The governance of the General Councils of Public Institutions of Education

Isabel Maia

Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra – Portugal

ABSTRACT

The governance "theories" have taken a central place in the academic research, in the last three decades. This paradigm shift in complex organizations' management, as the non-higher education institutions, includes new players in top management bodies. It legitimized the representation of external stakeholders in the organizations' strategic direction.

It became important the study of governance in the non-higher education institutions, which made us analyse the General Council operation, within the new governance model. To understand the General Council operation with the purpose of being possible to comprehend how the new governance model is being implemented in NHPEI became the main question of the research we have set ourselves.

The General Council is the new body of the strategic direction: collegial; democratic; with representation of all stakeholders. It is urgent to understand the operation of this body through the representation and the participation adopted.

We used a qualitative methodology, in accordance with the grounded theory, triangulating several sources of primary and secondary data. The sample is the result of a multiple case study in four NHPEI in a single administrative district: with different academic population profiles and several kinds of schools.

The implemented governance in the NHPEI with the operation of the studied General Councils, shows inefficiency regarding the fulfilment of the competencies described in the Law. The aim of the General Council being a strategic direction body is not verified: the players carrying out a representation of individual interests, illusory and substantially passive participation.

We provide good practice recommendations for the General Council governance.

Keywords: Non-Higher Education Institutions; Director; Grounded Theory; representation; participation

1. INTRODUCTION

The globalization process, which started in the last century, changed the course and development of governance models in an extraordinary way. Likewise, academic research in management has accompanied this growth and, specifically, in Education.

In the last century, the influence of the principles of New Public Management, imported from private management with an emphasis on instruments of effectiveness and efficiency and, later, the principles of New Public Governance, with the opening of public institutions, in decision-making bodies, to stakeholders representing society.

Non-Higher Public Education Institutions (NHPEI) have followed these changes, all over Europe and in Portugal.

This integration of new external stakeholders in strategic decision-making, has accumulated the connection of vertical and horizontal networks in multilevel governance layers. These networks have functioned as important strategic management tools in democratization, with permanent negotiation and collaborative forms, at the horizontal and vertical level, balancing with the centrality of the State.

In this research, we assume governance adapted to non-higher education, considered global, interactive and complex, translating into a set of norms, rules and institutional processes at each of the territorial levels, reconciling interrelationships between internal and external stakeholders, in order to adapt the challenges posed at its various levels and in a networked system, which shapes individual participation, as well as functioning and decision-making.

In education, the investigation of governance in higher education has multiplied, not in the same way as in non-higher education. In Portugal, there are few authors who approach the topic, and sometimes, only indirectly, such as: Barroso, Afonso, Antunes Lima and Teodoro. However, we know of no empirical work for the purpose of ours. Above all, with the concern to question participation directly to the actors representing the various groups of stakeholders, responsible for decision-making in the strategic management body.

With this empirical objective, our focus of analysis has become the new deliberative body, of the new model implemented, the General Council (Decree-Law nº75 / 2008, of April 22) for the management of NHPEI.

The objective of this work is to analyze How is the governance model being implemented in NHPEI, in Portugal? and, more specifically, to analyze How do representatives participate in the General Council, in the decision making of the NHPEI ?.

This article is divided into five points in addition to the Introduction: multilevel governance in Education; the General Council in the governance model of the NHPEI; methodology; results; final considerations and recommendations.

2. Multilevel governance in Education

The literature shows that, despite the same management theories and practices circulating almost instantaneously throughout the world, and, specifically, throughout Europe, the implementation

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of structurally equivalent models are not implemented with the same results, in the various countries. , nor in the various regions of national scope, or at the local level, in the various NHPEI (Barroso, 2018; SP Osborne, 2006; Stephen P. Osborne, 2010). The cultural, economic and social contexts, the traditions of each country, each region and even each organization are different and seem to influence different functional models.

In the last three decades, the complexity of the implemented governance models, in a global multilevel system in education, requires political responses and structural management instruments. In the case of Europe, the various countries have had very similar responses, from decentralization policies implementing new governance instruments (Barroso, 2017; OECD, 2017). Once again, the results at each of the levels, in each of the countries were diverse, but in all of them the adjustment is constant over time.

