can be first of all characterized by an increase in formalization and rationalization. Requirements to get access to the academic profession are more standardized than some years ago. When one looks at job announcement it is clear that the compulsory requirements as well as the information to include in the application files are expanding and more precise. In a recent research led on French academics and comparing their careers from the mid-seventies to now, we also observed (Musselin, Pigeyre and Sabatier 2011) profound transformations in the trajectories followed by those who succeeded in getting a position: their trajectories are more standardized (following the same steps) and more homogeneous (outliers with atypical trajectories are rarer). Simultaneously hiring and promotion procedures have been developed. Interviews and seminars during which the candidates present their research (what is called “job talks” in the USA) are becoming the common norm in many countries; the composition of the hiring committee must follow some specific requirements in some countries, the direction for human resources might be involved in the process in some universities, letters of recommendation might be required etc. The very informal, sometimes very interpersonal and local arrangements that might have prevailed before are now criticized and replaced by more formalized, more (apparently) transparent, more intensive processes³.

The types of candidates looked for also evolve. In most European countries the best candidate was often a former PhD student and a national citizen. Even if such practices have not disappeared they have become associated with notions with negative meanings such as “collusion”, “inbreeding”, “localism”, (Godechot and Louvet 2008; Horta et al. 2011), etc. By

³ In the highly competitive call launched in Germany among universities to identify a small number (no more than 12) of institutions that will receive a large amount of resources (The “Exzellenzinitiative”), competing universities are expected to show that they improved their recruitment process by reducing its length, enlarging their search to international outreach, avoid “old boys” networking, promote women etc.

contrast, getting international staff, hiring outside the traditional circles is considered as an evidence for performance, reputation and quality (if not excellence).

A further phenomenon concerns the introduction of regular appraisal of the tasks achieved by academics once recruited. In most UK universities have to provide an annual report but the most powerful instrument is the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise or was as it is currently transformed into REF, Research Excellence Framework). Each department, about every five years, has to decide which of its members will be presented as “research active” and which not. In Germany, the introduction of contracts by objectives gives the possibility to each university to regularly assess individual performance. In France, the 2009 decree on academics foresees an individual assessment of all academics every four years, that should be led by a national council (the CNU, Conseil national des universités). Combined in many countries with regular assessment of teaching, it leads to more managerial control over academics (even if evaluations largely remain in the hands of the peers, cf. Musselin 2011), and a tighter link between evaluations, promotions and rewards. In the United Kingdom for instance, there is clearly the emergence of two career paths related to the categorization (or not) as “research active” for the RAE, one leading to positions where teaching prevails and the other to positions where research prevails.

The stronger and again more formalized⁴ differentiation introduced among academics might in some countries impact on income policies, either through the introduction of bonuses differently rewarding different types of investments or the abandon of national salary scales for individually negotiated salaries. More globally, there is a trend toward a more individual management of academic careers replacing the more collective treatment of a supposedly homogeneous group. The four-year regular evaluation of each French academics that is expected (but not yet implemented) after the 2007 act is for instance seen by reformers as an information that university presidents could use in order to individually negotiate the teaching and research duties of each member of their staff.

⁴ In the academic profession the segmentation between those more involved in teaching and those more involved in research probably always existed but they were no distinct categories and no formalized labeling of it.

Finally this is resulting in the expansion, empowerment and diversification of university human resources department. As shown by Simon Paye (2011) for the British institutions, the size, the role and missions of these departments have moved from small units providing administrative tasks to larger entity with more qualified personal and providing specific services such as career development, coaching, etc. The same is happening in French universities after the transfer of the payroll to these institutions and in many other countries where the empowerment of universities led to the transformation of their administration and in particular of their human resources departments. The latter thus become more and more involved in the management of careers first because they develop, formalize and stabilize the procedures and second because they sometimes might participate or contribute to the decisions made.

1.3. The management of academic work.

A first consequence of the empowerment of universities as institutional actors deals with the reduced autonomy of academics in the division of labor and the allocation of tasks⁵. Precisely measuring the scope of this evolution is very difficult as we rarely have studies on that aspect in the past and we thus can only rely on the perceptions of interviewed academics. But, many studies observe the development of devices or procedures that have been introduced. All deal with a more structured organization and steering of the way academic work is achieved, i.e. a less occupationally controlled division of labor to use Freidson's words.

