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Reconfiguring Power in Portuguese Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyse the shift in the internal power balance between managerial and academic self-governance as reflected in the perceptions of teaching and non-teaching staff on the tendencies, decision-making processes and actor's roles in these processes. The empirical data used in this paper were gathered on the basis of an on-line survey, distributed throughout 2014 and 2015 in all Portuguese higher education institutions. Responses were interpreted taking into account the influence of governance

narratives on the development of *boardism*, i.e., a decrease of academic self-governance reflecting the decline of the power of teaching staff in HEIs' governance; an increase of managerial governance as reflected in the reinforcement of hierarchies and organisational top-down decision-making; and the influence of external stakeholders. The analysis contributes to dig into the complexity of the governance arrangements challenging the prevailing influence of the NPM governance narrative while underlining the internal dynamics of HEIs, where Portuguese teaching staff continue to play a key role.

Keywords: governance; decision-making power; *boardism*

Reconfiguración de poder en la educación superior en Portugal

Resumen: El propósito de este artículo es analizar los cambios en el equilibrio de poder interna entre la administración y el poder académico, reflejados en las percepciones de los profesores y personal no docente de las instituciones portuguesas de educación superior sobre las tendencias, los procesos de toma de decisiones y el papel de los actores en esos procesos. Los datos empíricos utilizados en este estudio fueron recogidos a través de una encuesta en línea, distribuidos en 2014 y 2015, en todas las instituciones portuguesas de educación superior. Las respuestas fueron interpretadas teniendo en cuenta la influencia de las narrativas de la gobernanza en el desarrollo del *boardismo*, o sea, la disminución de la gobernanza académica, reflejando la disminución del poder de los docentes en la gobernanza de las instituciones de educación superior; el aumento del poder de la gestión, reflejado en el refuerzo de jerarquías y en la toma de decisiones organizacionales de arriba abajo; y la influencia de los *stakeholders* externos. El análisis contribuye a profundizar el conocimiento sobre las configuraciones de la gobernanza en la educación superior, desafiando la influencia predominante de la narrativa de la Nueva Gestión Pública, mientras enfatiza la dinámica interna de las instituciones de educación superior, donde el cuerpo docente sigue desempeñando un papel fundamental en la gestión y gobernanza.

Palabras-clave: gobernanza; poder de toma de decisión; *boardismo*

Reconfigurando o poder no ensino superior em Portugal

Resumo: O objetivo deste artigo é analisar as mudanças nos equilíbrios de poder interno entre o poder da gestão e o poder da governação académica, refletidas nas percepções dos docentes e não-docentes das instituições de ensino superior portuguesas sobre as tendências, processos de tomada de decisão e o papel dos atores nesses processos. Os dados empíricos utilizados neste trabalho foram recolhidos com base num inquérito online, distribuído ao longo de 2014 e 2015, em todas as instituições de ensino superior portuguesas. As respostas foram interpretadas levando-se em conta a influência das narrativas da governação no desenvolvimento do *boardismo*, ou seja, a diminuição da governação académica, refletindo a diminuição do poder dos docentes na governação das instituições de ensino superior; o aumento do poder da gestão, refletido no reforço de hierarquias e na tomada de decisões organizacionais de cima para baixo; e a influência de *stakeholders* externos. A análise contribui para aprofundar o conhecimento sobre as configurações da governação no ensino superior, desafiando a influência predominante da narrativa da Nova Gestão Política, enquanto enfatiza a dinâmica interna das instituições de ensino superior, onde o corpo docente continua a desempenhar um papel fundamental na sua gestão e governação.

