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The International Campus of Excellence Initiative in Spain

Marco Seeber

THE SPANISH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE ROOTS OF THE REFORM

This chapter analyses the *Campus de Excelencia Internacional* initiative – CEI, International Campus of Excellence – in Spain. The initiative was part of the broader *Estrategia Universitaria 2015–EU2015* – (Ministerio de Educación, 2008, 2009) and was officially launched in July 2009. The CEI initiative was strongly influenced by policy initiatives conceived in Europe in the same period, while at the same time expected to address problems central to the Spanish context.

The Spanish higher education system is among the largest in Europe, with 1.9 million students and 150 thousands academic staff (including tenured and junior staff, OECD, 2013). In recent years, resources invested in higher education grew from 0.96 % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2002 up to 1.35 % in 2008, while decreased after the economic crisis down to 1.23 % of GDP in 2012 (Eurostat database). Spanish universities had been regulated by the central authorities at the Ministry of Education until 1983, when the University Reform Act transformed them into autonomous bodies which

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transferred the direct responsibility over universities to the autonomous regions, although the devolution process was fully completed only in 1997 (Mora et al., 2000).

In order to increase access to higher education as well as due to the transfer of competences to the regions, the number of universities grew from 28 to 75 in the period from 1975 to 2005 (Delgado and Leon, 2015). From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Spanish higher education, alike other higher education systems in Europe, was increasingly expected to become more competitive and international, as well as contributing to and interacting with the society and the economic sector (Rubiralta, 2010). According to the interviews, there was a rather common understanding among policymakers and stakeholders that fragmentation – with 50 public institutions and 31 private centres scattered across 232 campuses and territorial sites¹ – were major factors making the system expensive and inefficient, leading to multiplication of structures and course offerings, little differentiation and specialization, lack of critical mass. Overall, these elements were deemed to undermine the international attractiveness and visibility of the Spanish Higher Education (HE) system, as only one university was among the world's top 200 universities in the Shanghai ranking and only 11 in the top 500.

In this context, the government of Spain introduced the Organic Law 4/2007 on Universities Organic Act Modifying the "Organic Act on Universities" (LOU) ('LOMLOU' – State of Spain, 2007), which sets a new legal framework in order to implement the European Higher Education Area guidelines (EHEA) and modernize the Spanish university system, aligning with the European Commission's recommendations included in the Modernization Agenda for Universities (European Commission, 2006).

THE DESIGN OF THE REFORM AND ITS GOALS

The debate on how to concretely modernize the university system emerged within the ministry, particularly after the approval of the LOMLOU act. Some officials were concerned about introducing a new ambitious policy at a moment at which Spanish universities were adapting their curricula to the Bologna Process standards, which was a time-consuming process. Accordingly, some public officials proposed that modernization actions should have required small administrative efforts on behalf of universities.

In April 2008, the *General Secretariat for Universities* was established within the Ministry of Education and Science, which took the responsibility

for the regulatory implementation of LOMLOU and fulfilment of the European universities modernization agenda. The General Secretariat was led by a representative of the academic community, the Rector of the University of Barcelona and the vice president of the Spanish Rectors Conference – Professor Rubiralta – and brought forward the ambitions, ideas and expectations of part of the university system to modernize. The modernization agenda of the European Commission (EC) and government commitment through the LOU/MOU law provided inspiration and legitimization to develop an ambitious plan. According to some interviewees, the initiative also represented an opportunity for a renewed role of the central government in the steering of higher education and research. With the creation of the General Secretariat for Universities, the idea prevailed to promote more actively the modernization of the Spanish system. A working group within the newly established body was set in place to define an overall strategy for the development of the system. In less than a year, the *EU2015* policy framework was crafted and the *CEI* initiative – *CEI* represented its main pillar.

