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Master Thesis

Does national culture matter for organizational culture in institutions of higher education?
An Italian University and a Norwegian University compared

BY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS = Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CIA = Central Intelligence Agency

EEC = European Economic Community

EU = European Union

GLOBE = Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness

HYP = Hypothesis

IBM = International Business Machines Corporation

ICT = Information and Communication Technology

IDV = Individualism/Collectivism

IT = Information Technology

LTO = Long-term versus Short-term Orientation

MAS/FEM = Masculinity/Femininity

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NPM = New Public Management

PD = Power Distance

PDI = Power Distance Index

PhD = Doctor of Philosophy

SIU = Senter for internasjonalisering av høyere utdanning (Centre for International University Cooperation)

SVI = Swartz Value Inventory

UA = Uncertainty Avoidance

UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index

WVS = World Value Survey

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The university of today has become an object of study, debate and reflection. Changes in the social sphere, globalization, economic and political trends, all these factors push universities towards new forms and role. Indeed, universities are still deeply bounded to the national history and culture. In the present study, national culture is taken as an explanatory factor for organizational differences. Culture is operationalized through specific indicators: the study relies on the work of Geert Hofstede (Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind, 1991) who defined national cultural dimensions. The basic assumption is that cultural differences produce in turn organizational differences. These differences are here are studied comparing two public universities. A university is a public organization infused with values. That is, despite worldwide common elements in higher educational institutions, universities are expression of identities, roles and cultural traits which strictly identify a national context from another.

The research is based on a comparative case study of an Italian and a Norwegian university. A comparative strategy enabled the researcher to move form merely describing the cases to a more advanced investigation of the invariances between the cases. Therefore, it created a basis for hypothesis-testing. Hofstede's theory on cultural differences is used as a framework for hypotheses, assuming organizational invariances derive from national culture. In the research process both quantitative and qualitative styles are combined, using a mixed method approach. Both primary and secondary data have been used. Information were collected through survey, interviews, documents review and web databases.

During the research process, the evidence collected proved Italy and Norway different in cultural terms: Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been substantiated by data from the World Value Survey database. Then, structure, behaviours and relations in the two universities were investigated, to see to what extent they reflected national values. Data have been analyzed through bivariate analysis and they confirmed the hypotheses. The national cultural context influences the universities in key aspects: the degree of decentralization, the distribution of power between institutional units and between actors, the way teaching and learning are carried out, the degree of reliance on current forms and rules, autonomy and flexibility, the propensity of the university towards reforms and the changing process. Despite its limitations, the study highlighted the relevance of the cultural variable, too often underestimated by higher education researchers. A better understanding of national and organizational culture in the life of a University may improve discourses on quality and efficiency, steering models, governance in higher education and reform processes.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The university of today has become an object of study, debate and reflection. The past two decades have seen a change in the way universities are perceived, a challenge to traditional forms, and a development of a university unique culture. Changes in the social sphere, new economic trends, globalization, the increasing number of accesses to the educational system, the new efforts to increase quality and efficiency in the administration (such as with NPM reforms): all these forces have pushed the University towards a new identity. This is why it is interesting to explore the reality of universities today, what kind of culture they represent and are likely to reproduce in future (Folch and Ion, 2009).

In the present study, the focus is on the link between national culture and universities. The research measures to what extent national culture affects public universities (despite such a multifaceted context), assuming that cultural divergence may produce variations among countries. In order to measure potential variations, the analysis is conducted comparing the Roma Tre University (Università di Roma Tre, Italy) and the University of Bergen (Universitetet i Bergen, Norway).

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: THE LENS OF CULTURE

Cultural studies and the emphasis on culture in the social sciences were in the mainstream in the 1940s and 1950s. Then, interest in culture has gained new force in the last decades, moving towards the articulation of culture-centred paradigms for the study of social and political phenomena (Harrison and Huntington, 2000). Increasingly social scientists turn to cultural factors to explain modernization, political democratization, institutional change, the alignment or divergence among countries, etc (Harrison and Huntington, 2000). Culture became the lens through which we look at actions and behaviours. Culture became the framework to interpret societies.

In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn compiled a list of 164 definitions of culture. It is clear that the term fits into many diverse explanations and understandings. One of the most used definition of culture came from Cliford J. Geertz *(The Interpretation of Culture*, 1973), who tried to identify the various meanings attached to the word: the social legacy that individuals acquire from their community; a way of thinking, feeling and believing; a learned behaviour and a mechanism for the regulation of activities; a collective system of meaning of a group; "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). In a general sense, the term culture refers to both ideas (values,

symbolic thought, believing) and actions (patterns of activity, behaviours, social learning) (Tayeb, 1988; Schein, 1984). Moreover, it refers to both individuals and communities, in the sense that culture also characterizes a social group, affecting the way that group organizes itself through specific structures and institutions. This interpretation is supported among others by Hofstede et al. (2010), who define the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting as *mental programs*, or *software of the mind.*

In their understanding, culture is a collective phenomenon, whose sources lie in the social environment, in life experiences collected, in all we learn. In other words, "culture consist of the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.6). Basic values are the core of culture, which assign a deeper meaning to common social practices. These practices and behaviours are then quite stable, and tend to reproduce themselves through institutions and organizations built within a specific society. Core aspects of culture are extremely difficult to change, and can justify the continuity of specific social forms (such as institutions, laws, public organizations) (Hofstede et al., 2010).

That is why, an increasing number of scholars and researchers focus on culture as the key explanatory factor of social phenomena: cultural aspects facilitate or hinder social processes of development, adaptation, growth, etc. Despite the resistance and scepticism of some sociologists and researchers, many studies have proven that research on culture can be scientific and fruitful (to cite some: Hofstede, 1991; Schein, 1984; Harrison and Huntington, 2000; Jamil, 1994). Culture is used as analytic tool. Its influence became somehow measurable: cultural differences can explain political, economic, social differences. Or, as the present research intends to do, differences among specific institutional forms.

1.2 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

The first step of a research project is the formulation of a topic, also called research problem (Layder, 1998). The choice can be driven by academic interest or by other circumstances (personal inclination and values, for instance). My process of thinking about the research topic has been long and hard. While considering many options, I finally found myself in a privileged position to study cultural differences. I moved from my own country, Italy, to Norway: I experience every day what makes it so diverse to live in one country or in another. First of all, they differ in terms of economic growth, political system, living habits, not to say weather or food. Going more deeply, what mainly differentiate Italy and Norway is their habits, values, meanings, in other words their culture.

According to many evidences, Italy and Norway are significantly divergent in their cultural profiles. To draw a quick picture of Italy, let us say that the family is the centre of the society, supporting individuals during all life and in every interaction. Appearances matters (first impressions are lasting

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impressions); great respect and deference is due to elders, authority, high status individuals, business men and academics (class divisions matter)[1]. Courtesy and friendliness are the basis for relations. On the other hand, Norway is well-known for feelings of modesty, egalitarianism, gender equality. This is translated into a strongly supporting welfare system and a welcoming society. People deserve respect because of their skills and achievements, more than because of their social role. The core of the social net is the individual (more than the family), and establishing relations is often difficult.

In scientific terms, cultural differences may explain why Norway and Italy perform so differently in public institutions, and which cultural aspects may have major impacts on the way societies organize themselves into specific structures. To make the research more focused, the analysis focuses on higher education institutions: the whole study is an attempt to establish a relation between national cultural traits and universities. Although other cases could have been selected (such as municipalities, government agencies, public health organization), the choice was driven by methodological reasons[2], manageability and my personal experience. First, Universities were more easily comparable and accessible for a researcher like me. Second, I studied for four years in Rome and I am now attending a Master Programme in Bergen. The familiarity with both systems made me better aware of the research context, the implications for data collection and the relevant variables.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present research aims to draw a relation between cultural values and national institutions. Assuming that culture is an explanatory factor for organizational differences, the thesis measures to what extent this assumption can be proven true in the context of universities. By defining culture in terms of precise measures (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010), the study analyses their influence on higher education institutions. The scope is to define a relation between national culture and universities, testing the hypothesis that culture matters in the management of public institutions.

The basic idea behind the choice of an institution, such as the university, lies in its own nature. An institution is a public organization infused with values, which embodies symbols and patterns of interactions (Selznick, 1957). These symbols and relations stands in favour of specific meanings and norms. Universities as well are imbued with value and embrace a fairly well codified set of values and widespread norms (Bleiklie, 2006). Thus, despite worldwide common elements in higher educational institutions (a board of trustees, a president, various administrative divisions, a number of academic departments or faculties, a commitment to education and research), the choice is supported by the belief

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[1] http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/italy-country-profile.html
[2] They will be discussed in details later, in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3)

that universities are expression of identities, roles and cultural traits which strictly identify a national context from another (Kogan at al, 2006). According to a respondent:

> *"Generally speaking I would say the University, perhaps more for its shortcomings than for its merits, is pretty much a copy of the society. All the mental attitudes that we find in everyday forms of social living are reproduced in the University environment, maybe in slightly different forms, more refined but substantially similar".* (an Italian professor)

Moreover, in order to survive over time, institutions tend to reproduce and socialize these values and norms (Selznick, 1957). It means universities are linked to the national culture though a double tie: they are committed to produce, reproduce and teach knowledge; at the same time, they are affected by the existing state of knowledge, which determines their role and structure.

According to Olivier (2006), the selection of Universities is justified also because:

> "It was important to ensure that the organisations selected as case studies would be as similar as possible. Otherwise it would have been difficult to draw valid conclusions about the role of organisational culture. Organisations selected as case studies are, therefore, as similar as possible in terms of functions, in order to assist in the identification of cultural differences and similarities" (Olivier, 2006, p. 299).

As a result, how a national system administers universities may reflect the way that system prioritizes some cultural aspects over others, some structural forms over others. Basic hypotheses of the research is that, if proven that the two countries under study are culturally divergent, consequently they would also show different ways of organizing public institutions. The research investigates how university's organizational characteristics are expression of some national cultural traits.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to King et al., "a research project should pose a question that is important in the real world" (King et al., 1994, p.15). I made clear my personal interest in the topic, which drove the choice in the first place. However, the research should also be significant in academic terms. The study findings are likely to point out benefits and burdens brought by specific institutional forms: whether for example cultural dimensions facilitate or hinder educational processes, administrative working practices, relations among institutional actors. All in all, it can add some insights to the discussion around policy alternatives and administrative reforms, underlying the relevance of cultural factors. During my studies, I have learned that policies may have different implications depending on the national context: studies about NPM, as well as research on policy transfer, have shown so far that cultural traits deeply affect the success or failure of political alternatives. As soon as cultural aspects can be operationalized through

specific indicators (such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions, 1991), the study may help tracing which higher education policies best suit a national context.

Moreover, in the past two decades, the EU has promoted a convergence of higher education systems, in order to increase the mobility of students and professionals around Europe (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The so called *Bologna Process* "has put in motion a series of reforms needed to make European Higher Education more compatible and comparable, more competitive and more attractive" (European Commission official website[3]). One of the respondents defined the Bologna Process as a "never-ending process" that drove a radical change in higher education institutions among Europe. Both Italy and Norway have signed the declaration, confirming the will to adapt their universities to the common framework. The present research might be noteworthy also in this respect: since universities are moving towards a *European Higher Education Area*, the study findings can unveil which factors may be more difficult to change (being culture highly stable), which reforming policies may be more easily accepted, which institutional aspects must be preserved because tightly connected with the cultural identity of a country. All in all, findings can unveil which cultural factors are facilitators for, or obstacles to, certain forms of development and management.

Lastly, the study can highlight which variables need further attention by social researchers: most comparative studies of organizational culture, including Hofstede, are based on private organizations. Instead, in this research, two public institutions are compared, which are likely to be more infused by society's culture. Nevertheless, "the rise of mass education during the 1980s and 1990s made higher education and its costs more visible and contributed to a more intensive focus on how higher education institutions are organized and managed (Bleikie and Kogan, 2007, p. 482). The cultural variable might result a new key to understand university's steering.

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purposes of the study are:
- o Draw a relation between national cultural dimensions (as formulated by Hofstede, 1991) and university's organizational culture;
- o Investigate whether the implications of certain cultural dimensions can be tested true in the context of public higher education institutions;
- o Identify which cultural and organizational factors may explain relevant differences in universities between Italy and Norway.

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[3] http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc1290_en.htm

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question expresses the general assumption driving the research project:

- o How does national culture affect higher education institutions? Is it possible to draw a relation between national cultural dimensions and university's characteristics?

To proceed in the research process and collect data, also operational specific research questions have been formulated. These questions direct the researcher attention towards certain aspects and variables: answering the specific questions bring knowledge about the cases under study. The evidence collected on university's core aspects will make possible the comparison, testing the basic assumption of the research and therefore answering the main research question.

- o Does culture influence institutional actors? How do cultural dimensions affect the interaction between students and teachers? How do they influence administrative staff working relations?
- o How does culture affect the university's learning environment?
- o How does culture affect the institutional structure?
- o How does culture influence the degree of autonomy granted to administrative staff?
- o How does culture influence institutional autonomy and the university response towards change?

1.7 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis refers to the frame within which the researcher find answers to the study questions. Taking into consideration the geographic proximity and the potential chances in the access of data, the unit of the study is the University. The research is conducted at two different levels, considering both the whole university and the micro-institution, that is, the department level (Folch and Ion, 2009).

The advantage of having two levels of analysis is the access to different kind of data. University documents and reports about the institutional life help tracing a picture of which general characteristics distinguish one university from another. However, at this general level, the two universities might show more similarities than differences. Thus, a more operational level must be included in the project: a department level, where universities may display more differences than similarities. Departments or faculties are the best subunits to investigate both administrative working routines and didactic characteristics (Folch and Ion, 2009). The main activity ground for both academic and managerial staff. The best locus to observe patterns of activities, routinized (thus stable over time) and symbolic (thus meaningful). Moreover, at a lower level of analysis, it is possible to go deeply into relations and variables: the researcher is able to conduct interviews, examine particular cases and administer questionnaires on a smaller representative sample.

As stated before, the research compares two public universities. The universities are the Roma Tre University (Università degli Study Roma Tre) and the University of Bergen (Universitetet i Bergen). My personal experience as a student in both universities gave me enough knowledge of the institutional environment to conduct the research effectively. In practice, two faculties are the operational units of analysis: the faculty of Political Science in the Italian University, the faculty of Social Science in the Norwegian University. The selection is also justified by similar characteristics of the two faculties under study: a) the total number of students in the faculties is around 900 students; b) a board of the faculty where both academic and administrative staff are represented; c) a certain degree of autonomy within the institutional framework set by national laws.

1.7.1 BRIEF PROFILE OF THE UNIVERSITIES UNDER STUDY

a) **Roma Tre University - Università degli Studi Roma Tre**

It was founded in 1992 and it is the *youngest* university in Rome. It has about 40.000 students, 8 faculties and 32 departments. According to the University Statute:

> *"The Roma Tre University is a public autonomous institution, whose aims are the promotion and production of knowledge, and the development of culture. Primary functions of the University are: a) the education and the intellectual training of the students enrolled; b) the preparation of suitable scientific structures for research and academic activities; c) the organization of services to promote study and research"* (University Statute, Title I, General Principles, art 1, p.1)

The University declares itself "fully engaged in offering training courses able to prepare students with high levels of skills training and preparation for research" (from the university's official website)[4]. In 1999, the University has started a comprehensive reform to standardize the learning programs and the corresponding degrees to the European level. Now the University mainly offers three years Bachelor programs and two years Master programs, plus PhD and other specific educational programs. It relies on a credit-system (1 credit every 25 hours of study) to weight exams and allow higher flexibility among courses and universities. Grades are expressed on a 30 points scale, where 18/30 is the minimum requirement to pass an exam and 30/30 with honors in the maximum grade (from the university's official website[5]).

b) **University of Bergen - Universitetet i Bergen**

The UiB was established in 1946, with only 3 faculties (arts, medicine, natural science). Now it includes 6 main faculties and 60 different specialized departments, centres and institutes. It has about

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[4] http://www.uniroma3.it/page.php?page=ateneo
[5] http://www.uniroma3.it/page.php?page=Guida_all

14.000 students and its academic landscape is characterised by a great variety, offering Bachelor and Master degrees, as well as PhD, participation in research groups, etc. As stated on its web-site, "the University of Bergen is a research university with a high international profile that is committed to academic and research excellence"[6]. In fact, it has been given a position amongst the world's 200 leading universities in this year's Times Higher Education rankings (2011) (from the university's official website[7]). According to the Rectorate's Policy Statement 2009-2013, university's fundamental attributes and functions include "basic research and post-graduate programmes in all academic units, research-based education over a broad range, free and critical thinking in all academic activities and an organization and leadership firmly rooted in the academic units".

The Norwegian University relies on a credit-system as the Italian one, but grades are given in letters (from F for failure, through E which is the minimum requirement, to A which is the maximum grade). Moreover, as Italy, Norway has been a member of the *Bologna Process* since the beginning (1999). It has implemented the new arrangements in the education system mainly through the Quality Reform, which came into effect in autumn 2003 (from the official website of the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU)[8]).

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is mostly based on the work of Geert Hofstede (*Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*, 1991). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are the basis to evaluate the two countries in cultural terms, formulation the hypotheses and compare the cases along to key aspects. Assuming that Italy and Norway are culturally different, for the researcher is able to study the potential implications of cultural differences. In other words, the researcher is able to make predictions about the potential variations among the countries. Where to study these variations? The University has been selected as the focus of the study, making it necessary to define specific variables related to the higher education context. An ample literature review has been made on higher education research, but the study mostly relies on the literature about organizational culture in universities, and specifically on the work of Tierney, '*Organizational Culture in Higher Education: Defining the Essentials*' (1988). Then, to identify operationalized measures, the case study of Marina Tomas Folch and Georgeta Ion (*Analysing the Organizational Culture of Universities: Two Models*, 2009) was analyzed. They conducted a four year research project on Catalonia public universities (Spain). The article was mainly helpful because of its detailed methodology, guiding me to define my own approach and variables.

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[6] http://www.uib.no/about/profile/academic-profile
[7] http://www.uib.no/news/nyheter/2011/10/uib-remains-in-the-top-200
[8] http://www.siu.no/eng/Front-Page/Policies-and-relations/Norway-and-Europe/The-Bologna-process

1.9 RESEARCH METHOD

Since the research investigates extremely different aspects of culture and their impact, qualitative and quantitative data are combined. The quantitative approach helped to identify patterns and trends on a representative sample, giving the researcher 'a direction to follow'. The qualitative approach gave depth to the research, strengthening the quality and validity of the evidence collected. The so called mixed-method implies that each research strategy shares the same research questions, in order to collect complementary data and support the initial predictions (Yin, 2009). Some data have been collected through surveys and analyzed with statistical techniques; others with qualitative methods, such as documents review and interviews. Both primary and secondary data are used.

1.10 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organized in seven chapters. **Chapter One** covers the Introduction, where the reader is brought into the project: introductory information are provided, together with a background of the study, statement of the problem, motivation and significance of the study, objectives of the research and research questions. Moreover, the first chapters also introduces the unit of analysis (giving a brief profile of the countries and the universities under study), the theoretical framework and the research method selected for the project. **Chapter Two** deals with the Theoretical Review, presenting the main approaches in the field and discussing their applicability in the present research. The variables of the study are examined together with the basic hypotheses. **Chapter Three** is the Methodology Chapter, that presents how the research has been designed and conducted: research strategy and methodological approach, study area, sampling techniques and respondents characteristics, data collection tools, data analysis. In addition, weaknesses and challenges of the project are discussed, together with validity, generalization and reliability. **Chapter Four** discusses the Independent Variable of the research (national culture) matching data from different sources. The two countries are described according to cultural dimensions. **Chapter Five** presents report of the findings on the Dependent Variable. The Universities under study are described according to what emerged in the data analysis. Findings are discussed comparing Italy and Norway, but interpreted in relation to each national context. **Chapter Six** goes further in the Analysis of Findings: it covers the interpretation of results through bivariate analysis, establishing connections between variables, comparing the countries to test the hypotheses. The chapter shows to what extent the research has been able to answer the initial research questions. The final chapter, **Chapter Seven**, deals with: a summary of the project, implication of the findings (theoretical relevance of the inquiry, contribution of the study and emerging issues) and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes the influence of national culture on public institutions. The whole study is an attempt to establish a relation between specific national cultural traits (independent variable) and university's features (dependent variable). According to Layder (1998), every research project should take place against the background of the existing body of theory, to generate a balance between new hypotheses and previous assumptions. A literature review is now undertaken.

2.1 USE OF THEORIES

The chapter deals with the major theoretical approaches in the field of organizational culture and higher education, selected in order to develop an analytical framework for the research. Strengths, weaknesses and later applicability will be discussed. First the work of Geert Hofstede is presented (*Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*, 1991). His research has been applied in two ways: first for the selection of the countries under study; second it was extensively used in the analysis and comparison of national cultures (as suggested by Olivier, 2006). Then, the chapter goes through some key studies on higher education research and organizational culture in higher education. The scope of the literature review is to contextualize the research, identifying which aspects and variables are important in the university environment. At last, the dependent and independent variables of the research are discussed and operationalized, together with the hypothesis of the study.

2.2 DEFINING AND STUDYING NATIONAL CULTURE: HOFSTEDE'S STUDY

"There is a significant literature which assumes that each nation has a distinctive, influential and describable 'culture'" (Mc Sweeney, 2002). This literature justifies the causal role of national culture by citing the work of **Geert Hofstede** (*Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* , 1991).

Hofstede based his study on the assumption that *culture* can be defined as a *mental software,* referring to patterns of thinking, feeling and acting. "The sources of one's mental programs lie within the social environment in which one grew up and collected one's life experiences" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.5). It is acquired during childhood within the family, it implies a process of learning that continues at school, in youth groups, in the workplace and finally in the society. Culture is meant to be a collective phenomenon, shared within the social environment, "that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.6). The core of culture are *values*: feeling

towards the world that make people prefer certain states of affairs over others (examples are dangerous versus safe, forbidden versus permitted, moral versus immoral, irrational versus rational). Values are difficult to change, in spite of sweeping changes in symbols or rituals. In fact, national cultures differ substantially at the level of usually unconscious values (from Geert Hofstede personal website[9]). Therefore, national value systems are expression of the deepest character of a country, *the onion's core* in the author words, rooted and stable over time.

Collecting data from employees of the IBM in more than 70 countries over a long period of time, Hofstede was able to identify some common elements across countries, which have been grouped into 4 specific dimensions of cultures, named *power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance*. Afterwards, the project was widened through a Chinese Value Survey: a fifth dimension was added, labelled *long-term versus short-term orientation*[10].

Through his analysis, Hofstede created a framework to analyse national culture and to understand the differences among worldwide societies. Although nations are not always culturally homogeneous (national borders do not always coincide with cultural borders, especially for example in Africa), "comparing national cultures is still a meaningful and revealing venture" (from Geert Hofstede personal website[11]). Each country can be generally identified along cultural indicators, making it possible to define national culture and compare it with others[12]. Moreover, Hofstede highlighted cultural influence on societies defining potential implications for each cultural dimension, leading to specific institutional, behavioural and organizational forms.

Along with this reasoning, it is assumed in the thesis that culture can be an explanatory factor for differences in national institutions among countries. Specifically, the researcher compares Italy and Norway. According to Hofstede et al. (2010) they are culturally different, and so they are likely to show different forms in structuring and managing universities. For the purpose of the study, it was not feasible neither fruitful to use all 5 cultural dimensions. A selection was made to make the research focused and describe the relations between variables as precisely as possible. A first attempt of comparison highlighted which dimensions most distinguish Italy and Norway (that is, power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance). As a result, researcher's attention has been directed towards these aspects, more likely generate variations between the Italian and the Norwegian context.

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[9] http://www.geerthofstede.nl/culture.aspx

[10] Hofstede's stresses that dimensions of cultures do not exist in a tangible sense, but they are constructs. A construct is "not directly accessible to observation but inferable from verbal statements and other behaviours and useful in predicting still other observable and measurable verbal and nonverbal behaviour" (Teresa Levitin, 1973; cited in the Geert Hofstede's personal website, http://www.geerthofstede.nl/research--vsm.aspx).

[11] http://www.geerthofstede.nl/culture.aspx

[12] According to Hofstede's model, the country scores on these dimensions are relative: societies are compared to other societies (cultural relativism). These relative scores have been proven to be quite stable over decades, their relative positions tend to remain the same (http://www.geerthofstede.nl/culture/dimensions-of-national-cultures.aspx).

According to the data presented in the 3rd edition of *Culture and Organization* (Hofstede G., Hofstede G.J., Minkov M.; 2010) Italy and Norway display the following measurements

Figure 2.1 Italy and Norway. Source: http://geert-hofstede.international-business-center.com/
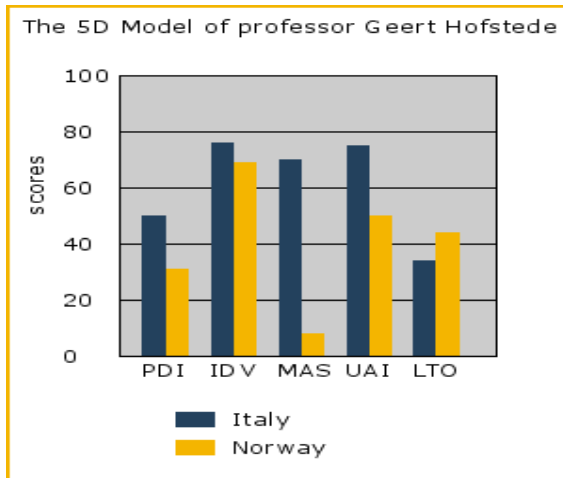
Table 2.1 Hofstede's scores for Italy and Norway. Source: www.geerthofstde.nl

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS/FEM	UAI	LTO
Italy	50	76	70	75	61
Norway	31	69	8	50	35
Difference	19	7	62	25	26

PDI=Power Distance Index.
IDV=Individualism.   MAS=Masculiny/Femininity.
UAI=Uncertainty Avoidance Index.
LTO=Long-Term Orientation

The main disparity is in the masculinity/femininity measure (with 62 points of difference); the two countries also differ in terms of power distance (19 points) and uncertainty avoidance (25 points)[13]. These three cultural aspects have been considered for the independent variable of the study (culture as explanatory factor). Each of the selected cultural traits are now briefly described, describing the implications in the context of higher education. To observe whether and to what extent national culture generate variations, the researcher analysed a national institution, the university. A focused analysis will provide a more detailed understanding of the impact of culture in context.

➢ **POWER DISTANCE (PDI)**

"All societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others" (www.geerthofstede.nl)

The dimension measures the way a nation handles inequality, the extent to which the members of the society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede et al., 2010). As mainly interesting for this study, the Power Distance Index (PDI) will be analysed for its influence on a workplace context and on the learning environment (we are talking about higher education institutions that are workplace for both academic and administrative staff, as well as a learning arena for students).
The PDI in relation to the workplace informs on the relations among superiors and subordinates, as more or less hierarchical in roles and forms: in large-PD countries, subordinates are highly dependent on

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[13] A great divergence can be also noted in the 5th dimension (26 points). However, for the purpose of this research, it has been established to compare the two countries only according to the so-called 'western dimensions' (PD; IDV; MAS/FEM; UA).

their boss for decisions and actions; in small-PD countries, organizations are highly decentralized, superiors and subordinates usually work together when taking important decisions (Hofstede et al., 2010). The PDI also affect the teacher-student relation: in large-PD countries there is a high degree of inequality between them and the educational process is mostly teacher-centred (very dependent on teachers' knowledge and ability). On the contrary, in countries with low PDI teachers and students have equal roles and the learning process is mostly based on student's skills and independence. The PDI helps understanding how relations are built within the institutional context, and to what extent they are influenced by certain structural forms (for example, by a more or less decentralized system).

> ### MASCULINITY – FEMININITY
> *"The assertive pole has been called masculine and the modest, caring pole feminine" (www.geerthofstede.nl)*

Which behaviour is regarded as feminine or masculine differ among both traditional and modern societies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Masculine values are strongly associated with competitive social roles, status recognition and preference for higher-level jobs. Instead, feminine values are associated with caring and social-oriented roles, preference for good working relationship and employment security over time. Masculinity is associated with performance societies, based on market economy, while femininity is more often associated with welfare societies (Hofstede et al., 2010). Likewise, masculine and feminine societies differ in the way they perceive and manage gender inequalities in roles and positions. Although it is not a case that some occupations are mostly filled by men and some others by women (occupational patterns may still be traced in relation to the masculine/feminine dimension), let us recognize that the dimension is mainly a measure of attitudes and behaviours, of *hard values* versus *soft values*. Whether a society is more masculine or feminine oriented, can be observed in the university's environment investigating perceptions and attitudes of institutional actors.

A good example is to observe which characteristics are considered more valuable when assessing teachers. Preferred characteristics of professors show whether masculine or feminine values are positively associated with high status actors (as the academic staff can be said in the university). In masculine countries, teachers are most likely to be evaluated for their academic reputation (masculine countries stress results and reward achievement). In feminine countries, teachers are evaluated according to their social attitudes, such as friendliness and support.

> ### UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE INDEX (UAI)
> *"Uncertainty avoidance leads to a reduction of ambiguity, rather than risk"(Hofstede et al., 2010, pag.197)*

The dimension indicates the way a society handles uncertainty and ambiguity, the way a culture 'programs' members to feel comfortable or uncomfortable in unclear or unknown situations. The Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) expresses the need for rules and predictability.

Societies with a high UAI tend to look for structure in organizations, institutions and relationships, in order to make events predictable. This need for rules is emotional, it fulfils a need for security (Hofstede et al., 2010). In the analysis of universities, it means that both administrative and educational environments are structured as much as possible, so that employees, teachers and students feel comfortable. It means, the university probably relies on strict protocols, standardized behaviours and formal procedures. On the contrary "countries with weak uncertainty avoidance show the opposite, an emotional horror of formal rules. People think that rules should be established only in the case of absolute necessity" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.210) and changed if not effective. Administrative workers have more autonomy and discretion in their functions, less constrained by fixed routines.

Moreover, the uncertainty avoidance index may also be indicative of the institutional propensity towards change or stability. Institutions in high uncertainty-avoiding countries tend to preserve themselves stable and conservative, maintaining the status quo. Conversely, institutions in low uncertainty-avoiding countries are more likely to innovate their structure, forms and procedures in the attempt to improve institutional effectiveness. For that reason, the dimension has also been used to measure the capacity and will of universities to change. It was not possible to investigate the process of change itself (long-lasting and too complex to observe and evaluate), but the researcher tried to define the extent to which culture affect the universities in their way to adapt and survive over time. The UAI has been used as expression of flexibility towards reforms and innovation.

2.2.1 CRITICS TO HOFSTEDE'S APPROACH

Many scholars have criticized Hofstede's work. To cite some, Wallerstein (1990) is sceptical about the extent we can operationalize the concept of culture validly. Triandis (1993) affirms the author made no attempts to link his own research with the contemporary social literature. Only few would support the assumption that national and occupational cultures are relatively stable, because learned in the early phases of life. Moreover, the research could be resized, compared with alternative studies on national culture (the GLOBE project, the Swartz Value Inventory) or with alternative explanations of culture (for example Geertz, 1973; Schein, 1984). The most serious criticism comes from **Mc Sweeney** (2002), who highlights major weaknesses associated with Hofstede's assumptions and findings.

➢ In the first place, he contested Hofstede's definition of national culture. Mc Sweeney questions the assumption that every nation shares a unique common culture, sustaining the cultural diversities of societies (Mc Sweeney, 2002).

