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This is an **author produced version** of a paper published in:

Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal 1.5 (2014): 183-197

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/doi/10.14738/assrj.15.486>

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# **How to place European Research Universities in the global rankings? Policies and strategies of University International Excellence in France and Spain**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although global rankings do not classify national university systems, the majority of countries are reformulating their HE policies to improve the ranking position of their best universities. Accordingly, this paper studies the case of France and Spain through the analysis of their respective national policies for the promotion of university international excellence (state-level response to global rankings). In particular, we discuss two initiatives of university collaboration (institutional-level response to global rankings) aimed to create synergies and increase the international visibility of the participant institutions: the new branded university Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL) and the Campus of International Excellence of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and the Spanish Research Council (CEI UAM+CSIC). In both case studies the participant institutions keep their autonomy and legal personality, a difficult alliance formula to administrate. Nevertheless, they are good practices that reflect a wide state-run strategy for the modernization of both national university systems.

**Keywords:** Higher Education Policy, Global Rankings, University Governance, Strategic Planning, University Alliances, World Class Universities.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the beginning of the 21st century the increasing internationalisation and commercialisation of the Higher Education (HE) sector led to a 'global market' of HE where Research Universities of all countries are supposed to participate and compete. As a result and promoting this competition, since 2003 the global rankings of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have appeared in the HE landscape. These global university rankings - the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Times Higher Education ranking (THE) and the Quacquarelli

Symonds ranking (QS) - have gained great popularity and success during the last decade, being the World-Class Universities those that compete for the top positions and aim to transform the future knowledge economy and research.

There is a huge debate on the utility of global rankings and their influence. There is extensive research on the policy and practice implications of these rankings [1-3]. However, as Gonzales and Nuñez [4] pointed out, the perceived purpose of these ranking regimes is to identify world class universities, and thus to organize post-secondary education into a competitive transnational market.

Although the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) seeks a limited homogenization of the European HE Systems and Institutions, nowadays the European university sector is strongly heterogeneous but increasingly competitive. Still, when considering the classification of HEIs in the existing global rankings it is possible to identify three categories of European universities: (1) World-Class Universities: elite universities, which exist in the main European countries. They are ranked among the top 100 in global rankings; (2) Research Universities: intensive research-active HEIs. They hold the positions 100 - 500 in global rankings; and (3) Local Universities: with a more specific mission than the above-mentioned universities which is usually focused on teaching activities, or else broader missions aimed to promote the local industry or greater development of their regional socio-economic context. They do not usually appear in global rankings. Most European universities belonging to the first and second category are located in UK, but European Research Intensive Universities are competing not only with HEIs from the United States (US) and other Anglo-Saxon universities, but also with Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin-American HEIs, a global race that was unthinkable a few years ago.

Consequently, although global rankings do not classify national university systems, many countries are reformulating their HE policies to improve the ranking position of their best universities. In fact, present research has addressed how rankings are reshaping the field of higher education. As stated by Hinfelaar and O'Connell [5], most of the European governments are fostering the accumulation of resources and talent in the best HEIs, either by encouraging some leading universities or technical institutions or the momentum of university Collaborations, Alliances and Mergers (CAMs).

In this context, this paper focusses on the analysis of French and Spanish policies and strategies implemented to improve the position in global rankings of the best HEIs of these countries. To this end, we analyse the reaction to global rankings of their HE managers - institutional-level response- and policy makers -state-level response-. This paper is structured as follows: section two highlights the importance to have World-Class Universities for reputation of the countries and the mechanisms that governments and institutions are implemented in the last decade; section three explains the methodology of the analyses performed; section four describes the reform process of the French and Spanish HE systems including the university excellence programmes in France and Spain; section five analyses the case studies: the strategy of Dauphine within the PSL alliance and the strategy of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid within the CEI UAM+CSIC alliance; and section six points out the main findings and discussion.

### **The Emergence of World-Class Universities**

As Hazelkorn [6] points out, Higher Education is sited on the cusp of an historic transformation and the different developments occurred in HEIs reflect profound changes provoked by the

intensification of globalization and the acceleration of competition. Consequently, many national governments develop policies to stimulate the emergence or strengthening of the top research universities called World-Class Universities (WCUs), which is considered by many authors a necessary step to successfully compete at the global level. In the same vein, Salmi [7] discusses the possible options available for governments to foster WCUs, that is to say, concentrating resources on a few HEIs or promoting CAMs between universities in order to develop synergies; and Albatch and Salmi [8] analyse nine case studies which illustrate the difficulties in building such WCUs.