In Portugal, the tension of this multilevel management has been shown to be between two poles: on the one hand, the policies suggested by supranational and international institutions (European Union, World Bank, OECD) and the convergence of national and local policies and desires; on the other, between State intervention and new forms of participation by new stakeholders, representatives of society (Figure 1).

The educational system in Portugal reflects a multilevel, sedimented and cumulative governance dynamics conjugating with the horizontal and vertical networks in a polycentric way.

The hierarchical structure of governance, in different spaces and territories with mutual exclusivity between spatial and functional jurisdictions, allows the State to associate and maintain the procedural centrality of the model (Justino & Batista, 2013).

The State is associated with denationalization policies that result from a mixture of transnational influence and decentralization of educational policies with an induced and shared regulation, but maintaining the traditional, coercive, centralized and hierarchical regulation as a counterpoint.

At the transnational level, the objective of strategic results management stands out with the strong incentive to use benchmarking practices, where each State allows itself to be evaluated. The national level is objectively a territory of procedural management, leaving administrative management to the lower levels and, for NHPEI, curricular and pedagogical management.

In the last two years, the transfer of competences began to take place, as a timid decentralization, however, given the procedural complexity and the lack of resources of local and organizational actors, a new regional, intermediate space has emerged (Law no. 50 / 2018, of August 16, and Law No. 21/2019, of January 30), with the aim of simplifying administrative management through Intermunicipal Communities.

Figure 1 - Multilevel governance scheme
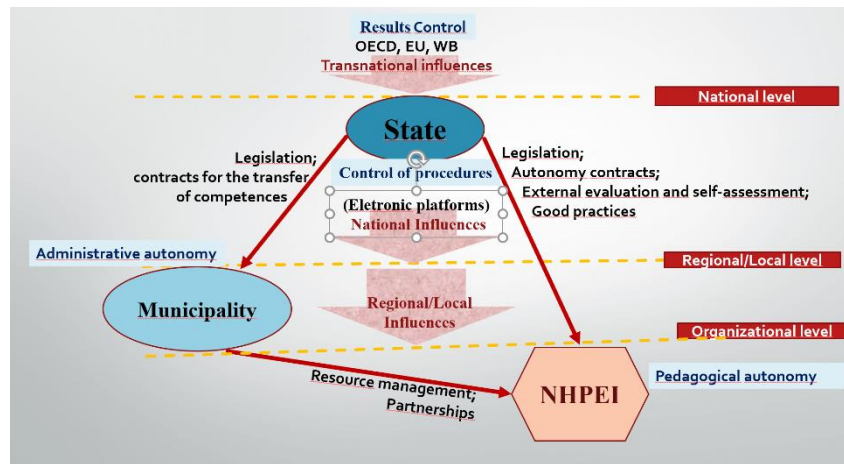
Source: adapted from (Justino & Batista, 2013)

Our empirical work is carried out at the micro level (in the NHPEI) and our choice fell on the new governance body, the General Council.

The General Council is the only collegial body in the current model, which reflects the paradigm shift through the principles of New Public Governance, legitimizing the new external stakeholders - representatives of society - in the decision making of the institution's strategic direction.

3. The General Council in the new NHPEI governance model

The (new) governance model, instituted by Decree-Law no. 75/2008, of April 22, includes in the NHPEI structure: the General Council - a deliberative and collegial body, with representation of internal and external stakeholders, where the Director is invited and is not an effective member -; the Director - executive body, sole proprietorship -; the Pedagogical Council - the Director's advisory body - and the Administrative Council - only composed of the Director, an assistant and the person responsible for administrative services.

The entry of new stakeholders in the strategic management body brings a new complexity to decision making. The co-opted elements of society are actors in economic, health and cultural organizations. In addition to them, they now have the legitimacy of representation: parents and the municipality.

Participation and representation are two closely linked dimensions, within the scope of the study of public governance models (Kooiman, 2010). Once again, whether through the literature or reading the data, we confirmed the decisive importance in this empirical

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study. The participation of each representative element, whether he chooses an agent / steward[1] attitude / position - implies an informal mechanism of interaction with the various actors of the organ (Bevir, 2010).