➢ In the second place, his review covers a methodological criticism, regarding sample size and potential generalizability of results. A closer examination of the number of the respondents selected reveals that the average number per country was often small, and for some countries minuscule (in

15 countries the respondents were less than 200). The narrowness of the population surveyed can invalidate the claim of 'national sample', even more considering that respondents were exclusively from a single company (IBM, a single micro-location). According to Mc Sweeney's analysis (2002), there are no valid reasons for assuming that IBM responses represent the national average.

➢ Third, the criticism is directed toward the basic hypothesis of the research. To study national culture, Hofstede assumed that the respondents from IBM all shared the same organizational and occupational culture (they were all working for the same company). Therefore, he claimed that the main element accounting for the differences displayed among countries was the national culture. Indeed, Mc Sweeney contests the idea that there is only one IBM culture, which is a common occupational culture for all IBM employees worldwide. "National cultures are said to influence occupational contexts and practices, but somehow that national diversity is not assumed to create national differences in occupational or organizational cultures" (Mc Sweeney, 2002, p. 99).

This critical review emphasizes that Hofstede's theoretical framework (1991) has certain weaknesses. It is undeniable that some of the basic assumptions can be questioned along with the previous analysis (Mc Sweeney, 2002). The validity of generalization from a single case to the national level can be weakened, when the validity of the specific case is not confirmed. Moreover, it is not easy to substantiate culture as the unique explanatory variable, especially when culture is over-simplified by equating it with nations (Olivier, 2006). However, in spite of those methodological limitations, it is important to acknowledge the merits of Hofstede's work (1991).

First of all, it is one of the few models able to investigate culture empirically, despite clear difficulties faced by scholars to operationalize and measure the concept. Second, the assumption that culture is an implicit and subjective characteristic helps confirming the claim that culture determines behaviours and attitudes, and it is supported by other studies in the field (Geertz, 1973; Tayeb, 1988; Schein, 1984). Third, "Hofstede clearly acknowledges the existence of subcultures, and it must be remembered that the research does not apply to individuals but reflects the tendency or likelihood to hold certain values" (Olivier, 2006, p. 297). Forth, although it is difficult to sustain that organizational and occupational culture are constant and equal in all countries, the choice is justified by the methodological need of keeping stable other variables and observe culture. In this sense, the IBM setting, with similar characteristics around the globe, could fit the purpose. Lastly, Hofstede's results (1991) have been confirmed by other findings worldwide: high individualism in the United States, high feminism in the Scandinavian countries, long-term orientation in Chinese-dominated societies, high power distance in Japan. Having said that, for the scope of the present research, Hofstede's dimensions are a valid and interesting point of departure to test new cases, as intended to do in this thesis (overcoming the shortcomings).

2.2.2 STUDYING CULTURE – ALTERNATIVE MODELS

As already mentioned, Hofstede's approach (1991) had the main influence and inspiration on the drawing of the present research. Obviously, other theoretical frameworks have been reviewed in order to investigate cultural dimensions. The most remarkable in the field are:

➢ **GLOBE project** (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness)

Conducted from 1994 to 1997, headed by Robert J. House. A research team collected data from surveys to 17.000 managers in 61 countries. The intention of the project, after the collection of such an amount of data, was to "describe, understand and predict the impact of cultural variables on leadership and organizational process" (House, Head of Project GLOBE, 1994-1997). The GLOBE project somehow expanded the dimensions proposed by Hofstede, defining 9 categories named power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism, assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, future orientation, human orientation and performance orientation. It stands to reason the similarity with the original dimensions. The fact that the projects relies on a reformulation of Hofstede's dimensions was per sé a good reason for the present researcher to prefer the original framework. Moreover, some of the concepts, although labelled with the same name, have indeed different meanings: for example, uncertainty avoidance is intended as intolerance for ambiguity and fear for unknown situations by Hofstede (1991), while in the GLOBE project it is intended as a search for orderliness, with some kind of positive meaning.

Another reason to discard the project was its strong focus on the relation between culture and leadership. The managerial aspect of higher education is increasingly relevant in contemporary debates, administrative performance and leadership are considered key elements for university's institutional change (Tierney, 1988). In fact, this has been also confirmed by some respondents in the research, who highlighted the impact of NPM reforms on the administrative work and the new trends towards evaluation and report writing. However, the present research is mainly focused on the cultural background in which leaders work. Although leadership is an important issue for universities, the study is intended to investigate the overall organizational life and context. The intention is to observe cultural influences, to understand the cultural frame in which actors and institutions perform. In this sense, Hofstede's findings are considered more appropriate and suitable: they refer directly to the national cultural frame. The researcher has the possibility to establish its own connections between culture and universities. On the other hand, using GLOBE Project data would have implied a different approach in the research (focus on leadership, assuming that leaders manage culture (Schein, 1984)). Here, the researcher merely tries to understand what kind of culture is produced and managed in the university environment.

➢ **Shwart'z Value Inventory (SVI)**

During the 1970s and 1980s, Schwartz was one of the pioneers in the research on development and consequences of behavioural attitudes, and the conceptualization of human values across cultures. His research aimed to identify which values act as "guiding principles of one's life": he asked respondents to asses the importance of certain values when selecting actions or evaluating events (Schwartz, 1992). Data were collected through surveys in 63 countries, with more than 60.000 individuals taking part. Finally, Swartz identified 10 types of universal values (power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security) at an individual-level analysis. Then, values have been grouped into 4 larger clusters: *openness to change* versus c*onservation*; s*elf-enhancement* versus s*elf-transcendence*[14]. Swartz moved from an analysis on behaviours towards the definition of values drive such behaviours: he assumed that values are relevant in shaping the way we think, feel and act, and on a more general level reflect the different solutions that societies formulate to address problems (Schwartz, 1992). In relation to the present research, a lesson has been learned from Swartz: that behaviours, attitudes and practices of university's actors can be representative of cultural values. In fact, the research is based mainly on the analysis of respondent's perceptions and actions, in the attempt to identify the influence of culture.

2.3 ANALYZING THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT:

HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH AND STUDIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

So far, the researcher has presented the approach chosen for the study of national culture. Culture has been operationalized though Hofstede's research framework (1991). According to the study design, the research seeks to draw a relation between national culture and university's characteristics. For the study of universities and the analysis of the educational context, two sets of theories were considered: first, the researcher went through a review of theories in higher education research, with a last focus on cultural studies in higher education research; than, studies on organizational culture have been examined.

The scope was to gain an overview over the main theories in the field. The result is that the concept of *university's organizational culture* is developed and used. The chapter deals with a summary of the approaches in higher education literature, a brief definition of organizational culture in higher education (mainly based on the work of Tierney, 1988), a case study on university's organizational culture (to operationalized the dependent variable, Folch and Ion, 2009).

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[14] *Openness to change*: stimulation, self-direction and independence, hedonism; *Conservation*: security, tradition, conformity as preference for rules and structures. .*Self-enhancement*: setting goals and reaching their achievement, power control and prestige, hedonism; *Self-transcendence*: universalism, social justice and equality, benevolence.

2.3.1 HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

Studies on higher education have developed towards many directions, attempting to understand and explain the complexity of higher education institutions and their relation to national and international political environments. The major branch of higher education research deals with modes of governance and policy issues related to higher education reforms. In fact, from the 1970s a high level of government interferences in institutional affairs increasingly captured researcher attention (Maasen, 2008). Many researches focused on the steering of universities, the impact of political reforms, the relationship between the state and the institution (Maasen, 2008). Moreover, the process of re-organization of European universities, including general reforms of governance and the modernization of the public sector (for example, through NPM reforms), has given to the research new inputs (Maasen, 2008).

Governance, organization, management tools, quality, leadership and policy making emerged as key issues for higher education research (Maasen, 2008; Kogan et al., 2006). Among other, some authors emerged as key researchers in the field: Maurice Kogan, Mary Henkel, Ivar Bleiklie. Their work expanded our knowledge on higher education: educational policies and the impact of policy-making on universities (Kogan et al, 2006); academic leadership (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005); policy regimes and higher education change processes (Bleiklie, 2006); academic identity and policy change in higher education (Henkel, 2000); organization and governance (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007). All in all, the work of Kogan helped in the analysis of the interconnections between knowledge, values, authority and power; and how these are reflected in institutional structures, relationships and individual practices in higher education institutions (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005). On the other hand, the other two authors tried to expand his work and summarize the contemporary thinking about the governance in higher education in the book *Governing Knowledge: A study of continuity and change in higher education* (2005). The book explored the relation and dynamics between structures and modes of governance, definition of knowledge and the values that those involved in higher education bring with them. On the whole, they identified three main sources of variation in higher education: policy issues and modes of governance, conceptions of knowledge (universities are increasingly evaluated for their production of applicable knowledge), values and culture within and outside the institution (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005).

Indeed, some researcher have blended cultural studies with research on higher education. "The history of cultural studies on higher education began in the 1930s, when there emerged a need to gain a better understanding of student cultures in American higher education" (Välimaa, 2008, p.12). Historically, studies focused on campus and faculty cultures from the beginning of the 1950s. One of the fist examples comes from the work of Burton Clark (1963, cited in Välimaa, 2008). Higher education institutions are increasingly defined as cultural entities, having their own organizational cultures or organizational sagas (Clark, 1970). The studies on higher education institutions as cultural entities

expanded in the 1980s, focusing attention on institutional missions, the process of socialization, leadership and communication in higher education institution (as in Tierney, 1988) (Välimaa, 2008). In fact, in the present research, studies on organizational culture are taken into account (related to the university's context) and the analysis of Tierney's research is presented.

According to Välimaa (2008) the cultural perspective has led to different opportunities in the study of higher education. The current state of research in the field includes: a) studies on disciplinary cultures (as distinctive cultures and as intellectual devises for the study of the nature and variations in academia); b) studies on institutional and campus cultures (describing the social fabric of higher education institutions); c) students as the object of studies (cultural students traditions are used also to explain differences in learning outcomes); d) national cultures used as analytic tools for explaining typical behaviours in a national system of education, in a way that the dynamics of higher education institutions must be contextualized into a wider socio and political environment (Välimaa, 2008). "The motion that national systems of higher education have a different character, which is rooted in their traditions […], is an example of the way national cultural contexts are recognized as important factors, when explaining the functioning of higher education institutions" (Välimaa, 2008, p. 17). As a consequence, the present research attempts to establish a relation between the national cultural environment and the university.

Cultural aspects of higher education are often recognized as an explanatory devise in order to understand the differences between countries. Two additional considerations must be made: first of all, the process of change in higher education (which is one of the most popular topics in the field) is deeply rooted in institutional and organizational cultures in higher education (Brennan and Shah, 2000; Curri, 2002; Harman, 2002; all cited in Välimaa, 2008). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that traditions, identities and cultures are real social forces in higher education (Välimaa, 2008). Second, according to Kogan et al. (2006), universities are becoming 'mediators' between political intentions and the process of reform itself. Examples of institutional efforts are: to find a proper balance between centralization and decentralization, between academic and internal administrative influences and external political and economic influences, between organizational stability and flexibility (Kogan et al., 2006). All these aspects are taken into account in this thesis, with the belief that understanding the current state of affairs in universities may help understanding how to maximize their institutional development within the national context.

As already mentioned, when studying the cultural variable in the higher education setting, studies on organizational culture emerge as analytical tools (Clark, 1970; Maasen, 2008). It becomes significant and interesting to see whether or not the institution has a common belief system, how students are treated, modes of behaviours, academic values and so on (Kogan, 1996).

2.3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Until the late 1980s, most European universities (and universities in Italy and Norway among them) had a form of bureaucracy but no management whatsoever (Paradeise et al., 2009). As social arrangements, they did not posses the properties of formal organizations (such as collective defined goals or control over their own performance) (Paradeise et al., 2009). They were seen as organizational 'garbage cans' or loose arenas, where multiple actors and agendas co-existed (Cohen et al., 1972, as cited in Paradeise et al., 2009). They were not considered as *purposely managed organizations*. Then, from the late 1970s and the 1980s new management tools spread within organizations, involving higher education institutions as well, turning universities into organizations: the reforms emphasized the idea that universities should be organized in such a way that they were able to operate as *strategic actors* (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007; Kogan et al., 2006). New instruments and new management capabilities entered the world of higher education, leading to internalization of decisions (rise of self-government tools) and increasing the level of belongingness of university's members (Paradeise et al., 2009).

Therefore, theories of organizational culture were progressively applied to the study of higher education. It was believed that fragmented reality of institutions and their peculiar structural forms could bring discourses on organizational culture one step further (Higgins, 2007). The concept of organizational culture became a tool for higher education institutions. Organizational culture tells members which goals to pursue, appropriate behaviours, work norms and guidelines, expectations, communication forms and so on (Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Robbins, 1989; Weik and Lang, 2001). Management discourse was not anymore sufficient for the steering of universities and the various governance models did not led to the expected positive results (Maasen, 2008). Institutional life requires strategies that emphasize the interpretation of organizational values and meanings, rather than mere administrative control (Kogan et al, 2006).

According to Tierney (1988), university's characteristics can be thus summarized into the expression *university's organizational culture*: the concept highlights the tight connection of university's specific meanings and forms with its unique values system. As a confirmation, many researchers attempted to study campus cultures. Initially, in the early 1960s, the study of culture primarily concerned student cultures (Becker, 1963; Pace, 1960, 1962; as cited in Tierney, 1988). Then, during the 1970s, Burton Clark has pioneered work on colleges as cultural entities, the role of belief and loyalty in college organizations, and organizational sagas as tools for institutional identity (as cited in Tierney, 1988). Recently, scholars have focused on academic cultures, leadership and the system of higher education as a cultural one. Thus, "a foundation has been prepared on which we can build a framework for studying culture in higher education" (Tierney, 1988, p. 7).

2.3.3 TIERNEY'S ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

William G. **Tierney** was one of the first scholars to propose the extension of the term organizational culture to cover the work and running of universities, in his essay *'Organizational Culture in Higher Education: Defining the Essentials'* (1988). His work aimed to provide a working framework to study culture in colleges and universities, based on the assumption that both administrators and academics would benefit from understanding their institution as a cultural entity (Higgins, 2007). "Our lack of understanding about the role of organizational culture in improving management and institutional performance inhibits our ability to address the challenges that face higher education. As these challenges mount, our need to understand organizational culture only intensifies" (Tierney, 1988, p.4-5).

Tierney conducted a case study of a public university identified in his research as "Family State College". Data for the study have been collected during the academic year 1984-1985, with a specific focus on certain categories: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy and leadership. Those essential concepts guided the analysis, with the scope of defining organizational attitudes towards the environment (hostility versus friendship), on which bases the institutional mission is articulated, how new members become socialized and survive in the organization, who holds key information and how it is shared, how strategies are defined, what the institution expects from its leaders (Tierney, 1988).

All in all, he found out that "beliefs in the institution emerge as the more important, given an unstable economic and political environment" (Tierney, 1988, p.17). In fact, "more often than not, more than one choice exists for the decision-maker; one simple answer most often does not occur. Culture influences the decision" (Tierney, 1988, p.5). It is not a case that organizational culture can be said to reflect "*what is done, how it is done, who is involved in doing it.*" (Tierney, 1988, p.3). It concerns both decisions and actions, it exists through actors' behaviours and interpretations, it is shared by the individuals participating in the organization (Tierney, 1988). It is not a case that a respondent in the present research defined the organizational culture in the university as: "*A very collective feeling of – we are all in this boat together and we have the common goal to make the university a good place*".

2.3.4 APPLICABILITY OF TIERNEY'S FINDINGS TO THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Tierney's research (1988) clearly confirms that higher education institutions have their own organizational culture, which needs to be taken into account when studying universities. Moreover, his study provides a theoretical framework that focuses on actors' interpretations "for describing and evaluating various dimensions of organizational culture" (Tierney, 1988, p.19). Therefore, also the present research is based on actors' meanings and perspectives in the attempt to describe the peculiar characteristics of the two universities under study. The focus is on structural forms (how the institution is organized) and actor's behaviours, being both related to a specific *institutional cultural system.*

Second, Tierney's research (1988) revealed that organizational culture in higher education institutions is double-sided, that is, looked at from two different perspectives: for administrators, it is something to manage in order to overcome problems and avoid conflicts; for academics, it defines the environment within which they work. In this sense, institutional culture has to be understood as a multiple instrumental concept, doubly related to managerial and educational aspects of universities (Higgins, 2007). That is why, the present research has been conducted investigating both the academic and the administrative reality in the institution: it was important to keep in mind organizational culture as related to administrative working practices and attitudes, the relations among actors, the characteristics of the learning environment and the dominant set of behaviours and values.

2.3.5 A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY'S ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Having said that, university's organizational culture has to be operationalized into tangible measures. Tierney (1988) helped to define relevant aspects to be taken into account; then the journal 'Higher Education in Europe' (Routledge) has been consulted in search for an empirical research. An empirical study is of monumental importance for a young researcher like me, especially to see how concepts are translated into real variables and how to measure them. The most interesting article found was written by **Marina Tomas Folch** and **Georgeta Ion** (2009): they conducted a four years research project on Catalonia public universities in Spain. The study was built to understand which aspects of universities would hinder or facilitate the process of institutional change in place. The authors aimed to outline the reality of universities today, in order to understand what kind of culture they will be likely to reproduce in the next decades (Folch and Ion, 2009). The research was carried out through two models, one at the general level of the university and the other at a micro-institutional level, the university department.

Through a case study approach and a descriptive ethnographical perspective[15], the two scholars were able to study universities organizational culture, defined as "a sum of beliefs, values, proceedings, behaviours, standards and symbols" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.146), with respect to the following dimensions: mission and goals, the administration, finance and resources, investigation, didactic methodologies, teachers' profile, student's profile, innovation and evaluation, ICTs and the development of the territory. All in all, the techniques used and the aspects researched "have offered the chance to get to know the organizational culture better and probe deeply into the life of the organization" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.148). The authors were able to uncover meanings and interpretations, perceptions and opinions related to the organizational culture in which actors perform. The ten measures selected seemed able to capture key aspects of what we call university's

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[15] "The ethnographic scheme considers the organization as a cultural system and intends to describe it" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.145)

organizational culture. In fact, according to the authors "all data agreed on assigning organizational culture a substantial role" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.153). In the present research, with evident limits of time and resources, it was unfeasible to reproduce their entire analytical framework. Thus, only few variables have been selected, considering their potential relevance in respect to the independent variable of the research (that is, where does national culture have a stronger visible influence?). As a consequence, to operationalize university's organizational culture the following aspects have been investigated: the administration of university (structure and functions, degree of autonomy, members relations), profiles of teachers (role and functions), students (as subject of education and members of the university community, in their interactions with teachers), forms of innovation in the institution. Once more, the scope is to draw a profile of the two universities under study, following the previous measures of organizational culture as expression of both context and actors (Folch and Ion, 2009).

Many data collection instruments have been used by the two researchers, to investigate as much as possible of the *manifest culture*, perceived as what observed in statutes, documents, symbols, the university web pages, etc. Thus, first of all the article was helpful in defining data collection tools: questionnaires, analysis of documents such as official statements or the university statute, interviews. The researchers confirmed that "the more varied the methods are, the more self-confident and credible the investigators are" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p. 147). Second, the study helped in the selection of respondents: teachers, students, responsible for academic matters, administrative representatives and so forth. The criterion applied was to choose people on the basis of "their involvement, knowledge of the topic, status at the university, etc." (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.148). Last but not least, the study revealed the importance of conducting the research at two different levels of analysis: the influences of national culture can be better investigated looking at both the institutional and the department level. Therefore, in the present research, some information have been collected looking at the university as a whole, gaining a picture of the institution as a unique entity. Others have been collected analysing the features of the sub-units (the faculty and the departments), making it possible to go deeper into the study.

2.4 DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

At the end of the theoretical review, we can conclude that institutions, being infused with meanings in their own nature, represent and imitate cultural frameworks. They stand in favour of specific norms and values, reproducing and socializing them. Culture becomes an explanatory factor of the current way of organizing and a predictive factor about future trends. A closer analysis of universities is potentially able to give insights into which activities and structures are connected to the existing cultural system of a country. That is what the present study intends to do. In the following paragraphs, the variables of the study are presented and then connected together into the research theoretical framework.

2.4.1 THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

In the study, national culture is the independent variable, the explanatory factor for institutional characteristics. The basic assumption is that variations in the national culture generate variations in the way a society organizes itself, or in this case, an institution organizes itself. Culture seems to have influence on the institutional structure, the relation to the socio-political environment, the relationships and the working dynamics established between actors (which learn, carry with them, and then reproduce values and behaviours) (Folch and Ion, 2009). National culture is operationalized using Hofstede's dimensions, namely power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance.

2.4.2 THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE

According to the review of theories in the field of higher education and organizational culture, several key elements have been identified as constituting the dependent variable. They have been synthesized in the expression *university's organizational culture,* to indicate values and behaviours of the institution as strictly related to its structure and members. Among many unique characteristics (such as fuzzy, differentiated, unclear goals; many internal and external stakeholders; disciplinary diversity), universities have a unique system of values and beliefs, which affect them deeply. For the purpose of the study, university's organizational culture has been operationalized through some aspects, grouped into four clusters:

1. THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNIVERSITY, WITH A STRONG FOCUS ON THE FACULTY LEVEL;
2. PROFILE OF THE TEACHERS;
3. STUDENTS;
4. INNOVATION IN THE UNIVERSITY.

That is, after reading about university's key aspects (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005; Kogan et al, 2006; Paradeise et al, 2009) and organizational culture in higher education institutions (Higgins, 2007; Tierney, 1988; Folch and Ion, 2009), the researcher has tried to match Hofstede's cultural dimensions with some relevant characteristics of universities. Each of the cluster serves to categorize data into sets, in a way that it is possible for the researcher to establish clear relations with the key dimensions of national culture (independent variable). These relations will be further discussed when presenting the hypotheses of the research, while here a detailed description of each aspect is given.

To get a picture of the universities under study, a first set of information was collected about the **administrative system**. Recent reforms have increased the degree of formal and actual autonomy of universities in defining their internal governance structure, and have strengthened their right to self-organize (Paradeise et al., 2009). It means, the university's structure actually results from preferences for certain forms: according to Douglas (1982), as cited in Maassen and Stensaker (2005), values and

beliefs cannot be separated from structure, but are part of that structure itself. Therefore, the institution has been qualified as more or less decentralized, keeping a major focus on the relation of a faculty with higher or lower institutional units (such as the university board, the institutes or the departments). Then, an attempt has been made to identify the degree of autonomy and participation of faculties and departments in the process of decision-making[16]. Another aspect under study deals with the relations established among administrative staff: attention was especially directed towards the relation among subordinates and superiors. Moreover, administrative behaviours and routines have been analysed to investigate to what extent they are predictable, built upon formal roles, more or less structured into defined patterns[17]. Last characteristic taken into account for what concerns the administrative structure of the university, was the faculty's ability to display flexibility, in respect to norms and regulations.

A second set of measures relates to **teachers**: the learning environment in which they work (and contribute to create), their activity of teaching and research, their role in the educational process, all vital aspects of a higher education institution. In fact, one of the respondents from the academic staff said:

> "The university is in the first place that thousands and thousands of hours that we spend teaching, I mean, the relation between a professor, hopefully good, and students, hopefully interested and willing to learn.. This is the core of a university's life, everything else is just instrumental"

Indeed, it is not a case that the third element of the dependent variable deals with **students**. That is, the analysis of teacher's profiles is naturally connected to the analysis of student's role and preferences. Thus, the researcher has tried to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions regarding their mutual relation, the nature of the educational process, their respective position during the learning process. According to McInnis (2005), the organization of universities aims to a more systematic management of teaching and learning, so that only acknowledging their core aspects can make researchers aware of the new arena, the new organizational dynamics of teaching-learning relations (that replaced the teaching-research contest) (McInnis, 2005). Moreover, this selection is strengthened by the belief that specific values may have effects on the way teachers and students experience the institution, and therefore affect the relation they establish with each other. Assuming that the final scope of the relation between teacher and students is to transfer and produce knowledge, it is interesting to observe how the process is affected by certain preferred behaviours or by certain innate expectations (strictly dependent on the culture actors live in). Student learning is increasingly gaining a central place in the strategic higher education agendas, (McInnis, 2005). Then, observing its key characteristics and observing whether they depend upon a specific cultural system, can be potentially useful for higher education policy researchers.

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[16] Decision-making here is intended as the process of deciding upon university's internal activities and organization.

[17] According to Kogan (1996), feelings and values become shaped and structured into procedures, processes and structures (a generative process in higher education development). Therefore, these aspects are believed important for the research.

Last but not least, the present study has attempted to evaluate **institutional reaction to change** and reforms. Universities are constantly facing the imperatives for continuity and for change, as two competing but complementary priorities (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005). As mentioned before, it was not possible to measure the process of institutional change itself, mainly for its own nature of evolving process. However, it was fascinating to see whether the two universities had different ways to manage their inevitable need to evolve. According to Välimaa (2008), "culture both facilitates and blocks change" (Välimaa, 2008, p. 17). The more conservative a system is, the more difficult is to accept and implement reforms. The more a system seeks stability and security, the more changes happen slowly and late. The more a system is structured and rigid, the more innovation risks to destabilize the entire institutional structure. Although the analysis was mainly based on observing a single faculty, the research is still able to produce insights on general university's trends. Actors' perceptions revealed much about university's reaction to change, its ability to promote change, whether innovation is welcomed or faced, the way reforms affects actors and actors affect reforms.

All things considered, it seems clear that the term *university organizational culture* resulted correct: the mix of cultural values, actors behaviours and institutional forms is the core of university's life.

2.4.3 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Having said that, a theoretical framework has been developed, particularly designed for the present research. According to Välimaa (2008), no method is comparative unless it is preceded by the formulation of a scheme which serves as a guiding hypothesis for the collection and presentation of data. The following scheme identifies the connections between independent and dependent variables: it will guide the research process (both data collection and analysis) in order to answer the research questions; it shows graphically how the research has been planned; it provides a basis for hypotheses.

Figure 2.2 Theoretical Framework

National Culture
PDI, MAS/FEM, UAI

University's Organizational Culture

Administrative Structure and Behaviours, profile of Teachers, Students, Institutional innovation

Source: Developed by the researcher

2.5 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The present study is based on the assumption that Italy and Norway differ in cultural terms. According to these cultural differences, they should differ also in the way a university is organized and functions. On such bases, the hypotheses of the research have been made. An hypothesis is a statement that predicts the relationship between variables. By defining possible outcomes, it directs collection and analysis of data. At the end of the research process, hypotheses would be tested and qualified as right or wrong, confirming or denying the initial theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009). In this latest part of the chapter, relation between the variables is briefly discussed and hypotheses presented.

2.5.1 IMPLICATIONS OF THE POWER DISTANCE INDEX

The PDI is studied for its influence on some aspects of the institution: the degree of decentralization and autonomy of the university; the relation between superiors and subordinates; the relation between students and teachers; the key features of the learning process. A brief discussion on how these aspects differ in small and large PDI countries is presented. Then, the first hypotheses of the study are stated.

Small-PD countries

o Institutions are more decentralized and more actors are involved in the decision-making process (decision power shared at different institutional level).

o The relation between superiors and subordinates is based on cooperation and equality.

o Teachers and students have equal status and a dialectic relation: students are expected to participate in class, express opinions and comments. The educational process is student-centred.

Large-PD countries

o The institutional structure is more centralized, with decisions taken at the central levels. The periphery of the system has less decisional autonomy. Faculty and departments are left mainly with implementing task (that is, the institutional hierarchy has the strongest impact).

o Subordinates treat superiors with deference and respect due to their role. Subordinates are rarely consulted by superiors on decisions, much often are told what to do. Relation substantially unequal.

o Teachers are in a privileged position in respect to students. They tend to reproduce a traditional scheme: students speak only if invited and are supposed not to contradict professors. Educational process is teacher-centred, so that the quality of learning is highly dependent on teacher's excellence.

Hypothesis 1a. *Norway has a low PDI, thus it is likely to display a more decentralized system, where faculties and departments have a high degree of autonomy and actively participate in decisions.*

Hypothesis 1b. *Italy has a high PDI, it has a less decentralized system, where decisions are mainly taken in a top-down manner and the institutional hierarchy has the stronger influence.*

Hypothesis 2 a. *In Norway, subordinates and superiors interact with each other both in planning activities and deciding courses of action. Despite the roles, they have equal position in the mutual relation.*

Hypothesis 2b. *In Italy, subordinates and superiors rarely collaborate for decisions, working issues are seldom discussed together. Generally, relations are built on formal roles and can often be controversial.*

Hypothesis 3a. *Norway has a low PDI, meaning that teachers are likely to treat students as basically equal and expect to be treated as equals by the students. The educational process is student-centred with a premium to student initiative, intervention and independence. Effective learning is based upon a two-way communication process between students and teachers.*

Hypothesis 3b. *Italy has a high PDI, which is evident in the way teachers and students relate to each other: they tend to behave along a traditional scheme that reproduce their inequality. The educational process is teacher-centred, that is, focused on teacher's skills. Intellectual disagreement is discouraged.*

2.5.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE MASCULINITY – FEMININITY DIMENSION

This is the cultural dimension in which the two countries differ most. As stated before, the index is mostly a measure of attitudes and perceptions, so that it will be measured looking at how teachers are evaluated by students, whether according to feminine or masculine values. The researcher believes this aspect is able to highlight which values are associated positively with high status actors.

Hypothesis 4a. *Norway has a more feminine culture, so that teachers are mainly qualified according to their friendliness, availability and support (feminine values).*

Hypothesis 4b. *Italy is a more masculine country, so that professors are respected and valuated for their academic reputation and intellectual achievements (masculine values).*

2.5.3 UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE IN PRACTICE

Universities need a well-built institutional structure, because of their multiple roles and multiple expectations. However, each system translates the need in a different way. Uncertainty-avoiding societies have more written and unwritten rules: behaviours became formal, predictable, ritual and symbolic. Talking about universities, it means that the institution is likely to rely on many rules and regulations, administrative employees are less autonomous (both in deciding and acting) and certain behaviours are expected. Conversely, weak uncertainty-avoiding countries tend to rely on few norms and protocols, because the need for predictability is less urgent. In the university, faculty's staff have a larger autonomy in the performance of functions, and behaviours are less formal and less predictable.

Hypothesis 5a. *Norway has a weak UAI (although not that extreme): it is translated into a high degree of employees autonomy in their working routines. Employees feel more free to decide and act on their own discretion, behaviours are less formal but still predictable.*

Hypothesis 5b. *Italy has a strong UAI, meaning that employees are less autonomous in performing their functions, because they have to follow precise patterns and courses of action; certain behaviours are expected, predetermined and highly stable.*

The uncertainty avoidance index, as expression of the degree of flexibility of a system, can also be used as a measure of the capacity of that system to remain conservative or to reform itself (as not strictly dependent on the present forms and rules). Therefore, UAI also becomes a measure of institutional propensity to change. An attempt is made to investigate whether the university is able to renew its own structure quickly and easily, or if it tends to prevent changes.

