

The Role of General Councils in the Supervision of the Organizational Performance of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract : Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and other levels of Education, face important challenges. One of the most relevant one is the ability to adapt to a society that is changing over time, whilst guarantying levels of training that do not merely react to such changes. Thus, interacting with society, particularly with surrounding communities and key stakeholders, has become an essential requirement for the sustainability of these institutions. One of the formal mechanisms implemented in European educational institutions has been the design of organizational structures that include a top governance body sharing its constitution with both internal members, students and external members. Such frame holds the core mission of involving communities in the governance of educational institutions, assuming, both strategic decision-making functions, with the approval of the institutions's strategic plans, and a supervision function, approved by activity reports. It also plays an essential role in the life of institutions by holding the responsibility of electing its top executives. In Portugal, it has been almost a decade since the publication of RJIES, the legal framework of Higher Education, such bodies being designated by General Councils. Thus, one may highlight that there has been a better understanding of the operative process of these bodies, as well as their added value to the education system. It has also been possible to analyse the extent to which their core mission has been fulfilled and to understand its growing relevance, particularly regarding the autonomy of institutions. This article aims to contribute to this theme by presenting the results of a study on the role of these bodies in the governance of Public Portuguese HEI, with a special focus on the supervisory competence of organizational performance. Through questionnaires made to board members and interviews with chairpersons of the bodies and top managers of the institutions, it was possible to conclude that there is a high concern with the connections to the external environment. However, regarding organizational performance and the role of the Council as a supervisor of that performance, the activity of the bodies has fallen short of what would be expected. Several reasons may be identified. It is important to emphasize the importance of the profile of the external members and the relationship between the organ's standard functioning and the election of the head of the institution.

Keywords : governance, stakeholders, supervision, performance

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