Palavras-chave: governação; poder de tomada de decisão; *boardismo*

Introduction

This paper aims to analyse the shift in the internal power balance between managerial and academic self-governance as reflected in the decision-making processes in Portuguese higher education institutions. Since the 1980s reforms of public administration across Europe have driven governance reforms in higher education. The driver of governance reforms stems from the shift from governing to governance, and the idea of the urgent need to change political steering of public institutions emerged hand-in-hand with the notion that bureaucratic and state-centred regulation was not effective and efficient. Actually, institutions, thereupon conceived as organizations, were assumed to steadily respond to the environmental changes based on their autonomy. In European higher education, boards became central in the governance of higher education systems and institutions, giving rise to what we have termed in previous work as *boardism*. It refers to the decrease of academic self-governance and the decline of the power of academics in university decision-making processes (Veiga, Magalhães & Amaral, 2015). Another key element of *boardism* is the assumption of influence of external stakeholders in governance structures and processes in higher education institutions. This assumption might reflect either a normative or an instrumental approach to the role of external stakeholders in institutional governance (Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2011). The normative approach refers to how universities should operate on the basis of social and political values and principles. The instrumental approach refers to the attainment of institutional goals and objectives through management of the core academic activities. While the normative stance underlines the assumption that external stakeholders make organizations more responsive to their external environment, the instrumental stance tends to focus on the expertise and links with the social and economic fabric they might bring into institutional governance. These features indicate a shift in the internal power balance between managerial and academic self-governance with an impact on decision-making processes. *Boardism* in higher education governance reforms is affecting the power relationship between academics and managers in organisational governance, triggering tensions. These make the issues of power, interests and conflicts relevant for explaining institutional governance and managerial processes.

In Europe, under this influence, higher education systems and institutions reshaped their organizational structures to meet the requirements of increased organizational accountability, and to address performance indicators. Following from Afonso (2009), accountability through articulating dimensions such as evaluation and responsibility promotes education discourses focusing on the relevance of what is measurable and comparable.

Changes in political environments of higher education have induced transformations in higher education governance, shifting from collegial models and loosely coupled organization to more managerial and tightly coupled forms, mostly inspired by New Public Management (NPM). However, these developments have shown ‘mixed signs and symptoms’ (Paradeise, Reale, Bleiklie & Ferlie, 2009) of NPM and Network Governance (NG). Further research also identified the influence of bureaucratic, New Governance (NewG) and collegial governance narratives (Magalhães & Veiga, 2012). This suggests that there is an interaction between reform narratives and institutional contexts and identities as the reform trend has assumed different tones according to national and institutional cultures and ethos. The objective of this paper is to analyse institutional processes of decision-making as reflecting governance narratives, which in turn pervade and influence *boardism*. The paper aims to respond to the following question: how do the perceptions of institutional actors on tendencies at their institutions and decision-making reflect the influence of governance narratives and how it influences the features of *boardism*?

On the basis of an on-line survey, distributed throughout 2014 and 2015 in all Portuguese higher education institutions, we have selected a set of topics to which academics and non-academics were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale, their views on institutions' decision-making processes. The responses were interpreted taking into account the features of *boardism*: a decrease of academic self-governance reflecting the decline of the power of academics in HEIs decision-making structures and processes; an increase of managerial governance referring to the reinforcement of hierarchies and organisational top-down decision-making; the influence of external stakeholders in strategizing processes shedding light on the actual influence they possess. The analysis assumes that governance narratives play a mediating role in legitimating and justifying the configuration of *boardism*.

In this paper, by looking at the shift in the internal power balance between managerial and academic self-governance with an impact on the decision-making processes, we start by emphasizing the role played by governance narratives in legitimating and justifying governance reforms in higher education institutions and their influence on *boardism*. Then, the analysis focuses on the perceptions of Portuguese higher education professionals as these perceptions reflect the redistribution of the decision-making power as mediated by governance narratives. Additionally, the analysis compared the perceptions of different groups of respondents according to higher education sector (public or private), subsystem (polytechnic or university) and professional characteristics (such as teaching or non-teaching staff, the respondents influence in decision-making processes and number of years working at the institution).