Hypothesis 6a. *Norway (low UAI)→ the University displays more flexibility, renewing itself more often through continuous small changes (incremental process of change). National regulations are stable enough to leave universities free to decide on implementation of reforms (less dependence upon fixed forms).*

Hypothesis 6b. *Italy (high UAI) → the University is less flexible, it tends to maintain itself as much stable as possible. Changes are extremely slow to be implemented, through a top-down approach (need to keep the process under strict control). More bounded to national legislation.*

2.5.4 SUMMARY OF THE HYPOTHESES

		ITALY	NORWAY
PDI	HYP 1	Decentralized system, departments have high autonomy, participate to decisions.	Less decentralized system, decisions taken top-down, strong impact of the institutional hierarchy.
	HYP 2	Subordinates and superiors have equal position, they collaborate for decisions.	Superiors and subordinates have unequal relation, subordinates are told what to do.
	HYP 3	Teacher and students have equal positions, the educational process is student-centred.	Students and teachers have unequal relations, the educational process is teacher-centred.
MAS/FEM	HYP 4	Students qualify teachers according to their friendliness, availability, support (feminine values)	Professors are respected for their academic reputation and intellectual achievements (masculine values)
UAI	HYP 5	Employees are quite autonomous in their working routines; behaviours are informal but highly predictable.	Employees are less autonomous; certain behaviours are expected, relations are built upon formal roles.
	HYP 6	The university is quite flexible, renewing itself more autonomously and through continuous small changes.	The university is maintained as much stable as possible. Changes are implemented top-down and the institution is not flexible.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The chapter has presented the major approaches used by the researcher to identify and operationalize the variables of the study. A theoretical framework has been drawn, in order to outline the relation among variables. In the next chapter, the methodology of the research will be described, directing the attention to the research methods, the collection of data and the selected strategies for the analysis of findings.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Research on culture is multifaceted and multilayered. Above all, it calls for a precise research design. The real challenge stands in the drawing up of such a plan: a research design is not a pre-formulated tool, ready to be taken and used. The researcher needs a process of construction and orientation, adapting the elements of his/her own study to the research goals (Layder, 1998). The scope is to outline a plan capable to produce valid and relevant inferences (King et al, 1994). This chapter presents how the process of research has been conducted: research approach and strategy, target population and sampling techniques, data collection tools, techniques of data analysis. Then, it presents the challenges encountered during field work and data analysis, limitations, validity and reliability of the research.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as a general model, which drives the researcher from defining a research problem to answering the study questions, going through a theoretical framework, the collection of data and the interpretation of such data. The plan serves as a guideline, to maintain the connection between concepts and evidence: it keeps the focus on individual cases, but it also guarantees an effective basis for generalization (Routio, 1995). To outline a fruitful methodology, the first step is to qualify the research according to expected results (descriptive or normative) and universality (extensive or intensive).

The present research is structured as a combination of **descriptive** and **exploratory approach**: it aims primarily at gathering knowledge about the object of study (i.e. descriptions) and then finding a relationship between the factors studied (i.e. explanations) (Routio, 1995). The study aims to describe university's specific characteristics, investigating an Italian and a Norwegian public university. Moreover, through comparison, it gives potential explanations for their differences according to cultural factors. Social exploratory research "seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions, and what issues concern them" (Schutt, 2008). In fact, actors' perceptions about their environment are included into the study, so that interpretation of data is enriched by respondent's opinions.

Second, the project can be said to be **intensive**, along with its degree of universality. The researcher looks into a specific case (university's organizational culture), making it possible to study relevant properties and relationships (the connection between certain aspects and national cultural dimensions) and achieve a deep understanding of the object in its social and cultural contexts (Routio, 1995).

The degree of universality must not be confused with potential generalizability. In fact, universality refers to the range of knowledge the researcher is looking into: common to many objects (extensive and generally valid) or specific to few cases (intensive understanding of a single object). However, even if the research is intensive, findings are still potentially generalizable to many cases: results can still be universally valid on the basis of a sample as much as possible representative and unbiased.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The style preference is a key choice for the design of a research project. The researcher must define a qualitative or quantitative approach, or both. In many studies on culture (Hofstede, 1991; Swartz, 1992; GLOBE project, 1994-1997) the preferred approach is the quantitative one: surveys and questionnaires are considered the best tools to investigate cultural traits. Numerical measurements seems to be a good expression of national cultural trends. This is also proven by the research conducted by Ming-Yi Wu in 2006: attempting to expand Hofstede's findings, she studied work-related cultural values in the higher educational setting, and she also preferred the use of questionnaires and quantitative analysis.

On the other side, when the research focuses on just one or few cases, a combination of different techniques can bring the analysis to a deeper level, as demonstrated by Folch and Ion (2009). When quantitative tools are combined with qualitative ones, the researcher is able to uncover detailed and meaningful information, which add significance to survey averages. Moreover, considering time limits and the problem of non-participation[18], quantitative data may result insufficient to generate connections between variables and describe them (which is the scope of the present research).

In the present study, quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined together, using a *mixed method*. The first reason relates to the variety of aspects into account. The complexity of cultural variables implies the use of quantitative data, especially secondary data, to identify national trends. However, when observing a single university, qualitative data serve to go deeper into the analysis and get meaningful information from few respondents (such as through interviews). A qualitative approach helps to confirm connections and produce explanations (as required in a descriptive intensive study). Second, a mixed method guarantees to overcome the weaknesses of an approach through the strengths of another (complementarity) (Routio, 1995). Third, since the research relies on a comparison, it provides a stronger evidence for conclusions trough convergence and triangulation of findings (Yin, 2009). Each research strategy share the same research questions: when different data-gathering techniques have the same outcome, data are valid and corroborate. When this does not occur, the researcher can find new variables or new interpretations. In both cases, the project is enriched by a mixed method approach.

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[18] The degree of participation in the surveys might be too law to support findings without additional evidence.

According to Yin (2009) "each method has its own advantages and disadvantages" (Yin, 2009, p.6). It stands to reason that this approach implies a high degree of difficulty for the researcher, mostly because qualitative and quantitative tools must be structured for the comparison and synthesis of findings. Data triangulation increases the complexity of the analysis. Moreover, since the experience of the current researcher is somehow limited, the use of the mixed approach is even more challenging: the planning the data collection phase required many efforts to make findings potentially compatible; data analysis was difficult and time consuming. In this sense, the research project benefits from the advantages of each method, but it also suffers from the difficulties of data analysis and interpretation.

3.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY

After reviewing previous studies in the field (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede et al., 2010; Folch and Ion, 2009; Ming-Yi Wu, 2006), the research has been designed as a **comparative case study**. The rationale for the selection is that a comparative strategy enables the researcher to move form a descriptive case study to a more advanced investigation of invariances, such as causality, evolution or variation (Routio, 1995). The researcher examines two or few cases. They must be similar enough to be compared (two national higher education institutions, one for each country), but different enough to reveal the underlying structure generating variations (they differ according to different cultural profiles). For the purpose of the study, the researcher has selected some aspects and properties to note and record, so that the comparison results meaningful (Routio, 1995): the final goal is to reveal which factors cause a variation. Lastly, comparison is significant when the researcher wants to study its own cultural environment: it is complex to observe core aspects 'from the inside', so that only through comparison she will be able to see the peculiarities of her own system, otherwise taken for granted (Routio, 1995).

As every research approach calls for specific data gathering tools, every research strategy calls for specific techniques of data analysis (Yin, 2009). In fact, comparative case studies guarantee specific analytical frames. As stated by Landman (2003) the activity of comparing countries focuses today on four main objectives: *contextual description* (to know what countries are like), *classification* (providing researchers with data containers to organize empirical evidence, reducing the complexity of the world), *prediction* (comparison allows researchers to predict likely outcomes in the future, or for other countries), and last *hypothesis-testing*. "Comparison of countries allows hypotheses derived form certain theoretical perspectives to be tested" (Landman, 2003, p.6): that is the case of the present research. A comparative strategy has been chosen to test the theoretical framework developed for the study: comparison allows the researcher to sort, interpret and report data effectively, enabling her to verify whether the model is appropriate to observe the connections between variables and explain them.

3.4 DEMARCATING THE STUDY: CASE SELECTION

To begin the research process, one case or many cases are selected, and then eventually compared. The selection of cases serves to define the limits of the research. As stated by Routio (1995), demarcating the *target population* ensures a secure basis for planning the study, report findings and assess applicability and reliability of the research outcomes. Here, the cases selected are two public universities[19]: the Roma Tre University (Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy), the University of Bergen (Universitetet i Bergen, Norway). Moreover, the unit of analysis, where respondents have been chosen, is the faculty.

Figure 3.1 Framework for a research project.
Source: Routio (1995)
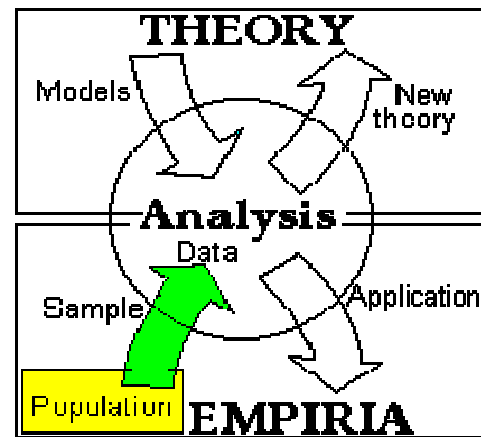
The criterion of selection for the cases in the current study is non-random, that is, the researcher made an *intentional selection* of cases (Landman, 2003): reasons were geographical proximity, the potential access of data, researcher's knowledge and experience in both environments, the possibility to observe variations along with the basic assumption of the study. Also scientific reasons justify the selection: according to Olivier (2006) "it was important to ensure that the organizations selected as case studies would be as similar as possible. Otherwise it would have been difficult to draw valid conclusions about the role of *organizational culture*" (Olivier, 2006, p.299). That is why, the two institutions are as similar as possible, in terms of functions and structure (two public universities).

However, the problem with a non-random sample is the selection bias, particularly influencing on studies that include only few countries[20]. In fact, it is more difficult to generalize findings and "the selection can seriously affect the types of inferences that are drawn" (Landman, 2003, p. 47). To reduce the negative effects of selection bias, the researcher tried to collect as much observation as possible on every issue, so that findings could be confirmed. Moreover, the research relied on a corroborated theory to assess the appropriateness of case selection: according to Hofstede (1991), when two countries differ sufficiently in cultural terms, they are likely to reproduce these differences also in similar settings (universities may seem similar, but still differ in key aspects). Research on purposely selected public universities, although narrow, is still able to produce interesting outcomes on cultural differences.

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[19] The selection of Universities has been already explained in the first Chapter (Introduction). It is important to recognize that Universities may not seem the best locus to such an investigation. Interesting would have been an inquiry on governmental units, political-administrative agencies, municipalities in order to study implication of cultural differences. However, because of the limitations in terms of time, money, possibilities for comparisons and access, Universities resulted the best choice for this thesis.

[20] When many countries are compared, the problem of selection bias is reduced: in qualitative studies the researcher have access of a large number of observations, so that evidence can be strongly supported despite the initial bias in selection; in quantitative studies statistical techniques can be used to eliminate the problem (Landman, 2003).

3.5 UNITS OF DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is the process through which a researcher obtain useful information on the research problem, when key evidence is gathered to answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). The evidence collected creates a factual basis to describe the objects under study and support the theoretical model that seeks to explain it (Yin, 2009). In this project, data were collected from primary and secondary sources, with both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Units of data collection are:
- o Respondents (interviewed with both questionnaires and face-to-face interviews);
- o Secondary data, such as Hofstede's survey reports and WVS database;
- o Documents, such as relevant literature, journal articles, university's official documents;
- o Internet sources, such as universities official websites.

3.5.1 SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS: SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Sampling means deliberately limiting the numbers of respondents for a study. Because of practical reasons (such as time, money or access), very often a researcher is not able to collect data on every potential informant. Different techniques are available to make a selection. The less biased is the random sampling (chance determines which respondents enter the research); however, especially in the social sciences, non-random sampling techniques are more often used.

The sampling techniques in this research are *random sampling* (for one group of respondents, the students) and a technique "referred to as *purposive sampling*, its logic and power lies in the selection of information-rich cases" (Layder, 1998, p.46) (for academic and administrative employees). Respondents were selected from: master students, with at least 4 years of study in the faculty (among the master students, the selection of respondents has been made *randomly*); administrative staff with organizational duties in the management of the faculty (selected *purposely*); academic units (professors with both educational and administrative responsibilities; selected *purposely*).

Informants for the non-random sample were selected according to criteria of accessibility and representativeness (Ming-Yi Wu, 2006). Respondents were chosen among those persons considered key informants for each of the hypotheses to be tested, on the basis of role, involvement, knowledge of the topic, position in the university, managerial experiences (Folch and Ion, 2009). Moreover, the researcher tried to maintain the principle of functional equivalence: participants were selected with similar functional roles in both universities. Functional equivalence is desirable in cross-national comparisons (Frey, 1970, as cited in Ming-Yi Wu, 2006).

The main disadvantage of purposive sampling is that the data collected risk to be biased by the selection itself. Respondents included into the sample are rich-information respondents; however, the researcher may not be aware of all potential relevant informants. Some may not fall into the sample only because the researcher is not conscious of their importance or their access. Still, there are some procedures to reduce the bias: using the largest sample that the researcher can afford; leaving open the possibility to enlarge the sample gradually (if and when needed); ensuring as much as possible the reliability of findings; reporting respondents role, position and duties to evaluate information in context; reporting responses for later analysis; keeping objectivity in interpretation.

3.5.2 SAMPLE SIZE AND CHARACTERISTICS

As mentioned before, respondents have been interviewed through face-to-face interviews and surveys. The total number of respondents that completed data collection is 52 (12 men and 40 women). There is no specific rationale for the gender composition of the sample: respondents among the master students have been selected randomly; respondents among the administrative and academic staff have been selected for their roles and competence. The majority of women in the sample is therefore not intentional.

Survey Respondents

In Italy, 16 students were contacted and 15 of them returned the questionnaires. In Norway, 24 students were administered with the questionnaire and 16 of them completed it. The total number of students is 31. The response rate for Italy was 94%, while the response rate for Norway was 67%.

Questionnaires have been submitted also to faculty's administrative employees: 26 persons were contacted in Italy, 29 in Norway. The disparity is caused by the access to informants: in Norway it was possible to contact each executive directly through personal e-mails, while in Italy only a general e-mail was available for many officials, limiting the chances to direct contact with the respondent. In Norway, 11 questionnaires were accessed by respondents, but only 4 completed (thus taken into account for data analysis); response rate for Norway is 38%, considering access to the survey, but only 14% considering completed questionnaires. In Italy, 21 questionnaires were accessed, but only 5 were completed; response rate for Italy is 81% considering access to questionnaires, 19% considering only valid data.

Interview Respondents

The informants contacted are 12 (6 for each country), both from administrative and academic units. Specifically, respondents are: the dean of the faculty and the vice-dean (their position is extremely interesting because they are committed both to educational and administrative functions); the general director for the faculty and the assistant; the head of faculty administrative offices; the head of the study section for the faculty (Norway) / the administrative responsible for the didactic (Italy).

Table 3.1 Summary of Sample size
Source: Self-administered data collection

Role/Working Position	Responsibility	Data collection Tool	Italy	Norway
Master Students	Exams + Thesis Writing	Questionnaire	16	24
Administrative Staff	General administrative functions	Questionnaire	26	29
Dean of the faculty	Professor with both academic and managerial duties	Interview	1	1
Vice Dean of the faculty	Professor with both academic and managerial duties	Interview	1	2
Director general of the faculty and Assistant	Running of the administrative activities in the faculty	Interview	2	2
Didactic Responsible	Organization and management of academic activities	Interview	1	0
Head of the study section	Administrative responsibility for the organization of the education and the studies	Interview	0	1
Head of Office	Management of administrative staff and recruiting	Interview	0	1
Total of respondents that completed data collection[21]:			25	27
Total of respondents in the study (only valid data):			52	

Master Students

The master students that completed the questionnaire are 15 for Italy and 16 for Norway. As stated before, the gender composition was not intentional. For what concerns Italy, 11 respondents were women and 4 men; in Norway, 13 respondents were women and 3 were men. The students selected have ages between 22 and 36. The average age for the entire sample is 24 years. However, in Italy the majority of the students (9 over 15) were older than the average; instead, in Norway more than half of the respondents (10 over 16) were younger.

In addition, students were asked to have at least 4 years of experience (Master students), due to the need of having them well aware of the university environment. The average years of experience in Italy was 6 years, in Norway 5 years. Italian students seems to stay at the University longer than the Norwegians: assuming that respondents are Master students selected randomly in both Universities, findings reveal that 60% of the students in Italy stay longer than required (5 years are the basic time to have a Master degree in both countries). On the other hand, only 25% of the Norwegian students seem to stay at the University longer than expected.

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[21] The total number of respondents contacted was 47 for Italy and 60 for Norway, but not all of them completed the surveys submitted or were available for the interviews.

Academic and Administrative Staff

Academic and administrative staff are grouped together because certain respondents (such as the Dean of the faculty) are representative for both subgroups. Considering them as one big cluster helps avoiding that some information are overrepresented. The number of respondents that completed data collection (who completed the questionnaire or agreed on being interviewed) is 11 for Italy and 10 for Norway. Findings reveal a majority of women: in Italy 8 of 11, in Norway 8 of 10.

Since academic and administrative staff were selected with purposive sampling, findings on their years of experience in the institution are meaningful, they serve to evaluate the correctness of the selection. Moreover, despite the large amount of data collected, the number of respondents is not very wide. The researcher is very dependent on key informants (Yin, 2009), so that assessing their familiarity with the university environment is a crucial exercise. According to the findings, the average years of experience of the respondents in Italy was 8 years, while in Norway it was 9 years. None of the respondents had worked in the university for less than three years. In this sense, information collected are considered valid enough to support research propositions. University organizational culture is investigated on the basis of the *qualified perceptions* of the respondents (Folch and Ion, 2009).

Table 3.2 Summary of Sample characteristics
Source: Self-administered data collection

Group of Respondents	Characteristic		Italy	Norway
Students	Gender	Male	4	3
		Female	11	13
	Age	Range	22- 27	22 -36
		Mean	25	24
	Years of Experience	Range	4 8	4 7
		Mean	6	5
Academic and Administrative Staff	Gender	Male	3	2
		Female	8	8
	Years of Experience	Range	3 - 14	3 - 18
		Mean	8	9

3.6 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The present research adopts a mixed approach, that is, both qualitative and quantitative tools were used for data-gathering. Self-administered questionnaires have been developed and distributed to gain primary data. However, the researcher has encountered problems to ensure a sufficient degree of participation in the surveys, so that additional information have been collected through face-to-face interviews, relevant documents and internet sources. Secondary data from quantitative databases has been also used (Hofstede et al., 2010; World Value Survey database, 1990, 2005-2008).

3.6.1 SURVEYS

A self-administered questionnaire was used, with open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions (the range of choice was among 5 possible answers, to facilitate data analysis)[22]. The use of a survey was possible because the relevant dimensions into account were identified before joining the field (Yin, 2009), through the study of Hofstede and the formulation of hypotheses. The questionnaire was formulated so that respondents could tell about their experiences and perceptions. Organizational culture is investigated as it is perceived by the university community (Folch and Ion, 2009).

Examples of questions to students are:

- *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 to what extent you feel free to talk to your teachers from an equal position?*
- *How do you speak and have contacts with your teachers?*
  (very informally, quite informally, neither/nor, quite formally, very formally)
- *What is the reaction of professors to intellectual disagreement by a student?*
  (encouraged, accepted but not encouraged, neither/nor, discouraged, highly discouraged)
- *How would you assess the following teacher's characteristics: important, not so important, desirable? (academic reputation, academic results, fame in the field, friendliness towards students, availability for students requests, support to student's individual learning process).*

The student questionnaire was meant to investigate one among fundamental university's activities: the learning experience. However, questionnaires have been also used to investigate the administrative environment. Examples of questions addressed to university employees are:

- *On a scale 1 to 5, how would you rate the level of independence of the faculty from the overall institution? And the level of independence of departments from the faculty?*
- *To what extent do you feel autonomous in the performance of your work?*
  (very small extent, fairly small extent, a certain extent, fairly large extent, very large extent)
- *Do you feel you have sufficient opportunities to influence the way you carry out your work?*
  (no opportunity whatsoever, rarely, neither/nor, quite a lot, I have a great deal of opportunity)
- *To what extent do you think your work is constrained by protocols and established procedures?*
  (very small extent, fairly small extent, a certain extent, fairly large extent, very large extent)

In each university, questionnaire distribution and data collection were performed by the researcher, as suggested in Ming-Yi Wu (2006) . To improve the process, in terms of time, costs and practicability, questionnaires were sent by mail. Online surveys have the advantage of being filled out in the privacy of a respondents' home or office, accessing sensitive information and higher response rates (Kaplowitz et al, 2004). Moreover, they guarantee informants' anonymity and are less time-consuming. A pre-notice e-mail have been sent to increase response rates (Kaplowitz et al, 2004), explaining researcher's role, the scope of the study, and ensuring respondents that data are used for research purposes only.

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[22] The questionnaire guide is available in the Appendix.

Despite the efforts of the researcher to involve respondents, and after renewing the invitation to participate in the survey (a second round of e-mails were send to solicit partaking), the response rate for the study was extremely low (especially for administrative staff). In the researcher's opinion, it was expected that submitting online questionnaires would have increased participation, giving respondents more time and privacy. However, results were not as expected: in the first phase of data collection (that includes both rounds of e-mails), many questionnaires have been accessed but only few completed. The reasons for a low degree of participation can be various: first, on-line contacts may be too weak to involve respondents in the project (building a relationship with the respondents make them more likely to respond) (Molasso, 2005). Second, the researcher has used an on-line software for the questionnaires, which may have decreased the trust of respondents (internet could have been valuated as an unsafe place to share information). Lastly, respondents may have found no benefits or incentives in participation.

Sufficient response rates are important for surveys. A survey that collects very little data may not contain substantial information (Yin, 2009). Generally, a response rate less than 55% is too low. Response rates that are good enough to validate findings, are usually around the 65 - 75% (Molasso, 2005). To increase participation in the study and collect a sufficient amount of data, a second phase of data collection was planned. The sample has been increased with new key-informants. New students have been contacted and delivered the on-line questionnaires (effectively increasing the response rate for students in both countries). New administrative respondents have been contacted: the researcher attempted to establish a closer relation to the staff through personalized e-mails, phone calls and direct meetings (when possible), to boost participation and clarify potential doubts that respondents may have had about the project. The number of completed questionnaires for administrative staff was still low, but additional information were collected.

3.6.2 FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

The second data-collection tool used in the study is the interview. Focused interviews imply asking precise questions to key respondents, about facts and opinions, on a short period of time (Yin, 2009). The researcher, rather than asking respondents to fill out a questionnaire, asks questions orally and records respondents' answers. Through face-to-face interviews, it is possible to investigate not only facts, but also opinions and perceptions (Folch and Ion, 2009). Although the researcher was at her first experience of field work, questions have been formulated as much genuinely as possible. An Interview Guide[23] was formulated, with guidelines to perform the interviewing process. However, during the interviews, not all the questions have been asked, neither in that precise order. The researcher followed the conversation, raised new questions and focused attention on these issues and themes emerged during

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[23] The interview guide can be found in the Appendix.

the interview. Attempts were also made to not push respondents towards the expected answer (Yin, 2009). In fact, respondents themselves conducted the discussion into one or another direction.

Interviews enabled the researcher to uncover informative and in-depth data: how respondents perceive themselves and the external context, what they consider important, interpretations and meanings. Those perceptions revealed much about the organizational culture in which actors perform. However, this method presents also relevant disadvantages: the researcher is highly dependent on respondent's emotion and disposability at the time of the interview (Yin, 2009); in addition, when data cannot be confirmed by other tools, the researcher is too strongly dependent on that single source, increasing the potential bias of findings (Yin, 2009). It is a time-consuming tool. Data analysis becomes more difficult as the data collection process becomes more unstructured, so a coding/interpretative system is needed (Routio, 1995). Lastly, it requires researcher's capability to acknowledge respondent's role, motivation and background, to evaluate trustfulness and merit of responses.

Interviews were recorded, so that the researcher could transcribe responses and analyse data at a later time, with no constraints. Information is then detailed, but at the same time the researcher can review the entire discussion (gaining a broader perspective on the total amount of data). As much important, he/she might need to listen to the records several times, to better understand the information collected. On the other hand, impressions and provisional comments were noted during the interviewing process. Memos and notes have a great potential (Layder, 1998): the researcher can immediately evaluate the attitude of respondents; he/she gets clues on the worth and quality of responses; he/she can write down immediate notes on key words and categories. Memos about informant's feeling, voice tone, reaction, familiarity became determinant in the evaluation of the validity and bias of the responses (Yin, 2009).

3.6.3 SECONDARY DATA

A variety of secondary information sources is available for researchers. Large databases are accessible, with the major advantage of saving time and costs. Secondary data are information collected and recorded by someone different by the current user, and often for different purposes than the particular study at hand. General sources of secondary data are censuses, survey reports, organizational records, etc. They allow a researcher to gain knowledge about certain variables otherwise inaccessible (in terms of time, geographic access, dimension of the sample). The main challenges with secondary data are: a) to ensure that they appropriately address the research scopes, that is, their applicability in the study (Yin, 2009); b) the evaluation of the original project that produced the data, to assess their validity and reliability. Sources of secondary data in the present research are: Hofstede's reports on national cultural dimensions (2010), the World Values Survey database.

First of all, the hypotheses are constructed on the basis of Hofstede's work (1991). Insights on national culture are the bases for explaining variations in universities organizational cultures. For a single researcher, it would have been impossible to collect sufficient and valid data about the general culture of a country, or in this case, two countries to be compared. Therefore, in order to investigate cultural variables, the research relied on **Hofstede's survey reports**, available from his official website (www.geerthofstede.nl). In this regard, measures for the three dimensions have been collected (PDI, MAS/FEM, UAI). Secondary data have the advantage of providing larger and high-quality databases (unfeasible for an individual researcher on its own), with macro-level information on national averages.

As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, certain criticisms against Hofstede's work may in part invalidate the use of his research findings. In spite of the methodological weaknesses, results from surveys in 43 countries carried out in the 1990s indicate that there is considerably replicability (Olivier, 2006). Findings have been confirmed by many studies in the field with similar outcomes: high individualism in the United States; Scandinavian countries as women-friendly states and vanguards for gender-policies; long-term orientation in China. These studies are taken as examples to confirm the validity of data, and Hofstede's ability to investigate national culture. One extra concern on secondary data relates to the level of analysis: data must refer to the same level of analysis in the original study and in the current study. In this case, Hofstede's data are originally produced to investigate national culture, and here used for the same purpose. The level of analysis is the national level in both cases.

The second source of secondary data is the **World Value Survey (WVS) database**, used in order to confirm Hofstede's findings and substantiate the country cultural profiles. The WVS Association conducts periodic data-collection rounds covering more than one hundred countries worldwide, with questionnaires on more than 360 items. Through the WVS official website[24], it is possible to have access to data collected, the questions asked (examples of questionnaires are available), the samples used, the time coverage, etc. So far, information are grouped into 5 waves. For the purpose of this research, data from the 1st wave (1990) and the 5th wave (2005-2008) were used. Precisely, data collection in Italy took place respectively in 1990 and in 2005, while in Norway in 1990 and in 2007. In both cases, data collection method was face-to-face interviews. In Italy the sample was random in 1990, while a stratified sample of individuals within 80 municipalities in 2005. In Norway, the researchers used random samples both in 1990 and in 2007. Data are accessible on-line, or can be downloaded.

This vast source makes it possible to access a great amount of data, already analyzed and formulated in percentages, cross-tabulation and graphics, for each of the country under study. Moreover, the possibility to access data for different time periods increases the validity of predictions: if Italy and

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[24] www.wvsevsdb.com

Norway result culturally different along time, hypotheses are more likely to be tested true. Against potential critics, the WVS database is a qualified and valid secondary data source, used by many social researchers and business agencies, performed by a large international network of scientists. Furthermore, methodological details about the original data gathering processes are available to assess findings. It is also possible to contact the principal investigator responsible for each country (when/if clarifications are needed).

3.6.4 DOCUMENT REVIEW AND INTERNET SOURCES

During the process of data gathering other sources have been included into the study: documents, such as organizational charts, university's statute, regulations, on-line information from universities' web-pages, Rectorate's official statements and speeches, official documents on university's future mission and perspectives. "Because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies" (Yin, 2009, p.103). Documents, organizational records, online information serve both at the beginning of a research, to get knowledge about the study problem, and later, to corroborate information and facts. However, according to Yin (2009) the researcher has the obligation to understand the reasons and scope why they were written, and critically assess writer and context.

Documentary sources for the present research are for the most part available through the University's websites[25]. They have been mainly used to triangulate the data obtained by the respondents, in the attempt to substantiate information, opinions and perceptions. They resulted helpful to confirm or deny researcher's interpretations of findings, gained through the analysis of survey and interview responses.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS - STRATEGY

Once data have been collected, they do not generate theory alone. Information must be examined, categorized, interpreted and discussed. Through this phase, the evidence gathered about the object of study is transformed into theory. Here, the theoretical framework is used as a guideline for interpretation (Routio, 1995).

Figure 3.2 The process of Research. Source: Routio (2007)
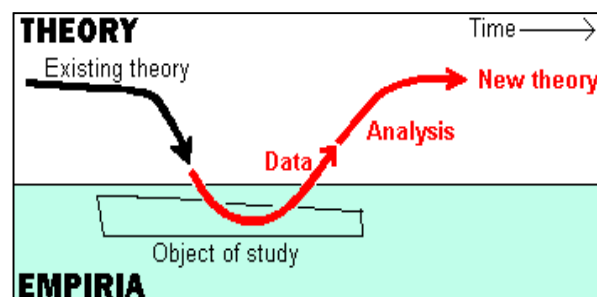
The present research is built to test a theoretical model through certain hypotheses. Therefore, the data collected are interpreted keeping in mind these predictions. Theoretical propositions serve to focus attention on certain data and ignore others, they facilitate the management of large qualitative data sets. Second, hypotheses help to provide a framework against which empirical data are matched (Yin, 2009).

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[25] www.uniroma3.it (Italian University), www.uib.no (Norwegian University).

Lastly, the theoretical model indicates the potential relation between dependent and independent variables. That is, it allows the researcher to use *bivariate analysis* as analytical strategy. In fact, when interpreting findings, bivariate analysis involves the analysis of two variables to determine the relation between them. A common exercise is to verify whether these two variables are correlated with one another; in the present research, it means to verify to what extent national culture and university's characteristics are correlated. As already stated, the present research may not be able to infer about a causal relationship. Instead, it still has the potential to uncover a correlation between national culture and organizational culture in higher education institutions. The main weakness of bivariate analysis is that it cannot detect other than linear relations between variables (Routio, 1995). It can not determine the exact pattern of the relationship. However, for the purpose of the present study, bivariate analysis seems adequate to establish a relation between the variables and test the hypotheses.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS – PRACTICE

"The process of analysis started in the course of data collection. Notes of any emerging themes or points of interest were made immediately after interviews" (Olivier, 2006, p.305). Then, once interviews have been transcribed, provisional comments were added and a set of broad categories developed (for example, *structure*, *actors*, *predictable behaviours*, *culture*, *autonomy/flexibility*, *learning*, *teaching*). In this way (content analysis), data have been organized according to these categories, facilitating analysis and triangulation. Categories somehow *emerged* from the transcripts, together with key words and meaningful expressions. Categories have been kept quite broad intentionally, "in order to keep their application as straightforward as possible" (Olivier, 2006, p.305). In fact, these provisional codes helped in the analysis of questionnaires as well. For the surveys, a preliminary step involved putting the data in the form of statistics measurements (percentages) and data displays (tables and graphs). Then, each value was assigned to a category and matched with interview responses. Again, the same exercise was made with relevant documents, in the attempt to validate information and corroborate data.