4. Methodology

After the decision on the research theme and its scope, in the face of the research questions raised - How is the governance model being implemented in NHPEI, in Portugal? How do representatives participate in the General Council in the decision making of the NHPEI? –We opted for a qualitative methodology following the principles of Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), with the empirical analysis of a case study of multiple units (Yin, 2015).

We considered four units of analysis, in the same territory, with the same municipality, so that there would be no different influences from higher levels of governance. These units of analysis have different profiles of the school community, specifically socioeconomic and academic profiles. In addition to the school community, the structural characteristics are different, they are NHPEI: grouped, non-grouped, with and without autonomy contract with the State and different types of teaching.

The composition of the General Council is in charge of NHPEI, regarding the number of elements (between 19 and 21) and the appointment of representatives of the various groups is carried out in accordance with Decree-Law No. 75/2008, of 22 April.

Knowledge of the functioning of this or any body depends a lot on the attitudes and behavior of its stakeholders in decision making. The importance of knowing the perceptions of each of them has become mandatory for our investigation.

We carried out a pre-test to validate the script of the semi-structured interviews with an NHPEI near our residence and discussed the questions, the language and the sequence, with the respondents, after transcribing the interviews.

Before conducting the case study, we also carried out a pilot case, which worked as a general rehearsal, in another region.

The sample found by theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 2006) is based on four General Councils, from our case study. The option of the sample for theoretical saturation

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[1] According to agency theory, within the organization, each individual (agent) must consider its objectives before its own objectives, whereas for Stewardship Theory, this each element (steward) interacts and aligns the individual objectives with those of the organization itself . (Frey, 1997; Rodrigues, 2013). In the case of the IEPNS, the groups represented on the General Council may choose to have their own interests to satisfy and defend - for example: students, teachers, staff and parents - or, given their collective importance of the IEPNS for the society, the extension of a greater interest - the public and social interest, such as education - common to the entire organization should prevail. (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997). It may always be an option for each representative on the General Council to behave like an agent or to be a steward. Different options of attitudes in decision making that can be identified within the two roles can even coexist in the same body.

is justified by the type of qualitative research based on the principles of Grounded Theory. Saturation was reached when we realized that the inclusion of new respondents no longer added to the reflection based on the data regarding the dimensions under analysis, we ended up closing the sample with 29 semi-structured interviews carried out (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

We used different empirical materials - semi-structured interviews (to members of all groups represented on the General Council, including the Director and the President of the General Council), literature review, formal and non-formal NHPEI documents, field diaries and focus-group with groups represented to validate results and experts, such as the Minister of Education of the government that approved this new governance model. The data thus collected were triangulated and subjected to different analysis techniques, which allowed us to ensure their credibility and validity (Bevir, 2017; Bevir & Rhodes, 2007).

The research questions we formulated led us to the empirical path for valuing the understanding of the context and the perspectives of the participants, through the realization of a qualitative research, supported by the application of a careful and extensive content analysis. The content analysis was carried out according to the principles followed by Bardin (2016).

According to the category table for coding the material considered for the content analysis, the coding was performed with the support of the MaxQda 2018 software, according to the code book made, allowing for faster comparison and validation (Seale, 2002).

The triangulation of data and the identification of categories, within the scope of content analysis, allowed to reinforce the main dimensions of the theme under study and to understand how they are related, according to the model we arrived at.

Codification validation has become of paramount importance through Inter Judge Coding Reliability, in the same context and with the same code book (Muñoz-Leiva, Montoro Ríos, & Luque Martínez, 2006). We carried out other tests such as the Cohen's Kappa coefficient - with 622 codifications compared by each judge, 89.2% were in agreement, resulting in a 0.863 Cohen's Kappa, translating a good reliability, according to the Cohen analysis scale (Cohen , 1960).

5. Results

All the General Councils of the four study units are composed of twenty-one members, representing the various groups of stakeholders, ensuring that the number of teachers and staff does not exceed 50% of the total number of members of the body.

Our sample comprises twenty-nine respondents, each member of a group represented on the General Council, in the four study units, to which we have added the organ's president and the Director (who is not part of the General Council, but is a frequent guest) of all organ meetings and participates as if it were a de facto element of the organ) of each NHPEI.

