STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT: THE CASE OF ITALY

Summary

This report aims to explain the role of students in the University governance and management in Italy.

In a brief introduction, the evolution of students’ involvement in the University governance through the years will be analysed, starting from the foundation of the first University to nowadays. Afterwards, the way Italian Universities are governed and managed will be discussed, focussing on the means of student involvement in this process. Finally, a particular attention will be given to the role of student associations.

1. Introduction

The establishment of the first University in Italy dates back to 1080s (the conventional year chosen is 1088 but no precise date is known) with the foundation of Bologna University, which is considered as the oldest western University. The presence of numerous foreign students in Bologna led to the creation of the first students associations, named “universitates”, and established by students as a means to protect their rights.

However, by 1088 a medical school already existed in Salerno and some historians claim that Pavia had been the seat of a law chair existing from 200 years, therefore it was an older University than the one created in Bologna.

The first public University, expressly established without pre-existing schools of law and rhetoric on the background, was the first of the five Universities of Naples, in 1224.

After the Italian experience, Universities started to appear all over Europe.

University of Udine has a quite young history, though, dating back to 1978. University of Udine has a peculiarity, which makes it unique among the Italian Universities: it was established by popular demand. In 1976, after the earthquake
that struck Friuli Region, the population and the local authorities collected 125 thousand signatures to ask for the establishment of a University in the territory of Friuli (for a law which is demanded by people, 50 thousand signatures are sufficient). Afterwards, the reconstruction law also provided the institution of a University in the Friuli area, which was then founded in 1978. Today, University of Udine counts more than 17,000 students, 730 professors and 531 persons in the technical and administrative staff. It avails itself of 28 departments and 5 inter-departmental centres and of 10 faculties with 43 B.A. courses and 49 M.A. courses.

2. University of Udine as an example for University governance in Italy

Due to the self-government opportunity enjoyed by Italian Universities, it’s not possible to describe their general functioning. Nevertheless, the governance of the University of Udine that we’re going to explain may be taken as an example of how an Italian University may be managed. University of Udine is organised in different bodies which are foreseen by its Statute.

1) The Rector of the University and his delegates, who represent the University by the law and is responsible of the academic government and administration of the University.

2) The Administrative Director, who is responsible for the legality of the administrative measures and for the functioning of the offices and services and who disposes the execution of the decisions of the central government bodies and of the various structures.

3) The Board of Management, which is the corporate governance body in matter of organizational, administrative, financial and economical management of the University.

4) The Academic Senate, which is the corporate governance body in matter of programming the University development and of coordination of education and research.
5) The Students’ Council, which is the guarantor body for the autonomous participation of students in the organization of the University and the corporate representative body, with suggesting and consultative functions.

6) Other Committees and Commissions.

2.1 Students in the University of Udine: participation to the statute bodies

The Statute of the University of Udine considers all persons regularly registered to B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. courses as its students. According to art. 11 of the Statute (6th paragraph), “The students participate to the University governance through their own delegations in the corporate bodies where this is foreseen by the Statute”.

The Academic Senate

The students take part with full right in the academic Senate (art. 15), which is composed by the University Rector and Vice Rector, the Headmasters of all the Faculties and the representatives of tenure professors and of confirmed researchers. This body deals with the planning of the development of the University and with the coordination of teaching and research.

The participation of students’ representatives to the academic Senate is not fixed. In particular, students take part only in the discussions dealing with the following topics:

a) approval of the multi-year development programme;
b) budget of the University;
c) approval of the yearly educational offer after hearing the opinion of the Students’ Council;
d) determination of the criteria for the evaluation of the teaching activities and expression of a judgment on the results obtained by the University structures, after hearing the opinion of the Students’ Council;
e) establishment, activation and deactivation of departments and other scientific, study and service structures and of the faculties and their courses, after hearing the opinion of the Students’ Council but only about the study structures;
f) Statute modifications;

**The Students’ Council**

A very important advisory role in the governance and management dynamics of University of Udine is, then, played by the students’ Council.