Once data have been summarized, selected and coded, interpretation begins. The researcher tried to interpret data as genuinely as possible, first analysing each country separately, then comparing them on the basis of the hypotheses. Comparison implied a further step in the analysis of data, where findings were matched with the theoretical model. Finally, data were reported in descriptive form, making use of percentages, graphs, quotations from interviews and documents abstracts. The report was done as precisely as possible, giving indication of methods and sources. Moreover, when reporting findings, it has been made an effort to present both pure data and interpretations, so that the reader is able to assess findings themselves and researcher's opinions. Lastly, additional instruments to enhance the reliability of the thesis are available in the appendix (the questionnaire guide, the interview guide, data tables, etc).

3.9 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING FIELD WORK AND DATA ANALYSIS

As for every empirical study, during field work[26] the researcher searches for valuable sources of evidence. However, data are not simply at the disposal of the researcher: special efforts are required to find and acquire them (Layder, 1998). Every scholar faces several challenges: a good trick is to find a way to acknowledge them in avdance and try to deal with them.

In the present study, the first challenge was to **access sufficient response rates**. The university environment has proved to be less accessible than expected. Although university is an open space for researchers, the administrative structure is as rigid as in every other institution. It was hard to effectively get in contact with faculty employees: some were too busy, some did not answer when contacted, for others it was difficult to find personal contacts (only general mail addresses were available). Moreover, it was difficult to get all questionnaire fully completed: respondents were maybe interrupted during the compilation (due to their workload) and they rarely came back to the survey. A number of efforts were made by the researcher to address these problems, as explained earlier in the chapter. Furthermore, during the analysis, the weakness of certain data has been fully acknowledged and reported.

A second major problem was the **language**. Since the study was conducted in Italy and in Norway, questionnaires and interviews had to be translated in both countries. Having the researcher limited knowledge of the Norwegian language, the field work at the University of Bergen was carried out in English. It would have been reasonable to use English in the Italian university as well. However, most of the students and staff members in Italy, despite a sufficient knowledge of English, felt more comfortable to use their own language. This implied a long process of translation of the responses in English, to make possible analysis and comparison of findings. The use of two languages and the ongoing translations complicated the entire research process. Understanding and interpretation risked to result weakened in both cases: in Norway, because of the use of a third language (English was not the language of the respondents neither of the researcher); in Italy, because comparison of data is conducted with translated versions of responses, instead of the original ones. To overcome limitations, translation of responses was made maintaining correspondence with the original formulation as much as possible.

Last but not least, a **lack of experience** in the process of data gathering lead to an additional difficulty: accessing meaningful data. During the interviews, it was important to let respondents speak, in order to get genuine information; however, it was then harder and harder to redirect the conversation on meaningful issues without breaking the flow. Moreover, it was difficult to catch immediately sensible information: certain key sentences were noted only during data analysis, missing the chance to investigate them further (the interviewing process was concluded).

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[26] A report of the field work is in the Appendixes.

3.10 LIMITATIONS AND MERITS OF THE STUDY: GENERALIZATION, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The debate about culture as explanatory variable is still capturing scholars' attention. Testing Hofstede's dimensions in specific settings is becoming a popular exercise (as for the case of higher educational environment in Ming-Yi Wu, 2006). In this regard, the present research has some potential merits.

Two arguments are first addressed: generalization to other universities within the country and generalization to other institutions. According to Yin (2009), the problem is to evaluate whether study findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case, that is, assessing *external validity*. First of all, to support generalizations to other universities within each country, the representativeness of the university under study must be assessed. If the institution selected (i.e. Roma Tre University for Italy; University of Bergen for Norway) is to some extent representative of national higher education institutions, then a form of generalization can be made. Once a correlation between national dimensions and institutional characteristics is established, then other national universities, with attributes alike the present one, are likely to have similar relations with national culture. Universities within one country display many common elements (mainly due to a common legislation on higher education, similar recruitment of academic and administrative staff) and therefore are likely to reflect national culture in similar forms.

On the other hand, generalization to other national institutions is more challenging. Universities have several peculiar characteristics, which deeply distinguish them from other public institutions. Thus, even if the cultural context is the same, the relation to specific structural or administrative aspects is less generalizable. In the present study, national culture is related to university's organizational culture. Other institutions, even sharing the same cultural influence, may not display the same institutional/administrative characteristics (in terms of structure, autonomy, size, goals, actors, etc). This is particularly true for political or governmental institutions, which suffer from a stronger pressure in terms of settling goals, achieving tangible outcomes, dealing with competing interests. Thus, a generalization from the specific cases and context to other national institutions is hard to sustain.

Different issues emerge when dealing with the validity and reliability of the research. The general validity of a study strictly depends on the selection of concepts and operational measures (also said *construct validity)* and on the methodology used (*reliability and reasoning*). To address **construct validity**, a long and deep literature review has been done before planning the research. Concepts and definitions have been studied carefully, to identify correct and appropriate dimensions. Operationalization of concepts is based on widely used, well tested and accepted studies (Hofstede, 1991; Tierney, 1988). An attempt was made to match concepts with operationalized variables which are commonly used to measure cultural values (for example, culture translated into Hofstede's cultural dimensions). The quite strong foundation of the research serves to increase the validity of findings and the overall quality of the project.

The quality of the study has its roots in the research design (the theoretical model selected, data collection tools, analysis procedures, etc). The researcher has tried to discuss strengths and weaknesses of every decision taken. However, it is still possible to make some considerations about the ***reliability*** of the entire research. Yin (2009) defined reliability not only as replication of procedures, but as reproducing the same logical chain that conducted the researcher to the final findings. For this reason, every step of the research process was described as precisely as possible: the theoretical framework developed for the study and the operationalized variables, procedures of case selection and field work, data collection and data analysis, tools for interpreting findings. Arguments have been provided for selections and procedures documented.

It is also important to evaluate the ***reasoning*** behind theoretical deliberations. In the present study, the theoretical model served as guideline: interpretation of data is based on the hypotheses. The process of theorizing was presented clearly, using expressions such as "in the researcher opinion" to separate pure data from interpretation. In this way, the reader is aware of the process theorizing from data to explanations. In addition, findings are described paying particular attention to the links between evidence and theory. Finally, the researcher tried to reduce personal influences and increase objectivity.

Last but not least, to appraise the general ***quality*** of the research, a major problem deals with assessing causality. According to King et al. (1994) defining a causal relation between variables implies strict mechanisms of inference. Among them, the independent variable must be the unique explanatory factor (counterfactual analysis). In the present study, a causal inference is hard to sustain. This would therefore affect the quality of the study, in terms of value and future applicability of the findings.

3.11 CONCLUSIONS

The chapter discussed the methodology applied to the study. Research design and research approach have been presented, followed by selection of cases, units of data collection and sampling techniques. Then, tools and techniques for data collection and data analysis are discussed. In the end, the project has been qualified in terms of validity and reliability, potential generalization, merits and limitations.

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW ON THE COUNTRIES' CULTURAL PROFILES: DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The starting point of the present research is to understand the influence of national culture on a specific setting (higher education institutions). To operationalize national culture, the research is based on Hofstede's dimensions. These dimensions (power distance, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance) are selected as the independent variable of the study and need further investigation: the chapter gives an overview of the Italian and Norwegian cultural profiles, integrating Hofstede's data (Hofstede et al., 2010) with data from the World Value Survey database. Only secondary data will be used. The chapter presents a brief general profile of the countries under study. Then, Italy and Norway are analysed along the cultural dimensions, looking at some peculiar aspects in each case. When possible, the two countries are compared with each other, to substantiate the theoretical assumptions of the research. However, it was not possible to always compare them (for every set of data and for both waves of data collection) because some data were not available.

4.1 ITALY AND NORWAY: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Rome, the capital of **Italy**, was for centuries a political and religious centre of Western civilisation as the capital of the Roman Empire. After the decline of the Roman Empire, Italy endured numerous invasions by foreigners. Centuries later, Italy became the birthplace of Maritime republics and the Renaissance, an immensely fruitful intellectual movement. Through much of its history, Italy was fragmented into numerous city and regional states (such as the Republic of Venice and the Church State) but was unified into a nation-state in 1861, following a tumultuous period in history known as *Il Risorgimento* (The Resurgence). According to the CIA official website[27]:

> "A democratic republic replaced the monarchy in 1946 and economic revival followed. Italy was a charter member of NATO and the European Economic Community (EEC). It has been at the forefront of European economic and political unification, joining the Economic and Monetary Union in 1999. Persistent problems include illegal immigration, organized crime, corruption, high unemployment, sluggish economic growth, and the low incomes and technical standards of southern Italy compared with the prosperous north."

It has a population of around 60 million people; the official language is Italian, although German, French and Slovene are also spoken languages in some regions; about 90% of the population is Catholic. Italy's economic strength is in the processing and manufacturing of goods, primarily in small and medium sized family-owned firms.

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[27] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/it.html#top

Generally speaking, Italy is well known for its family values: the family is the centre of the social structure and provides a stabilizing influence for its members. From the childhood, it is important to learn to respect those who are older, those who have achieved a level of academic or business success, and those who have official and institutional roles. Appearances matter in Italy: the way people dress can indicate the social status, family's background and education level. Italians prefer more face-to-face contacts, so that they prefer to do business with people they know and trust[28].

Talking about **Norway**, we can say that the history of the country is well known, first of all, for two centuries of Vikings, which deeply left their imprint on the country culture and traditions. A period of civil war ended in the 13th century when Norway expanded its control overseas to parts of the British Isles, Iceland, and Greenland. In 1380, Norway was absorbed into a union with Denmark that lasted more than four centuries. In 1814, Norwegians adopted a new constitution, which has been kept also later on, during the union with Sweden. Rising nationalism throughout the 19th century led to a 1905 referendum granting Norway independence. In the late 1960s Norway discovered oil and gas, and this discovery boosted its economic fortunes. Norway is a member of NATO since 1949, but it refused to join EU twice (first in 1972 and later in 1994). "Key domestic issues include immigration and integration of ethnic minorities, maintaining the country's extensive social safety net with an aging population, and preserving economic competitiveness" (CIA official website[29]). Norway has a population of around 4,6 millions people; the official languages are Norwegian Bokmål and Norwegian Nynorsk; the bigger minority group is Sami, whose language is official in six municipalities; around 85% of the population follow the State Church of Norway.

Generally speaking, Norway is known for its liberalism. Marriage is not a prerequisite to start a family, so that there are many different forms of family (one parent only, couple living together without being married, divorced parents with children, etc). Women are highly respected in business and generally receive equal pay and have access to senior positions; they also have a great support from the state in case of maternity. Main expression of the Norwegian culture is considered to be the Law of Jante (Janteloven), an expression denoting humility and modesty:

> "Janteloven teaches people to be modest and not 'think big'. It is demonstrated in most people's refusal to criticize others. Norwegians try to see all people as being on equal footing. […] Norwegians view themselves as egalitarian people whose culture is based on democratic principles of respect and interdependence. They like people for themselves and not for what they do for a living their professional accomplishments or how much money they earn." (www.kwintessential.co.uk[30])

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[28] http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/index.php
[29] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/no.html
[30] http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/norway-country-profile.html

Specifically speaking, according to Hofstede (1991), every country can be 'culturally defined'. In addition, his cultural dimensions gain greater meaning when countries are compared with one another. For the purpose of this study, Italy is compared with Norway. They are characterized by the following scores (Hofstede et al., 2010). :

Table 4.1 Cultural scores for Italy and Norway.
Source: Hofstede et al., 2010

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS/FEM	UA	LTO
Italy	50	76	70	75	61
Norway	31	69	8	50	35

4.2 POWER DISTANCE INDEX IN ITALY AND NORWAY

Hofstede's measures have to be understood in context. The Power Distance Index measures the way a society handles inequalities, it can be defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions (the family, the school, the community) and organizations (people's workplaces) within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.61). Countries such as Mexico, Venezuela, China, United Arab Emirates display a very high PDI scores[31], meaning that those in authority openly demonstrate their rank, class divisions within society are clearly evident and somehow accepted, while politics is prone to totalitarianism.

To have an idea of where Italy is positioned on the power distance scale, let us consider that the lower PD score is 11 for Austria, followed by Denmark (18), New Zealand (22), Norway and Sweden (31). Italy is positioned well over the average, displaying characteristics more similar to large-PD countries, although not that extreme. On the contrary, Norway is well known for the promotion of egalitarianism and equity: in fact, the PDI for Norway is 31, at the very bottom of the scale. Common between countries with low PDI are the efforts "to serve this ideal of equality by treating everybody as equal regardless of status, wealth, or power" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p.54). In small-PD countries, class divisions have less influence on public and private relationships, subordinates easily approach and contradict their bosses, children are treated as equals as soon as they are taught to take control of their own affairs. Behaviours are not dependent on the other's age or status. A need for independence is the central trait of small-PD societies (Hofstede et al., 2010).

To confirm that Italy and Norway belong respectively to large- and small-PD countries, the researcher analyses data from the World Value Survey database, to match them with Hofstede's reports.

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[31] They display respectively a PDI of 81, 81, 80, 80 points.

Characteristics of the political system

First of all, although Italy has a quite high PD score, the country still displays a strong belief in democratic institutions. When asked about their political system, Italians clearly prefer a democratic system: to the question '*What do you think about having a democratic political system?*' the 64% of the population surveyed answered '*very good'* and the 31% answered '*fairly good'*. They also refused a system having a single strong leader (the 86% of the population said that it is bad). In that regard, Italy refuses the tendency of large PD-countries toward totalitarianism, being similar to the other European countries and Norway as well. Data are showed in the following table:

Table 4.2 Political preferences - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 5th wave.

Question	Italy - % of agreement	Norway - % of agreement
Having a democratic political system is GOOD	95%	97%
Having a strong leader is BAD	86%	85%

Question 1: What do you think about having a democratic political system?
Question 2: What do you think about having a strong leader?

Income equality and income differences

It stands to reason that both Italy and Norway belong to an European context where democratic values are highly shared. The difference in the PD scores do not seem to generate differences in that respect. However, other data highlight additional differences between the two countries. For example, when asked on *income equality*, Italian respondents made clear that income is distributed unequally. Income equality is here taken as the measure of how benefits and wealth, main expression of power, are distributed more or less equally in the society[32]. Indeed, in the 1990's survey, 27% of Italian respondents said income should be more equal, meaning it is evidently unequally distributed. However, 38% of them said that income differences should be larger. In the researcher opinion, findings reveal that a large part of Italians recognize that income is not equally allocated, but at the same time they wish for larger differences. The distance between classes of income (and therefore, between social classes) should be larger, in line with large-PD countries trends (Hofstede et al., 2010). These results are confirmed by findings in the 5th wave: still 29% of respondents wish for larger *income differences*. When compared to Norway, in both time periods, Italian respondents aiming for larger income differences are more numerous. In fact, Norway is at the forefront for equity and egalitarianism: income and status differences should be reduced as much as possible, as expressed by the WVS data. Norway clearly belongs to small-PD countries, where differences in the distribution of power and wealth are highly discouraged (see table below)

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[32] The relation between power, wealth and high status is confirmed also by Hofstede et al. (2010) when discussing Power Distance.

Table 4.3 Income differences - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 2nd and 5th wave.

Question	Year	Italy - % of agreement	Norway - % of agreement
Income should be made more equal - Do you agree?	2005-2008 (5th wave)	40%	**57%**
Income differences should be larger Do you agree?	1990 (2nd wave)	**38%**	31%
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	**29%**	17%

Question: Incomes should be made more equal versus We need larger income differences as incentives. Express your view on these issues: to what extent do you agree with one or the other statement.

Respect for Authority

Other findings confirm Italy having a high PDI and Norway having a low PDI (respectively 60 and 31). A first example concerns authority: respect for authority in small-PD societies is related to achievements rather than tradition or status (Hofstede et al., 2010). In other words, respect must be deserved. Instead, in large-PD countries, respect for authority is a natural trait in society: official roles matter (Hofstede et al. 2010). Along with this reasoning, data from the WVS should display different trends when respondents were asked *Do you think it would be a good thing or a bad thing to give greater respect to authority in the future?*. Norwegian are more likely to think that respect can not be given in principle, but it has to be justified and deserved; on the contrary, Italian respondents are more likely to think that authorities deserve respect per sé (even without confirmation of future achievements). Here data from the 2nd and in the 5th wave are analysed. The major part of Norwegians think it is a bad thing to give respect to authority in the future: respectively the 48% and the 40% of respondents considered it as a bad thing. In the researcher's opinion, authorities do not have people's respect because of their role, but only because of their results, in line with small-PDI countries (Hofstede et al., 2010). Conversely, in Italy, respect and deference for authority is automatic and somehow taken for granted, in line with large-PD countries. In fact, only 14% of respondents in the 2nd wave, and only 8% of respondents in the 5th wave, agreed that greater respect for authority in the future is a bad thing. In the following table, Norway is compared with Italy.

Table 4.4 Respect for authority - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 2nd and 5th waves

Question	Year	Italy - % of agreement	Norway - % of agreement
Greater respect for authority is a BAD THING. Do you Agree?	1990 (2nd wave)	14%	48%
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	8%	40%

Question: Do you think it would be a good thing or a bad thing to give greater respect to authority in the future?

Important child qualities

Another confirmation of the differences between Italy and Norway, along with their PD scores, comes from discourses on *important child qualities*. In small-PD countries, children are taught to be independent and responsible for themselves, not asking parent's permission or advice even on important issues (Hofstede et al., 2010). As a consequence, Norwegians are more likely to evaluate these qualities as more important compared to Italians. Data from both waves of survey confirm that assumption. In Norway, respectively 86% and 91% of Norwegian respondents valued *independence* as a central child quality. Conversely, only the 34% and the 59% of respondents in Italy mentioned independence as an important child characteristic. In large PD-countries, relations of dependence are strengthened (Hofstede et al., 2010), so that children tend to depend on their parents to a larger extent.

Table 4.5 Important Child Qualities - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 2nd and 5th waves

Question	Year	Italy - % of agreement	Norway - % of agreement
Important Child Quality - Independence	1990 (2nd wave)	34%	86%
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	59%	91%

Question: Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn. Which do you consider to be especially important?

4.3.2 CONCLUSIONS ON THE PDI IN ITALY AND NORWAY

According to the findings examined so far, Italy and Norway differ in key aspects related to the Power Distance Index. Discourses about official roles, equality and fairness, independence as an important quality, all confirmed that the two countries display different trends. These implications related to the PDI will be further discussed in relation to the higher education setting. Here indeed, data from the World Value Survey confirmed the appropriateness of Hofstede's findings as the basis for comparison. Italy belongs to large-PD countries and Norway to small-PD countries, although their positions on the PD scale are not extreme. In fact, both nations belong to an European context where certain common values are highly shared: for what concern universities, many aspects are similar for Italy and Norway, but still the PDI is able to produce differences, as it happened to the aspects examined in this paragraph.

4.3 MASCULINITY/FEMININITY IN ITALY AND NORWAY

Defined by Hofstede et al. as "the desirability of assertive behaviour against the desirability of modest behaviour" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 136), the second dimension expresses the way a society tends to promote and support masculine values (such as earnings, recognition, competitiveness) or feminine values (such as relation building, cooperation, modesty, employment security). This aspect has to deal with both roles and attitudes: through the promotion of some social forms, people are attributed specific

gender roles, produced and reproduced in the society. It is important to acknowledge that the dimension is not reduced to gender differences only. However, gender role patterns almost entirely depend on socialization of certain values over other (Hofstede et al, 2010). Therefore, some forms of gender equality can still show which attitudes people have about masculine or feminine values.

In the Masculine/Feminine scale we find Italy between the countries with the highest scores: with 70 points, it is preceded by Japan (95), Hungary (88), Austria (79) and Venezuela (73). It means that Italy is a very strong masculine country, especially if compared to Scandinavian countries positioned on the other extreme of the scale. In fact, Norway has an impressive low score (8), preceded only by Sweden with 5 points, and followed by Netherlands scoring 14, Denmark scoring 16 and Costa Rica scoring 21. Data are presented for Italy and Norway, and when possible the two countries are compared.

Most important aspects at work

The two following example concerns Italy and Norway separately, in the attempt to assess the two countries as more masculine or feminine oriented. For what concerns Italy, interesting findings emerge when respondent were surveyed (in the 5th wave) on which aspects are considered most important in relation to work. As expressed by Hofstede et al. (2010), work issues clearly express whether masculine or feminine values predominate in society. According to the data, it is easy to affirm that masculine values predominate among Italian respondents. When asked to indicate the most important thing when looking for a job, the first choice was *having a safe job with no risks* (38% of respondents). However, after that Italians preferred *doing an important job* (recognition as a masculine values) or with a *good income* (earning as a masculine value). Only 9% of them considered *working with people you like* as most important (relation building as a feminine value). Data are presented in the table below.

Table 4.6 Important aspects when looking for a job - Italy
Source: WVS Database, 5th waves

Question	Year	Italy - % of agreement	
Important aspects related to work	2005 (5th wave)	A good income	22%
		A safe job with no risks	38%
		Working with people you like	9%
		Doing an important job	31%

Question: Here are some of the things many people take into account in relation to their work. Which one would you place first if you were looking for a job?

Solidarity

Other data help assessing Norway as a feminine country. One of the key characteristics of feminine societies is the solidarity with poor and weak (Hofstede et al., 2010). One question in the WVS asked respondents to *evaluate the importance of helping people nearby and caring for their well-being*. In 2007, about 73% of Norwegian respondents answered that it is a very important aspect of a community life: solidarity as a feminine value is imperative and shared within the society. Unfortunately, data for Italy are not available for this issue. However, when Norway is compared to Japan for example (the strongest masculine country), findings become even more meaningful. Japanese evaluated helping others as a positive value, but the percentage of respondents that truly recognize themselves in a person helping people nearby is considerably low, only 21% of respondents.

Table 4.7 Helping people nearby, Norway
Source: WVS Database, 5th wave

Question	Year	Norway	
To a person is important to help people nearby. To what extent do you feel this person is like you?	2005-2008 (5th wave)	Like me	73%
		Somewhat like me	26%
		Not like me	1%

Question: To a person is important to help people nearby. To what extent do you feel this person is like you

Job scarcity

Another issue that distinguish Italy and Norway, along with their MAS/FEM scores, is *job scarcity*. Although the cultural dimension is mainly expression of attitudes, it also produces specific occupational patterns (Hofstede et al., 2010), particularly interesting for the present analysis. In fact, interesting findings emerge when respondents were asked the following question: "*When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women. Do you agree or disagree with the statement?*". Findings from both the 2nd and the 5th waves of surveys reveal variations between Italy and Norway.

In 1990, 43% of the Italian respondents agreed with the statement. In 2005, although the 59% of the population surveyed disagreed, still 22% of respondents agreed with the statement. Over time, the percentage of disagreement was reduced. However, a consistent part of the respondents still agreed to favour traditional gender roles, consequently reproducing social forms according to masculine values. Italian responses are even more meaningful if we observe Norwegian ones. As mentioned before, Scandinavian countries are at the forefront for social equality and gender equality. In fact, in 1990, about 78% of Norwegian respondents disagreed with the previous statement, refusing the idea that men should be granted access to work more than women. This belief was felt even stronger in 2007, when 89% of the respondents in Norway disagreed with the statement. Norwegian respondents tend not to

attribute privileges based on gender or traditional social roles. Moreover, interesting is to notice that such a high percentage of respondents proves that both men and women agreed on this refusal.

Table 4.8 Job Scarcity - Italy and Norway
Source: WVS Database, 2nd and 5th waves

Question	Year		Italy	Norway
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.	1990 (2nd wave)	Agree	43%	16%
		Disagree	45%	78%
		Neither	12%	6%
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	Agree	22%	6%
		Disagree	59%	89%
		Neither	19%	5%

Question: When jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job than women. Do you agree or disagree with the statement?

Protecting environment

Last aspect into account deals with *protecting the environment against economic growth.* Findings from the 5th wave confirm once more that Italy and Norway differ. Feminine countries are said to pay more attention to the environment, instead of pursuing accumulation of wealth at the expenses of the quality of life (Hofstede et al., 2010). In fact, 77% of Norwegian respondents preferred protecting the environment, against 21% that disagreed. Norway is again positioned among feminine societies: it displays attitudes alike Sweden and Finland (where respectively 65% and 66% of respondents preferred protecting the environment). When compared to Italy, Norway proves to be more feminine oriented, leaving Italy on the opposite side of the scale. Although data are not very extreme, Italian responses reveal that the number of respondents that would favour the environment rather than economic growth is lower than in Norway. It is not a case that masculine countries are said performance oriented (Hofstede et al., 2010). This last example, together with the previous ones, seem to confirm that Hofstede's assumptions along with the MAS/FEM dimension are sufficiently accurate to support comparison.

Table 4.9 Environment against economic growth, Italy - Norway
Source: WVS Database, 5th wave

Question	Year		Italy	Norway
Protecting the environment should be given priority against economic growth.	2005-2008 (5th wave)	Agree	61%	77%
		Disagree	31%	21%
		Other	8%	2%

Question: Protecting the environment should be given priority against economic growth Do you agree or disagree?

4.4 UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE INDEX IN ITALY AND NORWAY

The Uncertainty Avoidance Index is based on the assumption that extreme ambiguity can create anxiety and stress. People share this feeling of uncertainty and try to find means to reduce the anxiety that new situations bring (Hofstede et al., 2010). Rules and laws regulate people's behaviours preventing vagueness and insecurities. As for the previous dimensions, these uncertainties and the ways of dealing with them belong to the cultural heritage of societies. Uncertainty-avoiding cultures minimize the stress and seek predictability. To understand it in practice, people in countries with a high UAI look for structure in organizations, institutions, and relationships that makes events predetermined and easily interpretable (Hofstede et al., 2010). For example, in the family, children are taught what is risky, dangerous and taboo. Racism and 'fear of the other' is more common in high-UAI countries, while in weak-UAI countries the predominant feeling can be summarized by 'what is different is curious' (Hofstede et al., 2010). In fact, the lowest the UAI, the strongest the tolerance for unpredictable situations and unknown events. People tend to accept the existence of uncertainties and experiencing novel situations is generally encouraged (Hofstede et al. 2010).

In comparison with other countries, both Italy and Norway are in a central position on the scale, scoring respectively 75 and 50 UA points. High-UAI countries are for example Greece (112), Portugal (104), Uruguay (100) (South-Europe and Latin America). On the opposite extreme, we find Singapore with only 8 points of UAI, Denmark with 23, Honk Kong with 29 and United Kingdom with 35. Generally speaking, Norway shares certain typical characteristics of countries with low UAI: its relatively short history as a national state; a population which is quite diverse due to geographical distances and waves of immigration; innovation and modernization encouraged. On the contrary, Italy shows characteristics alike high-UAI countries: anxious countries tend to be expressive cultures, where people talk with their hands and where it is socially acceptable to show one's emotions (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Freedom of choice and degree of control over one's life

To understand the measure, let us consider that uncertainty-avoiding countries feel an emotional need for rules, fixed behaviours and forms of control over risks. Established routines are preferred. Among WVS data, responses on freedom and control show that Italian attitudes are compatible with high uncertainty-avoiding countries, against Norwegian responses that confirm Norway a weak uncertainty avoiding country. Respondents have been asked to evaluate *how much freedom of choice and control they have over their lives*. Data are presented in the following table, where *low control* is associated with high UAI (highly structured contexts reduce possibilities of personal initiative) and *high control* is associated with low UAI (less structured environment allow free choices).

Question	Year		Italy	Norway
Some people feel they have completely freedom of choice and total control over their lives, while other people feel the opposite way. How much freedom of choice and control you feel you have?	1990 (2nd wave)	Low control (high UAI)	20%	9%
		Medium control	**44%**	41%
		High control (low UAI)	36%	**50%**
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	Low control (high UAI)	18%	2%
		Medium control	**51%**	35%
		High control (low UAI)	29%	**63%**

Question: Some people feel they have completely freedom of choice and total control over their lives, while other people feel the opposite way. How much freedom of choice and control you feel you have??

When asked to evaluate the degree of control over their own lives, the most part of Italian respondents said to have medium control (44% of respondents). When structured situations are preferred in society, the chance to make a personal free choice over fixed situations is reduced. In fact, when compared to Norway, Italians demonstrated to have less control over their lives than Norwegians. In 1990, only 36% of Italian respondents stated to have *high control and high freedom of choice over their lives*, against 50% of Norwegian respondents (the major part). The trend is also confirmed by the data of the 5th survey wave (see table above): the number of Norwegians respondents is higher than the Italian respondents when it comes to high degree of control and freedom. Findings can be explained considering that Italy has probably more predetermined situations, where individuals feel to have little control. Formal rules and expected behaviours are more likely to reduce freedom of choice and increase security (Hofstede et al., 2010). That is why low control is associated with high UA scores. On the contrary, respondents in Norway feel to have a deeper grasp on their lives and more chances to decide autonomously: this is probably due to a weaker tendency to formality and predictability (lower UAI score). The findings seem to confirm Hofstede's UA scores for Italy and Norway.

Unwelcomed neighbours

According to other findings (only data from the 5th wave were available), Italians show a tendency to dislike individuals with clear and outstanding differences (for instance different religion, origins, race and so on). This is particularly true in comparison to Norway. Respondents were asked to answer the following question: '*On this list there are various groups of people. Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours?*'. Answers are shown in the following table.

Table 4.11 Unwelcomed neighbours - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 5th wave

Question: Could you please sort out any that you would not like to have as neighbours?	Italy	Norway
Drug addicts	72 %	91 %
People of a different race	13 %	4 %
People who have AIDS	36 %	9 %
Immigrants/foreign workers	16 %	8 %
Homosexuals	25 %	8 %
People of a different religion	12 %	3 %
Heavy drinkers	59 %	50 %
Unmarried couples living together	4 %	1 %
People who speak a different language	8 %	3 %
Militant Minority	-	21 %
Gypsies	86 %	-
Total Number of Respondents	N = 866	N = 703

Findings are interesting in relation to the Uncertainty Avoidance Index. In countries with high UAI, such as Italy, people tend to avoid circumstances where they have to face unknown situations or behaviours difficult to understand and interpret (such as immigrants language and traditions). Moreover, who is considered by the society as 'an outsider' (let us think about homosexuals) is again refused, because it is not part of the traditional and secure scheme. Conversely, people in low-UA countries tend to be more open towards new circumstances and people, assuming that security is not necessarily related to predictability. According to WVS data, Italian respondents do not want gipsies, drug addicts and heavy drinkers as neighbours. Norwegian respondents do not want drugs addicts, heavy drinkers and militant minorities as neighbours. However, after that, let us notice that Italians are more likely than Norwegian to dislike people of different race (13% against 4% of respondents), immigrants and foreign workers (16% against 8%), homosexuals (25% against 8%), people of different religion (12% against 3%), people speaking a different language (8% against 3%). Data are in line with UA scores.