Governance Narratives and Higher Education Governance Reform

Narratives are concepts of social epistemology and social ontology and it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world; i.e., "it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities" (Somers & Gibson, 1994, p. 59) and provide meaning to choices and justify (legitimate) decisions taken. In this paper, narratives are assumed as policy and management stories aimed at making sense of policy and action. Governance is about political management of rule systems, both formal and informal, that drive values and norms affecting behaviours and attitudes of actors and constellations of actors (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Kjaer, 2010). These rules and system values are made narratively coherent and influence the environment of actors, structures and processes. The rise of governance as opposed to governing has challenged the need for formal authority and legitimacy, central to traditional settings of government. Autonomy, accountability and quality assessment became key-words in the last decades of policy making and governance arrangements in higher education (Magalhães, 2004), reflecting the influence of prevailing governance narratives such as NPM. As pointed out by Ferlie, Musselin and Andresani (2009) governance narratives meld normative/ideological ingredients with technical elements. In each country they "can be linked to specific conceptions and theories regarding the relationship between the state and the society" (Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani, 2009, p. 13).

Paradeise, Reale, Gostellec and Bleiklie (2009) compared higher education governing and governance changes in several European countries and examined the impact of NPM and NG narratives on the political steering of higher education systems and institutions. The results of the study challenged the isomorphic influence of NPM showing "a mix of signs and symptoms of NPM and NG" (Paradeise, Reale, Gostellec & Bleiklie, 2009, p. 245). Elements of other governance narratives (e.g., NG, collegial governance) were identified, for instance, in the Portuguese context (Magalhães, Veiga, Amaral, Sousa & Ribeiro, 2013).

The NPM narrative is organised around elements such as the stimulation of competition for students between HEIs; the hardening of soft budgetary constraints; the vertical steering of the system through setting explicit targets and performance contracts; the market based research funding; the development of a "management must manage" perspective; the emphasis on stronger managerial roles of rectors, deans, heads of department; the focus on efficiency and value for money; the development of strong rectorates; the reduction in the representation of faculty in HE management; and the increased participation of external stakeholders in the governing bodies, assuming that the role attributed to external stakeholders is closely linked to the managerial concerns of efficiency and effectiveness ultimately with an eye on value for money.

In turn, the NG narrative elements are the development of networks designed with the explicit goal of joint problem recognition and solving; the development of networks between HEIs; networks as playing a significant role in the governance of the HE system; softer leadership; external control systems taking the form of 'light touch' systems. While emphasising the collaborative features of 'third-party government', the NewG narrative focuses on the networks within which actors develop their action rather than on the internal workings of public organizations. Following Salamon (2002) "the collaborative nature relies on a wide array of third parties in addition to government to address public problems and pursue public purposes" (Salamon, 2002b). The recognition of collaborative features by NewG narrative underlines: a) a shift from public vs. private to public + private; b) a focus on networks rather than on hierarchy; c) a shift from command and control to negotiation and persuasion; d) a shift from management skills to enablement skills. The shift from public versus private to public + private encompasses collaboration as a consequence of important complementarities that exist between sectors. NewG sees this interaction between public and private as a source of opportunities. From the perspective of the stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), this interaction is better seen as a set of relationships established between 'any group or individual that can affect or be affected by the realization of an organization's purpose' (Freeman, Harrison, Hicks, Parmar & De Colle, 2010, p. 26). Hence, stakeholders influence decision-making processes to make them consistent with their needs and priorities. Under NewG, the role attributed to external stakeholders in higher education governance is subsumed to the third-party arrangements and subsumed to governance goals. As pointed out by Salamon (2002a),

'third-party government' brings forward dilemmas challenging management, accountability and governance legitimacy. Management dilemmas arise from the shift from management skills to enablement skills, meaning: the ability to bring multiple stakeholders with partially independent sources of power and influence to the table to share resources for a common end in a situation of extensive interdependence (p. 608).

In line with this, accountability challenges hierarchical and top-down decision-making and governance legitimacy, as third-party arrangements operate in new arenas and contribute to a fragmentation of governance arrangements.