In line with the findings of these papers, we state two categories of mechanisms that can be used by countries (in their policies) and HEIs (in their institutional strategies) to efficiently increase the size and prestige of universities: internal and external growth. The internal growth mechanism requires extra (public and private) funding allocated to a specific institution, while the external growth mechanism implies any type of university collaboration (CAMs).

Regarding internal growth, public funding of European public universities has dropped in recent years and there are only few governments that explicitly link universities' resources to the results in the areas of teaching and research [9, 10]. Moreover, HEIs have to diversify their income streams, developing their still limited fundraising capacity beyond the traditional research and innovation income streams and tuition fees [11-15].

As regards the external growth mechanism, a possibility could be through alliances between different universities [16]. León [17] establishes a theoretical model in which the governance, budget, life span and thematic area of an interuniversity collaboration are determined by its extent. Based on this theoretical model, we propose the following classification of interinstitutional collaboration (Table 1):

Since 2005, some Asian and European countries have opted for the external growth mechanism having launched national programmes to promote university excellence, which last between three and 10 years: Germany: Excellence Initiative (2005); France: Centres for Research and Higher Education – PRES (2006), Campus Operation (2008) and Excellence Initiatives – IDEX (2011); Sweden: Linnaeus Grants and Strategic Research Areas (2006); South Korea: World Class Universities (2008); Spain: Campus of International Excellence – CEI (2008); United Kingdom: A new 'University Challenge' (DIUS, 2008) and Strategic Development Fund - SDF (2010-2011); Denmark: Investment Capital for University Research Programme - UNIK (2009); Japan: World Premier International Research Centre Initiative - WPI (2009); Malaysia: Malaysian Research University - MRU (2011).

**Table 1: Typologies of Interinstitutional Collaboration in Higher Education and Research**

Characteristics of the collaboration	Type of collaboration		
	Collaboration	Alliance	Merger
Range	Short-range	Medium-range	Long-range
Governance	Limited to the thematic area(s) of the collaboration	Limited to the thematic area(s) of the collaboration (the partners retain their independence and their own legal entity)  A new institution responsible for the management and monitoring of the alliance may be established (e.g. foundation, association)	Common governance for the merged institutions



<b>Budget</b>	Small budget mainly consisting of: - Government subsidies - Profits of the activity in which the partners collaborate	Small budget mainly consisting of: - Government subsidies - Profits of the activity in which the partners collaborate - Contributions of the members of the alliance (from small percentages to significant percentages of the budget of each member)	Common budget for the merged institutions
<b>Life span</b>	Short and usually coupled to obtaining external funding	Indeterminate	Indeterminate
<b>Thematic area</b>	Teaching or R&D activities established beforehand and clearly defined	Areas in which the partners are complementary, such as: education, R&D, transfer of knowledge, facilities or citation policy	All areas of activity of the merged institutions

*Source: De la Torre, Perez-Esparrells, Casani [18].*

## METHODOLOGY

In order to analyse some responses to global rankings of European countries and universities we have chosen two case studies: the national university excellence programmes and university public policies of France and Spain, and the medium-range collaboration strategies or alliances of two universities: Paris-Dauphine and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM). As for the two universities, their collaboration strategies show two common basic characteristics: the goal of both universities is to strongly improve their position in global rankings; and both HEIs aim to strengthen (mainly) their research activity through an alliance with other research institutions retaining their individual institutional identity.

France and Spain are both countries which have launched national university excellence programmes in response to the fact that their HE systems are poorly positioned in global rankings, that is to say, their leading universities are not internationally ranked among the first positions, although the level of their HE and research systems are different, as France already had a couple of universities positioned among the top 50 before launching its university excellence programmes, while the best Spanish universities were in 201th - 300th place. But also the differences between both HE systems enrich this study: France has a diversified HE system, with a university system more or less similar to the rest of European countries combined with a separate system of strongly selective HE Institutions, the *Grandes Ecoles*, which implies that many of the best French institutions are not even ranked in the global rankings. In addition, a great proportion of the French research effort is carried out by large research organisations such as CNRS, CEA, INSERM, INRA, which are the instruments of national research policies, therefore only marginally contributing to the rankings of HEIs. Regarding Spain, its public HE system is essentially homogeneous with no big differences among institutions in terms of budget or students selection. Moreover, this selection of countries allows us to analyse the French centralised HE policy and the different Spanish HE policies due to decentralisation.