Most people can be trusted

Once more, data from the World Values Survey are in line with Hofstede's data. When surveyed on whether people can be trusted or not, the major part of Norwegian respondents think that most people can be trusted. Specifically, 65% in the survey of the 1990 and 74% in the survey of 2007. Norwegians believe that people deserve trust even if never met before. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), weak uncertainty avoiding countries are more likely to be positive towards unknown people and new situations. The world is pictured as basically benevolent (Hofstede et al., 2010). Data became more

meaningful when Norway is compared to Italy. The majority of Italian respondents (respectively 66% in the 2nd wave, 71% in the 5th wave) believe that it is important to be careful with unfamiliar people. As expressed before when discussing unwelcomed neighbours, Italians confirm again that what is unknown is difficult to understand and trust, in line with high UAI (Hofstede et al., 2010). The following table shows the comparison between Italy and Norway in that regard.

Table 4.12 Most people can be trusted - Italy and Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 2nd and 5th waves

Question	Year	Italy	Norway
Most people can be trusted	1990 (2nd wave)	34%	65%
	2005-2008 (5th wave)	29%	74%

Question: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

Living in secure surroundings

Another interesting evidence comes from the responses to the following question: '*Living in secure surroundings and avoid anything that might be dangerous is important. To what extent?'*. Once more, Norwegian respondents confirmed to belong to a weak uncertainty avoiding society (data were unfortunately available only for Norway). Findings reveal that only 13% of Norwegians felt that it is very much important to live in secure surroundings. The major part of them (around the 50%) believe this need for security is somehow important, but there is not a strong pressure to avoid everything potentially dangerous. In fact, 36% of the respondents do not agree with the statement: avoiding ambiguity is not felt as an important factor.

Table 4.13 Secure Surroundings - Norway.
Source: WVS Database, 5th wave

Question	Year	Norway	
Living in secure surroundings and avoid anything that might be dangerous is important. To what extent?	2005-2008 (5th wave)	Very much important	13%
		Important	25%
		Somehow important	25%
		Not important	36%

Question: Living in secure surroundings and avoid anything that might be dangerous is important. To what extent?

4.4.2 CONCLUSIONS ON THE UAI IN ITALY AND NORWAY

Along with the examples discussed so far, data from the World Values Survey express clearly that Italy and Norway differ in their attitudes towards unpredictability and unknown situations. Italian

respondents are clearly more sceptical when facing different people, which do not deserve total trust. Moreover, when asked about their lives, Italians feel to have little control, most of the times they are likely to follow predetermined behaviours and deal with fixed environments. In Norway, survey answers express the opposite situation: people are more open, less bounded by prefixed contexts, more positive towards unknown people. Both countries display attitudes in line with Hofstede's cultural scores: Italy belongs to strong uncertainty-avoiding countries, Norway to weak uncertainty-avoiding countries. This cultural dimension has a strong influence on the life of higher education institutions, as it will be discussed further in the thesis.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

In the chapter the researcher has matched Hofstede's scores on cultural dimensions with World Values Survey data on national cultures. The scope was to outline Italy and Norway in cultural terms and verify the basic theoretical assumption of the research. At the beginning of the project, I assumed that the two countries had different cultures. On that basis, hypotheses were formulated, presuming that cultural differences produce in turn organizational differences in the university. The present chapter served to confirm the assumption: findings reveal that the two countries differ culturally, and these differences can be associated to different scores for Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The results of the data analysis can be summarized as it follows:

Country	Hofstede	World Value Survey
Italy	High Power Distance Index Score = 50	Preference for a democratic political system. Refusal for a strong leader. Income (expression of power and social status differences) is unequally distributed and people wish for larger differences. Respect for authority is automatic, due to official traditional roles. Independence is not evaluated as a central child quality. Parents tend to strengthen relation of dependence.
	Masculine country Score = 70	Italians prefer doing an important job (recognition) and with good income (earnings): masculine values. Job scarcity = a substantial part of respondents think men should have more right to job than women. The quality of life is important, but a high percentage of respondents still prefer economic growth instead of protecting the environment.
	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Score = 75	Medium control over one's life, the freedom of choice is reduced in highly structured situations. Italians tend to dislike individuals with outstanding differences (religion, race, origins) = avoiding what is difficult to understand. It is important to be careful with unfamiliar people.

Country	Hofstede	World Value Survey
Norway	Low Power Distance Index Score = 31	Income is distributed equally and this is the way it should be (equal society). Respect for authority is not granted per sé, it must be related to achievements and merits (official roles are less important). Independence is a key child quality.
	Feminine country Score = 8	Job scarcity: men and women should have equal access to job. Refusal to favour traditional gender roles. Solidarity is important and shared within the society. Respondents prefer protecting the environment against economic growth.
	Weak Uncertainty Avoidance Score = 50	High control over one's life, people feel to have more freedom of choice. Norwegians are more opened than Italians towards people with different characteristics = less afraid of what is unknown. Most people can be trusted, positive to new situations. Living in secure surroundings is important but not essential (at least for 1/3 of the population surveyed).

CHAPTER 5

UNIVERSITY'S CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURE SYSTEM: REPORT OF FINDINGS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study regarding the dependent variable. The research is built to investigate several aspects of the university's characteristics and organizational culture. In the chapter, each case begins with a description of the organizational context, then key factors of the two universities are described, using data from documents, surveys and interview responses. Both qualitative and quantitative data are used, although survey responses are presented in text rather than in tables (the number of respondents is too low to make percentages meaningful). A main focus has been given to actors' interpretations and attributed meanings (Olivier, 2006). The two cases are presented and examined in comparison to one another, even though data are interpreted according to the national context. In the following chapter (Chapter 6), the researcher will then analyse the relationship between dependent and independent variable. The cases will be further compared through bivariate analysis and findings interpreted in line with the theoretical framework of the study.

5.1 THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNIVERSITY

To describe the two institutions under study, the administrative system is taken into consideration here (along with the framework of the dependent variable). Peculiarity for higher education institution is a dual leadership: "at each organizational level (university, faculty, department) administratively appointed staff share the floor with elected academic leaders" (Paradeise et al., 2009, p.204). In this thesis, the administrative system is analyzed as a unique, where academic leaders and administrative staff share the duty of organizing and managing institutional activities.

The following aspects are considered:

a) forms of decentralization, together with the degree of autonomy and participation in decision-making;

b) the relations established among staff and administrative behaviours and routines;

c) the faculty's ability to display flexibility.

5.1.1 DECENTRALIZATION AND DECISION-MAKING – ITALY AND NORWAY COMPARED

A brief overview over the structure of the **Roma Tre University** revealed that the university is directed by a Rector and has two main central bodies for the ruling of the institution, the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors. As stated in the university's webpage, "the Academic Senate exercises all

powers relating to planning, coordination and verification of teaching and research within the University, except the duties belonging to other educational and scientific units"[33]. The Board of Directors exercises the powers relating to administrative, financial, economic and property of the University, as well as the management of administrative staff and librarian, according to university's regulations[34]. Then, the University of Rome is structured in 8 Faculties, each with its own administrative structure: a Dean and a Vice-Dean, a Faculty Board (with representatives of both academic and administrative staff), specific Boards for each degree, a certain number of administrative officials.

Merely looking at the university's structure is not sufficient for an evaluation of the institutional decentralization. It is clear there are two powerful bodies at the top managerial level, in charge of the management of the entire University. They exercise their decision-making power in many issues, except when it is delegated to other institutional levels. When delegation of functions occurs (towards faculties and departments) is what the researcher has tried to understand. Interview, survey responses and official documents have been analyzed. According to the survey, when respondents were asked to evaluate the university system, the majority of respondents said it is *poorly decentralized.* It means, faculties have some autonomy in performing their functions, but the most important decisions are taken at the central level. Even if the main bodies rarely oppose to proposals, they still have the final word on the major part of decisions. This is also confirmed by interview responses. A respondent said:

> *"I would say the system is poorly decentralized, in a way that faculties have power*
> *to take certain decisions. However, then these decisions have to be controlled and*
> *approved by the central bodies, the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors. In*
> *fact, some acts are finally signed by the Rector, not by the faculty Dean. However, I*
> *would say that 99% of the times what is decided at the periphery of the system, in the*
> *faculties or the departments, is then approved, without discussions, at the centre."*

The poor decentralization of the Italian University seems to be further confirmed when respondents described what a faculty does. According to interview responses, it is occupied with the organization of the teaching, as its major activity. In that regard, the Faculty Board has a high level of autonomy. However, some of the decisions that mostly influence the life of a faculty are not taken by the Faculty itself (like the number of students to enrol, that is established by law). A first example deals with budgetary issues: the faculty has freedom to act "in compliance with spending limits established every year by the Boards of Directors" (*Regulations on procedures relating to employment of professors and researchers, transfers and internal mobility,* established by the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors, last modified in 2006, still in force, p.1). In other words, the faculty has little control over its budget. Another example deals with opening a new degree or a new teaching: it is discussed in the

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[33] http://oc.uniroma3.it/intranet/Senato-Acc/index.asp
[34] http://oc.uniroma3.it/intranet/ALTRI-REGO1/index.asp

Faculty Board in complete autonomy, but the final decision has to be approved elsewhere. The decision must be taken by "*the central bodies of the University, the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors, otherwise obviously the new degree or the new teaching is not created*" (a respondent of the faculty management). Faculties and departments have the responsibility to discuss and make proposals about their own goals and activities; but actual decision-power is held by the central bodies.

Other findings can help us to better understand the degree of decentralization and the distribution of power in the Italian university. Survey data show interesting trends. It seems institutional actors perceive a higher degree of independence when moving towards the periphery of the system. When asked to evaluate the independence of departments from the Faculty Board, more than half of respondents selected the value 4 (high independence) on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 was associated with very little independence and 5 with very high independence). Again, when asked to evaluate the independence of their office from the central faculty offices, the majority of respondents selected the option 4 again. This is also confirmed by other data. According to interview responses, departments (totally devoted to research) have a high degree of autonomy in their activities. Respondents also said that especially at the periphery of the system, administrative offices work in close collaboration with each other, quite independently from the central bodies (to whom they merely report their work and outcomes).

Although actors in departments and peripheral offices feel a larger degree of autonomy when performing their work, it is still clear that decision-making power is held tightly at the highest levels of the Italian University. Interesting is to notice that the preference for a less decentralized structure is justified by the need of keeping control over the system, ensure efficiency and reduce abuses. From interview responses it emerged that the need for decentralization is not urgent. On the contrary, respondents seem to agree that the present institutional forms are preferable over a more decentralized structure.

On the contrary, when analyzing data on the **University of Bergen**, differences emerge. Although the institutional system has some common elements with the Italian one (such as a powerful central body and an organization in faculties and departments), decision-making power and responsibilities are distributed quite differently. At the top of the structure we find the Rector and the University Board (the highest institutional body). "The Rector is the Chair of the University Board and on behalf of the board he has the ultimate responsibility for the leadership of the University's activities" (university webpage). Then, as stated by a respondent, there are two lines: "*one going from the department leader to the Dean and the Rector (the academic line), the other line going from the administrative leader in the department, to the faculty director to the university director (administrative line)*". The Norwegian University has then six faculties, each with its own administrative units and institutes. Each faculty is structured with a

Dean, two Vice-Deans (one for research and one for education), a Faculty Board and administrative officials. This is showed by the chart in the following figure.

Figura 5.1 Organizational Chart University of Bergen
Source: www.uib.no
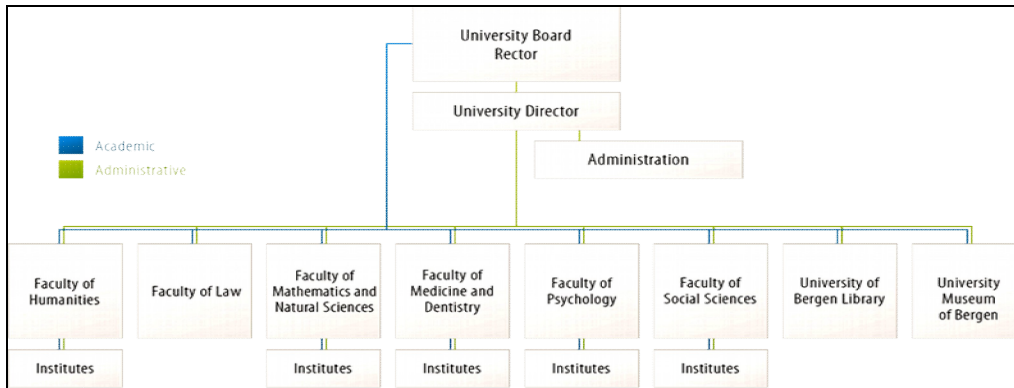
According to the findings, the University Board is the central body of the institution. The university leadership sets budgetary limits, overall university goals, the number of students accepted in each faculty, and lastly "*they are setting the rule*"[35], that is, university's regulations. All in all, the University Board formulates the institutional strategy and sets the bigger frame, within which faculties and departments operate. The latter are delegated functions and competences (as showed by the chart above). Again, the researcher has tried to investigate the relations among the different institutional levels, to see when and to what extent decision-making power is shared among them. Apart from budgetary and regulatory issues, Norwegian faculties are "*pretty autonomous*" in their functions: a faculty determines its own strategies about research, education and teaching. Within budgetary and regulatory limits, the faculty establishes in which activities to be engaged. The Faculty Board decides "*what we* [the faculty] *want to do, what we don't want to do*", it takes overall decisions about faculty goals and activities, also on high level changes (for instance, on an entire Bachelor programme). Autonomy in decisions about teaching and research gives the faculty a quite high control over its core activities. From interview responses, it emerges that many final decisions are actually taken in the Faculty Board in the Norwegian University. This is also confirmed by the Regulations for faculty bodies, stating that:

> *"The Faculty Board is the faculty's highest authority. It shall consider and decide*
> *certain matters as they are delegated by the University Board. The Faculty Board*
> *delegates authority to the Dean, to the departments or other bodies of the faculty."*
> (Regler for fakultetsorganene, approved the 18.06.2009, section 3).

Generally speaking, in Norway institutional strategies and resource distribution are defined by the central body, while faculties and institutes are assigned much of actual university's responsibilities. In this sense, the university structure seems highly decentralized, so that every units somehow participate in decisions.

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[35] It is interesting to notice that two respondents used the same expression referring to the University Board.

A respondent from the administration commented that the University is not very hierarchical. Rather, he defined the institutional structure as "*a flat structure*". In fact, the work of the Faculty is managed in close collaboration with departments. Although the Faculty Board has often the final word on department's proposals, "*decisions are taken in dialogue or based on what happens in the departments*" (an administrative employee). Departments are free, with no need of permission, to propose a re-composition of courses, add or drop programs and so on. In this regard, an employee said:

> *"You can have something that starts in the department and then the final decision is taken in the Faculty Board, they have to go to the board to get the final yes or no. The main reason is that we have to check if they followed the rules. If the proposal is compatible with the rules, we say ok. It is your program, do what you want*".

Departments play an important role in the Norwegian institution and have a large control over their own activities. Almost never proposals come from the faculty, instead 95% of the times suggestions come from the bottom of the organization. Having said that, it seems pretty clear that the university is *fairly decentralized* in its overall structure, with a quite generous degree of autonomy at every level. Decision-making power is shared within university's units, so that every layer has control and responsibility over its activities and keep dialogue with highest or lower university's bodies. However, this great deal of autonomy is not without rules. The main constraints derive from budgetary limits, defining the possibilities of spending, and from national regulations.

5.1.2 ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONS, BEHAVIOURS AND ROUTINES – ITALY AND NORWAY COMPARED

The second aspect deals with the relations established among administrative employees. The analysis focuses on: a) the extent to which employees act autonomously, that is, the degree of personal initiative staff can display within the boundaries of current regulations or other limitations; b) the interactions between subordinates and superiors. As a consequence, the paragraph will outline how administrative staff interact with each other and within the institutional frame.

In the **Italian University**, findings reveal that administrative employees act within a limited degree of autonomy, especially because of the strong influence of national regulation. Moreover, formality in behaviors and predictability of routines are encouraged, so that personal initiative is somehow discouraged. This is also clear in the relation among superior and subordinates, where the former holds power and the latter are most often told what to do. On the contrary, in the **Norwegian University**, administrative staff said to have a large autonomy in performing work. Despite regulations and other formal boundaries, employees have many possibilities to decide for themselves. Although behaviors are highly predictable (showing similarities with the Italian case), informality and easy relations among staff are preferred. Cooperation between bosses and employees is the common rule. Data are discussed below.

Autonomy in working routines, formality and predictability

As indicated by questionnaire responses, the majority of the administrative employees in Italy have a quite strong grasp on their activities. When asked "*To what extent do you participate in the planning of your working activities?*", the major part of respondents (4 over 5 respondents) answered a fairly large extent. Again, when asked "*Do you have sufficient opportunities to influence the way you carry out your work?*", the majority of respondents stated to have many and sufficient opportunities to do it. However, from interview responses emerge that staff autonomy is more limited than they think. For instance, Italian administrative employees are very little encouraged to take decisions autonomously, while mainly supported in performing their work as planned by superiors. Predictable behaviors are preferred: even when facing unexpected situations, administrative employees are strongly encouraged to stick to usual routines, or to ask advice from superiors. In this sense, interview responses reveal that administrative work is highly structured according to predetermined routines and formality in roles. It is not a case that an administrative respondent, talking about her freedom in performing the work, said : "*We always have to keep in mind rules, protocols to follow, university's regulations, directives from the boss and our daily routines. Within these limits, we are quite autonomous*". It seems from that analysis that the extent of independence is actually quite small.

In fact, especially in the Italian case, administrative routines are deeply affected by national and internal regulations. In Italy, universities are directed by a large number of laws "defining detailed substantive rules implemented top-down by Ministries in charge" (Paradeise et al., 2009, p. 203). These laws are then "*translated into internal regulations by the central governing bodies, and then implemented at the periphery*" (an administrative respondent). Findings suggest that norms and rules affect administrative working routines quite strongly, defining both overall strategies and operational procedures. And even when autonomy is to a certain extent granted (for example in the administration of teaching activities for faculty members), the use of such an autonomy results in practice still difficult. The following remark, from a respondent with both academic and administrative responsibilities, is another confirmation:

> "*The national legislation in the past years has been particularly influential. I have been in this institution for the last 14-15 years and I have witnessed at least 5 reforms, and variations of these reforms. We have seen so many different forms that is increasingly difficult to manage students and teaching. Thus, programming the work of the Faculty with a certain calm and serenity is rarely possible.*"

On the contrary, when analyzing Norwegian data, the situation seems quite different. Administrative staff said that they are granted "*a great deal of autonomy*". Talking about the administrative staff, an administrative respondent stated "*we are quite self-sufficient*". In other words, there are rules, protocols, budgetary and structural restrictions (such as in Italy), but all things considered the Norwegian

administrative staff is still quite independent in working routines. What emerged very clearly from the findings is that university's actors performs in an environment granting both limits and possibilities: there are national laws and internal regulations, but they actually serve to guarantee an institutional framework where actors can efficiently work. As well, there are budget constraints but also budget opportunities. In fact, an academic respondent commented: "*We are structured in relation to how to produce* [which rules to follow] *and within which budget, but we are free to decide what we want to do*". This is also true for individual employees. Although some things must be done, still employees can to a certain extent decide for themselves. Personal initiative is part of the Norwegian system, since work is organized upon an established agenda (what the central administration sees as an important issue) and upon "*what we want to focus on ourselves, what we see as an important aim*".

However, when asked "*Do you think your working procedures are predictable?*" answers reveal the other side of the coin. Norwegian employees are granted autonomy and flexibility within the system, but mainly because they are expected to follow certain daily routines. In fact, less than half of the administrative respondents in the Norwegian University said their working procedures are fairly predictable, based upon specific agendas. In the researcher's opinion, the major part of administrative employees perform in line with specific guidelines, not formally stated but highly shared within the staff. In this sense, organizational culture affects institutional actors, telling people what it is expected from them. Interesting is to notice that, while in Italy predictability is a from of control, in Norway it grants autonomy, e.g. when cases do not fit in the established framework, officials are able to act independently and take responsibility for decisions. The shared behavioral framework grants that personal initiative is in line with organizational standards.

Relations between subordinates and superiors

In the Italian University, roles are important. As mentioned before, behaviors are quite formal and predetermined by usual routines. People are expected to follow certain courses of action, mostly according to their position in the institution. It is not a case that the major part of Italian respondents in the survey affirmed that the relation with superiors deeply affect the working environment. In fact, in many cases they are expected to ask their bosses, especially when there are not clear directives or when they want to do something new. An example comes from the comment below:

> "*We propose, the right word is to propose. We cannot just have an idea and do something, and act. But we can propose and we must wait for the screening of our superiors, in many cases the Dean*"

> (an administrative employee in Italy)

In the researcher's opinion, quite often Italian employees have to ask permission from superiors, and rarely they are encouraged to act outside their routines and expected behaviors. Moreover, from interview responses, it also emerged that the relation between superiors and subordinates is not always positive. It may imply disagreement and misunderstandings, especially because employees are not encouraged to collaborate for decisions and to be actively involved in their working environment. From the findings, it emerged that employees are discouraged to introduce innovative routines or organize the work differently from what requested. In fact, according to survey responses in Italy, bosses do not encourage subordinates to act without clear indications or to act without previous permission (the majority of Italian respondents said that). This is confirmed in the following response:

> "*I have my personal initiative in my work, but.. you always have to keep in mind rules. For example, if I decide to modify an application form, for students or for teachers, I cannot change it and make it immediately effective. I have to, practically, ask for permission […] If I want to change a form for teachers, I have to ask permission to the Dean, which is my boss. We can have initiative, but ours is always a proposal, an opinion, and it has to be evaluated by our superior.*"
>
> (an Italian administrative employee)

For what concerns the Norwegian University, findings reveal different trends. First, it is worth of note the remark of an administrative officer (with management responsibility):

> "*In many cases our system is very democratic, everyone can bring anything on the table and then we discuss and follow it up together. But in some cases, especially when we have new issues to address, it has to be more – you should do that, you and you should have a meeting and discuss that. We try to make it as much as a team work, but sometimes things have to be done and someone has to do it.*"

As expressed by the respondent, the institutional structure has its importance in any administrative system. In every university, certain officials have managing roles, and others have executive roles. That obviously implies forms of control and management on behalf of superiors, that must direct administrative activities. However, in Norway it does not automatically imply that relations between superiors and subordinates are affected by a great distance in roles. Indeed, a Norwegian professor said:

> "*It is very clear that the Rector is the boss. He is very much the boss of the University, so you can see the hierarchy there. But still there are very few situations in which I would not address him with his Christian name, it has to be a very formal context to make me call him Rector. If you are the head of the faculty or if you are working as executer, you are pretty much on the same level, you would not use the family name, or I would say rarely*"

The quote above is interesting for two reasons: first it demonstrates that the *flat structure,* referred to previously, is evident also in the way people interact with each other. In contrast to Italy, roles and positions in the Norwegian institution are not very influencing on relations, everyone is at the same level, everyone can participate in both decisions and actions. Second, the climate of informality is highly shared in the Norwegian university, but this does not weaken the importance of official roles. The Rector is still the boss of the University, even though employees refer to him informally. The boss is still the boss, even though team-work is preferred and decisions are taken through cooperation and common planning. The easy relation between Norwegian employees is also confirmed by other findings. Along with the questionnaire responses, the study found out that respondents feel supported by their leaders to a large extent. Employees feel encouraged by their bosses in making decisions, performing the work, and most important, in taking responsibility for decisions even without permission (when necessary).

5.1.3 ADMINISTRATIVE FLEXIBILITY – ITALY AND NORWAY COMPARED

It stands to reason that the influence of national rules and internal regulations affect the flexibility of the institution. As mentioned earlier, administrative routines are in many cases bounded by national legislations in both countries. However, within the framework of the law and other general constraints, the life of the institution can be very different according to its flexibility. The extent to which the university is capable to perform efficiently, despite limitations, is what I tried to analyse here.

In the **Italian University**, survey responses reveal that administrative working routines are *to a fairly high extent* bounded by protocols and established procedures (as selected by the majority of respondents). Consequently, flexibility is not always easy. Findings indicated that it strongly depends upon external factors (higher education reforms coming from the Ministry) and internal factors (the propensity of employees to accept and apply changes efficiently). First, Italian respondents made clear that it is really difficult to implement properly what asked by the law, because legislations change too often. According to a respondent in Italy: "*If the directives were more stable, the university structure may be able to follow the legislation, and prove to be more flexible. The fact that regulations are changing so quickly does create resistances and rigidity*". This makes it difficult to get familiarity with reforms and implement them appropriately. Second, together with overall regulations, individual attitudes are important. The staff in the Italian University indicated that administrative work results rarely flexible, above all because there are many predetermined expectations upon workers (which of course make routines rigid). When standards change, expectations change. This produces uncertainty and sometimes implies misunderstandings. In fact, talking about the work of his office, an employee stated:

> "*We try to support the changes. In practice, what we do is helping the staff to implement new regulations and healing emerging problems. […] In that regard, the system is flexible, in principle. However, when it comes to update and upgrade our*

procedures, flexibility fails. Often it also depends on single employees, to apply new
procedures or not. Even more often, reforms are unpopular among many of us!".

In the **Norwegian University**, instead, the system seems to be organized to promote flexibility. In that regard, some respondents said: "*The freedom that many at the University have is really valuable*" and "*We have a frame, but within this frame we can and have to be flexible*". As already stated, in the Norwegian University flexibility serves to guarantee efficiency in the system, even when facing situations that do not fit into the institutional framework. That is, flexibility serves to allow employees to act autonomously, when required. Obviously, also in Norway there are quite strict regulations from the State, affecting the way administrative work is carried out. In the questionnaire, the majority of staff members said that they are also constrained by protocols and established procedures (coming from both national and internal regulations) *to a certain extent.* However, according to findings, Norwegian respondents show a different attitude towards the system. In that respect, a respondent said: "*The regulations and the laws are not flexible, and they should not be flexible. But as soon as you learn how to operate within the framework, you have flexibility in many areas"*.

I can conclude that flexibility is generally granted in the Norwegian system: employees are able to perform efficiently and follow preferred courses of action, despite official limitations. However, there is another side of the coin: flexibility seems a prefixed aspect of the institution, rather than a natural and desirable quality. In the university, the institutional leadership establishes the bigger frame, made of rules, budget and delegated functions. It means, flexibility is granted to institutional layers from the top, as another characteristic of the system, predetermined and settled. Norwegian employees have a personal grasp on working matters, but behaviours are increasingly fixed, prescribed, predictable. Giving staff autonomy is a way to manage situations that are outside the expected framework. In this regard, the researcher asked herself: to what extent flexibility is just another form of control over unpredictable situations?

In the following page, a summary of the findings so far is provided.

5.1.4 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

	ITALY	NORWAY
STRUCTURE	On average; poorly decentralized. There is some autonomy, especially when moving towards the periphery of the system. However, most important decisions are taken by the central governing bodies. Need for decentralization is not urgent.	Fairly decentralized, flat structure. Faculties and departments are pretty autonomous and share a large extent of decision-making power. Actors feel that this is the way it should be, since the disciplines are the basis of the institution.
BEHAVIOURS AND ROUTINES	Administrative staff have some independence in performing functions. However they are little encouraged to take decisions autonomously and to act without permission of their superiors.	Administrative workers are granted a great deal of autonomy, they are quite self-sufficient in performing work and encouraged to take responsibility for acting. The freedom employees display relies on the fact that behaviours are very much predictable
RELATION SUPERIORS - SUBORDINATES	Predictable routines are preferred. Independence from national and internal regulations is quite small. Administrative behaviours are highly structured along with roles and norms.	Roles are important and respected, but actors interact with each other from equal positions. Small distance between superiors and subordinates. Cooperation in both deciding and acting.
FLEXIBILITY	Flexibility is not always easy. Administrative work is bounded by protocols and established routines. Regulations changing vey often have the effect to create resistance and rigidity.	Strict regulations from the State, but the institution is still able to display high flexibility. It guarantees efficiency, also when some cases do not fit into the institutional framework. Flexibility however seems just another form of control over unpredictable situations.

5.2 THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: TEACHERS AND STUDENTS – ITALY AND NORWAY COMPARED

The second and third clusters of the dependent variable deal with teachers and students, focusing on the learning environment in which they act and interact, the activity of teaching and learning, the nature of the educational process. Teaching methods, academic culture and the quality of learning are increasingly becoming objects of study: higher education policy researchers have traditionally shown little interest in the management of teaching and learning, but now recent developments have pushed these activities into the policy spotlight (McInnis, 2005). More attention is also directed toward student's learning and their overall experience in the university (McInnis, 2005).

To discuss findings, this section will be organized in separate paragraphs: first, the educational context in both universities is introduced. Then, teachers' role and characteristics is evaluated according to student's perceptions. Lastly, the relation between students and teachers is examined, together with the influence it has on the learning process. All in all, the two universities under study are presented in their similarities and differences for what concerns teaching and learning experiences. Data have been collected with surveys and interviews, in the attempt to capture both information about the context and perceptions of the institutional actors that interact in that context. Also documentary sources are used.

The educational context

Essential elements of a University are two activities, i.e. teaching and research. Looking at the university as a cultural institution, its primary task is to engage in academic activity based on autonomous research and teaching (Bleiklie, 2005). Talking about the **Italian experience**, one of the professors commented:

> *"We have a very strong tradition for what concern higher education, that despite all*
> *contradictions in our history, still has some worth. [...] Universities were born as*
> *institutions for teaching; only at a later time, the other fundamental and indistinct*
> *function, that of research, was consolidated. In fact, what marks universities from*
> *other institutions is the presence of these two functions, teaching and research"*

Interesting was to discover that in the Italian University these two activities are separated. During the field work, it emerged that the faculties are assigned only teaching functions, while departments focus on research. This aspect is expected to be soon reformed by the Gelmini Reform (effective from the academic year 2012-2013), according to which faculties will disappear and departments will deal with both teaching an research. However, right now, it is the function of the Faculty to coordinate and direct teaching and educational activities, while "departments promote and coordinate the scientific activities, the research and research training" (University Statute, Title III, p.18). This separation of duties influences teacher's work and career. Research activities are managed by the Departments, but then it is the Faculty Board that has responsibility for appointing teachers[36], on the basis of scientific achievements. A respondent said in that regard:

> *"When the Faculty Board decides to contact a professor rather than another, the*
> *decision is based more on the experience of research and on scientific titles, then on*
> *the teaching experience. Normally, the research experience is what counts more,*
> *scientific production and intellectual achievements"*

Reputation, research activity and scientific publications seem to be key aspects of teacher's career. However, once appointed, most of the Italian professors will then be mostly engaged in teaching activities. This obviously deeply influences teaching and learning, as discussed later in the chapter.

On the other hand, when presenting the core activities in the **Norwegian institution**, a respondent confirmed that the university is built to handle research and teaching at every institutional level. Both faculties and institutes share competences in these two areas. This is established by internal regulations, according to which: "The Faculty Board shall determine the faculty's strategies for education, research, research training" (Regler for fakultetsorganene, approved the 18.06.2009, section 3); at the same time "The Department Council shall consider, make decisions and provide recommendations to the faculty or other superior authority in matters relating to research, research training and education" (Regler for

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[36] When it does not happen trough a public notice from the Ministry itself.

institutsorganene, approved the 18.06.2009, section 4). From findings it emerges that, in the Norwegian university, equal relevance is given to activities of teaching and research, both when appointing professors and when organizing university's activities. For example, professors must divide their time and energy for both academic and research-based projects. The University Board must "*guarantee a good balance between research and teaching activities*" (according to an administrative officer).