The concept and design of the *CEI* initiative were inspired by the principles included in the 'modernization of European universities agenda' (European Commission, 2006), and resembled to some extent previous initiatives developed in Germany (Excellence Initiative 2006–2012), France (PRES 2006, 2008, Operation Campus, 2008) and the United Kingdom ('A new University Challenge', 2008). The *CEI's overarching goal was to spur the aggregations between universities and between universities and other institutions around a common project and campus*. The campus had to become an environment for excellent scientific, educational and innovative activities in which institutions related to education, research and innovation – the so-called Knowledge Triangle – could meet and collaborate (European Commission, 2005). Accordingly, the *CEI* was expected to modernize and improve Spanish universities in a number of dimensions (Rubiralta, 2010; Ministerio de Educacion, 2011; Delgado, 2012; Rubiralta and Delgado 2010):

1. To reduce fragmentation, thus improving the position of Spanish universities in international rankings by promoting a few campuses of global recognition.
2. To open the universities and increase its contribution to the external context by fostering strategic alliances between a variety of partners located in the region. The campus, integrated with the

surrounding urban and regional environment, should meet societal demands and economic needs of their host territories. The involvement of industry in CEIs was expected to enhance labour market inclusion, knowledge transfer and the social and economic development of the regions.

3. **To increase diversity of teaching offering and research profiles.** Ideally, the transformation of comprehensive universities into CEIs that specialize in only one to three disciplinary areas was envisaged.
4. **Increase internationalization and attractiveness** for international students, academics and researchers as well as knowledge-related investors.
5. **To improve university governance.** Campuses were expected to adopt and experiment with governance arrangements and practices new to the Spanish system, such as boards of directors, and executives appointed by means of international selection processes, which could eventually be extended from campus governance to university governance.
6. **To increase excellence and efficiency** in teaching and research, by creating economies of scale and critical mass, efficiency of inter-institutional course offerings and optimizing investment in facilities.

The policy was presented in the period October 2008 until the end of 2008, at several public events and visits to a variety of public and private universities, autonomous communities, collegiate bodies like the Council for Universities (composed of University Rectors and chaired by the Minister for Education), representatives of the wider society and economic sector. The Strategy University 2015 was approved by the Council of Ministers on 30 January 2009, after informing the Science and Innovation Committee of the Spanish Congress and subsequently the Senate. In July 2009, the first CEI call was launched (State of Spain, 2009).

HIGH EXPECTATIONS IN ACTION

The implementation of the reform started after the formal approval of the policy in January 2009, and before the official launch of the first call in July 2009. In fact, during this period, the members of the General Secretariat for Universities were strongly involved in spreading the policy ideas among potential participants, making them aware of the CEI's importance.

At the same time, the policy designers also tried to convince the government to invest a considerable amount of resources. In fact, the CEI's ambitious goals understandably implied a large public investment – around the scale of similar initiatives in Germany and France. However, several ministries and officials were reluctant to endorse such a large investment, being concerned that the global financial crisis erupted in late 2007 would impact the economic and financial stability of Spain in the near future. In turn, the total funding of the CEI programme was 686.7 million Euros, of which only 15.5 % in the form of direct grants to universities and 84.5 % in the form of loans with a 0 % interest rate and reimbursable in 15 years' time (Delgado and León, 2015). By comparison, the German 'Excellence initiative' has been funded 1.9 billion Euros in 2006–2011 and 2.7 billion Euros in 2012–2017 (DFG, 2016), while the Plan Campus (2008) and the IdEx (2011) in France attracted 5 and 7.7 billion Euros, respectively (MESR, 2010, 2011). Moreover, because funds were channelled mostly via loans, the Ministry of Education had to establish bilateral agreements with all the 17 autonomous regions, as they are the institutions legally responsible for the financial stability of universities under their jurisdiction. Thus, loans were allocated to the universities through and under the supervision of the regions themselves, making their role in the reform more important.

Crafting the Proposals

Despite some initial scepticism – due to the loan form of funding, which was pretty unusual for Spanish universities – nevertheless, almost all universities decided to participate in at least one proposal. They were autonomous in crafting the proposals, within very broad parameters. Universities were also active in looking for other partners as well as gaining political support from regional representatives.

The proposals for CEIs were crafted by universities and associated partners, and selected through competitive bids in 2009, 2010 and 2011. The proposals were first preselected by a technical committee composed of national academic and research experts, and the assessment was made on the quality and excellence of the proposal and its potential to develop in a 4-year period into a campus of excellence. Preslected proposals were granted a subsidy of up to €200,000 for the purpose of further preparation for the final selection.