Collegial governance underlines the representation of the institutional constituencies in governance bodies and is based on the authority of academic groups organised around disciplinary areas. The power of the academic groups deals with research and teaching, including the management of research contracts, the appointment of academic staff, and the selection and recruitment of students (Shattock, 2006). The collegial governance narrative is organised around elements underlying the managerial centrality of academics and academic activities' self-regulation. Under the collegial governance narrative, external stakeholders appear as 'imaginary friends' (Magalhães, Veiga & Amaral, 2016) as they are not supposed to interfere in the

governance of higher education institutions defined as an academic area of action. Decision-making structures and processes assume legitimacy on the basis of disciplinary and peer-review vigilance and authority. At different paces and rates, countries seem to have converged on the need to implement a managerial approach induced by NPM (Paradeise et al., 2009). In Portugal, the managerial approach and the NPM governance narrative and practices have assumed a central role in public policies, higher education included. To this, one could add the centrality of the technical-instrumental rationality which, according to Lima (2012), enhances the organizational control features. This reflects the already mentioned mixed signs of governance narratives promoting hybridization of elements stemming from bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic discourses (Barroso, 2006).

In 2007 a new legal framework (RJIES) for higher education institutions was passed, redesigning their governance processes and structures. The Law 62/2007 was elaborated under NPM's influence (Moreira, 2008) displaying its political and managerial assumptions on governance. This legal framework resulted in an increasing centralisation of power at the institutional top and the suppression (or weakening) of the collegial decision-making bodies (Magalhães et al., 2013). To these one must add the possibility for institutions to adopt the foundational model, the use of output-based contracts and the emphasis on accountability, individual responsibility and performance. However, the law itself assumes a hybrid character. For instance, NPM characteristics related to nomination and co-option coexist with the collegial election principle. Furthermore, the Portuguese governance reform appeared to indicate NewG and NG elements visible in networking of structures and processes, and the emphasis on the key role played by academics at the institutional level (Magalhães et al., 2013). Nonetheless, RJIES overtly displays its core political and managerial assumptions on governance: increase of managerial governance; decrease of academic self-governance and enhancement of external stakeholders' roles in decision-making bodies (Magalhães et al., 2013).

The mediating role of narratives in featuring *boardism* is based on discursive elements that influence the decision-making processes. Actually, the NPM elements focusing on the vertical steering of the institution under the assumption that "management must manage" and the emphasis on stronger managerial roles of rectors, deans and heads of department strengthen the increase of managerial governance. In turn, the NG elements focusing on the development of institutional networks as playing a significant role in decision-making and, consequently, inducing a softer leadership by means of 'light touch' control systems induce the enhancement of academic self-governance. The elements of the NewG narrative which underline a shift from command and control to negotiation to persuasion based on the development of enablement skills rather than on management skills encourage academic self-governance. In turn, elements of the collegial governance narrative based on the authority of academic groups promote decision-making structures and processes based on the disciplinary and peer-review vigilance and authority. The elements from these narratives shape the perspectives on the role of external stakeholders in higher education governance.

Their presence on the boards suggested that NPM had an impact on university decision-making. The actual role that external stakeholders play in the Portuguese higher education context is mediated by the influence of the NPM narrative while the prevalence of an instrumental stance reflects the tension between the drivers of academic self-governance and managerial governance.

Questioning the Data

The empirical data used in this paper were gathered on the basis of an on-line survey, distributed throughout 2014 and 2015 in all Portuguese higher education institutions and targeting the entire population of the teaching staff and the non-teaching staff (in the case of the latter, those working at the level of ‘qualified technician’ or similar). This survey was administered in the course of a wider project aiming to understand how Portuguese higher education institutions are responding to the challenges facing higher education. For the purposes of this paper we have selected a set of topics concerning institutional governance to which professionals were asked to indicate, on a five-point Likert scale, their perceptions on institutional decision-making processes, the participation of external stakeholders and tendencies occurring in recent years in the governance processes of their institutions.