The case studies have been analysed using a qualitative methodology based on the triangulation of three sources of information: (1) interviews and site visits to senior university managers and personalities related to the public policies and institutional strategies studied; (2) information published by governments on university reform policies and national programmes of university excellence; (3) online information published by the universities and alliances studied about their respective strategies.

In order to gather the institutional information we have interviewed several academic leaders of both universities. Concerning the French case: the President of the Université Paris-Dauphine, the Director of the Institut pour le Management de la Recherche et de la Technologie (IMRI) of the Université Paris-Dauphine, and the Director for the Institutional Relations and the Development of PSL. In the case study of Spain: the Rector of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, the Vice-chancellor for Scientific Policy and Research Infrastructures, and the Vice-chancellor for Innovation of the UAM; and the former Deputy Director for Internationalization of the Ministry of Education, who was in charge of the CEI programme.

## **UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE INITIATIVES IN FRANCE AND SPAIN**

### **University excellence initiatives in France**

The French HE reflected the republican principle of equality, in the sense that there was not a hierarchy of universities, and the sector was basically divided into two types of institutions: non-selective (and almost free) universities and *Grandes Ecoles* that recruited their students through highly competitive entrance examinations and charged higher tuition fees. In recent years, France has undertaken a restructuring of its HE sector aiming to establish a hierarchy of three types of universities very similar to the three European university categories defined in the introduction. One major aspect of this policy has been the encouragement of 'strategic convergence' of *Grandes Ecoles* and national research organisations with universities, in order to eventually improve the position of the latter in global rankings.

This restructuring of the HE system has been developed through new regulation at national level and public programmes aimed to promote university excellence. In 2006 France passed a Law of research programming (*Loi n°2006-450 du 18 avril 2006 de programme pour la recherche*) and launched the Centres for Research and Higher Education (PRES) programme (*Pôles de Recherche et d'enseignement supérieur*). According to the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, in September 2012 there were in France 26 PRESs that grouped more than 60 universities and a large variety of other institutions, which are clusters of universities and research centres aiming to improve the position in the international rankings of the partners by adding their results.

In 2007 France passed the Law on university autonomy and responsibility (*Loi n° 2007-1199 du 10 août 2007 relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités*) which provides universities with autonomy for managing the public funds to them allocated, to negotiate on equal footing with research organizations (CNRS, INSERM, etc.) and to set their own strategy.

In order to keep promoting the merger of institutions and to strengthen the PRESs, in 2008 France launched the Operation Campus programme (*Opération Campus*). This programme allocated funds for the establishment of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in which private institutions would renovate, build and maintain the campuses of the selected projects for 20 to 30 years in exchange for a 'rent' paid by the public sector. The programme was provided with € five billion but at the end of 2012 only € 188 million had been spent. According to the *Section des travaux publics du Conseil d'État* [19], one of the main reasons for the failure of the programme was the complexity of the PPPs and the marginal role played by regional governments. Since the election in 2012 of the new government, this procedure has been abandoned and most of these projects are now (or will be) directly managed by public agencies.

By the end of 2010 France launched the Excellence Initiatives programme (*Initiatives d'excellence – IDEX*) endowed with € 7.7 billion with the objective to help structure five to ten World-Class multidisciplinary centres of HE and research. This funding came out of the Investments for the Future Programme (*Investissements d'Avenir*), which was provided with €



35 billion, including among other national priorities, other specific projects also linked to HE, professional training and research such as the already mentioned *Opération Campus* and the *Plateau de Saclay* Project. All in all, the HE and research aspect of the Investment for the Future Programme represents € 22 billion out of € 35 billion and is its first priority covering, beyond the Excellence Initiatives, the funding of a large number of other projects directly linked to research in various fields and technology transfer.