After this first scrutiny, full proposals were developed by the leading university, with the support of associate members. This phase was particularly delicate for internal relationships within the universities. In fact, the governance of Spanish universities has been traditionally consensual, egalitarian and strategically weak. The leadership had little formal powers and legitimization to make strategic decisions, such as which areas of the university had to become an institutional priority. The CEI initiative, however, was asking universities to signal which parts were their flagships, and in which areas they wanted to invest. Understandably, in many cases, this raised internal debate and struggles. Still, the CEI was a sufficient legitimization for leaderships to identify such priority areas.

Selection

Shortlisted projects were selected by an International Assessment Committee of nine experts (one-third renewed each year).² The proposals were submitted via a website. Candidates included the details of the proposed cluster, its final objectives and the strategy by which they were to be achieved. They had to specify the institutions and structures involved and the governance structure. All CEI candidatures were also presented at a public event held the day before the official assessment. Each presentation consisted of a video and a 10-min talk, an explanatory hand-out and promotional materials.

The official call set some generic criteria for the selection of the proposal, leaving quite some discretion to the International Assessment Committee (State of Spain, 2009). The original idea of the policy designers was to identify only a few campuses of *international excellence*. However, during the selection phase, it became clear that a too selective approach would have created discontent among universities and lead to regions excluded – as the number of submissions was much higher than expected – with a waste of potentially valuable initiatives. Hence, it was decided that different categories of projects were to be awarded. Finally, three categories of projects were identified: (1) CEIs – for example, proposals most closely comparable to the best projects produced in other countries; (2) International Campus of Excellence, regional level (CEIRs) – Regional Campus of Excellence projects – namely, proposals viewed by the evaluators as not able to compete for excellence at a global scale, while regarded strong enough to act as ‘regional’ (in the European sense) drivers of knowledge; (3) promising, for example, proposals that earned a positive appraisal but did not yet

qualify as CEI or CEIR. This decision was endorsed by the ministry following the recommendations from the committee.

Despite this broader approach, however, the reaction from the universities and regions excluded from the selection was strong. In turn, throughout the three calls, the CEI developed into a much more comprehensive initiative than initially envisaged. The 32 awarded projects finally included almost all universities and research centres, as well as 74 % of the companies participating in the Spanish exchange index *Indice Bursatil Espanol*, e.g. Spanish Exchange Index (IBEXH35), plus a large number of business associations, hospitals and public institutions (Casani et al., 2014). Aggregations implied systemic collaboration between selected centres, institutes and facilities from two or more universities within the same region or across different regions, between universities and national or regional research bodies as well as public/private aggregations. Aggregations between selected centres, institutes and facilities from two or more universities were the majority (Rubiralta, 2010).

Implementation, Evaluation and Monitoring

Approved CEIs and CEIRs had to implement and sustain the plan of action throughout the entire period. Campus’ participants were fully autonomous in managing the implementation of the proposal and the related funds, although under the financial supervision of the regions. Each year a progress report had to be produced and assessed by an International Evaluation Committee, composed by two members of the general secretary of the universities, one of them acting as technical secretary and only interlocutor with the commission, the general director for the university policy and six foreign experts. The assessment was only based on the official reports and the content of the websites, with no visits *in situ*.³ Each campus was evaluated by two foreign experts, first with an independent evaluation, and finally reaching a consensual judgment with the support of the technical secretary of the committee. Key criteria for evaluation were: (1) the existence of strategic aggregations between universities and knowledge-related agents; (2) internationalization level and initiatives to increase the international visibility and recognition of the CEI; (3) specialization, based on own strengths; (4) interaction with the business and territorial environment, contributing to their socio-economic development. The main task of the evaluation was to judge the level of improvement and assess whether the campus

had reached a standard of international (or European) excellence, and eventually assign an official label of CEI or CEIR.

According to interviewees, the lack of meetings between the evaluators and universities' and stakeholders' representatives was arguably a major limitation of the evaluation procedure, especially regarding the capability to evaluate the integration with the local context, and the technology transfer progress, which are hardly captured by standard indicators alone. Moreover, no instrument was foreseen to enforce the recommendations of the evaluation committee, apart from the risk of not receiving the label of excellence in the next evaluation, and actually, none of the selected campuses had failed the target of the 'excellence' label, though some of them had received a C score – meaning limited progress.⁴

Box 1 – Example of a CEI: Campus of International Excellence 'Iberus'
The CEI Iberus is multi-campus project promoted by the strategic aggregation of the four public universities in the Ebro river valley, in the autonomous regions of Aragon, Navarra and Rioja as well as the province of Lleida in the autonomous region of Catalonia.