The students’ Council is regulated by art. 17 of the Self-Government Statute of University of Udine. It is the body guarantor for the autonomous participation of students in the organization of the University and it is, moreover, the corporate representative body, it has suggesting functions and it is a consultative body of the academic Senate and of the Board of Management for all those subjects which are foreseen by the in force regulation and by the Statute. The competences of the students’ Council are identified by the second paragraph of article 17, namely:
a) it gives opinions about all the issues that the academic Senate submit to the Council;
b) it gives opinions, according to its competence, about the students Regulation, the general University Regulation, the teaching University Regulation and the teaching structures Regulations;
c) it appoints the representatives in the University corporate bodies, where otherwise foreseen by the Statute or by the internal regulations of the various structures;
d) it elaborates proposals and expresses opinions about problems and issues related to the teaching organization and to all the activities specifically concerning students;
e) it gives an opinion and formulates proposals to the Board of Management about the contributions of which students are charged;

The students’ Council is composed by the representatives of all the Faculties, who are appointed by and among those students elected in each Faculty Council.
For each Faculty, the representation consists of two students:
- a first student as a representative for the B.A. study courses
- a second student as a representative for the M.A. study courses
Other members of the Council are:
a) one of the students representatives in the University Board of Management;
b) one of the students representatives in the ERDISU Board of Management (ERDISU is the regional public body covering the matter of study right);
c) one representative appointed by and among the Presidents of all those Students Associations that are recognised by the University.

The Council is composed by a President, a Vice President, a Secretary general and the Commissions.
The President represents the Students’ Council and he’s the rightful member of all the other university bodies, as foreseen by the Statute or the Regulations and by the Regional Committee for Higher Education.
The President convenes the Students’ Council at least once every two months.
A Students’ Council is in charge for two academic years and is organised according to an internal regulation, which is adopted by a Decree of the Rector of the University. The Students’ Council, with the absolute majority of its members deliberates the Regulation, which may be modified, after the proposal of each member, always with the absolute majority of its members.

**The Board of Management** (art. 16 of the Statute)

A delegation of students takes part, then, in the Board of Management, which is the corporate governance body in matter of organizational, administrative, financial and economical management of the University. Among other things, the Board of Management:

a) approves the general administrative, financial and accounting Regulation, after the opinion of the Academic Senate;

b) approves the plan of teachers, researchers, executive staff, and of technical and administrative staff;

c) assigns financial resources, executive staff and technical and administrative staff to teaching, scientific and administrative structures, according to the criterias set by the Academic Senate;

d) approves the activation and deactivation of Faculties and their respective courses, and also of Departments and other scientific, education and service structures;

e) approves, after hearing the Students’ Council, the general rules for the implementation of all the students self-governed activities stated in art. 11, 9th paragraph;

f) gives a compulsory opinion about all those acts which are related to the planning of the University development, as prepared by the Academic Senate;

Other than the students delegation, the Board of Management is composed by:

a) the Rector, who chairs it;

b) the Vice Rector;

c) the administrative Director;
d) the representative of tenure professors;

e) the representatives of the university researchers;

f) the representatives of the executive staff and of the technical and administrative staff;

g) the President (or a standing delegate) of the University Consortium of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region;

h) the President (or a standing delegate) of the Regional Body for the right to university education of Udine;

i) the President (or a standing delegate) of the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia;

j) the mayor of Udine (or a standing delegate);

k) a standing delegate appointed by the Province Administrations of Udine, Gorizia and Pordenone.

The Faculty Council (art. 27 of the Statute)

A delegation of students takes part as a permanent member to every Faculty Council, which is the corporate body which plans and coordinates the educational activity of the Faculty.