Representation and participation were the two dimensions analyzed in detail in our multiple case studies.

According to (Kooiman, 2010), representation takes two forms: symbolic - when the representative represents something undefined or an absent group - and descriptive - when the representative participates for himself, but on behalf of someone. In this case, with the exception of representatives of the municipality and the local community (society), everyone has a descriptive representation. Also, the representatives of the General Council are appointed in three different ways: elected by peers - teachers, staff and students -; appointed - elements of the municipality, or even co-opted by the body - representatives of the local community (Law: 75/2008, of 22 April).

The perception of each respondent, in relation to their representation and the way they condition their participation in decision-making, reflects the existing democracy in the body and guarantees the different views, behaviors and interests of each one in the General Council (Lima, 2012).

We crossed several questions to understand who they represent in the body effectively. We realize that everyone is aware of representing something or someone, but they admit that, in practice, they only feel that they represent themselves. Twenty five of the twenty-nine respondents (86%) assume that they represent themselves and do not consider that they represent their represented, nor their peers in the body:

"Pretend to tell, my role is to pretend" (local community3).

However, sixteen of the twenty-nine state that they follow the opinion of the Director, regardless of their own opinion:

"The Director is the one who influences everything else, everything goes with him" (parents5).

and twenty of the twenty-nine follow, in most cases, the opinion of the teachers (however, all teachers assume that they follow the opinion of the Director).

Regarding the existence of a group or someone influential in participation and, specifically, in decision-making, it is not surprising that twenty-four of the twenty-nine affirm that the presence of the Director in the organ is the main or only influence of decision-making. organ decision:

"*The Director doesn't let anyone send him over."* (president3).

We study the concept of participation in a conceptual governance structure in education in non-higher education, that is, participation is analyzed considering the representatives of a decision-making body, democratic and heterogeneous, with a specific look, in relation to effective behaviors and attitudes. , regarding the objectives to be achieved. Each element takes its place in the General Council and participates according to the option and is free to participate in a different way - "non-participation" is a form of participation (Pinto, 2000).

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According to the data collection, we analyzed the following categories regarding participation: i) Decision making; ii) Democraticity; iii) Regulation; iv) Degrees of involvement; v) Orientation; vi) Expectations for entry into the body; vii) Constraints; viii) Trust; ix) Communication and x) Information.

Here we present only the results of some of these ten categories.

● Decision making

Despite the different perception of each respondent representing their peers or themselves in decision making, it is important to understand how it influences the decision of the small group or the large group (organ). Pateman (1992) analyzes three levels of participation: total, partial participation and pseudoparticipation. From the analysis of the representation dimension, the data had already shown us that the teachers (twenty) induced decision-making, and everyone admitted to following the strong opinion of the Director - who evaluates them, as teachers, outside the General Council. Teachers control decision-making, based on the opinion of the Director, with a total (or almost total, partial majority) participation in the decision-making of the General Council:

"*The Director and the teachers who strictly obey the Director… everything is well controlled*" (municipallity 5).

Even though they are aware of the Director's control of the decision directly and indirectly, twelve of the twenty-nine agree with the Director's presence at all meetings of the General Council. However, thirteen refer that it is important to be present to inform the entire body, considering, however, that the Director could be present only at the beginning of each meeting or in only a few meetings according to the agenda. Finally, only four respondents do not agree with the presence of the Director at the meetings of the General Council.

But eighteen of the twenty-nine respondents are those who assume they have a pseudoparticipation in the General Council, that is, their participation in no way influences the decision-making process in the body (directly or indirectly):

"*We are there to say yes… the Director decides everything and then we approve to go well… he does the documents, everything has to be as he wants*" (student4).

Although nine respondents understand that in part they manage to interfere in some way in partial points of decision-making, but recognize that decision-making is influenced by those who have a full participation, despite not being a member of the General Council, that is, the Principal:

"*I try to give my opinion, I try to adjust ideas with my colleague who is in the CG and even with the others*" (student2).

