New evaluation criteria for higher education in France

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- In a context of modification of the governance of universities granting them a bigger autonomy in terms of financial management, university funding is changing in France.

- This change can show us something about the political view of quality criteria for higher education and also something about the political use of evaluation of higher education and its consequences.

The political origin of change

- In 2008, a report from the Evaluation and Control Commission of the French National Parliament presented the assessment of university funding in France.

- One of the main conclusions was the lack of link between evaluation and decision.

The political origin of change

- The goal was to "set up a system of distribution of the means which provides the financing of the missions of public utility assumed by higher education while inciting universities to the <u>performance</u>".

- The aim was to increase the equity, the transparency and the incentive nature of the financing.

- The proposition was "an allocation calculated according predominantly to the activity of the establishment, and a minority part of the allocation determined according to the performance of the university".

The political origin of change

- In this perspective, activity is link to the number of students, what corresponds more or less to the current system of financing.

- What is new, about which it is interesting to wonder, is the part connected to the performance.

- The question is how to define the performance of a university?

- How to asses this performance?

- Some proposals of this report are linked with the assessment of performance :
- First proposal: "for the teaching missions, the part of funding measured according to criteria of performance could reach 10 %; it should however be lower for the Bachelor's degree, and higher for the Master's degree."
  - Why is performance more important for Master's degree than for bachelor's degree?
  - This difference is justified in the report by the mission of "democratization of the higher education assumed by the universities by leading a large number of students to the success in bachelor's degree".

- Second proposal: "Performance indicators have to measure evolutions, not levels".
  - It seems to mean that there is no interest in the performance in itself but in the evolution of performance.
  - Thus the funding must be able to increase or to decline as the performance increases or decreases.

- Third proposal: "The evaluation of the performance of the teaching system has to take into account the success to diplomas, professional integration, social situation of the students and socioeconomic characteristics of the region of the university."
  - This proposition seems important because it tells us something about the indicators of performance and about the way to take into account some external parameters to maintain equity between universities by adopting an "other things being equal" approach.

- The indicators of performance are:
  - success to diplomas;
  - professional integration.
- The external parameters with some influence on success to diplomas and professional integration are :
  - The social situation of students;
  - The socioeconomic characteristics of the region.

- If evaluation is the assessment of the distance between reality and an ideal.

- then, in this report, the ideal university is:
  - a performing university,
  - where more students each year obtain their diplomas,
  - which increases each year their probability to find a job.

- However, other purposes could have been taken into account as :
  - the self-fulfillment of students;
  - the development of skills…
  - but also the reduction of the disparities of success linked with the social characteristics of students.
- By adopting the "other things being equal" approach (at the individual level), justifying it by equity between universities, the research for equity between students is, in some way, excluded of the performing ideal university.

The implementation of the project

- To implement the project to assess performance of universities in the process of funding, it is necessary to determine how to measure the level of success to diplomas and professional integration.

The implementation of the project : success to diplomas

- The problem of the "level of success to diplomas" seems quite easy, but it is not.
- In the formula (number of students obtaining their diplomas / number of students), there is two things to define:
  - What is a student? Is it a registered student or is it a student participating to the exams (all the exams, some exams, at least one exam)? What about professionals who are at the same time students?
  - When should we decide that a student should have obtained a diploma? Should it be 3 years for a bachelor's degree? Or is 4 years acceptable?

The implementation of the project : success to diplomas

- The solution adopted by the higher education ministry for the implementation of the reform next year is:
  - The count is on registered students that participated in at least one exam.
  - The level of success to diplomas is calculated 3 years after the entry at university for bachelor's degree.

The implementation of the project : success to diplomas

- The reaction in universities is to try to answer the question "what to do with unsuccessful students?"
- Two types of answers:
  - Try to promote success for all students;
  - Try to remove unsuccessful students.
- In some universities the answer is:
  - to remove unsuccessful students, as soon as possible, from their field of study;
  - to put them in a new structure of study, proposing an initiation to university studies, to promote their success without taking them into account in the statistics of specifics fields of studies.

The implementation of the project : professional integration

- The problem of professional integration is more complex.
- It is necessary to answer 4 questions:
  - Which students having left the university must be taken into account?
  - What is the appropriate indicator of professional integration?
  - Which are the elements of the context to be neutralized to identify the gain brought by a specific university ?
  - Which method to use for this neutralization?

- A simulation made in 2009 for the ministry of higher education by the CEREQ (CEnter for REsearch on Qualifications) on the data of the "Generation 98" and "Generation 2004" surveys brings answers to some of these questions.

- In this large survey, the students are questioned three years after the end of their studies, then every two years.

The simulation

- Three methods are used for the neutralization of the context:
  - Shift and share (structural-residual analysis);
  - Linear regression and logistic regression;
  - Multilevel analysis.

The simulation : indicators of professional integration

- The equivalence of various indicators of professional integration has been tested by structural analysis.

- The rate of employment and the salary are weakly related (R^2=0.13) .