The expansion of casual positions for instance is not only a question of quantity or percentages in relation with tenure jobs (even if this is of course a crucial matter for young academics). It also has to do with the content of the contracts and the tasks allocated to these academics. While such positions less than before correspond to a transitory situation before a permanent position is available (Musselin, Pigeyre and Sabatier 2011), they also become more specialized. The individuals recruited on a time-limited contract will less and less be

⁵ We are not dealing here with the content of academic work, i.e. with what they teach or what their research is concerned with, but with the division of labor (who is doing what activity and who decided this person will achieve this task, him/her-self or someone else). Content is of course a crucial issue but will go far beyond the scope of this paper (changing relationships between academics and universities) and include relations to society, to economic partners, public policies on science, etc.

considered as a not yet tenured academic achieving teaching and research but more as a labor force recruited to produce either research or teaching. What has to be taught or researched will also be dependant on the needs of the recruiting team and not on the choice of casual faculty. This is a well-known phenomenon that has expanded over the last years.

But this trend also affects the permanent staff. The main transformation there is probably not the specialization of some on teaching, others on research, and still some others sharing their time between these two activities – this specialization probably always existed – but first the formal recognition of these varying levels of implication and their stabilization into specific labeled positions (teaching professorship or research professorship) and second the matching process between individuals and such positions. While before each individual was adjusting his/her tasks to his/her preferences (notwithstanding the respect of some rules and constraints⁶), university managers (in the United Kingdom mainly, but also in Germany and in the Netherlands) have developed positions explicitly naming this specialization, or promoted procedures leading to a distinction between research active staff and others. All this makes specialization more visible, less individually managed, more dependent on organizational control and more formalized.

This reduction in the autonomy of organizing one's activity to one's discretion is also noticeable about the negotiation of the tasks to be achieved (Musselin and Becquet 2008). In Germany, the introduction of individual contracts and objectives set during the recruitment process is a good example for that. Again this is characterized by more formalization (from implicit to written contracts of objectives), evaluation procedures and an increased role of university managers in the negotiation.

As observed by many authors (Henkel 2000; Barrier 2011; Jouvenet 2011) academic values of academics are not directly affected by this evolution but the way academic activities are achieved is by contrast transformed because of the rationalization, formalization and technical equipment of academic tasks. Research projects provide very good evidence of this. Applications have to be written according to templates designed by the funding bodies; various tools (time-sheet, reporting, work packages, etc.) aim at organizing and tracing the

⁶ For instance the level of teaching duties according to national regulation or the often vague description of tasks related to a specific status.

development and realization of these projects; deliverables and dates to respect to deliver are set from the beginning.

It would be wrong to reduce this evolution to research: teaching is also experiencing the same transformation with the introduction of new technologies. The same class can be repeated at length thanks to videoconferences, on-line courses are produced according to a more industrial production system involving cooperation with technical services and reducing (not suppressing) the individual and craft character of a “classical” class.

In parallel to the traditional definition of academic activities and positions, there is also a trend towards the emergence of new functions held by new professionals having an academic background and achieving tasks at the frontier between administrative and scientific activities: rewriting research project, working on technological platforms or providing support in technology transfer offices. The classical divide between academia and administration is thus blurred and new professional groups are developing and transforming universities into multi-professional organizations (Whitchurch 2012).

The new division of labor is also observable with the emergence of a new category: the academic managers, i.e. academics who progressively specialize into administrative and management missions. As a group of professionals, academics were used to run their own institution and self-governance is a traditional feature of universities: usually (although not always), rectors/presidents, deans, heads of department are academics and academics are also largely represented in the university deliberative bodies. This collegial form of government is nevertheless challenged by the development of managerial practices, reforms in university governance⁷ and the transformation of the relationships between universities and academics. Diverse studies conclude to a weakening of the academic self governance (among many: Gumport 2000; McNay 2007; Schimank and Lange 2009), and to the reinforcement of the executive power *vis-à-vis* a bottom-up collegial style of decision-making (Lazega and Watterbled 2010). But this also led to the professionalization and specialization of some academics in elected or appointed functions. Because the later are more demanding in time and competences than before (largely because of the delegation of new managerial responsibilities to universities), they often have to be full time active as managers, are more

⁷ For instance those reducing the role of the deliberative bodies.

and more oriented towards these positions because of their managerial dispositions or inclination rather than for their scientific reputation and often have a hard time coming back to the situation of “simple” academic.