● Involvement

Degrees of involvement are a factor in participation. According to Lima (1998), there can be a participation: active - with a great commitment from the participant -, passive -

translates a detachment or total disinterest, in a body-present position -, or reserved - this being an intermediate point involvement and interest in the organ's meetings and actions.

The perception of an active participation, was only manifested by a president and a Director:

"I do give my opinion, yes… we always do it together, the Director and I… we have a frank dialogue" (president2).

As for a reserved participation, there were eight respondents, out of the twenty-nine:

"I participate a little, what they ask of me" (teacher4).

The majority (nineteen) are aware that their participation is substantially passive.

"I prefer to pass between the raindrops… quietly and only participate if it is very necessary. Vote with the Director and everything is fine" (teacher5).

Interestingly, external stakeholders are the ones who most recognize this passivity, which here corresponds to around 83% of respondents, while internal stakeholders are about 53% (in the case of teachers, 50% respond that they are passive and the rest understand to be reserved. , but none are believed to be active).

● Orientation

The orientation towards participation, according to Pinto (2000) - based, in part, on Bajoit (1988) - and Lima (1998) can be: convergent - align personal goals with those of the organ or organization -; divergent - misaligning personal goals with those of the organ or organization, even if it is temporary, or a form of protest, or provocation for change (for good reasons); apathetic - the individual does only what is asked, nothing more - and, finally, abandonment - as a condition of rupture with the organ or the organization, or even with someone responsible.

Ten of the twenty-six respondents to this question acknowledge having a convergent orientation (despite referring to the appearance given by the unanimity of the votes, in decision-making, given the reference to the influence of the Director in these votes):

"There are no problems, the school knows ... it is only unanimous" (autarchy2).

The remaining respondents have a divergent participation (three),

"In normal matters… yes, I am always against it" (staff);

apathetic (seven)

"I have to be there and let it go" (student2);

or abandonment (six)

"It is approved and ready, nobody wants to know and neither do I" (parents5).

● Expectations

We considered the expectations at the entrance of the organ, they were mentioned as very positive and motivating by twenty-two of the twenty-nine respondents, being even relevant for the acceptance of the place in the organ. Only seven did not say they had any expectations at the start. Of the expectations, the most noticed subcategories were: effective participation in decision making (ten); the interest of those represented (nine); the recognition of legitimacy (five); the release of participation (four). However, at present, after the experience of participating for at least one term on the General Council, many consider themselves to have less (if any) expectations.

● Constraints

The constraints during the mandate and the most referenced were: the limits to the freedom of participation (twenty-two); the illusory participation (twelve); conflicts (nine); the lack of interest of those represented (six); the lack of recognition of legitimacy (three); structural formalities (three) and others, such as the lack of time, or the lack of information for the decision, or even the lack of recognition by the General Council.

● Trust

The data showed two subcategories, in relation to trust: trust - a form of trust in relation to a certain individual - and reliance - trust in a given organ, function, organization. We subdivide each of them into: negative and positive trust (the negative functioning, in certain cases, as mistrust) and internal reliance, in turn, positive and negative. Sixteen respondents, of the twenty-seven who answered this question, assumed a negative trust

"He is a person without character. That does not inspire confidence in anyone ... my confidence in him is total distrust" (president4),

in which nine of them do not trust the Director as a person - who participates in practically all meetings of the organ - (trust) and five expressed the same perception regarding the organ's president.

Those concerned with the positive trust, remain the same: the Director with five respondents and six, relatively, to the organ's president and two professors.

As for reliance, in the General Council, of the twenty-two respondents, thirteen refer to it as negative and eleven of these thirteen respondents identify the Governing Body.

"There, the Director is in charge, but he is in charge... he says that there is no right to distrust, but there is, there is, if there is…" (municipality 5).

Nine respondents refer to a positive reliance, where six refer to the Director.

● Information

The information we encoded here, treating it as messages transmitted between the sender and the receiver, we considered two subcategories: the sought and the made available.