For the IDEX programme itself, two calls for tenders were launched in 2010 and 2011. An independent international jury has selected eight IDEXs (usually PRESSs) considered capable to gain international visibility given their high research and educational potential, efficient governance and close collaboration with their socioeconomic environment. The government has then decided the appropriate endowment for each IDEX (up to € one billion). These projects are to be developed in two phases. During a first four-year phase the endowment is managed by the National Agency for Research and each IDEX receives funds, generated by the endowment's interests, for the initial expenses of the implementation of their projects. IDEXs positively evaluated after this trial period will be directly responsible for the management of their endowment but the funding of projects should still rely on the interests generated during a ten-year period. At the end of this second phase, and after the evaluation of the achievements of each IDEX, the endowments should be given definitively to them with free use. The political changes which occurred in France in 2012 may modify this general scheme in the future, beyond the four-year phase, but this point is not clear as yet.

**Table 2: Projects selected in the IDEX programme**

Name	Initials	Location area
IDEX Paris-Saclay	IPS	Île-de-France
Université Sorbonne Paris Cité	USPC	Île-de-France
Paris Sciences et Lettres*	PSL*	Île-de-France
Sorbonne Université	SUPER	Île-de-France
Aix-Marseille University IDEX	A*MIDEX	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur
Université de Toulouse	UNITI	Midi-Pyrénées
Université de Strasbourg	UNISTRA	Alsace
IDEX Bordeaux	IDEX BORDEAUX	Aquitaine

*Source: authors' elaboration based on Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche and l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche.*

From the beginning of the IDEX Programme, it was clear that no single interuniversity collaboration model would be favoured by the international jury. The only criterion would be, in each case, the credibility and efficiency of the proposed governance. Therefore, among these eight IDEXs various types of organisations can be observed, from federations between prestigious HE and research institutions in complementary fields which keep their autonomy to merging of several universities.

The recent Law on HE and research (*Loi n° 2013-660 du 22 juillet 2013 relative à l'enseignement supérieur et à la recherche*), among other major topics of this domain, obliges all HE and research institutions to form Communities of universities (*Communautés d'universités et d'établissements*) with a common legal status. The selected IDEXs thus have now to adopt this new status through an organisation that can be based either on a federation of constituent members, with a varied level of mutualised activities and projects, or a full merging of their

structures. Some specific institutions (e.g. research Foundations, Museums, etc.) may only remain associated to these communities with more limited participation to their governance.

### **The University Excellence Programme in Spain**

Regarding the Spanish case its public HE system is a homogeneous system with a fair average quality [20], but with inefficiencies resulting from its excessive atomization, uniformity of its teaching supply and research areas, and weak internationalization especially regarding teaching and academic staff. As a consequence, in 2008 the Spanish government launched the so-called University Strategy 2015 (*Estrategia Universidad 2015* - EU2015), a strategy to restructure and modernise the Spanish university sector according to the European Modernisation Agenda for Universities [21, 22] by coordinating regional university systems in order to boost the social and economic development of the country.

The Committee of International Experts of the EU2015 produced in 2011 a report to governments called *Daring to reach high: strong universities for tomorrow's Spain* [23] in which measures to improve the Spanish university system were proposed but never implemented. After the change of government a new committee of experts (2013) reported to the Ministry of Education its *Proposals for the reform and improvement of the quality and efficiency of the Spanish university system* (*Propuestas para la reforma y mejora de la calidad y eficiencia del sistema universitario español*) [24] for which there is not sufficient consensus for their implementation.

The Campus of International Excellence programme (CEI) is one of the strategic initiatives of the Spanish University Strategy (EU2015) and aims to improve the international visibility of the top Spanish universities. The CEI programme started in 2008 and was based on the French and German university excellence programmes already launched in 2006 and 2005 respectively. It has consisted of three calls for projects (2009, 2010 and 2011), having spent over € 686.7 million in subventions (to fund the definition process of the pre-selected projects) and loans to be returned at a low interest and after waiting periods (to fund the implementation of the selected projects).

The CEI programme aims to increase the quality of the Spanish university system through boosting universities' individual quality (and international excellence for those who can achieve it). In order to achieve this goal the CEI programme drives greater specialization and differentiation, the establishment or strengthen of CAMs between universities and other research institutions, greater interaction with private institutions, internationalization and accumulation of talent.

Nowadays, 67 universities have participated in the programme, that is to say, all the 50 Spanish public universities and 59% of the 17 private universities. Also, 16 projects have been awarded with the hallmark CEI (Campus of International Excellence) and 15 with the hallmark CEIR (Regional Campus of International Excellence) – see table 3 on next page.