Therefore the division of labor seems more established than before and less “vocationally autonomous” but the transgression of the frontiers from one segment to another also seems more difficult to achieve. To be more precise, some transitions seem possible (from a research oriented job to a managerial position) while others seem rare (from a teaching oriented job to a research oriented one, cf. Paye 2011).

2. Analytical framework and theoretical perspectives

Based on the main conclusions led by recent work on the academic profession in Europe, we identified some major trends in the transformation of the relationships between academics and universities in the first part of this paper and argued that they are linked to the increased institutional autonomy of universities. One of the objectives of the TRUE project is to compare how deeply these evolutions developed within universities in different countries and how/whether academics were concretely impacted. A further objective is to also to explain and interpret these changes and our claim here is that to reach this goal, we should borrow interpretative frameworks from sociological theory. Four perspectives seem particularly useful here: a sociology of work; an labor market perspective; an analysis in terms of careers and trajectories and finally a revisited exploration of the relationships between professions and organizations. The first one might help understanding the transformations in the management academic work; the second and the third ones, the transformations in the management of careers; and the last one how to address the tension between profession and organization which is broader perspective involved in the transformations of the relationships between the academic profession and universities.

2.1. Sociology of academic work: Division of work / Individuation /Integration /Regulation

As stressed in the first part of the paper the on-going evolutions aimed at affecting the division of labor that is a classical issue in the sociology of work. Because of the study of

academics as a profession (Merton (1972 [1942]) and of the focus on scientific activities as a networking process to enroll other actors (Latour 1987), academic activities have rarely been studied with the perspective of the sociology of work. Nevertheless, the evolutions mentioned above speak in favor of this approach. As already argued in a previous publication (Musselin 2008), among the many concepts available in this branch of sociology, it could be helpful to look at the transformation of academic activities with the four notions suggested by the French sociologist of work Michel Lallement (2007).

The first one is the notion of “di-vision”, i.e. “the way segmentations with cognitive virtue are built, last and are destroyed”, “the principles which structures the division of work” and “the criteria determining hierarchies within the productive spaces” (Lallement 2007: 28-29, my translation). It could be very helpful to understand the evolution of the division of work among the profession (and the new segments (Bucher and Strauss 1961) it creates) resulting from the increased managerial capacity of university and suggests to be also attentive to the cognitive transformations (in the conceptions of the professions and its activities) it provokes.

The second notion is “Individuation”, i.e. the process “at the crossroad of the policies producing a diffraction of the social” (Lallement 2007: 29, my translation). This could help understanding the processes of increased competition among academics that is favored by the introduction of individual assessment and the valorization of individual performance within universities. Status and disciplines no longer are the only distinctive features organizing the academic profession, because processes of “singularizing” are emerging in order to differentiate among individuals with the same status and belonging to the same discipline. Furthermore, individuation increases as information available on individual academics are more and more accessible to university leaders but also to society at large through Internet reputation builders such as Google scholar or Public or Perish.

The paradox of the current transformations is that competition is as fostered as collective and cooperative work. Therefore the third notion suggested by M. Lallement is “integration”. In the case of universities, it is of course to be understood as vertical (more hierarchy, more control, more management), but also as horizontally: project-based research, decentralized competencies, stress on interdisciplinarity, all plea for more coordination and cooperation among peers. Finally integration should be considered in the sense of feeling of affiliation: academics are traditionally expected to feel closer to their discipline than to their institution

but we know that they are strong international variations about this (Altbach 1996). The recent book published on the academic profession in 18 countries (Locke, Cummings and Fisher, 2011: 3) shows that “academics have come to distance themselves from their departmental and institutional homes” while their disciplinary tie is more important.

