

Chapter 11

Between Academic Self– Governance and State Control: The Case of the University of Ljubljana

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the model of university governance at the University of Ljubljana. Basic information on the university and its history is given at the beginning. The chapter continues with the description of the university governing bodies and procedures, and with the national system of higher education governance which significantly shapes the institutional governance. The presentation is based on the University of Ljubljana and national documents, and on the author's introspection being rector of the university in the period 2013–2017. Referring to some recent scientific publications, the chapter concludes with the discussion on the governing dilemmas and responses to the existing University of Ljubljana governance model which may be described as an amalgam where the primary tension exists between academic self-governance and the state-centered elements. This tension could be expressed as a permanent struggle for greater autonomy within the university and for control of the university by the state and other external stakeholders.

ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA

In order to understand the specifics of the University of Ljubljana's governance, it should be placed in a historical and organizational context. The University of Ljubljana was founded in 1919 as the first Slovenian university to introduce teaching in the Slovenian language. This was made possible by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which had previously opposed such a project, and despite the opinion of the Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade that Ljubljana did not need a university.

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The University of Ljubljana was the only Slovenian university for more than five decades and represented the center of research and higher education in the country. Its main missions were to nurture basic research, educate young generations, and contribute to strengthening the national identity. Initially composed of just five departments (named faculties), it has grown to become a comprehensive university covering all fields of study, today entailing 23 faculties and 3 art academies. It retains its leading position in the country with the best international rankings, encompassing around half the research and half the higher education area. It has 39,000 students, about 11 percent of whom come from outside Slovenia, and nearly 6,000 employees (UL Home Page, 2018).

The University of Ljubljana was established as a public institution. It was organized along the lines of a traditional model with an accent on collegial governance. During the time of socialism (1945–1991), the Communist Party exerted its influence and control over the university. The Party's deepest interference in organizational and academic issues came in the 1970s when the student unrests that erupted across Western Europe penetrated Yugoslavia. The Party elite was afraid of a strong university that might incubate new ideas among a united and growing student body. A new organizational model was therefore introduced under which every faculty was established as a separate legal entity. The central university bodies lost their power at the expense of the faculties and the university as a whole developed quite a loose structure. The same happened with the student organization (Mihevc, 2008). In addition, a new public university was established in Maribor in an attempt to prevent an excessive concentration of academics and students in Ljubljana. The official justification for this was that smaller units would facilitate more effective direct democracy according to the self-management model then being practiced in all spheres of life in Yugoslavia (Simmie & Dekleva, 1991).

The governance model of the 1970s was abolished in the early 1990s when Slovenia gained its independence and started its transition to a political democracy and a market economy. The University of Ljubljana intensified its communication with international institutions such as the European University Association, which evaluated its organizational model twice. As a consequence, the University of Ljubljana established a strategy of stepwise re-integration, while also trying to avoid excessive levels of centralization. Centralization and integration are considered to be two different modes of organization, although they somewhat overlap. Unlike the centralization of power at the university level, integration retains a significant share of power at the overall faculty level achieved by adopting a soft approach to working towards attaining shared goals.

This introduction should help readers understand the University of Ljubljana's present governance model, which will be presented in the following pages on two levels: institutional (the university) and national.

INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE

The model of governance implemented at the University of Ljubljana may be described as an amalgam, with an accent on stakeholders and academic staff (collegial) model elements (Trakman, 2008). It occurs on two levels: central (university) and departmental (faculty) (UL, 2017). The main governing bodies on each level are senates, governing boards and student councils. The top executive bodies at university level are the rector and secretary general and, at the faculty level, the dean and faculty secretary. An organizational peculiarity of the University of Ljubljana is that the faculties hold dual legal statuses.

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