Teacher's characteristics according to students' evaluation

Within the educational context, teachers and students carry out their daily activities. In the present research, I tried to understand on which basis students evaluate their professors, to investigate to what extent certain values are associated with high status actors. Student's perceptions are believed to be less bounded by rational interests (such as economic, managerial or political interests) and therefore able to reflect values. In that respect, it emerged clear that Italian and Norwegian students seek in their teachers different qualities. Moreover, official roles have different influence in the two universities.

According to questionnaire responses, academic reputation seems to generate great respect on behalf of the **Italian students**. When asked to evaluate teachers, more than half of the students indicated academic reputation as the highest qualification, among the possible choices. Again, almost all of them considered academic results as extremely important. In addition, they have been asked "*In the choice of a supervisor/advisor for your thesis or an official study project, would you select your teacher because of his...?*". Most of the Italian students answered "*academic skills and knowledge of the topic*", focusing attention on scientific results rather than, for example, on *teacher's availability to work in cooperation with students* (selected only by 13% of respondents). Academic reputation and scientific achievement generate esteem and respect: they are considered important positive teacher's characteristics. However, it is important to acknowledge that many of the students interviewed also included friendliness and availability among desirable professor's attributes. They stated "*preparation in the field and capacity of teaching*", "*ability to capture student's interest*", "*availability and attendance*" as desirable aspects. Interesting is to notice that, while knowledge and skills are considered indispensable elements, availability and support are still considered additional aspects, desirable but not crucial.

Looking at responses from **Norwegian students**, it seems clear that they have different opinions about their professors. Dedication and passion in teaching are the qualities that students mostly seek in teachers. Being the University of Bergen a research-based institution, professors are mainly scientists. However, they are required to hold lectures as well. Interesting is the remark of a student in that regard: although many of the professors are experts in their field, this does not automatically implies they are good teachers. Indeed, the ability to transfer knowledge is what students mainly want from their teachers.

What else Norwegian students appreciate of their professors? Many of them indicated teacher's availability, friendliness, openness, ability to involve students, motivation and enthusiasm[37]. All these aspects have been pointed out as teachers' preferred characteristics. What students seem to respect most is the involvement of professors in class: knowledge is not the only requirement, because knowledge without passion is pointless. In fact, while academic results and reputation in the field are considered important for less than half of respondents, almost all the Norwegian students agreed that friendliness and availability in the learning process is the most important aspects in teachers. Teachers must have academic competences, but they must also share them with students. In fact, when asked in the survey which quality they are looking for in a supervisor (the same question discussed for Italian students), half of the students selected *academic skills and knowledge of the topic* (less than the Italian respondents), and more than one third selected *availability to work in cooperation* (more than the Italian students).

Relation between students and teachers and the learning process

In the University, teachers and students continuously interact with each other. They work together to produce and reproduce knowledge. However, their activities are deeply affected by the interaction itself, by the way they relate to each other. In other words, the relations between teachers and students is the basis of their activities, in a way that the educational process may have different modes and outcomes.

According to survey findings, the major part of the **Italian students** stated that teachers relate to them from a quite unequal position. Teachers tend to maintain a certain distance from their students. In fact, when asked to what extent they feel free to relate to professors on an equal footing, more than half of the respondents indicated *to a small extent*. Students somehow feel the obligation to keep a certain degree of formality in the relation, strengthening the distance in roles between the professor and the student. This distance is also confirmed by other findings. For example, the major part of the students said that contacts with professors always happen "*quite formally*" or "*very formally*" (see the graph in the following page). Moreover, an Italian respondent noted that "*It is quite normal that there is a great distance between students an teachers, because in that case the professor plays the role of the trainer*". The formal role of the teacher seems to define the way he/she relates to students. Interesting is the use of the adjective *normal*, to indicate that large distance in the relation is a natural condition.

In **Norway**, questionnaires' responses reveal that the interaction between students and teachers is more equal. In fact, the major part of the students surveyed think teachers relate to them *from a fairly equal position*. Again, the major part of the students feel more free to relate to professor from an equal position, and agreed on the possibility have *very informal contacts* with their professors (see graph below).

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[37] One of the questions in the survey was an open question, students were asked to describe positive and negative teachers aspects.

It seems clear that students and teachers in the Norwegian institution tend to build relations where they are equally involved. Moreover, data analysis revealed that formality is not a prerequisite in the relation; on the contrary, despite traditional roles, professors and students relate quite easily to each other. The focus of the relation is not on the way they interact, but on the products of the interaction itself. This is also confirmed by professor's responses:

> *"I hope that what students say is just as much important as professors say"*

> *"You would not use my title, if you as a student speak to me you would use my Christian name. My students, most students do that. Rarely they would address me as Professor, although in many other places this happens"*

Figure 5.2 – Contacts with teachers – Italy. N=15. Source: Self-administered Questionnaire
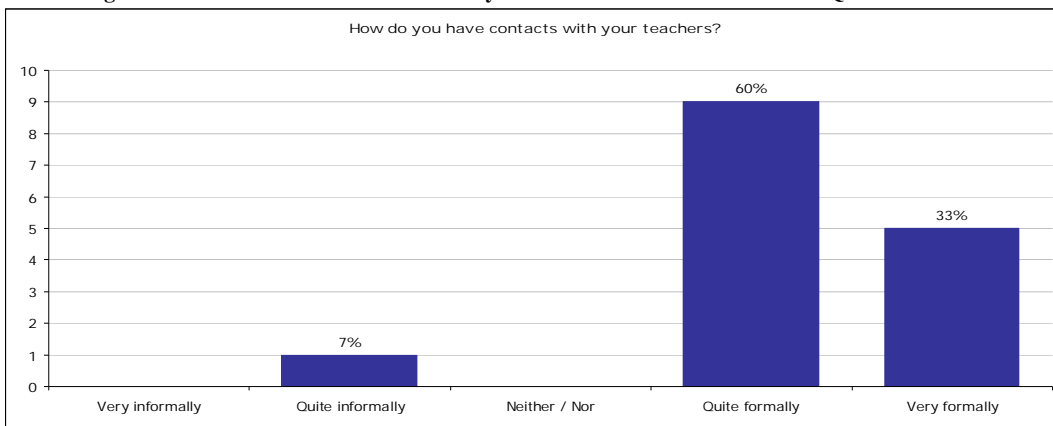
Figure 5.3 – Contacts with teachers – Norway. N=16. Source: Self-administered Questionnaire
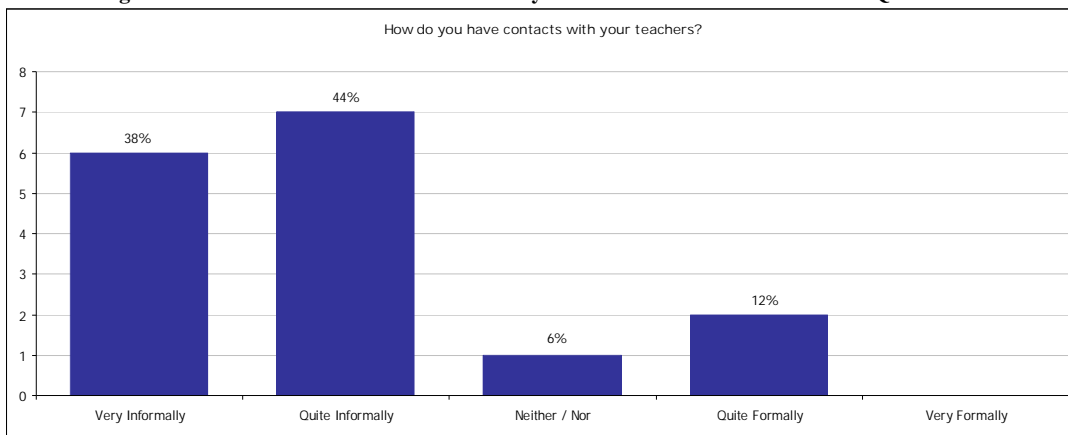
Having said that, is it evident that teacher-student relation has a strong influence on the learning process. Consequently, the two universities under study should display differences also in that regard. The more teachers cooperate with their students, the more the learning process depends on the communication between them. On the contrary, if the education is based on teacher's traditional role (the trainer), the quality of the process strongly depends on teacher's excellence, and students barely have a marginal role.

As indicated by questionnaire responses, the majority of Italian respondents stated that the learning process promoted in the **Italian University** is "*generally impersonal*" and fairly structured. Students have very few possibilities to influence their educational process and learning patterns are organized pretty much in the same way for every student. It means, students can actively participate in the learning only when they interact with teachers. However, in practice, the educational process is teacher-centered: it is based upon teacher's role. Professors guide the learning, establish content and timing, so that the learning depends effectively on teachers capacity (their ability to transfer knowledge to their students). In the researcher's opinion, the current relation between teachers and student is strengthened by the fact that teachers themselves are rarely willing to weaken their position and loose control over the educational process. Moreover, it also serves to professors to manage a growing number of students, whose demands increasingly complicate and threaten their traditional role and power position.

In the **Norwegian University**, on the contrary, the learning environment is defined differently. It emerged from data analysis that both academic staff and students are encouraged to dialogue openly and produce knowledge in cooperation. In the "*University Strategy for 2011-2015*", it is stated:

> *"The university community is a place where opinions can be freely shared, and where students can engage in unbiased, free and open debate. Interaction between students and staff is typically defined by mutual respect, expertise and a desire to achieve the highest quality."*

<div align="right">(University of Bergen, Strategy for 2011-2015, p. 3)</div>

In other words, the learning itself is the focus of the interaction. Students are encouraged to intervene in class and contribute to the educational process. The distance between teachers and students is very small, so that they are able to "*share knowledge*". Findings reveal that, especially when students are less numerous (for example, in Master programmes) the teaching-learning experience is pretty much "*an interaction*". Students are in many case involved to join the scientific staff, so that effective learning is a shared product from the communication between the two. In addition, teachers try to increase student's independence. In fact, interesting is to notice that the students actually feel dependent on their professors. When asked "*To what extent do you feel dependent on teacher's guidance?*" the majority of them answered to a high extent. In the researcher's opinion, that depends on the fact that students establish closer relations to their professor. Thus, since education is based upon this relation, students feel the learning process depends on teacher's assistance and advice.

5.2.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

	ITALY	NORWAY
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	Activities of teaching and research are separated and managed by two different units and that influences teachers' career.	Activities of teaching and research are discussed and managed at every level in the institution. Equal relevance is given to both research and teaching.
LEARNING PROCESS	Generally impersonal and fairly structured. All students have similar educational patterns. The learning process depends upon teacher's capacities and traditional role.	The learning process is based on the interaction between students an teachers. Open dialogue in order to produce knowledge. Teacher's try to increase student's independence.
RELATION TEACHERS-STUDENTS	Scientific achievement and academic reputation generate esteem and respect. They do not relate to each other from equal positions. Students have contacts and talk with their professors quite formally. Large distance between teachers and students during the learning process.	Student and teachers relate to each other from equal positions. Students have very informal contacts with their teachers. Learning is the focus of the interaction. Small distance between teachers and students during the educational process.
TEACHER'S CHARACTERISTICS	Professors are valuated for academic skills and research achievements. Focus on scientific results. Preparation in the field and teaching skills emerge among other teacher's preferred characteristics. Availability and support are desirable but not essential.	Main characteristic of a teacher is dedication and passion. Being experts in a field does not automatically make them good teachers. They must be able to share knowledge. Availability, cooperation, ability to involve students are important and desirable.

5.3 INSTITUTIONAL REACTION TO CHANGE AND INNOVATION

The last variable into consideration in the present study deals with the way universities manage evolution. Change in higher education systems is a complicated affair (Bleiklie, 2006). A university must handle the need for both stability and change: the balance between an enduring structure and a modern innovative institution is a key issue. Generally speaking, new policies are initially formulated by national policy-making bodies, subsequently translated into laws and implemented within educational institutions (Bleiklie et Kogan, 2006). Finally they affect the behaviours of individual faculties and the way they conduct research, teaching and administrative tasks (Bleiklie et Kogan, 2006). It means, reforms move from a national level to the institutional level and last to the individual level. "The process normally runs like this: decisions made at the higher level become structural conditions that affect behaviour at lower levels" (Bleiklie et Kogan, 2006, p. 10). Whether a system is more or less conservative may affect the way that system addresses this process of innovation. Here the analysis is mainly based on actors perceptions: in the researcher's opinion, respondents were able to reveal much on university's capability to promote or delay change, whether innovations are welcomed or faced, the way reforms affect actors and actors affect reforms. Findings are interpreted trying to highlight institutional dynamism or, on the contrary, institutional conservatism (Maassen, 2008).

5.3.1 UNIVERSITY'S NEED FOR STABILITY AND CHANGE – ITALY AND NORWAY COMPARED

As mentioned before (when discussing the flexibility of the system) many reforms have changed **Italian universities** in the past years. An academic respondent said he witnessed numerous reorganizations in the higher education system, which basically resulted in higher complexity for the university leadership. According to the findings, the directives from the Ministry in Italy generate most of the times radical reforms, while internal changes are mainly implemented by institutional actors themselves to make "*our work easier*". Examples are the increasing use of IT software, the harmonization of procedures, the electronic running of exams, etc. In both cases "*I would say the system has a kind of flexibility, but we change things very slowly*" (an administrative respondent). During data analysis, it emerged that the major reason why the Italian University changes very carefully is the need to keep the system as much stable as possible. That is, stability and conservation are the keys to maintain continuity and efficiency, despite continuous reforms coming from outside. Interview responses reveal it quite clearly:

> "*Changing is not fast, it requires constancy, it is slow, gradual, step by step. It can not be sudden, because it would shock everyone. This is true for me as well: if they would change a practice, a course of action, from one day to the next, suddenly, I would have a strong impact! I would need some time to understand, to restart and go on. Too fast is too difficult, too demanding.*"　　(an administrative employee in Italy)

> "*Graduality is necessary. Otherwise reforms have a too strong impact, such as destabilization*"　　　　　　　　　　　　(an administrative employee in Italy)

The extracts above indicate that the Italian university does not change rapidly. Changes are implemented step by step, mainly because they risk to destabilize the entire institutional structure. In that regard, a respondent said that the institution is not able to follow the legislations efficiently, because they change too often. Another said that there are so many regulations and directives coming from the Ministry that the result is a great confusion and uncertainty for Italian universities. In this context, it seems pretty clear that the institution has difficulties to perform at its best. It is not a case that the Rector himself opened a new academic year with the following words:

> "*The international system of higher education and research is undergoing a delicate transition phase […] We can not ignore that in Italy this step is proving difficult and awkward, and that since many years a permanent state of uncertainty and anxiety afflict individual universities and the entire university system. […] Great part of the Italian universities have shown in these years a sense of responsibility and attachment to their mission. For how long can we stand still in a condition in which everything is put in turmoil, without a unique framework of reference? It is not an exaggeration to say that the University has reached a limit insurmountable, beyond which the future of the system is at risk!*"

> (inauguration academic year 2009-2010 of Roma Tre University)

Findings reveal that reforms in Italy are often meant to make the structure more adaptable and reactive. Instead, the result is a growing need for stability and control. All things considered, it is not a surprise that institutional actors may prefer a more centralized system, which allows a better control over the university. From the interviews emerged that a stable structure is the means to ensure efficiency, that rigidity (or reduced flexibility) is mostly a need rather than a choice. Changes are rarely welcomed, because they produce uncertainty. In fact, an academic respondent said: *"In many cases, some forms of rigidity are necessary, things must be rigorous, otherwise the entire structure comes apart"*.

On the contrary, the **Norwegian University** seems positively receptive to reforms and innovation. The higher education system has proved to change sufficiently easily and fast. However, large changes rarely occur: the biggest reforms date back to the late '90 when the Bologna Process began, NPM tools spread in higher education institutions and the so-called 'Quality Reform' was implemented. Indeed, Norwegian respondents have described the university environment as a place where "*small changes happen all the time*". In the researcher's opinion, national directives are less constrictive than in the Italian case: Norwegian respondents made clear that regulations from the State are strict and influencing, but mainly on economic and procedural matters. The State establishes how much resources a University can get and its legislative framework. However, this is a part of the institutional frame within which actors perform, giving to them autonomy in defining operational practices and methods. In line with that, an administrative employee in Norway stated:

> "*We change because of new demands form the State or from the University leadership. We have new regulations to apply and rules to follow. But what is most important, we change along with our own evaluation, when we think we can re-organize our work to make it better*".

Therefore, most interesting for the study case are innovations coming from the inside. It is not a case that, for what concern institutions with a high autonomy from state control (like Norwegian universities, according to Bleiklie, 2006), many changes take place within the institution itself, as a result of internal (i.e intra-institutional) processes and decisions (Maassen, 2008).[38]

In the Norwegian University, reforms come from both the top and the bottom of the institution: the University Board promotes new strategies and goals; institutes propose innovations and improvements on teaching methods, programs and courses; student organizations suggest inputs and updates. The University tries to keep itself "*up-to-date*" according to its core activities. Some respondents said:

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[38] In this paragraph I discussed the impact of national reforms for Italy and the impact of internal changes for Norway. The reason is that, in both cases, I decided to discuss what is mainly influencing for one or the other system. This is also confirmed by other researchers. Some authors highlighted that in Italy the strongest influence on universities comes from national regulations, that leave universities with very little freedom about implementing methods (Reale and Potì, 2008). On the other side, the independence that Norwegian University display when implementing reforms (with their own times and methods), makes internal and intra-institutional decisions more relevant for the study (Bleiklie, 2005).

"In the education and in programmes there are changes all the time, there are small changes, but very often things are discussed and improved"

(a Norwegian professor)

"The system changes through small steps. Especially about teaching. Departments come with suggestions about things to be modified and certain issues are discussed quite often. We have to get things discussed and be open for changes"

(a Norwegian administrative employee)

What emerged from findings is that reforms are undertaken on the form of small changes, continuously discussing certain issues, especially related to research and teaching activities. The Norwegian university is positive towards innovation, it is seen as a means to increase quality and be more attractive internationally. Of course, innovation and intra-institutional changes are possible also because national legislations are stable enough to produce an encouraging environment. However, there is a risk behind this pressing will to modernization. Although the scope is to increase quality in education, productivity and competition risk to make the institution vulnerable. And one professor expressed it very lucidly:

"I would say the University is in some ways flexible in respect to changes, for example in relation to the Bologna protocol. Quite soon things have changed so that you could go from one university to another, from one country to another. Things have changed quickly. In a generational perspective, I think that the University is changing quite much. But as I see, the University has also a very important place in society, as a place for knowledge. And that role should not be played to much with. I mean, it is a long tradition and we should take care of that tradition, because if we don't do that, the University might be just another instrument for modern societies. And this is important, that we have a task which is different from other social institutions. So we are flexible, but we should not be too flexible on our core values".

5.3.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

	ITALY	NORWAY
REACTION TO CHANGE AND INNOVATION	Things change very slowly, carefully, step by step. Main reason: too many reforms from the Ministry combined with the need to keep the system as much stable as possible. Graduality is necessary otherwise the system risks destabilization. Reforms are meant to make the system more adaptable and reactive, while the result is a growing need for stability and control.	The University is quite receptive to reform and innovation. However large changes rarely occur. Innovations come mainly from the institution itself, in the form of small changes happening all the time (proposals from both the top and the bottom of the university). However, the pressure for modernization risks to make the University vulnerable, especially regarding its core values and goals.

5.4 Conclusions

As mentioned before in the thesis, the elements into account for studying the University have been drawn by the case study of Folch and Ion (2009). To study university's organizational culture, they identified where to look for evidences (the administrative system, teaching and learning activities, attitudes towards change) and how to collect data (surveys, interviews, document review). Each factor is intended as part of a more complex and unique set of values and beliefs in the University. In the next chapter, the researcher has attempted to establish a relation between these key aspects and the national culture, i.e. between the dependent and the independent variables of the research. .

CHAPTER 6

COMPARISON OF THE CASES – TESTING HYPOTHESES

6.0 INTRODUCTION

In the chapter, findings are further discussed. Following the framework of the hypotheses, the two cases are compared. Data are interpreted through bivariate analysis, examining the relationship between dependent and independent variable. The researcher has tried to match findings with predictions: this stage involves the application of Hofstede's dimensions (as an analytical instrument) to the data collected. Differences and similarities between the two universities are highlighted: the scope is to evaluate the extent to which values, norms, behaviours, motivations and preferences are embedded in the institutional context (Maassen and Stensaker, 2005) and in turn produce organizational differences. Cultural dimensions are used as lenses, to provide a theoretical perspective and explore how far variations between the countries can be explained in terms of national culture (Olivier, 2006). In the words of Folch and Ion (2009), "in order to interpret the educational reality it is necessary to go from observation [field work] to description [report of findings as done in chapter 4 and 5] to interpretation [as I intend to do here]" (Folch and Ion, 2009, p.145).

6.1 HYPOTHESIS 1: POWER DISTANCE → INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

The first hypotheses of the study is based on the Power Distance Index. Along with the prediction made, Italy has a higher PDI score, so that the institutional structure is probably more centralized. Decisions should be taken for the major part by the university's central bodies, and the institutional hierarchical structure should have a very strong influence on the decision-making process. On the contrary, Norway is characterized by a lower PD index. It means that the university is likely to be more decentralized. Faculties and departments should have a high degree of autonomy and actively participate to decisions.

The first attempt to observe the influence of national culture on universities is made looking at the **institutional structure**. According to the hypothesis, the two countries should display different ways to organize the university. Looking at the findings (as presented in the previous chapter), data seem to match predictions. When talking about the Italian university, respondents agreed to a large extent that the system is not very decentralized. Precisely, the major part of respondents qualified it as *poorly decentralized*: faculties and departments are granted a sufficient degree of autonomy, but important decisions are taken by the two central governing bodies (namely the Academic Senate and the Board of Directors). This is further confirmed in the Italian institution by the University Statute, where division of power and competences is stated clearly: even through faculties (and consequently departments) can say much about their own activities, the final decision is taken at the highest institutional level. For example,

in the Statute it is stated that: "It is duty of the Faculty Board *to propose* to the Academic Senate activation of courses of study. [...] It is duty of the Faculty Board to formulate and approve *requests* to the Academic Senate, for what concerns reorganization and development of the faculty, regarding teaching, didactic and staff" (Title III, p.16). The use of words is not causal, it produces and delimitates power, generating effects on institutional actors (Mills, 2004): the wording used in the Statute subtly acknowledges that faculty's functions are not to decide, but to propose and request to a central governing body. Findings are further confirmed by Reale and Potì (2009), who discussed the weakness of the intermediate levels (faculties and departments) in the Italian universities, against the centralization of power in the governing bodies.

On the contrary, a respondent from the faculty management in the Norwegian University, when asked about the institutional structure, explained:

> *"Many final decisions are made in the Faculty Board. The University Board is more kind of strategic and related to economic issues. We do also have space to define our activities, quite much I would say. The faculty as a unit is not doing this on its own, we are doing it in cooperation with departments. In many ways it is top-down, when it comes to overall strategies or economy and budgets. But I would say that the operational strategies are operated by the departments and the faculty, in a way that it is more bottom-up"*

The quote above describes precisely that the Norwegian University is organized to delegate decision-power at every level of the institution, along with different competences and goals. Although the central bodies set the bigger frame, most part of the **decision-making process** is delegated to other institutional layers. In this sense, Norwegian respondents confirmed that the institution is quite decentralized: the University Board is the one setting the rules and budget (within which actors operate), but faculties and institutes are left quite autonomous to decide their own strategies and activities. Expressions such as "*many final decisions are made in the Faculty Board*" indicate that decision-power is quite decentralized in the Norwegian university. Faculties are delegated power and responsibility for their own matters. This is also confirmed by Kogan et al. (2006), that talking about Norway highlighted the decentralization and strengthening of leadership at all levels of the university organization. Indeed, interview responses also confirmed that the institutional structure is flat (as referred to in the previous chapter): faculties work *in cooperation* with departments, following up what indicated by the University Board and keeping the focus on their own projects. The institutional hierarchy is not very strong.

Indeed, according to Hofstede et al. (2010), countries with a high PDI suffer the influence of the **institutional hierarchy** much more than countries with lower PDI. In the Italian University, although respondents perceive autonomy increases going towards the periphery of the system, the central bodies still represent the *pyramid apex* in the traditional sense. They are the top of the hierarchy, decisions are

mainly taken from the top down. In fact, when analyzing the Italian higher education system, Moscati (2008) talks about the traditional top-down way of academic organizations, related to chair power. On the contrary, Norwegian respondents evaluated their institution as "*what you call a flat structure, is not very hierarchical*": every institutional unit participate to University activities with both proposals and decisions (decision-power is delegated along the entire institution). It is interesting the remark of an academic respondent, who highlighted the tight connection between the Norwegian culture and the institutional structure: "*When it comes to this egalitarian aspect I would say our culture has much to do with this. Our country is not very hierarchical if you compare it with many other cultures*". The hierarchy has evidently a low influence on the actual work of the University. The University Board is the most important body in the pyramid, but departments proved to be as important when it comes to the core of education. In that regard, it is also interesting the comment of an administrative respondent:

> "*Lots of things are promoted by the departments heads, they can decide for themselves. Departments have a lot to say concerning study programs, the curriculum, the teaching. Actually, that is the way it should be, I mean, the disciplines are the basics in the all organization, so that is the way it should be*".

This last expression is another confirmation of Norway as a small-PD country: while in large-PD countries people tend to accept an unequal distribution of power as a natural element of societies, in the Norwegian case egalitarianism is the core. Decision-making power within the institution must be distributed equally, because every layer has its importance in the system. In this sense, the Norwegian University reflects the society: everyone is equally important "*to make the big machine work*".

According to low-PDI, the distance between powerful and less powerful members in the society is small. When talking about the University, we can translate the expression saying that the **distance between institutional levels** should be small. Being Norway a small-PD country, it is not a case that in Norway "*decisions are taken in dialogue and based on what happens in the departments*". The institutional structure is built to decentralize both responsibilities and decision-making power: faculties and institutes collaborate and interact for decisions about teaching and research. They must manage their own activities within budget limits and rules, but they have the opportunity to establish priorities and have a deeper grasp on core issues (such as teaching methods, programmes of courses, research projects, etc). Instead, Italy proved again to be a large-PD country. The distance between institutional bodies is large, both in the vertical line (between the Academic Senate and the faculty, for example) or in the horizontal line (departments and faculties deal with their activities separately, to such an extent that the former deal only with research, the latter only with teaching and didactic activities). Moreover, faculties and departments are left with very little to say. They have the responsibility over what is delegated to them by the Academic Senate and/or the Board of Directors, but they can only make proposals about the work. Final decisions are again left to the highest institutional layer.

All in all, we can say that in Norway cooperation between institutional units is the means to guarantee quality of performance. On the contrary, in Italy, concentration of power and a centralized organization is preferred. In Norway decentralization is a natural trait: who manage the core activities of the institution, teaching and research, should be the one establishing how these activities must be done. In Italy, a tight control over institutional bodies is the means to stability and continuity. Italian respondents described it clearly. Two respondents, both with a long academic and administrative experience in the Italian institution, could clearly see the other side of the coin:

> *"Normally, for my experience, Faculty Boards have decentralized very few things. Although we have specific Boards for each degree, they do very little, and for many things they still need approval from the Faculty Board. With the new reform[39] we go towards a higher degree of decentralization. However, honestly, for small universities such as our, all these demands for decentralization are not so strongly felt. Indeed, it is preferable that things are shared, done together, regarding both management and information"*

> *"Often we hear appeal for greater autonomy, in order to have less influences and limits upon our work. Many say – judge us only by the outcomes and not by the procedures. But it is also true that we often witness deleterious phenomena, absolutely negative, so that autonomy is a double-edged sword: it helps in terms of flexibility, but sometimes it allows abuses that discredit also the ones working well and according to rules"*

Italian respondents confirmed that the need for decentralization is not felt very strong, on the contrary, for small Universities (such the one under study) it is preferable to keep control over information and decision-power, mainly to guarantee efficiency and avoid abuses. This is particularly true for the periphery of the institution, where control is usually more loose and cases of inefficiency are more common. To ensure that the institutional machine would work as expected, centralization is believed a good means: a stronger form of control over actors and institutional units would grant a better performance. As a respondent said: *"Autonomy is a double-edged sword: it helps in terms of flexibility, but sometimes it allows abuses that discredit also the ones who works well and according to rules"*.

According to what discussed so far, culture seems to have quite a strong influence on the institutional structure, such as to justify the differences between the countries. Despite the standardization of certain characteristics in higher education systems, local cultures[40] still push organizations towards unique adaptations, which distinguish a national context to another (Olivier, 2006). However, it is equally important to recognize that the environment in which Universities perform is influencing as well.

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[39] The Gelmini Law of 2011, which is about to be implemented in Italy. In the University into consideration, the reform will be officially implemented from the new academic year (2012-2013).
[40] Understood as national cultures.

In Italy, where policies and reforms change very often, a centralized system allows control over the institutional structure, against continuous pressures from the State. Indeed, this is also the case when the social concern for higher education increases (Kogan, 1996). In Italy, the issues around the costs of higher education and the inefficiency of the current system are more and more capturing political attention. Consequently, universities are structured with a very hierarchical channel of authority, to secure the functioning of the organization. However, the lack of decentralization of power and the overload on central decision-making bodies risks indeed to produce inefficiencies (Reale e Potì, 2009). On the other hand, in Norway, a stable and unambiguous environment makes the University able to take advantage of decentralization. First, the Norwegian policy-making style tend to favour decentralized patterns of decision-making, that leave relatively substantial authority to every institutional level (Bleiklie, 2006). Second, the Universities are granted great autonomy in their choice of internal organization (Bleiklie, 2006). For the purpose of this research, it means that decentralization is certainly promoted through national policies, but it is also a peculiar choice of higher education institutions.

As a consequence, a question arises: to what extent that influencing national context is in turn influenced by national culture? To what extent higher education policies reflect national culture? Even though I can not answer these questions, findings reveal interesting issues. Despite the specific relation between the state and the university in each coutnry, the present research was still able to draw a relation between national culture and the level of autonomy and responsibility attributed *de facto* by the university to its internal sub-levels of organization (Reale and Potì, 2009). That is, although the margin of autonomy granted to universities from the state is of a greater importance, universities are still able to take fundamental decisions independently, and most likely according to their own set of values.

6.2 HYPOTHESIS 2: POWER DISTANCE → SUPERIORS - SUBORDINATES

The second hypothesis of the research deals with the relations established among institutional actors. Specifically, it aims to predict the relation between superiors and subordinates in the administrative system, as it is influenced by cultural values. The differences in the PDI scores are supposed to produce variations in the way actors interact more or less equally in the two Universities. In Italy (high PDI), relations should be built upon formal roles, so that the position a person covers in the institution defines also his/her relations. There should be a great distance between actors, so that employees rarely collaborate and discuss decisions. Most likely, the boss is the manager, the subordinate is the executer; and the relation between subordinates and superiors may be often controversial. In contrast, Norway displays a low PDI: subordinates and superiors are expected to interact with each other quite often. Boss and employee should collaborate for planning activities and deciding working routines. Despite formal roles, they should have equal position in the relation and be easily in contact with each other.

In other words, the Power Distance Index is said to influence the way relations among staff are more or less formal. The **distribution of power among actors** may affect how they interact, whether according to fixed behaviours (everyone is expected to behave according to the position in the system) or actual necessities (enhance institutional efficiency, no matter who is the boss and who is the subordinate). It is not a case that the cultural dimension includes in its definition the word *distance*: to what extent employee are influenced by the distance generated from institutional roles and hierarchy?