Finally, we should be attentive to the notion of “regulation”, i.e. at the “continuous movement of creation, re-composition and destruction of rules” (Lallement 2007: 31, my translation). This notion and the related notions of regulation of control (developed by the university hierarchy), autonomous regulation (at the level of the professional workers) and joint regulation (as the result of the two processes) developed by Jean-Daniel Reynaud (1997) would be very useful to understand the redefinition of the balance between professional and institutional power and how this is translated into new rules and processes in higher education institutions.

2.2. *Analysis of academic labor markets*

Nevertheless, one can not look at the transformation of the academic profession only through the transformation of academic activities. As mentioned above, academic careers and the management of academics are also affected. As a result we need to further develop our understanding of academic labor markets on the one hand and change on academic trajectories on the other. This will be successively developed in this point and in the next one, starting with academic labor markets.

One characteristic of academic labor markets is that they are still rather national. First even if international recruitments are increasing, international hiring is still rather rare in many countries. Second the rules, status, procedures, practices deployed on these labor markets are still rather different from one country to another. This means that the context in which the evolutions mentioned above are occurring is not the same in the eight countries under study.

One possible entry point to highlight the dynamics on which each national labor market relies consists of identifying mechanisms at work in hiring and career management central and shared by all national labor markets (thus enabling comparison). In a recent book (Musselin 2009 [2005]) I suggested four of these mechanisms.

The first one is the mechanism of selection. Two main ways of selecting candidates constitute the endpoints on a continuum. In one, recruiters proceed by pitting candidates are competing one against another and the recruiters (or those responsible for promotions) are choosing “the best.” At the other end of the spectrum, candidates are selected if they meet previously specified requirements. In this case – such as the tenure process in the US – the candidate is competing against himself or herself.

The second mechanism concerns the length of time and role of the phase preceding tenure. Duration affects average age at which one obtains lifelong employment (and consequently the ratio of fixed-time contract staff to tenured staff) but should be considered in connection with the role assigned to that period. On the one hand, this period consists of learning in the framework of a master-student relationship with hierarchical relationships between junior and seniors; on the other, at the opposite, it serves to the gradual revelation of skills on the job. And relations between seniors and juniors are much more egalitarian. Consequently, length and role of the pre-permanent period involve both different expectations and demands of candidates and different types of work organization.

The third mechanism corresponds to the relation between internal and external markets on each academic labor market (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Their relative weight varies greatly from one country to another. In some countries, career advancement is organized as an internal process and teaching staff management instruments are likewise internal, whereas in others academics can only advance in their career by changing universities.

The fourth and last mechanism is the determination of the “price” of academics and the “price” range within a given country, i.e. the degree of differentiation between the less and the best paid among a given discipline, between disciplines, from one institution to another.

A second possible entry on academic labor markets consists of combining these different mechanisms to build a typology of countries. In a paper published with Jürgen Enders (Enders and Musselin 2008), we thus identified three different models. First the tenure model, that is typical of the US system, is based on the “up or out” system (O’Flaherty and Siow 1992 and 1995): only some young doctors will be offered tenure-track positions, i.e. time-limited posts; after a certain period of time (mostly 6 years), a tenure procedure is launched in order to

decide whether he/she will be offered a tenured position. We called the second model the “survivor” model. It is typical for countries where the chair-system tradition is strong. Up to the 2001 reforms, it was therefore characteristic for Germany. Only those overcoming the long period of selection and competitions against many other candidates had a chance to survive and become professors and tenured. The third model can be described as a “protective pyramid” and is still typical for many public systems of higher education. The access to a permanent position intervenes quite early after a highly selective competition. There then exist different categories of permanent positions organized in a hierarchical way with promotional procedures allowing some to go from one category to another, following a vacancy chains pattern.

All of these models have experienced severe changes and hybridization over the last years because the four mechanisms described above evolved. One of the aims of the TRUE research program is certainly to report on those transformations and to update such a typology in Europe.

2.3. *Sociology of careers/trajectories*

Analyzing academic labor markets is only one of the two sides of the coin. It provides information about the transformation of the national settings but further work is required in order to understand how individual careers are impacted by these changes.