The answers from the 2,060 higher education professionals who responded to the questionnaire (1,661 from the teaching staff which corresponds roughly to 5% of the population and 399 from members of the non-teaching staff) were analysed resorting to statistical techniques. The sample’s characterization can be found in Table 1. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode and standard deviation) were computed to reveal respondents’ perceptions on the selected variables. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney) were run to explore the influence of selected institutional and individual factors on professionals’ perceptions.

The responses were interpreted taking into account the features of *boardism*: a decrease of academic self-governance reflecting the decline of the power of academics in HEIs’ decision-making structures and processes; an increase of managerial governance referring to the reinforcement of hierarchies and organisational top-down decision-making; the influence of external stakeholders in decision-making processes shedding light on the actual influence they possess. The extent to which institutional governance reflects *boardism* is to be looked at, taking into account the features of the Portuguese higher education system; namely the divides between polytechnics and universities and between public and private institutions. Additionally, to identify the internal dynamics of power relationships at the institutions, data were analysed on the basis of the differences between teaching and non-teaching staff, the respondents’ own role in the decision-making processes at the institutions and the fact that they have or have not been working at their institutions since before the implementation of the 2007 law.

Table 1
Sample’s characterization

		N	%
Professional Group	Teaching staff	1661	80.6
	Non-teaching staff	399	19.4
	Total	2060	100.0
	Missing	-	-
HE’s subsector	Public	1576	79.1
	Private	417	20.9
	Total	1993	100
	Missing	67	-
HE’s subsystem	University	1036	52.0
	Polytechnic	957	48.0
	Total	1993	100
	Missing	67	-

Table 1 (Cont'd.)
Sample's characterization

		N	%
Years at the institution	After 2007	555	27.8
	Before 2007	1439	72.2
Total		1994	100
Missing		66	-
Current role in decision-making	Lower influence in decision-making.	1705	84.9
	Higher influence in decision-making.	304	15.1
Total		2009	100
Missing		51	-

Professionals' Perceptions on Tendencies at Their Institutions

The analysis revealed that the professionals' perceptions on institutional governance reflect the influence of the NPM narrative on the features assumed by *boardism* in Portuguese higher education institutions. These perceptions are mediated by discursive elements stemming from the NPM governance narrative related with the perspective that "management must manage" and that of strong rectorates or central administrations. Actually, the influence of the NPM governance narrative appears to be confirmed by the perceptions that in respondents' institutions there is a tendency for *the most important decisions to be taken by the central management and an increase of administrative workload* (Table 2).

Table 2
Professionals' perceptions on tendencies at their institutions in recent years

In recent years there has been a tendency in my institution for:	N	Mean	Median	Mode	S-D
The most important decisions to be taken by the central management.	1816	3.96	4	4	.828
The loss of influence of collegial bodies in decision-making processes.	1707	3.45	3	4	1.035
The institution to be guided towards the achievement of objectives.	1805	3.61	4	4	.893
An increase of administrative workload.	1845	4.07	4	5	.888
An increase in the central management's control over the employees.	1795	3.75	4	4	.943
An increase in the external stakeholders' participation.	1550	2.91	3	3	.916
The growth of the support structures for academic (teaching, research and extension) and non-academic activities.	1833	2.67	3	3	1.043

Professionals showed a very high level of agreement that there has been a tendency in recent years for *the most important decisions to be taken by the central management* and for *the loss of influence of collegial bodies in decision-making*. At the same time, there was a perception of a marked *increase in the control exerted by the central management over the employees*, which is enacted and also visible in the perceptions on an *increase of administrative workload*. Research has pointed out that procedural mechanisms pervaded the control over academic work (Neave, 2012) promoted by the digital bureaucracy (Lima, 2012). Concurrently, there was also a view on the tendency of the institutions *to be guided towards the achievement of objectives*. The definition of measurable objectives and outputs reflects discursive elements pertaining to the NPM narrative. However, the influence of the NPM narrative regarding *the increase in the external stakeholders' participation*, to which professionals showed a moderate disagreement, underlines the influence of discursive elements of other governance narratives. Thus, even though the influence of the NPM narrative reinforced the mandate of external stakeholders in the institutions' boards, elements of other governance narratives, namely the collegial governance narrative and the NG narrative, also appeared.