The information sought is practically nonexistent - only three respondents (a president of the General Council and two parents) sought it, only once or twice during the term, to help decision-making (we triangulated these data from the interviews with those from the

analysis minutes of meetings). The justification presented by the respondents, in general, is the lack of time and availability to deal with matters outside the meetings and, even at the meeting, the agenda is very overloaded and there is little time to discuss matters in depth and it is only possible, in many cases, to carry out a vote without big data. In addition to the lack of time, they complain about the lack of their own staff for the General Council, which would facilitate the confirmation of the information provided by the Director and facilitate the search for more information necessary for a conscious decision-making.

The information made available to the members of the General Council, twenty-six respondents claim to be all sent only by the Director, according to the agenda that he establishes with the organ's president. The volume and type of information available is controlled by the Director's opinion:

"We don't have the information we want, but what the Director wants… everything comes prepared by the Director" (local community4).

The possibility of an asymmetry of the information available is great, according to some respondents, since most of the issues on the agenda are documents presented by the Director, which ends with a simple approval by the General Council.

Schematically, we arrived at the following analysis model (Figure 2), in which we have the composition of the General Council and the relationship with the analysis of the two dimensions - representation and participation. The large yellow arrow highlights the Director's influence on the participation of elements of the General Council in decision-making, controlling the information made available to the body and as the sole spokesperson for the other corporate bodies. The larger arrows that round the organizational level of the central NHPEI represent the influences of the higher levels of national and transnational governance.

Zooming into the core of Figure 2, we obtained Figure 3. Where we represent a negative pole, almost explosive of the constraints, in relation to participation, in contrast to the initial expectations and created throughout the mandate, as a positive pole. This balance and overcoming negativity will contribute to a more active, effective and convergent participation in good governance.
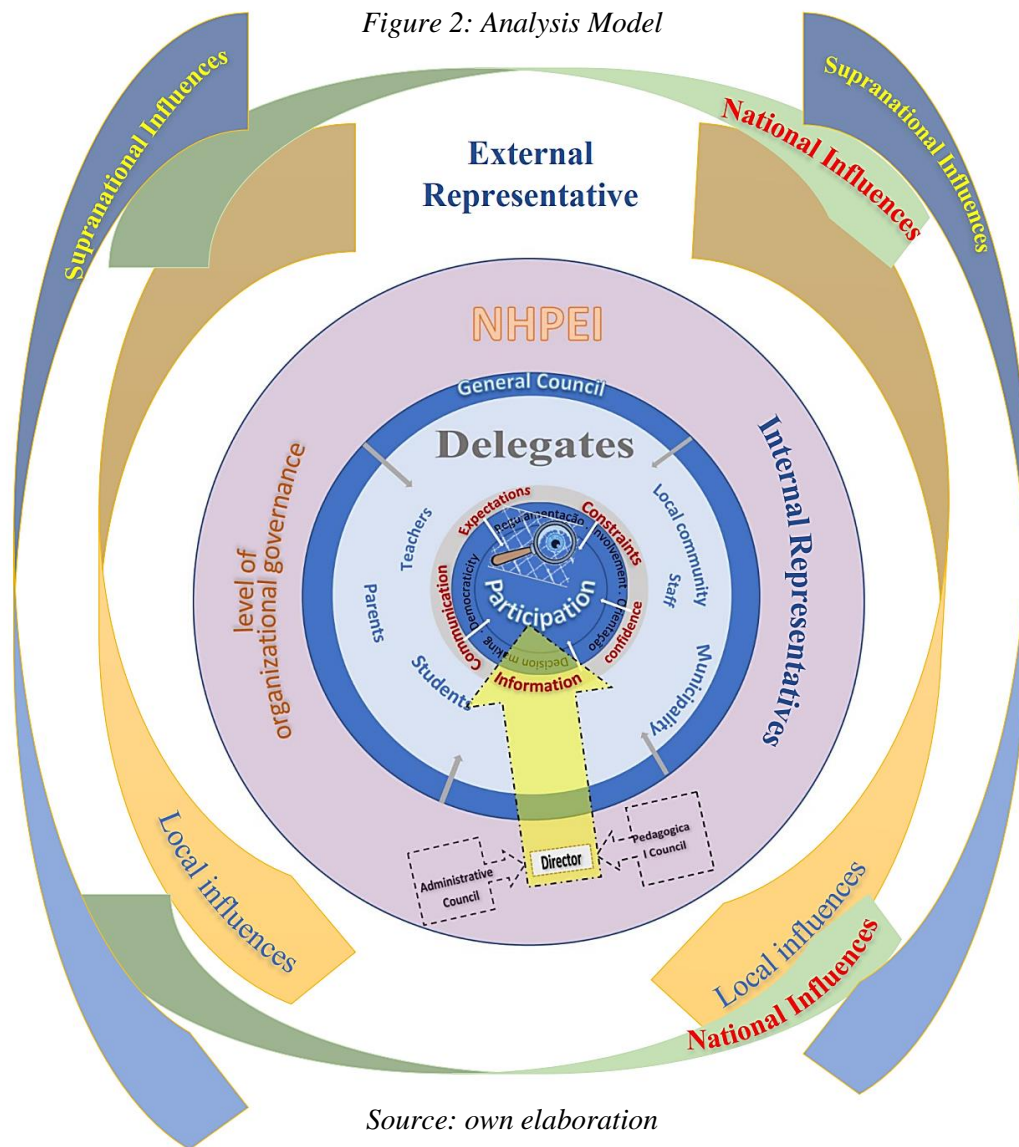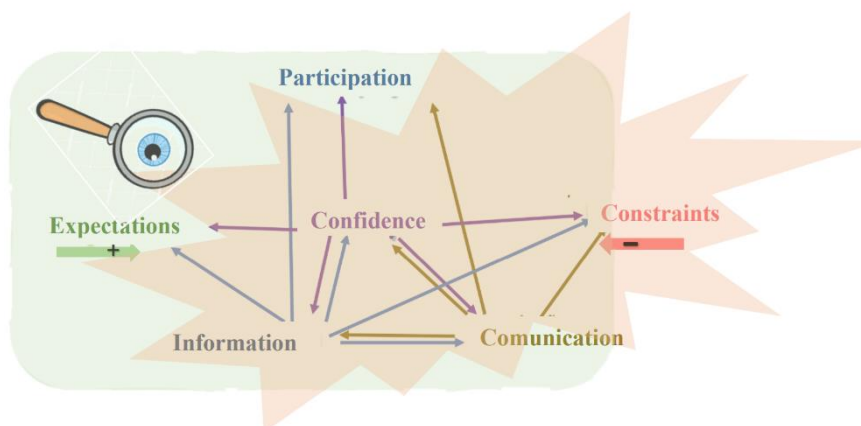
Figure 2: Analysis Model