In particular, the Faculty Councils:

a) plans and assigns educational resources in compliance with the resolutions of the Academic Senate;

b) approves and coordinates teaching programmes and educational engagements of professors and researchers, according to fairness criteria in respect of the freedom of teaching of individuals;

c) provides for the covering of all the tenure position for professors and researchers, after having acquired the opinion of the appropriate Departments;

d) makes proposals for the institution and activation of new educational activities;

e) formulates the Faculty Regulation

The Faculty Council is composed by:

a) tenure and non tenure professors

b) confirmed researchers;
c) students representatives, as for 15% of the other members holding the right to vote in the Faculty Council and anyway in a number which must not be inferior to three.

Students representatives take part to the counting of the legal number only if present at the Council seat, and they take part with their vote while dealing with specific subjects defined by the University Educational Regulation.

3. The evolution of student participation in the University governance and management: perspectives of reform

University of Udine, as well as the other Italian universities, shall acknowledge the recent changes introduced by the law 240/2010 (a.k.a. “Legge Gelmini”). Art. 2 second paragraph letter g) of this law, force Universities to introduce in their own statutes the institution in each Department of a students-professors Joint-Committee, which shall:

a) cover the monitoring of all activities dealing with the educational programmes and quality, as well as of the activity of students services offered by professors and researchers;
b) identify indicators for the evaluation of the results of the above mentioned activities;
c) produce advices about the activation and the abolition of study courses.

3.1 The Statute of Students rights and duties

In 2007 the C.N.S.U. (National Council of University Students) approved the Statute of University Students Rights and Duties, an important document that, for the first time, as a Constitution, gets together fundamental rights of students of all universities.

After the approval, the Statute of Students was presented to the Conference of the Rectors of Italian Universities by the appropriate Minister who, in order to evaluate the applicability of the norms and the impact in the organization and in the
functioning of the Universities, proposed a one year sperimentation of the project in six Universities (Bergamo, Camerino, Bologna, Modena, Roma Sapienza e Messina), so as to proceed with the formal issuing of the act by Ministerial Decree at the end of the period.

The Statute was conceived as a mean to implement the right to education, which is stated by article 34 of the Italian Constitution, and it proposed itself as some kind of small University Consitution, composed by 58 articles, which introduced some relevant news and topics. First of all, a wide attention to the theme of the right to education, while attempting at enlarging the forms of support and stressing the need for effective (public and private) means to make it real.

Another important remark concerns the topic of the right to mobility, a very relevant topic in the light of the knowledge internationalization process, which involve a growing number of students and researchers.

The Statute invites the Universities to favour students mobility (in Italy and abroad) by creating the appropriate logistic conditions and by removing all those obstacles coming from the social conditions of individuals.

Also subjects like the topics of teaching and of exams are examined, as well as those concerning democratic representation, economic contribution rights, rights and duties of working or part-time students and of PhD candidates.

But the main concept which is at the center of the whole Statute is the strong idea of citizenship, which is conceived as an indefeasible assumption in the strategy of the construction of a new student welfare.

The issuing of the Statute of Students was never formalized with a Ministry Decree, due to the subsequent fall of the Government.

Nevertheless, from the substantial point of view, the indications contained in the Statute were taken by the Universities which published them for their professors and students through their publication in the respective University websites.

Up to this moment, all the main Italian Universities (and several others as well), have adopted their own Statute of Students Rights and Duties.
Coming back to the 2007 Statute, the more significant dispositions concerning students participation to the University governance and to the decision politics, are those listed in the Title VI of the Statute, with the title of “University government and students representation”, which states as follows:

Art. 35. All students have the right to elect their representative and to be elected. Passive electorate is governed by rules that ensure the turnover in student representation. Universities must disclose in advance and adequately disseminate any relevant information to the wider awareness and participation in election times, and ensure location and opportunity for electioneering. The university elections shall be held at a time and in a manner that would ensure the maximum participation.

