

Relations between the State and the universities in Belgium (Flemish Community)

HUMANE Seminar – Trieste 8 – 9 October 2010



Vrije Universiteit Brussel

A simplified structure of the Belgian State

1 federal state (the whole territory)

3 regions

Flemish (dark blue)

Walloon (red and green)

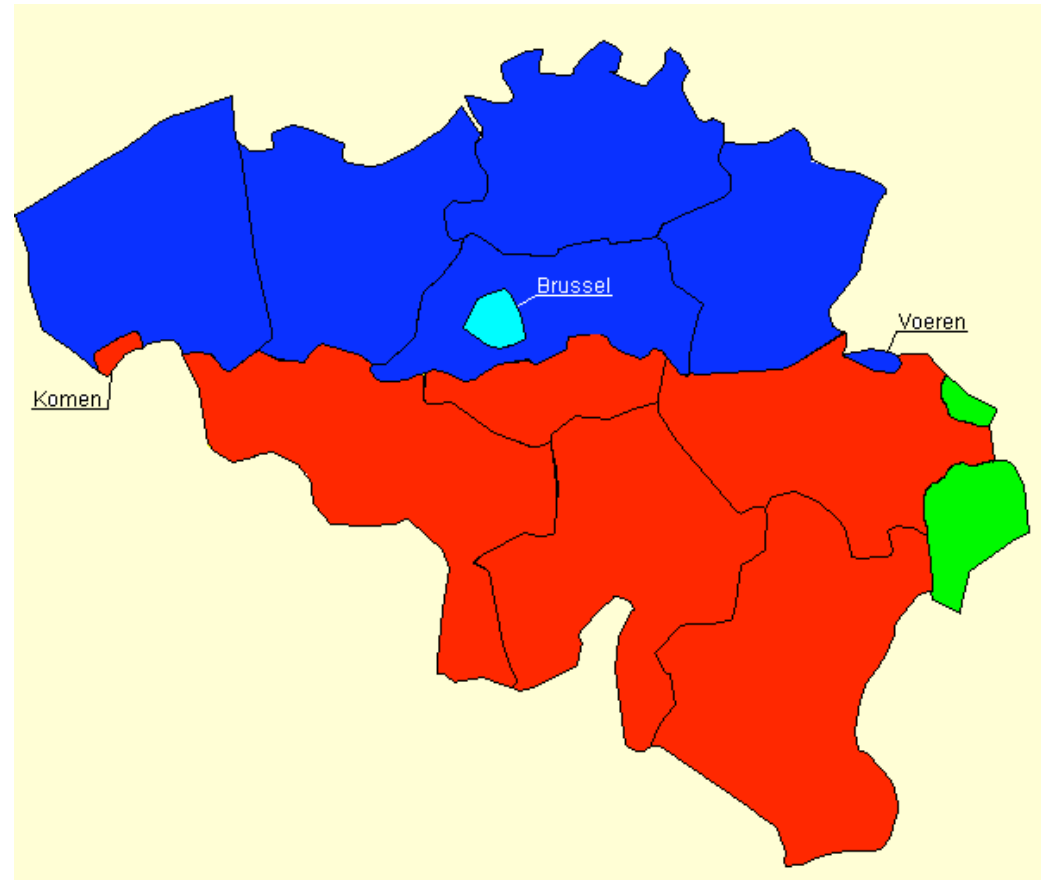
Brussels (light blue)

3 communities

Flemish (dark and light blue)

French speaking (red and light blue)

German speaking (green)



Belgian governments

Federal, regional and community governments

- * Communities

- based on language
- competences attached to the persons

- * Regions

- based on territory
- competences attached to this territory

'Only' six governments

Important for us: education is competence of the communities

Belgian educational model (in general) (1)

- * freedom of education: unlimited right of initiative to set up schools
- * 100% subsidies by the State if preconditions are fulfilled
- * diploma requirements, recruitment and wage conditions for personnel set by the State
- * the school is the employer but...
 - most belong to a network (catholic, governmental,...)
 - little or no possibility of differentiated payment

Belgian educational model (in general) (2)

- * inspection of learning programmes and personnel by inspection services of the networks
- * automatic civil recognition of the diploma's handed out by the schools (no State exams such as baccalaureate)

Belgian educational model (in general) (3)