As a result, the 31 projects awarded comprise almost all Spanish knowledge institutions including in addition to the 67 universities and research centres, the 74% of the companies participating in the Spanish exchange index IBEX-35 as well as, among others, business associations, hospitals or public institutions for regional and municipal development. The specialization fields of the awarded projects usually correspond to the strategies of the regional programmes for economic development.

**Table 3: Projects selected in the CEI programme. Calls 2009, 2010 and 2010. CEI hallmark<sup>1</sup>**



CEI 2009	CEI 2010	CEI 2011
Barcelona Knowledge Campus.	Andalucía TECH.	Horizonte 2015. Donde talento y progreso se unen. Universidad de Navarra
Campus Moncloa: La energía de la diversidad.	Campus ENERGÍA UPC: Energía para la Excelencia.	CAMPUSHABITAT5U
Campus Carlos III.	CAMPUS IBERUS: Campus de Excelencia Internacional del Valle del Ebro.	Campus Vida
UAB CEI: Apuesta por el Conocimiento y la Innovación.	Campus UPF - Icària Internacional.	
Campus de Excelencia Internacional UAM-CSIC.	CEI Montegancedo I2Tech.	
	EUSKAMPUS. Una Universidad, un País, un Campus.	
	Health Universitat de Barcelona Campus (HUBc).	
	VLC / Campus- Valencia, Campus de Excelencia Internacional.	

Source: author's elaboration based on *Secretaría General de Universidades*, Spanish Ministry of Education [25]

Note 1: CEIR are not included.

## CASE STUDIES

### The strategy of Université Paris-Dauphine within the IDEX-PSL

The Université Paris-Dauphine, created only four decades ago, has imposed itself as an international reference in the field of organisation and decision sciences and is a flagship in the French landscape of HEIs. Indeed, Dauphine has developed a model which can be compared to that of the most renowned French *Grandes Écoles*: controlled student population, rigorous selection of students, five-year basic curriculum with progressive professionalization (possibly complemented by doctoral studies), 'small classes' pedagogy, and intensive and diversified student activities.

Dauphine has designed its strategy independently, with complete autonomy from the central government, and has deemed being founding member of the IDEX Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL, its best option to ensure its future excellence in terms of international visibility, research, teaching, innovation and socio-economic interaction with its environment.

In fact, PSL is an institutional-level response to the fact that the model of the *Grandes Ecoles* is not successful enough in the current global market for HE. Their model was based on the principles of the French Revolution (e.g. The Ecole Normale Supérieure and Ecole Polytechnique were founded in 1794) and has strongly contributed to the education of the élites and has influenced profoundly society for two centuries, but now French HEIs need to adapt to the new environment.

PSL is a new branded Research University with only 14,000 students (70% at the graduate level including 1,800 PhD students) and 2,500 researchers despite its 20 institutions<sup>1</sup>; but 21 Nobel Prizes, 10 Fields Medals and 29 CNRS Gold Medals. It has been initially established as a Foundation of scientific cooperation (although this status will change in the near future as already mentioned) and consists of *Grandes Ecoles*, research organisations and one university, namely Dauphine, which cooperate and progressively mutualise a number of activities, but are not merged.

PSL was chosen as an IDEX in July 2011 receiving a significant endowment (€ 750 million). Its aim is to rapidly become one of the leading universities of the world and be ranked among the top 20 universities. More precisely, the policy of PSL is to emulate its strong and dynamic research potential to propose a comprehensive teaching offer from undergraduate to doctoral studies, in which research is a key element of pedagogy, to develop strong partnerships with the economic sphere, to offer to the broader public its digital, documentary and patrimonial resources and to structure a reactive organisation in three layers forming an efficient governance for strategic decisions, execution and operational implementation. In order to develop this policy, PSL has developed a common medium long term strategy which establishes goals in the fields of internationalisation, research, teaching, funding and transfer and valorisation of knowledge.

One of the most ambitious objectives of PSL is to implement a common citation policy for publications (PSL Research University) which currently would rank PSL in the 30th place in ARWU by only consolidating the existing scientific excellence of present members. The transition to this common citation of each institution is being performed carefully in order to avoid intervening years of confusion. In fact, to ensure its success the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the President of PSL have explained to the consultancy company that elaborates ARWU that it is not a cursory transformation, but a profound restructuring of the French university system to adapt to the challenges of globalisation.