The prevalence of the NPM narrative is not evenly perceived by all groups of respondents (see Table 3) whether because they work in different types of institutions (in which both institutional characteristics and historical legacy may influence the enactment of the recent reforms) or because their own professional roles (namely if they belong to the teaching or non-teaching staff, the length of their professional career at the institution or their own role in institutional decision-making processes) may led them to perceive the features and changes occurring in their institutions' governance differently. While the influence of the NPM governance narrative regarding the tendencies for *the most important decisions to be taken by the central management* and for *the increase in the central management's control over their employees* generated a high consensus among different groups of respondents (although it is more highly felt by respondents with lower influence in decision-making processes), *the loss of influence of collegial bodies in decision-making processes* and *the increase of administrative workload* appears to be more highly perceived by respondents from the public sector, the teaching staff and those who have been working at their institutions since before the implementation of the 2007 law.

Table 3

Differences in professionals' perceptions on tendencies at their institutions in recent years

	HEI's subsector	HEI's subsystem	Professional group	Years at HEI	Role in D-M*
The most important decisions to be taken by the central management.	$p=.826$	$p=.352$	$p=.352$	$p=.162$	$p=.000$ (<Influence)
The loss of influence of collegial bodies in decision-making processes.	$p=.000$ (Public)	$p=.922$	$p=.005$ (Teaching)	$p=.000$ (before 2007)	$p=.000$ (<Influence)
The institution to be guided towards the achievement of objectives.	$p=.101$	$p=.000$ (Univ.)	$p=.523$	$p=.000$ (after 2007)	$p=.126$
An increase of administrative workload.	$p=.000$ (Public)	$p=.230$	$p=.005$ (Teaching)	$p=.000$ (before 2007)	$p=.325$
An increase in the central management's control over the employees.	$p=.000$ (Public)	$p=.103$	$p=.060$	$p=.125$	$p=.001$ (<Influence)

Table 3 (Cont'd.)

Differences in professionals' perceptions on tendencies at their institutions in recent years

	HEI's subsector	HEI's subsystem	Professional group	Years at HEI	Role in D-M*
An increase in the external stakeholders' participation.	$p=.038$ (Private)	$p=.299$	$p=.021$ (N-teaching)	$p=.000$ (after 2007)	$p=.012$ (>Influence)
The growth of the support structures for academic (teaching, research and extension) and non-academic activities.	$p=.000$ (Private)	$p=.026$ (Univ.)	$p=.000$ (N-teaching)	$p=.001$ (after 2007)	$p=.007$ (>Influence)

Note: Data were analysed through Mann-Whitney tests for a .05 significance level. The group that perceives the item considered to a higher extent is noted (in bold).

Perceptions on Decision-making Processes and Actors' Roles

The influence of the NPM narrative in institutions' decision-making processes is visible not only in that they are significantly centralised, as we had seen before, but that they have been progressing in recent years towards that pronounced centralisation (see Table 4). The NPM governance narrative also appears to be relevant in the professionals' perceptions on the concentration of power at the top management of institutions regarding decision-making processes. Respondents perceived to a very high extent that in their institutions *the power to decide about academic and non-academic issues relies mostly on the central management or central services* and that *their institutions have very hierarchical structures*. Inversely, professionals tended to only moderately agree with the statement that *there is a high degree of teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in academic issues* and to disagree with the existence of *a high degree of participation of the non-teaching staff in non-academic issues*. These perceptions reflect a high level of concentration of decision-making power at the top management of the institutions, challenging the power relationships between teaching and non-teaching staff.