According to the findings, although Italian administrative employees feel that they have good opportunities to influence and participate in the planning of working activities, they are in reality very little encouraged to act autonomously. An Italian official used the expression: "*I practically have to ask for permission*". The relation between subordinates and superiors is often controversial, the former being highly dependent upon what is decided by the latter. In that regard, an Italian respondent said:

> "*Who is in charge of an office, either by merits or seniority, may exercise such power in the wrong way.. first of all, because it is wrong to see it [being a boss] as a power to use.. a boss should be a person to which subordinates refer, not in a controversial way, but in a positive way. Indeed, many times we clash with our boss*"
>
> (an administrative employee)

The quote is meaningful: the respondent used an interesting wording, first of all referring to *being a boss* as a form of power, then stating that often there are conflicts between superiors and subordinates. It emerged from findings that Italian employees felt frustrated by the relation with the superior, mainly because the relation is based on a disparity of power. It is evidently not equal. Moreover, some of them also referred about situations where the boss must decide upon matters he/her is not really competent about, resulting in inefficient decisions or missing information. "*This of course affect the work and does not help to make it better*". The respondent in the quote above used the expression *should be* referring to the boss, a means to underline that it is a desirable situation, well different from the current one.

On the contrary, Norwegian respondents said that the distance between employees and bosses is quite small. Respondents confirmed to be quite *self-sufficient* and *independent* in performing functions. Official roles are highly recognized and respected, but still actors relate to each other from very equal positions. In that respect, a Norwegian employee said that it is very easy for everyone to get in contact with the boss and to go talking with him/her without problems. There is an informal environment, where employees relate to each other as equals. In fact, findings reveal that in the Norwegian University administrative work is often performed as a team-work. Although there is someone *signing the letters*, responsibilities are shared and subordinates actively participate in defining the working agenda. An employee explained: "*We have the chance to say this is good or this is bad. We discuss things although maybe they* [the superiors] *are then taking the final decision*".

Another respondent confirmed: "*If I am very insecure about a decision, I would go to my boss and ask Bu I do not have to go to her for everything. She has delegated a lot of responsibilities to me, so I can make many daily decisions on my own. We cannot ask the boss all the times*". Certainly, the researcher's impression is that what makes things easier is that, within the Norwegian organization, expectations are clearly defined. That is, the freedom that employees are granted depends on the fact that behaviors are pretty much predictable. Everyone knows the limits, the rules, the usual routines. Organizational culture tells members what to do, so that autonomy is *de facto* predetermined into certain forms.

Having said that, and along with the research purposes, organizational culture seems to reflect national culture. In Italy, it defines that relations are built upon roles and formal behaviors (like in countries with high PDI). In Norway, it guarantees staff autonomy because behaviors are highly predictable (like in countries with medium or low PDI). An example of the impact of organizational culture in the Norwegian University is what an administrative respondent told about calling a meeting:

> *"In the administration there are things to be done, and they are shared among us.*
> *For example, if you call a meeting everybody comes. Sometimes you even wish that*
> *only half of them would come, but still everybody is there, they feel obliged to do it.*
> *It is both because of the role they cover and because everyone else is doing it"*

The comparison between university seems to highlight that the PDI actually affect **actors relations**. While in Norway both superiors and subordinates participate in decisions, in Italy superiors decide which activities to undertake, and subordinates are neither consulted nor encouraged to act outside the expected patterns. Again, in the Norwegian university decision power is delegated (a respondent said: "*We try to make it a team work as much as possible*") and employees display a quite fair degree of autonomy (another employee stated: "*I cannot ask my boss all the time!*"). Conversely, in the Italian university employees have difficult relations with superiors. Those difficult relations also complicate performing the work (for example because information are not always shared). In this context, personal initiative is rarely sustained, in a way that subordinates' proposals to improve administrative work are often underestimated. In fact, in the survey, only Italian respondents included "*the relation between superiors and subordinates*" as an influential factor on working routines. The work is negatively affected by the failure to communicate clearly and by the refusal to relate to each other as equals.

In addition, the Power Distance Index became also a measure of **formality**. In Norway, less distance between employees means that relationships are more informal. A Norwegian official, talking about the administrative structure, said that it is very clear that the Rector is the boss of the University. However, she would still use his personal name when addressing him, instead of using the official title. There is in the Norwegian University a shared attitude of familiarity and informality beyond official roles. This tendency seems to come directly from a national trait: preference for egalitarianism, rather than

hierarchy, is part of the social system, a shared feeling both in the society and in the University (as confirmed by Norwegian respondents). In fact, according to Bleiklie (2006), the Norwegian higher education system is highly influenced by the small scale of the Norwegian society, where intimacy and equality are fostered. The situation in the Italian University is pretty different: respect and deference are tightly connected to formality and official roles. Employees are used to address superiors with titles, especially when referring to the Dean or the Rector. Indeed, they are discouraged to access superiors when it is not necessary. Great distance characterizes relations, as expressed by the higher PDI in Italy: who holds power tends to keep control over the relation, leaving subordinates to play a very little part.

6.3 HYPOTHESIS 3: POWER DISTANCE → TEACHERS, STUDENTS, THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The third hypothesis of the research takes into consideration the kind of relations that teachers and students develop during the educational process. Attention is now directed on teaching and learning activities, which are conducted within a meaningful and respected framework of institutional and teacher-student relationships (Gornitzka et al., 2005). Being these two activities of learning and teaching less bounded by technical necessity (if compared to administrative functions), the connection with national culture should be clearer. According to Hofstede himself (1991), when activities are less affected by technicalities and more outcome-oriented (knowledge is the goal and the focus of the relation), values are more likely to influence the way actors behave and interact.

As stated in the third hypothesis, in Italy teachers and students are more likely to relate to each other according to a traditional scheme. A high PD score means that the relation should reproduce their inequality, as related to the intrinsic inequality in their roles. The educational process should therefore be teacher-centred, where the professor guide the learning and intellectual disagreement from students is discouraged. Conversely, Norway has a low PD score: teachers are supposed to treat the students as basic equal and expect to be treated as equals by the students. The educational process should be student-centred with a premium to student initiative, intervention and independence. In fact, effective learning should be based upon the two-way communication between students and teachers. The power distance index indicates the actual distance between actors, as related to their different positions in the institution. Moreover, the measure also inform us about the way that inequality is perceived and handled (Hofstede et al., 2010): inequalities between more or less powerful members (such as professors and students in the learning process) can be considered a natural trait (large PD-countries) or a misbehaviour (small PD-countries). Let us see to what extent data reveal differences for the two countries under study.

First of all, data reveal that none of the students surveyed in both University said to have a complete equal status in the relation with the teachers, but neither many of them said to be in an extremely disadvantaged position. Moreover, in both cases "*the great disparity in numbers between teachers and*

students have a strong impact on the relation" (in the words of an Italian professor interviewed). In fact, for the purpose of the research, Master students have been selected for the collection of data. It is believed that, at the Master level, a lower number of students in the class would enhance a closer relation with teachers. Indeed, for what concerns Italy, once more we can observe that official roles matter: students and professors feel somehow obliged to manage their interaction according to formality and shared conventions. There is a great distance between **teachers and students**, that is perceived as a normal condition because of their different roles: professors are trainers, students are trainee. In that case, the high PDI seems to be a good measure of the distance between actors: in Italy, the interaction is characterized by inequalities and these inequalities are somehow expected (although not always desirable). A high status is granted to teachers in academia. This in turn implies that the Italian university tends to promote a context where the activity of teaching is more evaluated than the activity of learning (Moscati, 2008).

On the other hand, in Norway, questionnaire responses indicated that teachers and students interact with each other from a fairly equal positions. In the Norwegian university, students feel more free to relate to teachers informally. Moreover, it seems that also professors interact with their students as equals. In fact, an academic respondent stated: "*Here there is this egalitarianism that I think is a cultural aspect of the Norwegian society that you can find it very much in the university as well*". Traditional roles are less important, while both actors actively participate in the educational process. In Norway, contacts between teachers and students occur easily and without official ceremonies. It is not a case that a Norwegian respondent used the expression *student-friendly* when talking about traditions in the university[41]. The fact that both students and teachers are equally involved in the educational process implies that the focus of their interaction is the learning activity (more than the teaching, like in Italy). A professor said about the institution: "*We have to guarantee place, space and time to students to develop themselves and help us to develop knowledge*". Students' contribution is evidently equally important.

It is clear that interactions between institutional actors are quite different in the two countries. Data seem to match with predictions: in large-PD countries (like Italy), the distance produced by formal roles define the relations; in small-PD countries (like Norway), the focus is on the outcome of the relation itself (i.e. the learning). In Italy, the long tradition of academic elites in the higher education system still determines the large distance between professors and students (Reale and Potì, 2009; Moscati, 2008). In Norway, the focus on quality and efficiency in higher education tend to promote "*a shared production of knowledge*". Both students and teachers must participate in the education. Their closer relation is functional for enhancing the quality of teaching-learning activities and the scientific production.

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[41] The exact quote is from a professor interviewed, that stated: "*We have a reputation, since I started here, that we are not very hierarchical, rather we are a very student-friendly university*"

It emerged from the analysis that the differences in the relationship between teachers and students generate additional differences in the **learning environment** promoted in the University. In Italy, the educational process is teacher-centred, that is, based on teacher's skills. In other words, the activity of teaching defines the educational process, so that courses programs and teaching methods differ according to different professors, but not to different students. Students have a marginal role, educational patterns are generally impersonal and highly structured. In fact, students' educational patterns are very similar to each other. In that regard, an Italian administrative respondent said: "*Unlike before, when the student could create his/her own career and somehow define a personal educational pattern, now the study plan, the study career, is already established by the University*". Diversification of academic issues is based on teachers' capabilities rather than on students' need and demands. It is not a case that, in Italy, the quality of the education relies upon teachers' excellence (like in other high-PD countries, according to what stated by Hofstede et al, 2010).

In the Norwegian case, instead, the educational process is student-centred. The organization tries to show to students that the education is their own responsibility. In fact, an academic respondent said: "*We have the duty to organize students to be self-independent and able to organize their studies*". In small-PD countries, "students are expected to find their own intellectual paths" (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 69-70). The small distance between actors is instrumental for effective learning. Education is intended as the product of the dialogue between the two, so that students are highly encouraged to participate in class, intervene and express intellectual opinions. In that regard, it is interesting what a Norwegian professor interviewed said: "*It is fair that teachers do not have all the answers*". Students contribution is equally important in the learning process. Even more important for the present research is to notice that both actors perceive that condition as positive. In line with Hofstede et al. (2010), in small-PD countries actors think that equality in relations is the way it should be. Although formally students and teachers have different power positions in the institution, that does not affect their interaction.

Another aspect must be taken into account when discussing the interaction between students and teachers. According to survey responses, Norwegian students depend more on **teachers' guidance** than Italian students. In Norway, the majority of the students said to be *fairly dependent* upon their teachers, while the majority of the Italian respondents said to feel *very little dependent* on them. This seem in contrast with the theoretical model: according to Hofstede et al. (2010), power distance informs us also about dependence relationships. In small-PD countries, there is a little dependence between actors, that is, students should be more independent. On the contrary, in large-PD countries, there is a considerable dependence of the less powerful actors (in this case, the students) on the most powerful actors (in this case, the professors). First of all, it may be explained looking at the way Master programs are structured differently in the two countries. In Norway it is more thesis-oriented, so that students depend more on

the supervisor to accomplish their task. Thesis-writing is quite demanding in Norway and therefore teacher's guidance is sought more for student's success. On the contrary, Master programs in Italy are more courses-oriented, so that student must be able to go through the educational process more independently. They are in contact with a higher number of teachers: establishing a closer relation with all of them is rarely possible and fruitful. The process of thesis-writing is shorter and the supervisor plays more the role of *the controller* rather than *the guide*.

Having said that, it is still possible to observe that culture has its influence, along with predictions. We can look at the relation between institutional actors from another perspective. In Italy, where the number of students per lecture is quite high, the relation between professors and students is more loose, contacts are rare and the teaching is a one way communication. Students must be able to learn as much as possible autonomously, from what professors decide to share in class. Students are therefore less dependent on teachers, because dependence itself implies a closer interaction between them. Instead, in Norway, students and professors establish a strong and lasting relation. Students depend upon teachers because the learning depends on the communication with teachers.

Once more, the cultural variable seem to be a very meaningful explanatory factor. In Italy, inequalities are associated with power and status, as in other large-PD countries. Teachers (high status actors) hold control over the relation and maintain a certain distance in respect to students (lower status actors). The high level of formality between actors is necessary to keep large the differences in powers and roles. As in society, authority rather than achievement seem to generate deference and respect. On the contrary, in Norway, egalitarianism is a highly shared cultural trait. It implies that actors behave as equals both in private and public frameworks. This is also true in the University, where teachers do not need to increase the distance to their students to reinforce roles and power. Informality is the common rule, interactions are based on equality, official roles are important but not influencing on relations.

6.4 HYPOTHESIS 4: MASCULINITY/FEMININITY → TEACHER'S CHARACTERISTICS

The second cultural dimension into account is the masculinity/femininity dimension. It has been used to investigate which values are associated to actors with high social status, such as professors in higher education systems. In this research, I assumed that the values associated with high status actors in the University can be used as an expression of which values are positively promoted in society. Whether teachers are positively evaluated according to performance or dedication can be a measure of the Masculine/Feminine dimension. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), the dimension expresses the desirability of assertive behaviours against modest behaviours. Looking at the preferred teacher's characteristics can show if high status actors are given reward along masculine or feminine values.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), Italy is one among the so-called masculine societies, scoring 70 points on the MAS/FEM scale. It means, professors are more likely to be rewarded for their intellectual achievements and academic reputation. Instead, being Norway a very feminine country (scoring barely 8 on the MAS/FEM scale), teachers should be positively evaluated according to friendliness, availability and support to student's career. Here the analysis is based on students' perceptions.

From data analysis it emerged that, in the Italian University, professors are assessed along academic skills, research achievements, knowledge and reputation. Students feel privileged when they can study with *a known expert* in the academic field. When a professor has fame in his/her field, automatically deserves respect and appreciation on behalf of students. However, reputation and experience in one field does not mean he/she is *de facto* able to transfer this great amount of knowledge. It seems that Italian students respect most academic achievements than teaching skills. That is, they reward professors mostly according to the so-called *hard values* (i.e. performance and career) (Hofstede et al., 2010).

On the contrary, findings reveal that the majority of Norwegian students mostly appreciate availability and disposability in their teachers. In the Norwegian University, professors are positively appraised along with the so-called *soft values*: availability, friendliness, motivation, openness. Academic achievement and reputation in the field are important, but mainly if that means professors are able to share their academic experiences and teach with passion. In that regard, a respondent expressed the following remark: "*Main qualification for a teacher is dedication, the interest in the work. A teacher has to explain and tell about his work, only a dedicated professor is able to explain why something is worth studying, to transfer the passion for a topic*".

Another consideration must be made. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), Norway is a feminine country: it also implies that the University tends to foster quality against pure outcomes. It means that decisions are based on criteria of efficiency and quality: since knowledge is the focus of the relation between teachers and students (as said before), learning is increased when both actors develop interest and care in the activity. A professor that is actively involved in the process is positively evaluated. On the other hand, Italy is a masculine country: the University tends to develop an environment where brilliance and performance play the most important role (Hofstede et al., 2010). Professors must hold knowledge in the first place, so that excellence and achievements (rather than teaching skills) bring along esteem and recognition.

6.5 HYPOTHESIS 5: UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE →
STAFF AUTONOMY AND ADMINISTRATIVE ROUTINES

The third cultural dimension into account is Uncertainty Avoidance. It has been used to evaluate whether a culture programs people to feel more or less comfortable in unclear situations and unpredictable routines. In the specific case, the UA Index has been used to measure the extent to which administrative staff is able to handle uncertainty, or behave according to formal and fixed patterns. According to the theoretical model, Italy has a higher UAI: the administrative staff is likely to be less autonomous in performing the work. In Italy, where culture should prevent members to face unknown situations, behaviours are supposed to be highly formal, predetermined, fixed. On the contrary, Norway has a lower index of UA: employees in the university should be more autonomous in their working routines, they should be left with more freedom to decide and act independently. Behaviours should be less fixed and formal, but still to a certain extent predictable (Norway scores 50 points on the UA scale).

Along with the hypothesis, Norway and Italy should display different attitudes towards uncertainty and **staff autonomy**. According to the Hofstede et al. (2010), Italy is a high uncertainty-avoiding country. It implies that the university under study is likely to display a high level of rigidity in the working routines. In Italy, the major part of respondents said to be *to a certain extent* constrained by protocols and procedures, and pressed to follow certain courses of action. Administrative autonomy is generally limited: employees feel supported to follow precise behaviours, and are discouraged to act differently. Organizational culture seems to have quite a strong impact: members in the Italian university are expected to stick to certain behaviours. The personal initiative is not encouraged. Moreover, in Italy, the institutional framework in which actors perform is continuously under reform, so that even the working environment can not guarantee clear and defined spaces for autonomy. When the external context is ambiguous, and the university is constantly put under pressure (better outcomes, less costs, more efficiency, new management tools), controlled and fixed behaviours within the university help to keep the institution under control and reduce growing uncertainty. Organizational culture, telling people how to behave, becomes the key for control over ambiguity.

On the contrary, data showed that administrative employees in Norway have "*a great deal of autonomy*". The institution provides them with a precise framework in which work is carried out, but within the framework they are able to decide for themselves. In Norway, administrative work is a combination of established duties and personal initiative. In this sense, Norwegian respondents seem less afraid to undertake personalized behaviours. In fact, in the words of an administrative employee:

> *It is important to create an environment where people can manage their jobs. An environment where everything should be someone's responsibility, and when it is not, people say – well, I will do this, I can take this, this can be part of my job."*

However, in Norway, around two/third of respondents said that their working procedures are quite predictable. Employees are left with a larger autonomy when facing unexpected cases, mostly because they already have guidelines for behaviour. When left free to decide, employees already have in mind predetermined activities to undertake. Again, organizational culture is the key: autonomy is granted to the Norwegian administrative staff because working routines are still somehow predictable. Interesting is to notice that in Italy, where the UAI is higher, organizational culture is a means for control. Conversely, in Norway it is a means to grant staff a larger degree of autonomy.

As mentioned before, the issue of autonomy brings along discourses on **predictability**. In fact, a good means to reduce uncertainty is to make actions as much fixed as possible and therefore predictable. In that regard, the two countries exhibit more similarities than differences. In fact, behaviours are quite predictable in both Universities. This is maybe because, despite a difference of 25 points on the UA scale, both Italy an Norway have quite high scores (respectively 75 and 50). Both societies tend to a certain extent to reduce ambiguity and hold some forms of control over their members. In the Italian case, control is more strict (higher UAI). In the Norwegian case, the University is less structured (along with low UAI) but still under control (along with high UAI).

In both cases, organizational culture is a powerful tool: it guides actors towards preferred behaviours. According to what discussed so far, it seems that organizational culture is highly influenced by national culture: while Norwegian staff displays more autonomy, Italian employees are more structured in their routines. While Norwegian staff is encouraged to act when needed, Italians are mostly expect to behave as they are told. In both cases, working routines seems highly predictable, so that uncertainty is anyway under control. Fixed behaviours became a form to manage unpredictable situations. However, it is equally important to acknowledge other factors that may cause these similarities. First, we must take into account the need of every administrative system to maintain control over its functions, so that routines must be somehow constant and predetermined. Second, the influence of national legislation that imposes some precise courses of action. Third, the administrative agenda , which requires the staff to respect established timing and outcomes.

6.6 HYPOTHESIS 6: UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE →

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, FLEXIBILITY AND REACTION TO CHANGE

The last hypothesis of the study relates again with Uncertainty Avoidance. As discussed earlier in the thesis, the UA dimension has also been used to evaluate the flexibility of the system and its propensity towards change or stability. This interpretation is confirmed by Olivier (2006), who defined UA as the need to avoid uncertainty about the future. In the present research, it is investigated whether the university is an institution that tends to remain conservative or tends to be innovative and updated. It

expresses if the University has some autonomy from the current forms and flexibility for the future. Here autonomy is intended as *substantive autonomy*, that is, the power of institutions to determine the content of their activities (Reale and Potì, 2009) and the freedom to make independent decisions on their affairs and their own organization as they see fit (Bleiklie, 2006). Following the theoretical model, the sixth hypothesis predicts that the Italian university is likely to be less autonomous and flexible than the Norwegian university. In Italy, the system should be highly dependent on the current forms and rules (so less able to change), while in Norway the institution should be more adaptable to reforms (less bounded to specific organizational structures).

Said in other words, Italy has a higher UA score, meaning that the institution probably tends to maintain itself as much stable as possible. The university probably changes through a top-down approach (which increases control over the change) and reforms are extremely slow to be implemented. The university is therefore more bounded by national legislation, although rarely regulations increase efficiency in the work of the institution. On the other hand, Norway has a lower UA score: the university should be more flexible, more proactive and autonomous. It is more likely to renew itself often, through continuous small changes. National regulations are influential, but universities have the possibility to influence the implementing process of reforms (less need for control, less dependence upon specific forms).

In Italy, an employee stated that the University is in principle flexible but, when facing upgrading and reforms, this flexibility very often fails. Findings reveal that **autonomy and flexibility** are not easy in the Italian case: first, there is a high risk for abuses, especially at the periphery of the system where control is more loose. Second, a national environment where legislations change very often reduces the possibility of the University to be flexible. The continuous pressure for reforms have the result to increase rigidity (some forms must be kept stable despite changes) and scepticism about the utility of the reforms themselves (when the institution must implement innovations very often, it will not have time to adapt to change and perform effectively). For the purposes of the research, findings reveal that the UA Index is a good measure of institutional dynamics: in Italy, where members tend to avoid uncertainty (high UAI), flexibility is difficult to put in practice. Institutions are left with very little autonomy form the State, who defines methods and time of the implementation (Moscati, 2008). This top-down approach creates rigidities and resistances, above all from the most powerful institutional members and from the peripheral units of the university (Moscati, 2008).

On the other hand, the Norwegian University displays more flexibility and independence. When interviewed, the majority of the Norwegian employees evaluated the University as flexible. Flexibility actually serves to guarantee efficiency: in fact, according to Bleiklie (2005), in Norway authorities have sought to establish a framework where higher education institutions are more efficient, more flexible, more open. In Norway there is a common understanding that universities should be granted considerable

autonomy in order to function properly (Bleiklie, 2009). In fact, State's control over higher education institutions mainly concerns budgetary policy and legislation. The decentralized political style implies that institutions are left with greater decision-power, especially on the way reforms must be implemented (Bleiklie, 2006). This consequently allows higher flexibility for individual institutions in deciding autonomously upon their forms and methods. Control from the state does not occur in advance, but *ex-post*. Evaluation of outcomes is more important than evaluation on projects. In this sense, the cultural aspect is confirmed (low UAI): Norwegian institutions are more able to take risks, more reactive, more willing to find their own ways to manage the change process. There is less dependence upon specific forms, there is less need for control over the changing process and its potential outcomes.

As mentioned before, the discourse about Uncertainty Avoidance is tightly connected to discourses on **reaction to innovation and change**. If a system is strongly dependent upon protocols and regulations, it will be less able to reform itself easily. On the contrary, if the system is more flexible and autonomous, it will be able to implement changes efficiently and adequately. As discussed previously, Norway and Italy should exhibit differences in that regard, both in terms of institutional attitudes and in terms of the external context they must deal with.

According to respondents, the Norwegian University is quite positive and receptive to innovation, being able to implement changes quite often and sufficiently effortlessly. According to Bleiklie (2009), Norwegian institutions tend to implement changes slowly and through an incremental approach. It is not a case that an academic respondent said that in the university "*small changes happen all the time*". Moreover, since Norwegian universities are left with great autonomy in implementing methods, the major reforms come from the institution itself, in the form of proposals for updates (both for teaching methods and for administrative procedures). On the contrary, the Italian institution is less adaptable. Moscato (2008) has talked about the secular lack of autonomy of Italian universities: control from the State is so tight that institutions have very few means to deal with the ambiguity brought along with every process of change. Reforms highly destabilize the institutional structure. An Italian professor said: *"Universities are not able to move along with great agility"*: this in turn increases the fear for innovation and new organizational forms.

Other factors may influence organizational attitudes towards change. Most important, **the national context** in which universities perform. In Norway, reform policies have been traditionally handled within a rather close relationship between institutions and the Ministry (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007). Policies are developed gradually and in a consensual way (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007). National regulations contribute to design the institutional frame within which universities performs, granting a high autonomy and a clear legislative context. Full-size reforms are implemented by the State (such as the recent Quality Reform), but operational strategies and implementing methods are left to the

University, increasing its adaptability and efficiency. In this way, the Norwegian university is able to reform itself more easily: national legislations define the boundaries and the possibilities for innovation. Stability and a low level of conflict have been stable features in the higher education system (Bleiklie, 2009). It implied that single universities were able to display stable and incremental processes of reforms. The question here is to what extent such a national context can be related to the cultural variable. The small scale of Norwegian society surely facilitates stability and efficiency both in politics and in institutional processes. However, in the researcher's opinion, the fact that Norway has a medium position in the UA scale has its importance. The country is able to rely on decentralized patterns of decision-making, it is able to reduce control over procedures and implementing methods, and it is able to display a higher level of trust in its system.

On the contrary, national legislations in Italy create an increasingly ambiguous environment, which in turn increases the need for control. The country has been for a long time in a *"in-between"* situation, where the State was unable to introduce general reforms in the higher education system (Reale and Potì, 2009). The inability to undertake structural changes can be directly related to the UA Index: reformers felt strong the need to maintain stable certain models, seen as indispensable for the functioning of the system. For a long time, the Italian system was characterized by many reforms, although none of them was able to bring radical efficient changes in the universities (Reale and Potì, 2009). In such a context, it is very difficult for single institutions to function properly. In one case, the State maintains control over operational strategies, leaving Italian university with little flexibility. In the other case, procedural autonomy is not supported by clear overall guidelines.

The result is to increase rigidity and inefficiency. The inconsistencies in governing policies result in a slow adaptation of the university to the changing environment (Reale and Potì, 2009). When a new course of action is promoted, the University needs time to adapt. However, when finally a reform is implemented, the system is under change again. In this context "*changes destabilize the entire institutional structure*". Therefore, the Italian university has learned to change more and more carefully. Moreover, the university tends to avoid additional reforms coming from inside the institution, although probably they would result more effective. The Italian university puts its efforts in keeping its structure and forms stable. Rigidity becomes a means to ensure stability and continuity, despite the continuous pressure for innovation coming from the State. In line with Hofstede et al. (2010) on high-UA countries, changes are rarely welcomed because they produce uncertainty. This is true for a single university and for the overall national context, where politicians are unable to think about constructive and radical reforms. The cultural dimension (high UAI) seems to be a powerful explanatory tool in respect to both institutional inability to reform itself and the governmental impossibility to undertake a comprehensive process of reform in the higher education system (Moscati, 2008).

6.7 SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

	Italy	Norway
PDI	¬ More centralized structure. ¬ Weakness of lower institutional levels compared to the power of central governing bodies. Hierarchical institutional structure. Both vertical and horizontal distance between university units (i.e. central bodies, faculties, departments). ¬ Unequal distribution of power among actors. Subordinates and superiors relate along official roles and formal power positions. High formality. ¬ Students and teachers are not equal. Great distance between them, both in daily interactions and in the overall learning process. Formality and official roles matter in their relation.	¬ More decentralized and flat structure. ¬ Strengthening of leadership and decision-making power at every level of the institution. Small distance between institutional units: cooperation and dialogue between institutional layers. ¬ Institutional actors relate as equals despite different positions in the university. The relation between superiors and subordinates is easy and characterized by informality. ¬ Students and teachers have equal status. The closer relation between them is functional for the two-way communication and for effective learning. Egalitarianism is a highly shared trait in the university as in society.
MAS/FEM	¬ High status actors are rewarded according to hard values: academic reputation, career, research achievements. Excellence and performance play the most important role, and bring along esteem and respect.	¬ High status actors are rewarded according to soft values: availability, motivation, dedication, passion and teaching skills. A professor that is actively involved in the learning activity and that support students is positively evaluated.
UAI	¬ Rigidity in working routines. Staff autonomy is limited by fixed behaviours, shared expectations, rules and protocols. Personal initiative is discouraged, because it implies uncertainty. Organizational culture, telling people how to behave, becomes the key for control over ambiguity. ¬ High predictability of behaviours is a means to manage unpredictable situations and hold some forms of control. ¬ Strict control from the State over higher education institutions reduces university's autonomy and flexibility. Top-down approach when implementing reforms, to maintain control over the process. It creates resistances and rigidity against reforms and innovation. ¬ Inability to undertake structural changes and to promote efficient operational strategies. Universities are not able to move along with agility.	¬ Administrative staff has greater autonomy in performing work. Administrative routines are a combination of established duties and personal initiative. Organizational culture becomes a means to grant staff independence because it regulates behaviours. ¬ Autonomy is granted because administrative routines are highly predictable. Predictability allows control over the institution and actors when facing new situations. ¬ Common understanding that universities should be granted autonomy to perform properly. High flexibility for individual universities in implementing methods and timing. Less degree of control over the changing process. ¬ In the university small changes happen all the time (incremental model). The higher education system is stable enough. Universities are able to undertake successful processes of change and adapt to the national legislative environment.

6.8 CONCLUSIONS

The chapter has attempted to match the predictions made upon the theoretical model with the findings of the research process. Hofstede's approach resulted sufficiently appropriate to justify the differences between the cases. Moreover, the researcher also tried to discuss other potential influencing factors. Indeed, it is clear that a relation between national cultural dimensions and university's characteristics can be traced. Culture is an explanatory factor for the differences between the two Universities, even though it was not possible to establish a direct causal relation between the variables. In the following chapter, the contributions and the limitations of the theoretical approach are discussed, together with implications of findings and the possibilities for future researchers.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

7.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It presents the main outcomes of the research process. Then, findings are discussed in relation to the original theoretical model, to highlight the theoretical relevance of the model in explaining the cases and the emerging issues of the study. Last, contributions and limitations are presented, together with suggestions for future research.

7.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

A summary of research outcomes is here provided answering the original research questions. "Returning to the research questions demonstrates how the methods and techniques described above enabled investigation on the interactions of culture" (Olivier, 2006, p.308). The scope of the research was to demonstrate that universities are tightly related to national culture: a university is a complex cultural system that reproduces the major values of a national culture. It is not a case that two respondents said:

> *"Studying in a Norwegian University you can learn about Norway, you take part of the bigger picture. You learn behaviors, habits, the language, you know, how this people think!"*   (a Norwegian professor)

> *"Studying abroad is an occasion of opening your mind, you acquire the ability to let yourself down in the culture of that country"*   (an Italian professor)

The present research has been built in order to draw a relation between national cultural dimensions and university's characteristics. Structure, behaviours and relations among institutional actors have been investigated to see to what extent they reflect cultural values. Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1991) have been used to describe national culture, while studies on organizational culture (Tierney, 1988; Higgins, 2007; Folch and Ion, 2009; Ming-Yi Wu, 2001) have been used to define university's features.

The scope of the project was to answer the following question: *How does national culture affect higher education institutions? Is it possible to draw a relation between national cultural dimensions and university's characteristics and values?* In the previous chapter (Chapter Six) we have seen how culture can actually affect universities, confirming that there is a strong relation between cultural dimensions and university's organizational culture. The two institutions under study have proved to be different along key aspects, each somehow expression of national culture. Research outcomes will be now presented answering the specific research questions of the study project.