The specific budget of PSL consists of the interest income generated by the endowment of the IDEX programme (each PSL member having, in addition, its own budget). It is a small budget and stands for less than 10% of the income of each partner. However, Dauphine expects that synergies among partners would lead to a more efficient use of funding and would promote the development of new excellence activities.

It is worthy to note that PSL was one of the only three projects (and the sole in Paris) selected in 2011 as an IDEX in the first round of the programme because, in addition to its excellence in research and high quality of education, it was the only proposal with a governance model considered suitable by the international jury. Its model is a common one in Anglo-Saxon universities but quite new in France, and ensures the autonomy of Dauphine and the other partners but at the same time makes of PSL a tool to increase their international visibility and enhance their excellence.

The common institutional project of PSL is presently run by a *Foundation for Scientific Co-operation*, a central body which works in association with a Public Establishment for Scientific Co-operation (PESC PSL Formation) while the 20 participating institutions keep their autonomy within PSL. The *Board of Governors* of the Foundation is the executive body. Half of its members are external and comprises the President of PSL, the directors of PSL members, personalities from the economic world and cultural institutions, representatives of the academic staff and international academic personalities, representatives of Paris as well as a government commissioner. Nevertheless, in practice, decisions are taken by the *Steering Committee*, chaired by the President of PSL and composed of the highest authority of each partner. The *Academic Senate* consists of representatives of the academic community (teaching and research staff and students) and it makes propositions to the board of the Foundation in order to promote and enhance debate within the board. The *Committee of Strategic Orientation* has eight (international) prestigious academics which perform the external monitoring of the PSL activity. As already mentioned, the recent law for HE and research will oblige PSL to change this organisation.



### The strategy of Universidad Autónoma de Madrid within the CEI UAM+CSIC

The Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), founded in 1968 is one of the top Spanish universities, being always ranked among the 125 best universities in Europe, the 250 best universities in the world, and the 50 best universities in the rankings of institutions under 50 years all over the world. The UAM proposed to the Spanish Research Council (CSIC) to establish the alliance Campus de Excelencia Internacional UAM+CSIC. The CEI UAM+CSIC was one of the five projects awarded with the official hallmark of the Campus of International Excellence (CEI) Programme in 2009 and so far has received about € 27 million, most of it as loans and the rest of it as subventions.

The mission of the CEI UAM+CSIC is to enhance the teaching, research and transference of knowledge outputs of both institutions. With this strategy, the UAM has taken advantage of the opportunity offered by the CEI programme to universities and has defined its already tacitly existing strategic areas, restructured its organization and strengthened its long-established collaboration with the CSIC. Thanks to this alliance, the UAM expects not only to compete in its strategic fields for a relevant position in the global rankings, but also to increase its interaction with the local environment to lead the cultural, economic and social development. Through an aggregation of the size and performance of both institutions, this partnership is expected to improve the joint visibility of the partners, particularly regarding the impact of the scientific publications of the CEI UAM+CSIC, which may result in a noticeable rise in global rankings. In fact, as shown in Table 4, the UAM alone is the fourth scientific producer in Spain, but when added the CSIC outputs generated in the university campuses, their joint scientific production would be the highest one.

**Table 4: Scientific production of Spanish Universities**

University \ Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
CEI UAM+CSIC	1,916	1,777	2,007	2,100	2,295	2,406	2,587	2,762	2,849	20,699
Universidad de Barcelona (UB)	1,605	1,611	1,814	1,879	2,104	2,330	2,567	2,757	2,733	19,400
Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM)	1,498	1,535	1,735	1,735	1,886	2,068	2,369	2,422	2,490	17,738
Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB)	949	999	1,189	1,373	1,511	1,848	1,903	2,085	2,132	13,989
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM)	939	912	1,014	1,094	1,231	1,296	1,416	1,533	1,522	10,957

*Source: De Filippo, Casani, Sanz-Casado [26]*

The CEI UAM+CSIC integrates: all faculties, schools and research institutes of the University; five joint research institutes belonging to UAM and CSIC; and five research institutes of the CSIC located in the university campus of the UAM. Consequently, the CEI UAM+CSIC consists of the 34,000 students and 2,500 researchers of the UAM added to the 2,500 researchers of the CSIC working in the university campus of the UAM. Even more, Table 5 shows that the productivity of the CEI UAM+CSIC would be peer to some of the most prestigious European Universities, since the alliance between a research centre and a university increases their research inputs (researchers and facilities) and outputs, leads to synergies in graduate teaching, but keep a constant number of students.