- The association between the rate of employment and the percentage of executives and professionals is stronger, but still weak (R^2=0.40).

- This results shows that a ranking of universities, in terms of professional integration, is going to depend on chosen indicators.

Simulation with shift and share

- Different variables are used to explain the gain in professional integration (rate of employment after 3 years (RE) or proportion of professionals and executives (PPE)).

- The first variable is the level at which the students left the university : the consideration of this variable reduces the observed differences of PPE between the universities of about 58 % and modify their relative positions.

- When also taken into account, the specific field of study has low impact on the PPE but it has a more important effect on the explanation of the RE.

Simulation with logistic regression

- This technique allows one to take into account individual variables, here:
    - the type of secondary education,
    - the sex,
    - the social status of the parents,
    - the place of birth of the father.

odds to be
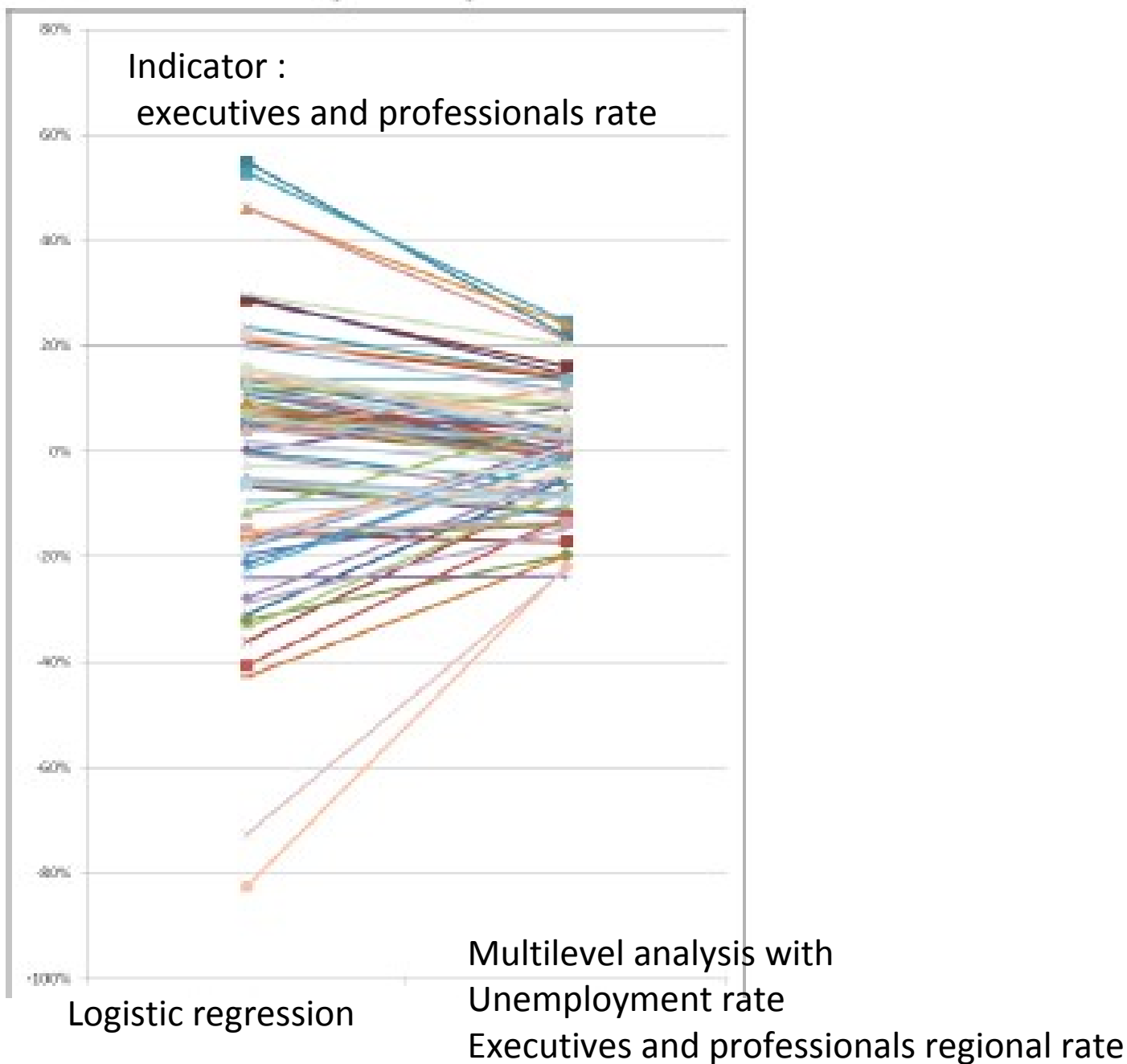a professional or
an executive
(For each university)