Up to now, two rather contradictory conclusions can be found on this point. For some (for instance, Baruch and Hall 2004; Kaulisch and Enders 2005), many aspects in the transformation of the academic profession are reflecting a trend towards more boundaryless careers in academia: the increase in casual staff, a project-based organization of work, multi portfolio affiliations, increased institutional and geographical mobility, horizontal careers, etc. document such a conclusion. Institutional rules seem less important than the individual construction of career.

For others, there is on the contrary a shift towards more organizational careers and again many elements speak in favor of this conclusion: those acceding to academic permanent positions have to follow more and more standardized programs (proposed by doctoral

schools), procedure of access are more and more formalized, the determinants for promotion are increasingly stabilized, the relationships between academics and the institution gets closer to a employer-employee relationship, etc. Therefore the development of academic trajectories depends less on individuals than on the institutions where he/she works.

One hypothesis developed by TRUE is the segmentation of the academic profession into different groups, some of which experiencing boundaryless careers and other more organizational ones. Our guess is that the first group is rather heterogeneous and counts most of the casual staff on the one hand and academic stars on the other, while in the second the permanent and local (in the meaning of Gouldner 1958 and 1959) is concerned. Comparing different categories of academic staff in different institution could bring some insights about this hypothesis but also provide answers to questions like: what are the principles for this differentiation? What are the characteristics of the two segments? Is it possible to shift from one to another? When and how does the segmentation happen?

This would probably lead to overcoming the traditional oppositions between organizational/boundaryless or objective/subjective careers.

2.4. Links between forms of organizations and forms of labor markets

A strong theoretical hypothesis in the TRUE project is that there exists a relationship between specific forms of organization of work and specific forms of labor markets. Pierre François and Christine Musselin (2011) suggest a development of this hypothesis in a paper comparing musicians and academics. They show how specific organizational characteristics (division of work, the forms of control exercised over the workers, horizontal relationships and the degree of functional interdependency among workers, the sense of belonging to the organization and the commitment to its goals) are associated with specific characteristics of the labor markets (the competitive logics in which employers are engaged in order to attract their employees, the competitive logics in which employees are involved in order to be sorted out by their employers, the matching devices (or hiring processes) allowing employers to meet their employees and the nature of the exchange resulting from the match between employers and employees).

Because academic work and academic careers are simultaneously evolving at the institutional level, higher education institutions provide very interesting situations to understand how changes in the academic labor market can be related to or affect the organization of academic work but also to observe whether new types of match are emerging through the on-going evolution.

Conclusion

The main argument we developed in this article is that the relationships between academics and universities have been profoundly affected by the recent reforms undergone by higher education systems. More precisely, relying on recent publications, we looked at the transformation in the balance between academic activities in terms of division of academic labor, assessment of performance, professional autonomy, etc. We also looked at the evolution of the academic labor markets because of the emergence of new status, more regulated internal labor markets, human resources management etc.

But identifying these changes is not enough and the aim of the TRUE research program clearly is twofold. First, universities are the entry point for a large part of the studies led for TRUE, in order to observe how the changes described in this paper are concretely implemented and the effective effects they have. Second, the project is expected to understand and interpret these evolutions.

This paper therefore suggests some analytical perspectives and questions that could help achieving this second goal. Four approaches were proposed. First adopting a sociology of academic work and thus studying academic activities as other activities are studied. Second, exploring the specific mechanisms that are common to all academic labor markets and observing how they evolve with the recent reforms. Third linking this transformation of academic labor markets with its impact on academic careers. Fourth, better understanding how change in the organization of work affects change in labor markets and reciprocally, thus bringing organizations and professions together rather than treating them separately or in opposition.

Two main insights can be expected from the mobilization of perspectives brought from sociological theories. First we expect being able to revisit and nourish the classical debate on professions and organizations. Looking at it through the lens of the relationships between professionals and their organizations suggests looking at employment relationships, division of labor, matching between positions and individuals, organization of work, and at how these different mechanisms interact and interfere one on another.

Second, a comparison with the transformations of other productive sectors for which analysts use the same perspectives to study evolutions in division of labor, labor markets or work relationships could be led. Beyond the specificity of the empirical results related to a peculiar sector, the identification of common or, on the contrary, of very different mechanisms among diverse sectors may allow for more general conclusions on the transformation of work and labor in our societies.

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