**Table 5: Productivity of CEI UAM+CSIC vs. European Universities**

University	Teaching and research staff 2009	Scientific Production 2002-2009	Productivity
Univ. Pierre & Marie Curie	3,000	27,360	9,12
UAM+CSIC	2,012	17,850	8,87
Univ. de Munich	3,576	30,702	8,59
Univ. de Cambridge	5,826	45,319	7,78
Univ. de Copenhagen	4,406	21,617	4,91

Source: De Filippo, Casani, Sanz-Casado [26]

Regarding the governance structure of the CEI UAM+CSIC, the *Association for the Development of the CEI UAM+CSIC* is the institution in charge of the implementation and monitoring of the project. The members of this Association are the UAM, the CSIC and the Association for the Promotion of Innovation in the North of Madrid (InNorMadrid). The main governing body of the Association is the *Assembly*, which delegates in the Steering Committee the direction, implementation and monitoring of the *Strategic Plan* of the CEI UAM+CSIC. The daily operation of the Steering Committee is performed by various committees for coordination and management.

The project is still at an initial stage having been implemented slower than initially anticipated because of the withdrawal of public financial support. Thus, results are not expected to completely fulfil the initial goals, but still prospects are good and the project has passed successfully the periodical evaluations performed by the Ministry of Education. In addition, both partners have enhanced their teaching quality and research results through collaboration and strategic reorganization of their research structures to increase efficiency, and the CEI UAM+CSIC has already had a major impact on its institutional environment as external stakeholders has become more committed with the university activities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Regardless the pros and cons of global rankings, it is a fact that they do influence the reputation of HE systems and institutions. In this context, we have shown that policy makers and HE managers are bound to include in their policies and strategies factors to improve their performance on ranking systems. Therefore, as confirmed by the two case studies, global rankings are impacting national educational policies and long-term strategies of universities, in the sense that both of them are including among their aims the achievement of the required size and prestige for some leading Research Intensive Universities to be ranked in a good position.

In the French case we have observed how the IDEX programme is being successful because of its strong economic investment to fund the university change process, and the autonomy allowed to universities to set their own strategies and choose their strategic partners despite the traditional centralized rational planning of the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. Moreover, France has only awarded initiatives with the most innovative and consistent governance models.

In the Spanish case, despite the small financial effort made by the government, the CEI program has undergone a process of continuous evaluation, which has led at least in Madrid to the involvement in the results of the project of the whole university community and the stakeholders: local governments (six city councils), public research institutions (IMDEAS, CIEMAT, CNIO, CNIC), one technology centre (Parque Científico de Madrid), small and medium

enterprises and 24 leading companies. However, the next step of the CEI UAM+CSIC is to raise funds from these agents that aggregate the scientific and innovative ecosystem of North Madrid.

Despite the differences between the IDEX and CEI programmes we have drawn the following common goals: encouragement of the definition by universities of their medium and long term strategy; improvement of the HE sector international visibility through enhancing the excellence, specialization and differentiation of the leading universities, international cooperation and recruitment of international researchers; encouragement of university CAMs with other universities, research institutions and companies of their environment in order to achieve greater research capacity, improve their position in the international rankings and drive innovation and economic development; and building of synergies among disciplines, universities and other institutions (non-university research centres, companies, etc.).

As showed by the findings of both case studies, France have implemented three consecutive and completely different programmes for the promotion of excellence in HEIs that have allowed a gradual selection of initiatives and have finally led to only eight IDEX which comprise the most promising CAMs. Meanwhile, Spain has launched a single excellence programme, similar to the first programme implemented in France (PRES), which have consisted of three calls whose objectives and characteristics have gradually evolve in order to increase the programme's effectiveness. During these three calls 16 projects have been awarded with the hallmark CEI and 15 with the hallmark CEIR.

Regardless the above-mentioned differences, both university excellence programmes share similar positive aspects: both belong to a wider national strategy for the modernization of the national university system, and the selection of projects has been performed by an independent international committee and both recognise the need of new governance systems to promote and make visible the excellence of leading universities. In addition, both programmes were initially launched to implement a public policy for the accumulation of resources in the best institutions in order to improve their position in the global rankings, which entails diminishing resources available for the rest of universities, hence increasing the differences between universities. In the French case the IDEX programme has already implemented this policy and therefore, France has identified its flagships; while in the Spanish case the CEI programme has not yet led to a hierarchical HE system.