Art. 36. Students exercise their right of representation in the Senate, the Board of Directors, the Boards of Faculties, the Boards of the degree course. Their presence in these bodies can not be less than 15% of the members who have the right to vote. Students also have the right to participate in the relevant bodies for the evaluation of the training system and for decisions concerning the organization of teaching, in accordance with the regulations of the university.

Art. 37. Student representatives have the right and duty to participate to the academic bodies which they belong to. The Universities regulate coincidences with exams, lectures or laboratory work and training with compulsory attendance in order to fully protect the exercise of this right and duty.

Art. 38. In the non-elected bodies, possible appointment of students must occur after consultation with the elected student representatives in governing bodies of the University.

3.2 The university students representation at national level

The National Council of University Students (C.N.S.U.) is a consultative body representing the registered students in the Italian universities’ degree courses, and degree of specialization and doctoral programs.
It shall provide advice and recommendations to the Minister for Education, Universities and Research:
- on the proposed reorganization of the university system prepared by the Minister
- on the ministerial decrees, which defined the general criteria for the regulation of teaching courses, as well as the ways and means for guidance and facilitating of student mobility;
- on the criteria for the allocation and use of economic fund.
- elects, between its own members, eight student representatives in the National University Council;
- It can make suggestions and can be heard from the Minister on other matters of general interest to the university;
- submitted to the Minister, within one year of taking office, a report on the condition of the student in the university system;
- Can ask questions to the Minister about the facts or events of national significance relating to the teaching and the student condition, which is answered within 60 days.

The C.N.S.U. consists of twenty-eight members elected by students registered in undergraduate and graduate degree, by a member elected by members to specialized courses and a member elected by enrolled in a PhD. The members are appointed by the Minister, hold office for two years and may be reelected. The C.N.S.U. elects from its members the Chairman and three members that make up the Bureau.

4. The role of student associations

Students Associations have an important role of aggregation and involvement of students in university life and in the activities of the various Faculties.

The CLDS (Board of Lists for the Right to Education) is the reference point and means of aggregation for the lists of students’ representatives: around 70 lists which are present in the majority of Italian Universities makes reference to the CLDS. The members of CLDS are elected in different ways by the academic
Evaluation of student participation in the university governance and management and student services in the consortium members

bodies, starting from B.A. Course Councils, going through Faculty Councils and up to Boards of Management, Academic Senates, Education Right Bodies and the National Council for University Students.

The lists of student representation which are related to the CLDS, normally appear with names like “Ateneo Studenti, Obiettivo Studenti, Student Office, Lista Aperta, List One”.

A more “trade union-like” approach has been chosen by the UdU (Union of University Students). UdU is a confederation of student associations which are active in the major Italian Universities. Every year, around 10.000 students join UdU, an organizational example totally new in Italy: the student unionism.

UdU was founded in 1994 by a group of students who believed in the realization of a union-like associative model.

The choice of Student Union comes from the acknowledgment of the main importance of the student and his needs, his being a social actor and as such, autonomous from his family.

UdU brings along claims oriented to the protection of students’ rights and to socialization of their needs, it daily fights in Universities to create a system guaranteeing the real right to education, a system that gives all those who lack of means the access to University education, that betters the students’ conditions, that ensures all students a representation system which is capable to promote democracy and student participation in each University, which guarantees the free access to knowledge.

UdU participates with its lists to local and national elections for the election of students’ representatives and it has a very high number of representatives who are elected every year in University and Faculty boards and also in the National Council of University Students and in the National University Council.

The possibility for students to take part in students associations and to elect their representatives who can be the speakers for their rights and for their will to be actively part of the governance of Italian University, is then a fundamental and
crucial element in the view of an increased involvement in the definition of guidelines for the wished University reform.

5. Final remarks

This report analyzed the role of students in the University governance and management in Italy, taking the University of Udine as an example of how an Italian University can be managed. The focus was on the means of student involvement in University governance and inside its management bodies. Finally, the future perspectives of students’ involvement in the University governance due to recent reforms were explained, and also the role of students associations, in particular of the Student Union, was analyzed.