7.1.1 CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

The first specific research question states:

Does culture influence institutional actors? How do cultural dimensions affect the interaction between students and teachers? How do they influence administrative staff working relations?

From data analysis, it emerged that actors in the two universities behave and interact quite differently. National culture seems to explain, for example, why in Italy institutional actors tend to stick to formality while in Norway their behaviours are less structured and informal. Again, cultural variables seem to influence relations within the university framework: in Italy, they are based upon official roles and power positions; in Norway, relations are less bounded by formality and more outcome-oriented (i.e. actors behave to accomplish a goal together, despite official roles). In that regard, the PDI proved to be a good measure of the interactions between institutional actors.

The influence of the Power Distance dimension emerges, first of all, when observing the relation between subordinates and superiors. In Italy, subordinates are less independent in performing work. They mainly find themselves following directives and what decided by superiors, and they are rarely able to participate in decisions. It is very clear who is the boss and who is the subordinate, so that in Italy power positions define the relation. And that relation can often be controversial. The high formality based on roles makes it sometimes difficult to perform work efficiently: personal initiative is discouraged and subordinates are also discouraged to act autonomously.

On the contrary, in Norway, subordinates display a quite high degree of autonomy and independence. Very often official roles do not produce great distance between actors: superiors can be easily accessed by employees, subordinates are often consulted by the leaders. Administrative work is performed though cooperation and teamwork. The small distance between actors make the university able to perform more efficiently, although autonomy is tightly related to predictability in behaviours.

The comparison between Italy and Norway confirmed the basic assumptions of the thesis: organizational culture tells people how to behave (more or less formally); establishes whether actors feel free or not to act independently; creates a context where interactions are built either upon roles or upon goals. These characteristics are evidently related to the national culture: the differences in the PDI generate additional differences in organizational cultures and actors relations.

The influence of the PDI is further confirmed when looking at teachers-students interactions. The cultural dimension indicates whether both students and teachers actively participate in the educational process. In large-PD countries as Italy, formality and distance are the main characteristic of the relation between teachers and students. Contacts are not easy and a close relation is rarely welcomed. Teachers tend to maintain distance to strengthen their powerful role in the relation. Obviously, influencing on the

relation is also the large number of students that Italian teachers face, which decreases the possibilities for a deeper interaction. On the other side, in Norway, the national culture is the main explanatory factor for an open and joint relation between teachers and students (associable with small PD indexes). The teacher-student interaction is based on informality and proximity, so that actors can easily get in contact with each other and cooperate during the educational process. They behave as equals in the institution, despite different formal roles, reducing the negative consequences related to their power positions.

7.1.2 CULTURE AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

The second specific research question deals with the educational context promoted in the universities:
 How does culture affect the university's learning environment?

Findings revealed that both the Power Distance and the Masculinity/Femininity dimensions are influential on the learning environment. First of all, because the educational context strongly relies on the kind of relation that teachers and students establish (PDI). Second, because the high status granted to professors in academia may foster the promotion of certain values and behaviours, in turn influencing the educational process (MAS/FEM).

From the analysis of data, it emerged that in the Italian case, the larger distance between students and teachers lead to a teacher-centred learning process. That is, teachers have the most powerful role in the relation and they guide the educational process: teaching is effective when the teacher is brilliant and excellent. Students are left with a marginal role. Indeed, they must go through their learning path quite independently. Moreover, since students strongly rely on teacher's excellence to go through their education, the most important aspects associated with teachers are research achievements, academic results and performance (compatible with masculine values). On the contrary, in Norway the educational process is substantially student-centred: less distance is generated in the relation between teachers and students and this is essential for effective learning. Both actors actively participate in the educational process, the focus in on sharing and producing knowledge (i.e. two-way learning). Students' are highly dependent on their teachers, because the learning path is a shared path, built upon student's skills and teacher's guidance. In fact, students evaluate teachers for their availability, openness, capacity to raise interest and support them in the learning process (associable with feminine values).

7.1.3 CULTURE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

The third research questions state:

How does culture affect the institutional structure

The Power Distance Index is again significant to explain the difference in the structure of the two universities. The Italian institution is evidently less decentralized. The central governing bodies hold a

large part of decision-making power, taking the main strategic and operational decisions. Faculties and departments in Italy are delegated to make proposals for their own organization, although decentralization of effective power rarely occurs. In this regard, the high PDI for Italy is an explanatory factor for centralizations trends and unequal distribution of power between university's units. The inter-institutional layers are in a weak position compared to the two central powerful bodies: the university hierarchy in the Italian university has a strong impact on the life of the institution. On the contrary, in Norway, the system is fairly decentralized, in line with a low PD index. The University Board sets the institutional framework within which actors perform, but the operational strategies are left to the other institutional units. Faculties and institutes in the Norwegian university are delegated both responsibilities and power, and can decide quite independently how to perform their core activities. Leadership and decision-making power is strengthened at every level of the university, confirming Norway a small-PD country. Moreover, the system relies on a flat structure, where institutional units collaborate with each other to increase efficiency in overall university performance.

7.1.4 CULTURE AND STAFF AUTONOMY

The third specific research question concerns the degree of autonomy granted to the administrative staff. It aims to investigate whether culture affects working routines. In that regard, the two countries displayed both differences and similarities. The issue relates to the Uncertainty Avoidance measure: the way a system is more or less bounded to the current forms determines its flexibility. In Italy, where UAI is high, people tend to avoid ambiguity and foster conservation. In fact, findings reveal that working routines are quite rigid and fixed. Staff autonomy is somehow limited by rules, protocols, directives, predetermined behaviours. It is not a case that personal initiative is discouraged, because it implies a new courses of action potentially dangerous. On the contrary, in Norway, employees are more independent and self-sufficient. Administrative routines are based on an established agenda but leaving space for personal initiative (Norway is in a central position on the UA scale). The low UAI defines a context where actors are free to behave autonomously and to face unknown situations. However, that autonomy is possible because organizational culture regulates behaviours toward certain defined forms. Predictability becomes a means to control uncertainty.

7.1.5 CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSE TO CHANGE

The last specific research question states:

How does culture influence institutional autonomy and the university response towards change?

The Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions is also used as a measure of the capability of the system to reform itself. The degree of autonomy left to universities from the State deeply affects their reaction to

the changing environment. Innovative policies bring along uncertainty: whether universities are able to implement them efficiently depends upon their need for control. The more tight or loose control over universities directly expresses a stronger or weaker need for control over uncertainty.

Indeed, data analysis revealed that Italy is very much bounded to the existing forms to ensure continuity and solidity (high UAI). Institutional autonomy and flexibility is not easy: State's control, national regulations, procedures and centralization, all make the university less responsive and agile. Conversely, Norway relies on more flexible and open arrangements, where autonomy is commonly intended as a means for efficiency and appropriate performance (low UAI). That is why, in the Norwegian university reforms are usually implemented successfully, while in Italy the university is less able to abandon the current structures and adapt to the changing environment. In the Italian university, major efforts are directed to avoid the uncertainties created by institutional change, resulting in increasing rigidities and resistances. Another difference between the countries relates to implementing methods: in Italy the need for a strict control over the changing process (high UAI) lead to a top-down approach when implementing reforms. In Norway, instead, where control over uncertainty is less urgent (low UAI), universities are left with larger autonomy in defining the best operational strategies for implementing higher education policies. Consequently, in Italy the system is rarely able to undertake effective structural changes. Reforms have the only result to destabilize the system and reduce flexibility. On the other hand, in Norway the system is stable enough to lead to an incremental reform process, where small changes happen all the time. Universities are more positively reactive and adaptable to innovation.

7.2 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The major findings of the research process have been discussed so far. It emerged from data analysis that the theoretical approach selected for the research was a powerful tool to explain the differences between the cases. In the words of Kogan et al. (2006), "there is a considerable variation depending on national political and educational *traditions,* even though we can note commonalities […] which derive from the essential characteristics of higher education" (Kogan et al, 2006, p. 174). Hofstede's theoretical model (1991) was used to investigate the causes of the differences between universities in Italy and Norway. According to Hofstede (1991) every nation can be identified according to specific cultural values. These values guide people's behaviours and preferences, leading to specific social forms. The two universities have been compared to verify to what extent they reflected cultural attitudes. It emerged that national culture is an explanatory factor for the structure of the institution, the relations established between actors, the decision-making style within the university and so on. Obviously, during the analysis of findings, other factors have been taken into account, such as the normative environment in which universities perform or their specific role in society.

The scope of the research was first to highlight the current state of universities today; second, to understand which factors may influence institutional life in the future. It is assumed that when the society changes, the universities change with it; but this does not imply that such changes only relate to market needs, governance styles or international policies (Bleiklie and Henkel, 2005). Indeed, what I intended to emphasize with the present research is that the cultural variable is as well important and too often underestimated. When political reformers discuss about the higher education system, the focus is mainly on costs, performance, outcomes and efficiency. Indeed, I believe that great part of the life of higher education institutions relies on the context in which they perform. Universities are heavily involved in societal activities. National culture influences the definition we attach to the university, its role in society and its overall function of knowledge arena. Universities in turn are expression of national history, culture, developments. The growing vulnerability of the higher education system must be taken into account: in the researcher's opinion, this deeply depends upon the weakening of its core set of values. For example, discourses on governance models and leadership tools in the institution might be positively improved by discourses on culture. The cultural variable, as adopted in the present research, can still give potential insights about the context in which one or another steering model must be implemented.

7.3 EMERGING ISSUES

As proven by the present research, universities still tend to adapt their own constructs along with culture, values and traditions. In that sense, the present research has contributed to investigate the explanatory power of cultural variables. People bring with themselves profound values and learned behaviours, which consequently are shared and reproduced also in the institutional or organizational setting. In the specific case, although universities have a quite peculiar mission and structure, the cultural context in which they perform continuously penetrate, producing variations among countries. More interesting, the research found out that the relation institutions establish with the political and social context are as well shaped by cultural variables. An example derives from discourses on the relation between State and universities: in a society where the need for control is strong, the relation will be more tight, with consequences on the internal organizational of the university as well. In contrast, when innovations and transformation are welcomed, the university will result more flexible and policies will foster decentralization. Said in other words, the cultural background seems to influence not only the institution itself (with its variety of traditions), but also the way the university relates to the environment and vice versa (the dynamic interactions taking place between society and institutions).

Consequently, a governmental strategy that wants to be successful in higher education should aim at influencing the social institutional context, in such a way that actors will naturally change their

behaviours and values according to a new set of beliefs (Maassen and Stensaker, 2005). Change is generally examined in the perspective of policy change or as the introduction of new management ideas. Indeed, the inertia of higher education institutions to change is often rooted in institutional (or organizational) cultures (Välimaa, 2008). Thus, the analysis of organizational culture in the university is a potent tool in explaining institutional dynamics and enhancing the processes of reform.

7.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

It has been proven by Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) that national distinctive features still exert a heavy influence on the higher education system and on reform policies. National peculiarities keep surviving despite globalization and standardization around European countries (Bleiklie and Kogan, 2007). It means that the national cultural context still has great importance in the policy process. The findings of the study have shown that cultural dimensions have strong impact on the institutional life: they affect the structure of the system, the behaviours of members, the way activities of teaching and research are carried out in the university. Student dynamics, educational processes, administrative routines all play key roles in the university. A better understanding of organizational culture is crucial for improving the quality of education, the efficiency of the system, the implementation of policies, the relations between actors in the university. In this sense, I believe the present research has contributed to the study of higher education, especially because cultural studies on university are quite rare (Välimaa, 2008).

Moreover, findings can to a certain extent be generalized, increasing the validity of the research outcomes. Despite the limited number of respondents in the research, and the fact that only two single cases are examined, the study can still be insightful. Researchers on the Italian and the Norwegian universities have highlighted how universities within a country share a great deal of similar characteristics. For example, Reale and Potì (2009) stated that many university statutes in Italy are very similar. Moscati (2008) affirmed that universities in Italy are regulated by common rules that generate very similar institutional frameworks. On the other hand, Bleiklie (2009) confirmed that, despite the greater autonomy granted to Norwegian institutions, universities are following parallel patterns of development and share analogue organizational forms. Having said that, it is possible to conclude that research outcomes can to a certain extent be generalized to national level, enhancing our understanding. Universities are not regulated only by laws and budgets, but are deeply affected by cultural variables. They can better adapt to the political environment if these variables are taken into account. Last but not least, the internationalization of certain policies (especially in the European platform) may result more effective if the impact of national culture is involved in the evaluation of the process of change.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the potential contributions of the research in the debates around higher education, the present study has evident limits. First of all, as mentioned before, the limited number of respondents that participated in the project weakens the validity of the findings. The use of a mixed approach was helpful to enhance the quality of the research outcomes, but the narrowness of the sample deeply reduces the potential for generalization. Second, only two universities have been studied. The limited focus of the research challenges the potential contributions of the study. Although a case study approach is a powerful tool for investigation (Yin, 2009), the claim that the universities under study are representative of national higher education systems is again weak. Lastly, the researcher was at her first experience of field work and data analysis: that could have reduced the possibility for a more fruitful research process. However, despite limitations, the study was still able to trace a relation between the variables and substantiate culture as one important explanatory factor. Moreover, it adds some value for the study of higher education from a cultural perspective, too often set aside by political researchers.

Interesting would it be to continue the project in other directions. First, including in the theoretical framework other variables, such as institutional leadership (which is becoming increasingly relevant in higher education institutions) or political stability (which in the present study seemed to affect very much the life of the universities). Second, increasing the number of universities into account for each country, so that every national case would be more solid. Comparison will consequently be more meaningful. Third, it would be also fascinating to go deeper into the history of a single country, to investigate how the national culture has impacted on the development of universities and vice versa. From the research emerged that the political style, the traditional steering modes, the relation between policies and implementing tools, all affect the life of higher education institutions. Interesting would it be to investigate to what extent political transformations brought along institutional transformations, and how these processes of change are related to changes in the dominant set of values and beliefs, both in society and in the university.

Continuing research in this field will always be worth of note in itself, in every direction it will bring:

> *"We should ask ourselves to what extent the University is representative of the culture in which it lives, to what extent it is affected by that culture, to what extent the University itself is able to influence that culture. Mostly because I think the University has a very positive and active role in the society. We should not forget how this can really affect the life and development or our societies"*
>
> (an Italian professor)

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APPENDIX I: FIELD REPORT

After the design of the research and the formulation of the hypotheses, data collection started. As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, some data collection tools have been selected and used: *a)* a self-administered questionnaire for students and administrative staff was developed, using a free online-software: a link has been send by mail to respondent, together with a presentation letter of the researcher and the research project; *b)* an interview guide was drawn, as a guideline during the interviewing process, both in English and in Italian; the interviews have been taken in the offices of the respondents at the faculty (within the institutional setting) for both countries; *c)* a research among relevant documents and web-pages has been conducted.

Since the research focused on a University faculty, it was difficult to perform the data collection during the summer months. Field work was therefore delayed to mid-August, when both students and staff came back to the University after the summer holidays. However, the so-called 'semester-start', and later-on the conclusion of the year, made it difficult sometimes to schedule the interviews, and get fast answers from the on-line surveys. Data have been collected both in the Norwegian University and the Italian University. The researcher had to travel back home for the interviews, so that the data collection phase lasted few months, and was completed in January.

Entering the field was not so immediate as expected.
A University is a centre of learning and research and it was expected to be opened and supporting research processes. Athough that was particularly true for what concerned students and didactic staff (who welcomed positively and enthusiastically the project), the administrative system revealed itself as opened (or closed) as any other administrative structure. It was difficult (sometimes impossible) to get answers to the mails, notwithstanding a presentation letter of the project and a clear request for help. Scheduling the interviews was complex: some had to be rescheduled and sometimes the waiting time to access respondents was long.

On the other hand, some of the respondents showed a real interest in the topic, granting to the researcher time and availability and trust, disclosing fascinating aspects of the issue at hand. A respondent also emphasized how interesting it was to reflect on his working environment, often taken for granted. The positive attitude of some respondents gave the researcher greater motivation in bringing the project forward.

Total number of Respondents that completed data collection: 52
Total number of Surveys answered: 43
Total number of Interviews: 9
Total Recordings from Interviews: circa 9,30 hours

Personal Information

1. Sex:
2. Age:
3. Nationality:
4. How long have you been studying at the Universitetet iBergen?
_____

Relation Teacher-Student

5. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, To what extent students and teachers have equal status in their mutual relation?*

6. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, To what extent teachers relate themselves to students from an equal position*?

7. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, To what extent you feel free to talk to your teachers from an equal position?*

8. *How do you speak/have contacts with your teachers?*
    o In a very informal manner
      (by mail, talking and discussing with confidence about everything)
    o Quite informally
    o Neither / Nor
    o Quite formally
    o In a very formal way (only on a settled meeting, only about certain academic matters)

9. *During the lectures, how often are you able to intervene in class?*
    o As much as I wish, if my comments are supported by valid evidence
    o When I need clarifications
    o If I need clarifications, but only when the professors asks for comments
    o Only at the end of the lecture, if the professor asks for comment
    o Never

Features of the Learning Process

10. *According to your experience, how would you consider the learning process in your institution?*
    o Highly impersonal (the same for all students)
    o Generally impersonal, except for few specific topics
    o Difficult to judge
    o Fairly personalized on student's learning paths
    o Highly personalized and independent, focused on student's skills and competence

11. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, How would you estimate your degree of independence during your study path (for example, in the selection of readings, of topics for essays, of courses)?*

12. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, To what extent do you feel dependent on teacher's guidance?*

13. *Based on your experience so far, evaluate on a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum measure, and 5 is the maximum measure, To what extent do you feel your study path differs from the one of your classmates?*

14. *Every university is organized to promote a more or less structured learning process. According to your experience, to what extent do you think the system makes you dependent on teacher capacity and approach?*
- o Highly Dependent
- o Fairly dependent
- o Neither highly dependent nor highly independent
- o Enough independent
- o Highly independent

15. *Do you feel the learning process promoted in your university is:*
- o Highly flexible (depending upon what emerges during the process itself)
- o Fairly flexible (following some guidelines, but able to include new developments)
- o In part structured, in part open to multiple alternatives
- o Fairly structured (strict guidelines, choices are only possible among selected alternatives)
- o Highly structured
  (organized in the same way for all students, no matter individual skills or emerging needs)

16. *Do you feel your study path is structured in the same way of every other student in your course?*
Select a number on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 means that your study path is strictly shaped on your personal skills and selections, therefore every student has its own; while 5 means there is a precise structured path to follow, and all the students will learn the same with a similar study program.

17. *How do you feel in relation to teachers' knowledge and capacity?(Mark selected option, not more than 2)*
- o They are the experts in the field, students can only learn
- o They are the experts,
  but students can always add something important from experience and previous learning
- o Students can critically assess their knowledge, forming an independent opinion about the topic (however a critical point of view is discouraged)
- o Students can form their own opinions, select knowledge and discuss openly with teachers (critical skills seen as positive and encouraged)
- o Students only follow teachers guidelines, they can became the experts in a field

Teacher's Role and Characteristics

18. *How easily do you have access to contact teachers*?
- o Very easily
  (I can easily find their e-mail on the university website and contact them directly)
- o Easily (I can get their e-mail, but asking to the student centre)
- o Not too easily but not too hardly
- o With some difficulties
  (I can have access to the e-mail address, but often I have to contact them repeatedly before an answer)
- o Hardly
  (I got no answer when I write to them, so I have to go to their office according to a specific schedule)

19. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree and 5 is the maximum degree), How would you rate teacher's availability and disposability towards students, according to your experience?*

20. *How would you assess the following teacher's characteristics? Choose the preferred option:*

	Important	Not so important	Desirable
Academic reputation			
Academic results			
Fame in the field			
Friendliness towards students			
Availability for students requests			
Support to student's individual learning process			

21. *In the choice of a supervisor or an advisor for your thesis or an official study project, would you select a teacher because of his ... ? Select only one of the following:*
- o Availability to work in cooperation with you
- o Interest in your project
- o Interest in the potential outcomes of the project
- o Academic skills and knowledge of the topic

22. *When you talk about teachers with other students, what is the most relevant characteristic you notice and discuss (as in positive, as in negative)?*
_____
_____
_____

23. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree and 5 is the maximum degree), to what extent do you feel free to disagree and discuss teacher's opinion (considering for discussion a supported disagreement)?*

24. *What is the reaction of professors to intellectual disagreement by a student?*
- o Encouraged if valid and supported by evidence
- o Accepted but not encouraged
- o Neither / Nor
- o Discouraged
- o Highly discouraged, felt as personal disloyalty

25. *To what extent do you feel your intellectual opinion is supported by the teacher during the study path?*
- o At all (teacher's opinion and knowledge are the only relevant and drive the entire learning process)
- o Not much
  (I can express my opinion, but rarely it changes the study path established by the teacher)
- o Enough (part of my study plan is shaped on my intellectual preferences)
- o Very much (my opinions are the basis to build a study program which includes my preferences along with my teacher's preferences)
- o Completely (my teacher supports me in my individual learning path, driven by my interests)

Personal Information

1. Sex:
2. Age:
3. Nationality:
4. How long have you been working at the Universitetet iBergen?
_____

Institutional Culture

5. *According to your experience in the University, which would you indicate as the main factors influencing your working environment? (Select up to 3 options)*
   - The institutional leadership (decisions taken at the highest level/by university leaders)
   - The general institutional culture (values and norms of the whole University)
   - Rules and protocols established for administrative staff
   - The relations between superiors and employees in the department
   - The implementation of directives from the top
   - The actual attitudes and practices in your department
   - Your personal initiative in the performance of your duties

6. *Based on your experience so far, qualify the following statement on a scale 1 to 5, where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree: To what extent do you think the working procedures of your department are affected by the organizational culture of the institution?*

7. *What do you think about University institutional mechanisms and practices?*
   - They are very complex and strict
   - They are often difficult to follow, but helpful in specific cases
   - Difficult to judge
   - They are enough flexible and understandable
   - They are flexible and easy to follow, even in specific case

8. *To what extent do you feel familiar with your department working standards ?*
   - At all (they are obscure)
   - Poorly, they are fairly difficult to identify
   - Neither / Nor
   - Enough familiar (I know well enough the working standards required in my department)
   - Highly familiar

9. *To what extent do you feel familiar with the overall institutional working standard?*
   - At all (they are obscure)
   - Poorly, they are fairly difficult to identify
   - Neither / Nor
   - Enough familiar
   - Highly familiar

Department autonomy

10. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree), how strong do you think is the effect of University's hierarchy on your department work?*

11. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree), how would you rate the level of independence of faculties form the overall institutions?*

12. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree), how would you rate the level of independence of departments from the faculty central office?*

13. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree), how would you rate the level of independence of your working team from the department central office?*

14. *Do you think the administrative system of the University is:*
    o   Highly decentralized
        (faculties have a high degree of autonomy in the performance of their functions, and share decision power with top managerial levels)
    o   Fairly decentralized
        (faculties have a sufficient degree of autonomy in their performance, but the most important decisions are taken at the top managerial level)
    o   Poorly decentralized
        (the relevant decisions are taken at the top levels, departments/faculties only have some degree of autonomy in their daily procedures)
    o   Fairly centralized
        (decisions are taken at the top level, departments only have some degree of autonomy in the implementation of the decisions)
    o   Highly centralized
        (decisions are taken at the central levels, decision power is not shared with the faculties, departments are only in charge of the implementation of those decisions but according to strict rules and procedures)

15. Would you say your department is mainly committed to
    o   establish procedures for daily activities?
    o   implement procedures already established at the overall institutional level?

Working relations in the Department

16. *To what extent to you feel independent in the performance of your work?*
    o   A very small extent
    o   A fairly small extent
    o   A certain extent
    o   A fairly large extent
    o   A very large extent

17. *To what extent do you participate in the planning of your working activities?*
    o   A very small extent (I merely implement procedures/decisions established by my boss)
    o   A fairly small extent (I am rarely consulted by my boss)
    o   A certain extent (I am consulted by my boss for decisions regarding my work, but he is the one taking the final decision)
    o   A fairly large extent (decisions are taken by the employee and the boss together)
    o   A very large extent (I have autonomy in the planning of my work)

18. Are you regularly more committed to..
    o   ..implement other decisions (institutional protocols and/or your superiors decisions)?
    o   ..taking responsibility and decisions for your own work?
    o   other

19. *Do you feel that you have sufficient opportunity to influence the way you carry out your work?*
    o   No, no opportunity whatsoever
    o   Rarely
    o   Neither / Nor
    o   Yes, quite a lot
    o   Yes, I have a great del of opportunity

20. *On a scale 1 to 5 (where 1 is the minimum degree, and 5 is the maximum degree), to what extent does your boss/superior encourages your initiative...*
    … in making decisions?
    … in performing your work?
    … in solving problems, when the protocol does not provide you clear directives?
    … in taking responsibility for action without asking permission (if necessary)?

System flexibility vs Formal Mechanisms

21. *To what extent can you make autonomous decisions in the performance of your duties (instead of following a precise established pattern)?*
    o   A very small extent
    o   A fairly small extent
    o   A certain extent
    o   A fairly large extent
    o   A very large extent

22. *To what extent do you feel your work is constrained by protocols and established procedures?*
    o   A very small extent
    o   A fairly small extent
    o   A certain extent
    o   A fairly large extent
    o   A very large extent

23. *To what extent to you feel committed to follow specific courses of action in the performance of your duties (for example, when a problems emerges)?*
    o   A very small extent
    o   A fairly small extent
    o   A certain extent
    o   A fairly large extent
    o   A very large extent

24. *To what extent, do you think your working procedures are predictable?*
    o   A very small extent   (we have some protocols to follow in the performance of our work, but every case is treated according to its specificity, with wide discretion and autonomy)
    o   A fairly small extent   (we have rules and protocols, but we are free in their application, depending on the needs emerged in every specific situation)
    o   A certain extent   (we have rules and regulations to follow, we can act differently only in specific cases, where problems do not fit into the working protocols)
    o   A fairly large extent   (we follow rules and protocols in every situation; if a case does not fit into the regulations, but can be accepted as a valid exception, we ask the supervisor for advise)
    o   A very large extent   (we follow the formal protocols and regulations, and if a case does not fit into the established rules, it can not be treated and it is excluded as not valid)

25. *Would you say your daily occupation relies more on...*
    o   … your autonomy in the performance of your duties
    o   … what is told you by the boss
    o   … established procedures and methods
    o   … the flexibility granted you by the system you work in
    o   … strict rules and predictable patterns

26. *Have you ever find yourself in trouble in the performance of your work because of contradictory rules (all applicable to the same case)?*

27. Would you say that rules, protocols and accountability mechanisms established in the University, have the effect to increase the trust in the system, or they are necessary because of a lack of trust in the system itself?

28. *Could you describe which are the formal/informal values at the basis of the University (the assumption is that the activity of the University becomes more and more specialized, developing beliefs, values and practices which differentiate it from other institutions, and other Universities)?*

29. *Do you think the current organizational culture can be easily identified and shared by the employees of the University? (organizational culture is intended as the dominant values, behaviours, rules, guiding the main activities of the University)*

APPENDIX IV: ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Information

- o Which is you role at the faculty?
- o How long have you been working at the Universitetet i Bergen?
- o For how long have you covered this position?
- o What are you exactly doing at the University/Faculty?

Administration and Management

- o What is mainly influencing the decisions taken at the faculty? And what is mainly influencing your work? (institutional leadership, general institutional culture, working protocols and rules for administrative staff, personal initiative)
- o How do you came up with decisions for the management of the faculty?
- o Which is the relation between superiors and staff in the faculty? Within departments?
- o To what extent do you feel your work is constrained by protocols and formal procedures?
- o Which are the faculty working standards and main working aspects?
- o How often are the working procedures in the faculty discussed and changed?
- o Is the system very rigid or flexible? Are working procedures and rules strict and predictable? High autonomy in the performance of duties, in respect of protocols and regulations? Contradictory rules?

Degree of decentralization of the Institution

- o Which is the relation between the work of the faculty and the whole University?
- o How would you qualify the degree of decentralization of the University? Would you say your faculty/department has a high degree of autonomy or not? Why? About what is the faculty autonomous (number of students, teaching programmes, hiring, etc)?
- o Is your department/faculty free to take autonomous decisions about his planning, or you receive directives from the top managerial levels of the institution, which you must implement?
- o Would you say the hierarchic structure of the institution has a deep effect on the performance of the department/faculty?
- o How would you define the degree of autonomy in the performance of faculty work?
- o Bottom-up or Top-down? Which is the role of student's organizations? Degree of cooperation?

Relation Teacher-Student

- o To what extent students and teachers have equal status in their relation?
- o To what extent teachers relate themselves to students from an equal position?

Features of the Learning Process

- o How often are educational programs discussed and modified?
- o Do you have control over courses programs? Are they often updated? New learning methods?
- o Do the faculty promote learning independence for students in their study path?
- o How would you define the learning environment at the faculty?
- o Educational process: flexible, rigid, stable?

Flexibility of the system towards change

- o Thinking about your working experience at the University, would you define the institution flexible and reactive to new trends, or highly stable in the maintaining of its organization?
- o Do you think the University would be able to renew its practices quickly? If not, why do you think it will require long time and great efforts?
- o Do you feel the University has been restructured quite often in the past years? If yes, which have been the main driving forces for the change: necessity or initiative?
- o Which might be the obstacles to face, if a reform is undertaken?

Organizational culture

- o What are the formal and informal values promoted by the University?
- o Can organizational culture be easily defined and shared by the employees?

- o If you are asked to point out which national cultural values are evident and promoted in the University, what would you say? What of the national culture is mainly reflected by/in the University?

APPENDIX V: HOFSTEDE'S SCORES WORLDWIDE

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO
Argentina	49	46	56	86	
Australia	36	90	61	51	31
Austria	11	55	79	70	
Belgium	65	75	54	94	
Brazil	69	38	49	76	65
Chile	63	23	28	86	
China	80	20	66	30	118
Colombia	67	13	64	80	
Costa Rica	35	15	21	86	
Czech Republic	57	58	57	74	
Denmark	18	74	16	23	
Ecuador	78	8	63	67	
El Salvador	66	19	40	94	
Finland	33	63	26	59	
France	68	71	43	86	
Germany	35	67	66	65	31
Greece	60	35	57	112	
Guatemala	95	6	37	101	
Hong Kong	68	25	57	29	96
Hungary	46	80	88	82	
India	77	48	56	40	61
Indonesia	78	14	46	48	
Iran	58	41	43	59	
Ireland	28	70	68	35	
Israel	13	54	47	81	
Italy	50	76	70	75	
Jamaica	45	39	68	13	
Japan	54	46	95	92	80
Malaysia	104	26	50	36	
Mexico	81	30	69	82	
Netherlands	38	80	14	53	44
New Zealand	22	79	58	49	30
Norway	31	69	8	50	20
Pakistan	55	14	50	70	
Panama	95	11	44	86	
Peru	64	16	42	87	
Philippines	94	32	64	44	19
Poland	68	60	64	93	
Portugal	63	27	31	104	
Singapore	74	20	48	8	48
South Africa	49	65	83	49	
Spain	57	51	42	86	
Sweden	31	71	5	29	33
Switzerland	34	68	70	58	
Taiwan	58	17	45	69	87
Thailand	64	20	34	64	56
Turkey	66	37	45	85	
United States	40	91	62	46	29
Uruguay	61	36	38	100	
Venezuela	81	12	73	76	