Source: own elaboration

Figure 3 - participation

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Source: own elaboration

6. Final considerations and recommendations

The objective of our research work was to evaluate the implementation of the new governance model in Non-Higher Education, in Portugal. The structural model is the result of transnational influence and internal negotiation between the various levels of governance, until its implementation at the micro level, that is, the NHPEI. The central level of the State is influenced by the alteration of paradigms at the supranational level, which conditions all the various sub-national layers, solidifying lines of a very comprehensive network.

The theoretical or conceptual basis followed governance perspectives that best suited our work (Bevir, 2017; Klijn, 2010; Kooiman, 1993, 2010; Stephen P. Osborne, 2010; Pierre & Peters, 2020; Rhodes, 1997) and that allowed an adaptation to the Portuguese educational system. The coexistence of a multilevel global and networked governance in education assumes the coordination of stakeholders at various levels and origins (internal and external), largely due to the contribution of the evolution of globalization. Despite supranational influences and the obligation to transpose norms and adapt international policies, the dynamics have not been tense and have been adaptable at national level, in Portugal (Kooiman, 2008).

The existence of good governance in complex organizations, such as the NHPEI, involves finding a fluid communication with symmetrical and transparent information, enabling the various stakeholders in decision making, so that their participation can be active, total and convergent, in an environment of trust in the whole, both in the decision-making process of the deliberative body and at the institutional level.

As we were made aware of each member of the General Council, he has the notion that he represents some group and not himself. But they also told us that in practice they act on your behalf and according to your will and interests.

The illusory role is clearly a characteristic perceived by the members of the General Council, only a small minority (teachers) feel that they can consider its effective representation. This feeling of "body-present" to satisfy quorum, without any influence on decision-making, allows the widespread perception of a pseudoparticipation in a large number of respondents, since they limit themselves to accepting the decisions of others.