variables
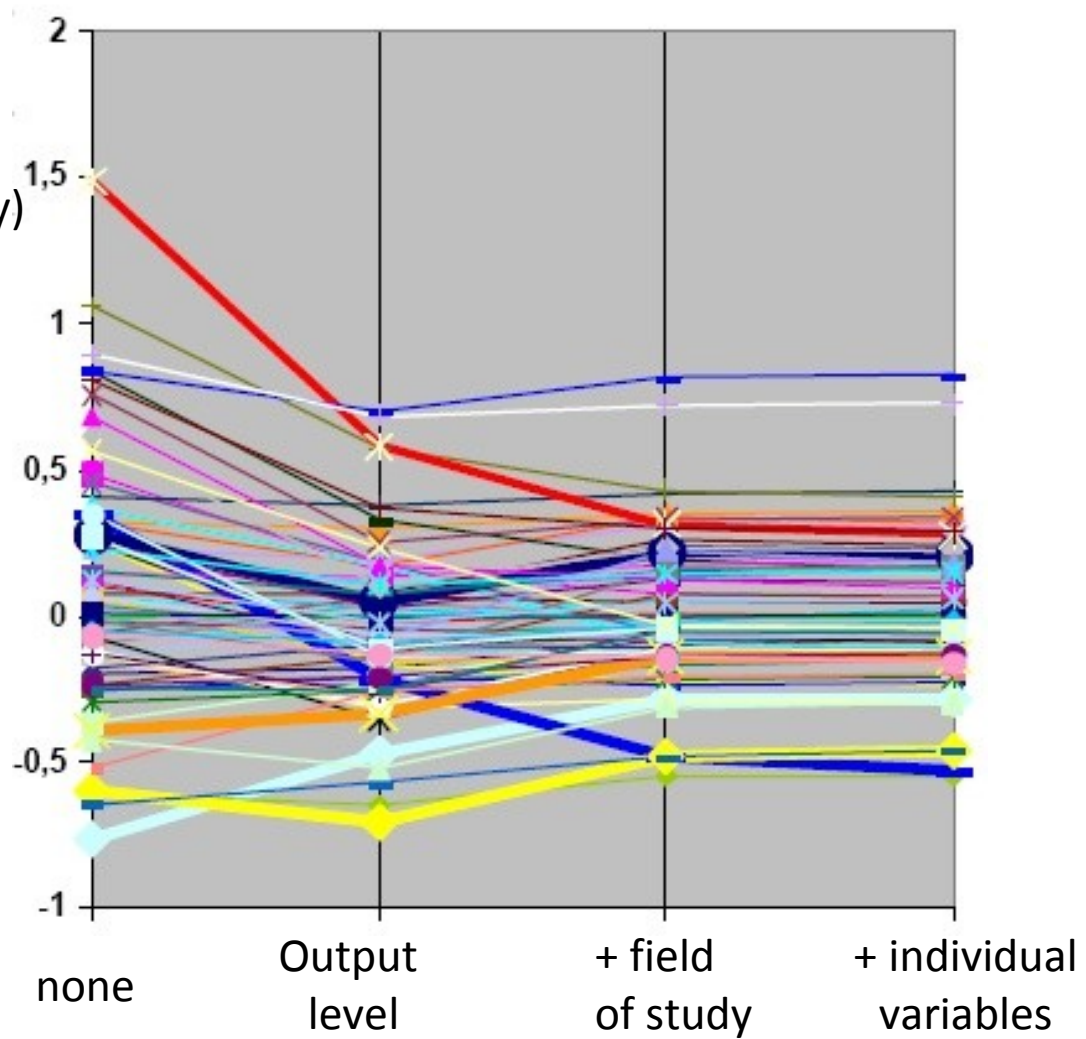
none | Output level | + field of study | + individual variables

Simulation : multilevel analysis

- This technique allows one to take into account some characteristics at the aggregate level of the university (as economic environment).

- Significant effects of the rates of regional unemployment, proportion of executives and professionals in the region on the level of salary.

- The consideration of the regional economic characteristics leads to the disappearance of most of the university effects.

- In other words, when regional economic characteristics are controlled, there is almost no differences of professional integration linked with universities.

Indicator :
executives and professionals rate

Average level

Multilevel analysis with
Unemployment rate
Executives and professionals regional rate

Logistic regression

Conclusions of the simulation

- Evaluating universities according to the professional integration of their students implies a choice among multiple options (indicators, methods) which would not end in the same ranking.

- Multilevel analysis made on the data of the Generation surveys, shows that the comparison of the "professional integration performance" between universities constitutes a real challenge.

Conclusion

- In reference to the objectives of equity and transparency of the new process of university funding, it is very difficult to understand why the ministry of higher education chose to measure the performance of universities in terms of rate of employment after thirty months, only for the students leaving the university after a Master's degree, by analyzing and by publishing until now, only data with uncontrolled individual and aggregate characteristics.

Conclusion

- It is all the more not understandable, as the choices of the ministry are not clearly argued, while decreasing the funding of universities which are in regions in economic decline, or excluding unsuccessful students by new processes, takes the risk to influence strongly the future functioning of the institutions of higher education.

Thank You