Table 4

Professionals' perceptions on decision-making processes and external stakeholders' participation in Portuguese HEI's

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:	N	Mean	Median	Mode	S-D
In my institution, there is a high degree of teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in academic issues.	1879	3.20	3.00	4.00	1.149
In my institution there is a high degree of non-teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in non-academic issues.	1684	2.74	3.00	3.00	1.030
In my institution, the power to decide about academic issues relies mostly on the central management or central services.	1877	3.73	4.00	4.00	1.066
In my institution, the power to decide about non-academic issues relies mostly on the central management or central services.	1771	3.94	4.00	4.00	.943
My institution has a very hierarchical structure.	1916	3.77	4.00	4.00	1.038

Table 4 (Cont'd.)

Professionals' perceptions on decision-making processes and external stakeholders' participation in Portuguese HEI's

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:	N	Mean	Median	Mode	S-D
The decision-making processes at my institution take into account the opinions of external stakeholders.	1568	3.07	3.00	3.00	.978
How influential were the external stakeholders in the creation of an organizational performance management system?	1499	2.88	3.00	3.00	.958
How important were the external stakeholders for the development of the internal quality assurance practices at your institution?	1234	3.00	3.00	3.00	1.053

With regard to the perceptions on the increase of external stakeholders' participation in decision-making processes, the tendency was perceived to a very moderate extent (see Table 2). When looking at the participation of external stakeholders in decision-making processes, respondents tended to perceive their role more clearly in *the creation of an organizational performance management system* and in *the development of the internal quality assurance practices at the institutional level*. This appears to echo the dimensions of accountability as reflected in the articulation between evaluation and responsibility (Afonso, 2009). The influence of elements of other governance narratives contributes to mitigating the instrumental stance towards the role of external stakeholders.

The analysis of the perceptions on decision-making processes and actors' roles showed that respondents from universities and those with lower influence in the institutional decision-making processes tended to agree more than other groups of respondents that *the power to decide about academic and non-academic issues mostly relies on the central management or central services* (Table 5). The perception that *my institution has a very hierarchical structure* gathered higher agreement from respondents from the public sector, from universities, from non-teaching staff and from those also having lower influence in decision-making, echoing the vertical steering and the development of stronger managerial roles of rectors, deans, heads of departments.

Table 5

Differences in professionals' perceptions on decision-making processes in Portuguese HEI's

	HEI's subsector	HEI's subsystem	Professional group	Years at HEI	Role in D-M*
In my institution, there is a high degree of teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in academic issues.	$p=.232$	$p=.234$	$p=.000$ (N-Teaching)	$p=.104$	$p=.000$ (>Influence)
In my institution there is a high degree of non-teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in non-academic issues.	$p=.000$ (Private)	$p=.006$ (Polytech.)	$p=.000$ (Teaching)	$p=.033$ (after 2007)	$.000$ (>Influence)

Table 5 (Cont'd.)

Differences in professionals' perceptions on decision-making processes in Portuguese HEI's

	HEI's subsector	HEI's subsystem	Professional group	Years at HEI	Role in D-M*
In my institution, the power to decide about academic issues relies mostly on the central management or central services.	$p=.446$	$p=.015$ (Univ.)	$p=.328$	$p=.508$	$p=.000$ (<Influence)
In my institution, the power to decide about non-academic issues relies mostly on the central management or central services.	$p=.457$	$p=.011$ (Univ.)	$p=.915$	$p=.091$	$p=.008$ (<Influence)
My institution has a very hierarchical structure.	.000 (Public)	.000 (Univ.)	.000 (N-Teaching)	$p=.620$	$p=.000$ (<Influence)
The decision-making processes at my institution take into account the opinions of external stakeholders.	$p=.000$ (Private)	$p=.208$	$p=.351$	$p=.000$ (after 2007)	$p=.000$ (>Influence)
How influential were the external stakeholders in the creation of an organizational performance management system?	$p=.000$ (Private)	$p=.011$ (Polytech.)	$p=.001$ (N-teaching)	$p=.000$ (after 2007)	$p=.239$
How important were the external stakeholders for the development of the internal quality assurance practices at your institution?	$p=.000$ (Private)	$p=.136$	$p=.000$ (N-teaching)	$p=.000$ (after 2007)	$p=.343$

Note: Data were analysed through Mann-Whitney tests for a .05 significance level. The group that perceives the item considered to a higher extent is noted (in bold).