The democratic nature referred to by the heterogeneity of the various stakeholders in the General Council would make it possible to foresee a diversity of involvement and, consequently, a truly democratic participation. However, most elements verbalize having a passive participation and even abandonment. Expectations at the entrance of the organ were lost and the constraints became bigger and more real. The convergent orientation - verified in the votes, the vast majority unanimously, according to the minutes of the meetings - for decision making was apparent, crossing this perception with the data of influence of the votes in the decision making, following the Director's will.

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Based on the work carried out, and after some discussion with experts and elements of the focus-group, it is possible to proceed with some recommendations of good practices for the governance of the General Council.

Some General Principles:

CG The CG is composed of a plural and heterogeneous set of actors (stakeholders internal and external to the organization), who participate, communicate with transparency and establish a relationship of trust with each other.

CG The CG must not be dominated by any of the groups represented in it.

CG The decision making of the CG must be based on a dynamic and democratic process.

All elements of the CG must have adequate conditions for the full exercise of their functions.

Recommendations:

i) The CG must, prior to co-optation, establish the criteria for the selection and profile of the members to be co-opted, in line with the internal IEPNS structuring documents.

ii) The General Council must provide initial training to all its members, which includes, inter alia, technical and content literacy of the organ's functions and objectives, in order to equitably level the knowledge necessary for the free and autonomous participation of each member in the CG .

iii) The Director must ensure the production and circulation of information in a timely, accurate and transparent manner.

iv) The CG must decide on the means and instruments necessary for its operation and the exercise of its powers, and may have its own budget registered in the IEPNS management account, its own administrative support and consultancy service.

v) Every six months, the Director must submit to the CG a report on the fulfilment of objectives and the plan, as a monitoring, evaluation and work basis for an executive improvement plan.

vi) The presence of the Director at each meeting of the General Council must be considered taking into account the need of the body to obtain information and its competence for the inspection it exercises.

We know that choosing a qualitative approach based on Grounded Theory constitutes a risk, with the usual criticisms of this methodology, however, since we wanted to understand and describe a phenomenon in a complex context, with detail and depth, it became inevitable . The variety of speeches, techniques and practices that we used added knowledge and through it we reached different perspectives of the study of the same object, which allowed us to obtain new results in the development of an empirically based governance model, based on the collected data and in the observed context, with all care of validity, credibility and reliability.

The fact that we opted for a multiple case study is understood to be an advantage, as it allows us to collect, directly and in detail, data from the different actors in their usual context.

The possible generalization is analytical, that is, it can be replicated in the reinterpretation of existing studies or of concrete cases or of new cases and, still, to induce new questions or to include those that we have posed here in future investigations.

The well-known studies, in the scope of Higher Education, present conclusions very similar to the ones we reached in this investigation. The figure of the Director is replaced by the Rector, who was also elected and removed by the new strategic management body, the General Council, as in Non-Higher Education. This new deliberative body opened higher education establishments to society, with the admission of external stakeholders, representatives of society. There is only one important difference in relation to the model of non-higher education: the obligation to elect a president who is an external stakeholder, representative of society (Law No. 62/2007, of 10 September), while in NHPEI he is a teacher the elected as president.

Of the few existing works, there is one that presents conclusions very similar to those of this article, regarding higher education (Oliveira, Peixoto, & Silva, 2014). Some examples of these conclusions: the information made available for decision-making in the General Council is sent only by the Rector who has his own staff, as is the case with the Director in non-higher education; also, the lack of time is a justification for the non-search for information, on the part of the members of the General Council in higher education; just as the presence of the Rector influences the participation of elements of the General Council and, specifically, decision-making; or even, the agenda for each meeting is compact and determined by the Rector, as well as the Director, among others.

As suggestions for further investigations, in the future, we suggest the choice of the model and its conceptual relationships, as well as the proposed recommendations, be tested in other NHPEI, always taking into account the difference in contexts in which each of them fits. Additionally, we suggest that a longitudinal analysis be applied to our data, in order to analyze the evolution of the considerations of this study.

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