In particular, the CEI programme success in establishing these differences has been limited because of five main reasons: (1) the withdrawal of the financial support to the projects selected as a consequence of the change of the Spanish government, which have led either to slower advancement in the projects' results or to their dropping; (2) the change of strategic priorities of the Spanish government in the HE field as a consequence of the economic crisis: some specific actions in which these universities invested the CEI funds (mainly infrastructures) are not considered a priority anymore yet they still pose pressure in the universities' budget along with the CEI loans; (3) the decentralised Spanish HE system entailed political pressures that led to award much more initiatives than originally pretended and consequently the financial resources assigned to the programme, much scarcer than in France, have been distributed among a large number of institutions; (4) as the political pressures led to the selection of too many initiatives, the CEI programme intended to identify those projects with real potential capacity to compete globally through the periodical evaluations of the programme, in which the majority of the awarded initiatives were expected to not be able to achieve the promised goals. Nevertheless, the lack of continuity of the CEI programme has not

allowed this gradual selection as occurred in the French case; and (5) the lack of a real change for a new governance system for the empowerment of the HEIs' leaders. Nevertheless, in our view the CEI programme has been able to increase the general efficiency of the system, as it has spread the culture of strategic planning and of synergic collaboration with other institutions among all Spanish Research Universities.

Concerning the strategy of the universities analysed in the previous section, Dauphine has become a partner of a great alliance that is an independent and new branded university, PSL. Although apparently all its educational partners are very different from each other, they share the following core characteristics, which reinforce the logic of the alliance: all educational institutions are *selective institutions* with explicit student selection systems; their teaching prestige is based on strict student selection criteria and a demanding teaching approach; these institutions keep a manageable number of students and do not seek continued growth; and these partners do not compete with each other because they have their own area of activity essentially different from that of the others. To sum up, the educational partners of PSL are *prestigious institutions*, which has been sufficiently proven through time.

In the case of the UAM, in the previous section we have narrated that its strategic alliance has the same goal of improving its international visibility and position in the global rankings, although it has chosen a single partner, and this partnership will not lead to a new university because seeks only to increase the research capacity of both partners by adding and reorganise their resources.

With respect to the strategies of Dauphine and UAM both share the same generic goals: to improve international visibility, to generate a highly competitive world-class research and to improve the reputation of the institutions involved. These common goals are to be achieved also through the same type of strategy, an alliance for which they obtain financial resources from the national university excellence programmes as well as from projects in specific areas and disciplines, and in which the member institutions add their inputs and outputs while keep their autonomy. On the other hand both strategies also have differences regarding their specific goals and budget. The specific goal of PSL is ambitious because it aims to be ranked among the top 20 universities, while the goal of the CEI UAM+CSIC is a moderate one, being to be ranked among the 100th – 200th universities. This is mainly consequence of their different budgets, €750 million in the case of PSL allocated mostly as an endowment, and €27 million in the case of CEI UAM+CSIC, mainly allocated through loans.

Last but not least, the most important difference lies in their governance systems. In the case of Dauphine, it became member of a new branded university with an innovative governance model. PSL designs its own strategy, while its twenty members keep their autonomy regarding their individual institutional strategies. On the contrary, the CEI UAM+CSIC is not a new institution but increase the research capacity through the addition and reorganisation of the research resources and facilities of the two members of the alliance. This will be the base for the real future implementation of its governance model.

In our opinion, the main difficulty of both strategies seems to be the management of their respective alliances, since this ambiguous formula is difficult to administrate. However, PSL seems to have better prospects than the Spanish alliance, since the first one is a medium-range collaboration with a specific legal form and extensive financial resources, while the second one, even though it is an alliance, it has characteristics of a short-range collaboration which has received few additional resources and face harder governance challenges.



To sum up, these strategic alliances add the inputs and outputs of research universities and research institutions, hosting a large number of scientists that generate a highly competitive world-class research with a possible future impact on global rankings. Moreover, they can obtain more financial resources for major projects in specific areas to compete in the global market of Higher Education and this type of strategy improves the reputation and prestige of the institutions involved. Nevertheless, given that these are experiences still in an early stage, time is needed before we can evaluate their results in terms of size, prestige, governance and, above all, global ranking position.

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