Iberus mission is to achieve a level of quality and visibility equal to that of the best European universities: through strategic aggregations, defining the areas of knowledge in which we can be and want to be strong, placing people and their integral development at the centre of the institution's aspirations, acting as an engine for socio-economic development.

Selected fields of specialization are sustainable energy, technology aiding the health of the citizen, food and nutrition, cultural heritage preservation. The aggregation implies collaboration of universities, companies and R&D institutions around smaller projects in the chosen fields of strategic specialization.

A Consortium Campus Iberus has been established whose composition and structure guarantee the participation of economic and social actors in the area of operation of Campus Iberus. The consortium provides a governance structure to the CEI, with a: (1) Board of Trustees: constituted by the President, three representatives from each university, two of them being the Rector and the President of the Social Council, and a Secretary as a non-voting member. (2) An

Executive Committee: constituted by a Rector, who acts as president of this body for a 2-year period, and the representatives of each university other than the Rector or the President of the Social Council. (3) A CEO: appointed by the Board of Trustees, she/he will take part in the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee and the Advisory Councils. (4) An Advisory Councils: appointed by the Board of Trustees, providing advice and counsel on the development of the Campus Iberus project.

The Iberus campus supports this structure's through centres, services and programmes and infrastructure. Centres: The International Postgraduate Centre (IPC), the Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE), mixed centres for investigation with businesses, and the Centre for International Reception. Services and programmes – new and common to all campuses – the evaluation and investigation transfer service, the teaching and research mobility programme, the university employment service, company links and links with secondary schools and vocational training. Infrastructures: Iberus Global Knowledge Exchange⁵ management platform, IT equipment and use, the building of residences, student and teacher housing and facilities, and the redesign of campuses according to fields of specialization.

Source: Strategic Plan (http://www.campusiberus.cs/page_id=259%26lang=en%26310)

THE CONTEXT OF IMPLEMENTATION AND THE IMPACT OF THE REFORM

The initiative was expected to reach its goals by 2015. An official evaluation formally recognized that Campuses have reached their 'excellence' status, and they are still active today. Beyond that, it is probably fair to say that more time is necessary to fully grasp the success of the initiative. Moreover, changes occurred in this period of time may not only be related to the CEI initiative alone but also to processes already occurring in the Spanish system, or at a global scale.

Overall, the development of the policy was deeply related to events occurring in the broader environment, affecting Spain and the Spanish

higher education system. Roughly in the same years when the initiative was implemented, the financial and then economic global crisis impacted Spain in a particularly strong way. As a consequence, funds available were much less than initially expected, they occurred mostly via loans, and the interest rate was gradually increased. In particular, when Spain subscribed the Stability Pact due to the economic and financial crisis, the interest rate on the loans was increased from 0 to 1.5 % in 2010, and to 5.67 % in 2011. At that point, regions were not allowed to subscribe to new agreements, so that no funds were allocated for the 2011 call.⁵ In turn, financial constraints affected the policy implementation and its overall impact (Casani et al., 2014). Moreover, in the same period when the CEI initiative was designed and launched, Spanish universities were involved in the adoption of the Bologna Process guidelines for the organization of curricula. This process required much effort from their side and was accompanied by students' protests. As a matter of fact, parts of the resources of CEI were then allocated for the implementation of the Bologna Process (under the umbrella of the EHEA initiative). The coexistence with this challenging process arguably limited the time and effort that universities and their leadership could devote to the CEI initiative, which was by itself a very ambitious and time-consuming task.

With these strong constraints in the background, the achievements and impact of the reform can be examined in a number of dimensions.

Visibility and participation. Interviewees agree that the most valuable result of the CEI was to increase the visibility of the universities in the society, by encouraging them to communicate with actors at the national and local levels, as universities leaders were in fact spurred to look for local political and economic partners to increase chances of success in the application. The initiative has emphasized universities' third mission and placed them for the first time at the centre of the regional debate on social and economic development. While in some cases, universities relied on pre-existing linkages, in other cases, new contacts have been established with some durable gains, such as more contract funds, internships and public-private partnerships. The initiative was able to attract much attention from the universities, which all participated to the competitive bid as leading or associate partners.