Respondents from the private sector, from polytechnics, the teaching staff, those who started their professional careers at the institution after 2007 and professionals with higher levels of influence in decision-making processes tended to agree more with the statement that *in my institution there is a high degree of non-teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in non-academic issues*. Additionally, the statement that in their institutions *there is a high degree of teaching staffs' participation in decision-making processes in academic issues* seems to be more split, with only professionals from the non-teaching staff and again those with higher levels of influence in decision-making showing significantly higher levels of agreement with it. Regarding the participation of the external stakeholders in the institution, while their influence was perceived to a very moderate extent, their effective role is nevertheless more highly perceived by respondents from private institutions, non-teaching staff and those who have started their professional careers at the institution after the implementation of the 2007 law, reflecting the higher influence of NPM discursive elements linked to the managerial concerns of efficiency and effectiveness. These groups of respondents, as well as respondents with higher influence in decision-making processes, are

likewise those who perceived to a higher extent that in their institutions there has been a tendency towards *an increase in the external stakeholders' participation* and towards *the growth of the support structures for academic and non-academic activities*.

Conclusion: The Influence of NPM Narrative on Boardism

The analysis of the perceptions of institutional actors on the tendencies influencing institutional governance and the decision-making processes and actors' roles allowed for identifying the features of *boardism* in the Portuguese context reflected in the power relationships between teaching staff and non-teaching staff. The analysis contributed to dig into the complexity of the governance arrangements, challenging a straightforward causality relating the influence of managerialism to the governance reforms of Portuguese higher education institutions. Even though the dominance of managerial governance over academic self-governance is visible, its effects on *boardism* appear not fully developed. Actually, one can hardly find in the analysis of the perceptions of the respondents a clear-cut tendency towards hard versions of NPM. Previous research has shown the mixed influence of governance narratives and practices in the actors' perceptions (Magalhães et al., 2013). Additionally, contextual factors such as the higher education subsector and subsystem, and the internal dynamics of higher education institutions—an arena where Portuguese academic staff continue to play a key role—condition the influence of NPM drivers, convening elements stemming also from post-bureaucratic discourses (Barroso, 2006).

The analysis points to the decrease of academic self-governance and the increase of the managerial governance in the institutions surveyed. When comparing the perceptions between higher education subsystems and subsectors, the analysis showed that respondents from universities and from the public sector tended to acknowledge to a higher extent the influence of the NPM narrative elements driving the vertical steering of their institutions. Public universities were the most rooted in the collegial modes of governance and it is thus understandable that these are the ones where respondents felt a higher impact of the managerial-driven reforms. For the same reasons, the teaching staff and respondents who have been working at the institutions since before the implementation of the 2007 law felt to a higher extent the loss of influence of the collegial bodies and the increased administrative workload. Lastly, these changes are challenging the power relationships between teaching and non-teaching staff. Respondents with lower influence in decision-making processes consistently perceived to a much higher extent the influence of the NPM narrative on institutional governance. This suggests that rather than a defeat of academics' professional power, we are seeing a reconfiguration of power relationships in which some academics, namely those in tenured positions or those who are managerial leaders, may maintain or even increase their power and influence while others, particularly in more precarious contractual arrangements, may be more affected by the reforms and increasingly subject to managerial control (Musselin, 2013), reflecting the centrality of the technical-instrumental rationality (Lima, 2012).

These features of the relationships between managerial governance and academic self-governance echo the perceptions on the role of external stakeholders in institutional governance, as institutional actors viewed their influence to some extent confirming their role as non-interfering friends in academic issues, as argued elsewhere (Magalhães, Veiga, & Amaral, 2016). This article opens avenues for further research as, on the one hand, it underlines *boardism* as an analytical tool, and, on the other hand, the analysis illuminates the importance of contexts in understanding education reforms, not to mention governance reforms. Actually, the nature and circumstances of the Portuguese case aims to bring forward the issues that drive the comparative approaches.

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