Conclusion

a large degree of autonomy to develop an own pedagogical project but... within a rather strict framework laid down by the State

Flemish universities

Six universities for approximately 6,5 million inhabitants

with together three different legal statutes

- one is a public community (formerly State) university

(board formed by the government that decides about the role and the competences)

- two are autonomous public universities

(the principles of composition and competences of the board laid down by decree but further to be filled in freely by the institute)

- three (one very small!) are free universities

(composition and competences of the board decided and filled in freely by the institute)

Educational model of the Flemish universities (1)

* unlimited right of initiative to establish a university: yes but... in practice many restrictions (tendency towards less rather than more universities + severe control and accreditation system)

* subsidized: yes but... within a legalized financing model based on number of students and other performance indicators and a quality control

* personnel: diploma requirements and wage scales set by the government. Recruitment conditions, career development,... are the sole competence of the university as employer

* no inspections but... visitations

* automatic civil recognition of diploma's when the university is accredited for the course

Educational model of the Flemish universities (2)

Comparison with general model:

Less strict framework, more autonomy but... on the other hand control on legality (commissioner of the government, inspector Ministry of Finance, Court of Accounts) and heavy reporting obligations

A double evolution (1)

a) direct share of “the State” in the income of the universities

- till the end of the 80'ies 80%
- now 50% and even lower in KULeuven

* *reason*: rise of research money with more freedom to spend

* *direct consequence*: half the personnel no longer under compelling stipulations of personnel under state budget although...

* *indirect consequence*: budget driven management of external resources -> more attention for effectiveness -> more result driven HR-management

* *challenge*: developing a career policy for researchers at once financially feasible but also attractive (recruitment and retention) under the circumstances a responsibility of each university independantly

* *... but*: in the framework of the “European charter of the researcher” pressure from the authorities (European and national) to implement and respect minimum rules and facilitate international mobility

A double evolution (2)

b) Dilution of rules concerning personnel paid with government money

* *till 1991*: strict central ruling concerning recruitment, wages, careers of academic personnel (professors, assistants, researchers) as well for public as for free universities. VUB also for ATP, KULeuven less strict for the last category

Difference in recruitment of professors

- free universities: completely free as long rules were respected
- "State" universities: recruitment competence of the Minister who chooses between three candidates presented by the university

* from 1991: systematic dilution of central ruling.

- a framework for all universities remains (e.g. scales).
- government obliges universities to draw up procedures themselves
- on the other hand again control by commissioner of the government, board of commissioners, year reports and other reporting obligations

A double evolution (3)

Consequences

1. not less rules but own rules. Nevertheless large convergence of rules amongst the different universities

2. remaining vertical steering, be it from a greater distance. Less ex ante (rules), more ex post (very extensive and detailed year reports, many other reports).

(example: fund for education(of personnel) requires extensive reporting for a matching fund of less than 0,1% of the budget)

Also evaluations by the university itself, external quality assessments of teaching and research (visitations, accreditation and recognition mechanisms)

Expectations for the near future

1. the “turning over” (of colleges/polytechnics into the universities) will enlarge and make clearer again the difference between the remaining colleges and universities. Regulation and form of management of the colleges will remain closer to those of compulsory education. Universities will keep their acquired autonomy en will be made more responsible: e.g. longer flow through of students -> negative impact on financing
2. making more responsible -> more budget driven management and effectiveness thinking also in spending of government money
3. rising pressure of international competition + attraction and retention of top personnel + need for competences scarce on the labour market -> more flexible labour conditions and more differentiated payroll
4. a thorough debate on the relation between autonomy and the accountability on the use of public money is inevitable

Two questions

1. is the actual vertical steering from a distance in fact efficient and effective?

The government has its doubts: over enquiring and rising "planlast" are recognized; excess of punctual and detailed information on activities without insight in results and performance, compulsory perception... whether perceived as good or bad: there is a growing diversity of the institutions that is more and more difficult to grab within a "uniform ruling".

2. do horizontal steering on the basis of strategic plans (profile, mission, strengths and weaknesses analyses, aims and performance indicators) **and contractual financing** (management agreements) on the basis of the strategic plan and the realizations **offer adequate guarantees for a fair division of taxpayers money** or does it promote the duality between rich and poor universities and therefore also advances this duality in society