Governance. The university leaderships were able, under the external pressure of the initiative, to reflect strategically and identify the institutional flagships. Internal reorganizations of departments and faculties have occurred in some universities, thanks to the CEI initiative. On the other

side, the governance of universities has not been affected by the CEI initiative (Casani et al., 2014). The CEIs' governance relies on their own bodies or on the universities governance structure. Their budget was limited to the loans and grants, whereas crucial decisions on recruitment and management of general funds remained under the authority of the universities. In turn, CEIs are more like appendices of universities, managed 'like any other university project' – although an important one (Ministerio de Educacion, 2015) – rather than a 'Trojan horse' for virtuous practices within the university. Finally, the campus existed physically only in some projects, whereas initiatives involving universities located in different cities did not have and did not create a new common campus, but rather added the CEI label to their existing locations and facilities.

Relationships. Several interviewees recognize that as a consequence of the policy, the universities are now interacting more between each other and with external partners, such as ministries, regional authorities and private organizations. On the other hand, not all initiatives implied aggregations between different universities, as several were led by one university alone.

Profiling. Differentiation and specialization only occurred to a limited extent, as the resources available for the campus were not large, and parts of the universities that were not initially involved in the proposals, were often involved during the implementation.

International visibility and vertical differentiation. Indeed the position of top Spanish universities in international rankings, their scientific output (+17 % on average) and level of internationalization, as regards scientific collaborations (+12 %), foreign students and academic staff, have improved considerably in recent years (Table 1). The international orientation has also improved as regards the teaching offer, with more bilingual courses (Spanish and English). However, the improvements regarded almost all Spanish universities, and not only top institutions or those more directly involved in the CEI initiative, with a mean growth of +22 % in scientific output, and +12 % in international collaboration between 2009 and 2014. Some interviewees among the policy proponents recognized that – given the salience of rankings in the policy discourse and for universities competition for status – the identification and promotion of an elite group of institutions was to a large extent instrumental to attract government's and universities' interest, rather than a key priority. Moreover, during the implementation phase, this goal emerged as the most problematic politically because of the opposition of universities (and related

proposals were not deemed as excellent in a first stance. In turn, less prominent universities and peripheral regions were able to access the initiative, and the available resources were distributed across a large number of campuses. Several universities did not focus their efforts on a unique area and campus but rather participated in several initiatives at the same time.

Some general lessons can be learned from this initiative.

The EU2015 and CEI policy reform were brought forward by a rather small group of academic experts, under a goal-oriented leadership which believed to have a unique opportunity to change the system. On the one hand, this approach allowed to craft an ambitious, rather coherent policy in a short period of time, with clear goals and a complex and fine-tuned policy infrastructure. On the other hand, no alternative was seriously explored to the campus model, probably because this model was perceived as successful, as already adopted by reputed European countries and coherent with EC guidelines in the modernization agenda. Some important contextual conditions were not sufficiently taken into account, such as the federal nature of the Spanish system and the potential impact of the global financial crisis. In other words, this approach limited the capability to foresee upcoming obstacles, as policy designers did not take too seriously the warnings on the fact that the Bologna process and upcoming economic crisis could limit the resources available. As a consequence, when the lack of funds from the government was acknowledged (beginning 2009), policy designers were fully committed to the design process, and they accepted the loans solution in order to proceed. The loans had several downturns that emerged later. In particular, as Spain signed the Stability Pact and the interest rate was gradually increased, no region agreed that their universities were to receive loans anymore. In turn, there are seemingly some trade-offs in the way a policy design process is managed. Strong leadership and goal orientation can increase the speed of the design and avoid the risk of diluting the main objectives. However, when the policymaker's ambition is to profoundly change the system, this may require to involve important actors and stakeholders during the design process in a more systematic manner, including members of the opposition party. This consideration appear particularly salient for system characterized by a decentralized form of governance, where regions need to be actively involved in the design of the policy and its goals.

Fragmentation of the higher education system was claimed to be a major motivation for aggregations. Nevertheless, if the sheer number of

Fig. 1 Number of HEIs in the five largest European countries between 1500 and 2010

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is taken into account, then Spain has the lowest number of institutions among the largest European higher education systems, even when the system size is taken into account (Fig. 1). Similar figures are observed when the number of public research active universities is considered.⁶ This suggests that policies and their goals are sometimes influenced and justified by perceptions rather than empirical evidence.

The reform was expected to introduce more competition and status differentiation between institutions. Given the importance of reputation and status in academia, the initiative was able to gain much interest and considerable effort was produced in attempting to gain a label of 'excellence'. Yet, the Spanish system was traditionally based on low status differentiation between institutions, and the attempt to create a status differentiation produced a strong reaction from excluded parts of the system. These actors (universities and regions) exerted political pressure in order to re-establish their rank position in the system. In turn, the importance of status for the academic system provides a leverage to the policy reformer to attract attention and efforts, even without a large investment of resources. However, creating status differentiation is a very sensible issue whose consequences are to be taken into account. The process should not be constructed as a zero-sum game, where some institutions gain in status and implicitly other institutions see their position in the system endangered. The solution identified by the International Assessment Committee to reduce the level of pressure was to recognize that also other institutions

regional authorities) whose proposals were not deemed as excellent in the first round. This resulted into a much more distributive approach, involving small universities and peripheral regions as well.

In sum, the reform did not meet the ambitious goals that were originally set. Nevertheless, it has produced some meaningful results with a relatively small investment, although the obligation to refund the loans may burden universities' budgets in the coming years (Casani et al., 2014). The reform has been generally accepted by various stakeholders, although the new conservative government (2012) has been rather sceptical on the initiative and showed the intention to abandon it. The reaction of the universities involved in the CEI hindered this decision, and there is an ongoing discussion on whether and how to give continuity to the campus initiative.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The original intention of the general secretariat envisaged a significant change in the Spanish higher education system, through and towards more cooperation and competition, enhancing excellence and relevance of the universities. The system was expected to become more interconnected, as well as more vertically differentiated, through the identification and aggregation of its excellent parts, via the selection of a small number of inter-institutional CEIs to be supported and they could become prominent on a global scale. These goals were rather clear in the policy design, although a certain degree of tension existed between the goal to select an elite for a stronger global positioning and visibility, and the goal of societal relevance and impact, which is arguably important for all the universities and regions. A certain degree of uncertainty existed, until the initial call, on whether funding was occurring via grants or loans, and in which proportion. While the design of the project was largely run and managed at the central level, on the other hand, the federal nature of the Spanish governance of higher education allowed the regions to have considerable influence in the implementation. In turn, the combination of financial constraints, some tensions implicit in the policy design, and specific attributes of the Spanish HE system (regional role, and a traditional distributive and egalitarian culture), substantially affected the policy ambitions and goals during the implementation phase. Most notably, the vertical differentiation dimension of the reform (spurring an elite) was gradually softened because of the pressure of universities – and regions – whose

Table 1 Evolving visibility, productivity and internationalization of the top 10 Spanish universities in SCIMAGO ranking 2014

Institution	Ranking position ^a		Output ^b		% International ^c		% Foreign academic staff ^d		% Foreign students ^d	
	2009	2014	Position	change	2009	2014	Delta	change (%)	2007	2011
Barcelona	167	152	15	7.62	8	42.26	47.75	13	5	2
Autònoma de Barcelona	263	194	69	5.65	26	48.75	43.69	13	1	6
Complutense de Madrid	229	203	26	6.4	8	33.88	37.87	12	0	2
Valencia	286	263	23	5.37	8	42.52	45.71	8	0	1
Politécnica de Valencia	297	265	32	5.17	12	39.56	45.73	16	1	4
Autònoma de Catalunya	292	271	21	5.3	7	40.84	46.55	14	0	2
De Madrid	389	305	84	4.13	25	35.14	41.39	18	1	3
Granada	466	356	110	3.51	33	28.6	33.48	17	0	1
Ptoencina de Valencia	413	377	36	3.87	15	36.52	35.91	-2	0	2
Sevilla	464	379	85	3.53	25	30.75	35.73	16	0	1
de Madrid				4.42						

^aSource: Scimago ranking. The ranking has a comprehensive approach and includes a variety of research organizations, such as institutes, hospitals, higher education institutions and government bodies.
^bOutput: Total number of documents published in scholarly journals indexed in Scopus. This is a size-dependent indicator. Source: Scimago ranking.
^cShare of internationally co-authored articles: Institution's output ratio produced in collaboration with foreign institutions. The values are computed by analysing an institution's output whose affiliations include more than one country address. This is a size-independent indicator. Source: Scimago ranking.
^dSource: Eumida dataset and Eir dataset.

were excellent, even though of regional (European) level, making the outcome of the selection politically more acceptable. Further, the selection process should be as robust and transparent as possible; in this particular case, the high reputation of committee members guaranteed the quality of the process. Eventually, given the goal to spur competition and differentiation in the system, other approaches such as a research evaluation exercise may result in a more gradual and objectively perceived process, which avoids an abrupt change. If the main goal is that of spurring aggregation, synergies and collaboration, then the lever of resources may be preferable to the lever of status, as implying a lower degree of conflict.

Funds were allocated mostly in the form of loans. However, loans can create unintended incentives that should be taken into consideration. In fact, the university administration in charge enjoys mostly benefits from accepting the loans, increasing their capacity for action, while the costs related to the loans burden future administrators. In the CEI experience, the regions had an important role in financial supervision, avoiding that loans could be given to universities in deficit.

In summary, this case study highlights how reforms can be founded to some extent on rational myths (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), encompassing the reasons for a HE system's problems – in this case, the excessive number of HEIs – as well as isomorphic processes leading to mimic initiatives deemed as successful. It warns also on the risks of adopting solutions from other countries when the same conditions cannot be replicated. Particularly, the relatively small amount of available resources has substantially reduced the capability of the reform to successfully meet most of its intended goals.

NOTES

1. Moreover, an important share of the research activity in Spain is run by institutes managed by national public research bodies (e.g. the Higher Council of Scientific Research, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas [CSIC]), and in recent decades, the regions also established research organizations, thus driving important parts of scientific and academic excellence outside the universities.
2. The committee profile was proposed by the Ministry of Education after agreement with the Conferencia General de Política Universitaria (General Conference on University Policy), a body formed by the university officials of each of Spain's 17 devolved regions. The Committee comprised a Spanish researcher enjoying an international reputation, an internationally recognized architect or engineer with special expertise in campus design, a

member of the European Institute of Technology or of the European University Association, an expert involved in the French Opération Campus programme, an expert involved in the German Exzellenzinitiative programme, a representative of a European association of research universities, a representative of a European student association, a member representing social partners and a member representing economic stakeholders. The names are listed on the Spanish Ministry of Education's website (www.educacion.es/campus-excelencia.html)

3. The progress reports had to include: (1) a summary of the progress (up to four pages); (2) quantitative and qualitative description of activities using indicators, use of resources and milestones on the four strategic axes of the programme: (i) teaching improvement and adaptation to the EHEA; (ii) scientific improvement and knowledge transfer; (iii) development of a social campus model and (iv) interaction with the territorial and business environment (up to 10 pages, excluding tables); (3) governance of the campus (up to three pages).
4. Scoring was on a three-level scale: A (good progress) – no need of further action besides sending annual reports; B (reasonable progress) – need to address specific weaknesses and follow recommendations in the next progress report; C (low progress) – removal of the CEI label. In practice, however, a C score was not followed by a removal of the label.
5. Except loans for two regions Madrid and La Rioja and the direct grants from the Ministry to the Strengthening subprogramme.
6. 105 Germany, 69 France, 77 Spain, 82 Italy, 106 Poland, 130 UK.

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External Links

Ministerial page with official documents on the Campus initiative <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/areas-educacion/universidades/convocatorias/entidades/campus-excelencia-internacional.html>

CEI and CEIR selected – by year

2009: <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/areas-educacion/universidades/convocatorias/entidades/campus-excelencia-internacional/2009/seleccionados.html>

2010: <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/areas-educacion/universidades/convocatorias/entidades/campus-excelencia-internacional/2010/seleccionados.html>

2011: <http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/scde/catalogo-tramites/becas-ayudas-subvenciones/centros-docentes/universitarios/campus-excelencia-internacional/2011/excelencia/2011-resolucion-concesion-calificacion-cei2011.pdf?documentId=0901e72b80fd2162>

Evaluation report on the International assessment committee for campus progress: <http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/ministerio/educacion/universidades/acta-firmada-com-int.pdf?documentId=0901e72b81494e82> (Example – year 2012)

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