

BORDÓN

Revista de Pedagogía

NÚMERO MONOGRÁFICO / *SPECIAL ISSUE*

Educación, esferas de participación y ciudadanía
Education, spheres of participation and citizenship

Miquel Martínez, Marta B. Esteban y Mercedes Oraisón
(editores invitados / *guest editors*)



Volumen 75
Número, 2
2023

SOCIEDAD ESPAÑOLA DE PEDAGOGÍA

THE POLITICAL AGENDA IN THE PARTICIPATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE SPANISH STATE COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

La agenda política de participación de los estudiantes universitarios en el Consejo de Estudiantes Universitario del Estado de España

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DOI: 10.13042/Bordon.2023.97311

Fecha de recepción: 22/11/2022 • Fecha de aceptación: 27/01/2023

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Cómo citar este artículo: Parejo, J.-L. and Maestu-Fonseca, E. (2023). The political agenda in the participation of college students in the Spanish State Council of University Students. *Bordón, Revista de Pedagogía*, 75(2), 177-191 <https://doi.org/10.13042/Bordon.2023.97311>

INTRODUCTION. During the last decade, the student movement in Spanish universities has evolved from an associative and assembly-participatory based model to a system of student councils as representative bodies with a strong influence on university governance. In addition, the State Council of University Students (CEUNE) was created so student interests could be directly promoted and mediated with the government. As the highest representative student body at the national level, it has enabled its members to pursue a political agenda throughout the last decade. **METHOD.** The aim of this work is to reconstruct the contexts in which student university policies have developed in order to describe and analyse the evolution of the debates, agreements and disagreements that have emerged within this Council. Through discourse analysis, we triangulate information from CEUNE meeting minutes, student manifestos, media coverage and interviews with key informants. **RESULTS.** We discuss the role of CEUNE in influencing university policy through classic issues (scholarships and public prices) and its capacity to introduce new issues to the agenda. **DISCUSSION.** Lastly, we analyse whether different administrations have planned their activities in cooperation with student representatives.

Keywords: *Student Participation, College Students, Participative Decision Making, Student Organizations, Governance.*

Introduction

In this article we study the evolution of the highest body of student representation in Spain, the State Council of University Students (CEUNE). Created in 2011, it coordinates the delegations of student representatives from public and private universities in matters of university policy, and acts as a space for discussion with universities and the government. In this paper, we consider the agendas deployed by CEUNE members, analyse their speeches, claims and opinions on university legislation, reconstruct the consensus, and trace the evolution of this body until today.

Theoretical framework

In the last two decades there have been remarkable advances in the inclusion of students and student organizations in university governance through structured dialogue, inclusion in traditional governing bodies, and the creation of new, student-specific bodies. Following the recommendations of the summits of European higher education ministers in Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003), ministers confirmed that students should be able to influence the organisation and content of education in universities. In this regard, students can design their own political agenda with the aim of influencing university governance policies and decision-making, as well as national and supranational policies through interactions with authorities such as institutional leaders, government bodies and international organisations (Klemenčič, 2017). Following this path, students have gradually taken their place as stakeholders in university governance (Bergan, 2004; Persson, 2004).

In Spain, national representative student bodies can be considered as interest groups (Klemenčič, 2012), given that they have stable structures, aspire to defend collective interests, prefer the institutional political route, seek access to government authorities with whom they negotiate and lobby, express themselves through the media and occasionally carry out protest actions (Vallès, 2007). Following Schmitter's (1974) theoretical model, Spain has evolved from a pluralistic system of relations between the central government and students to a neo-corporatist one, especially since the creation of the CEUNE. This fact has caused the "student voice" before the Ministry to be channelled through this collegiate body of the State by means of a representation system organized through the student councils of the universities and the strongest and best organized national student federations or associations (Parejo and Lorente, 2011; Parejo, 2023).

Extrapolating Hirschman's (1986) model to our current case, student representatives at the CEUNE can adopt three patterns of behaviour when faced with dissatisfaction with their participation in this body: voice, exit, and loyalty. By using their voice, they can express their proposals and communicate their criticism and opposition. They can also exert pressure on the government internally, from within the system. However, if the student representatives realise that the channels of communication through the CEUNE are inoperative, atrophied or blocked, the mechanisms for using their voice are much less effective and they can opt for the second option: to exit, that is, to leave the CEUNE and return to the reference group: their student council, association or student movement. Even so, some student representatives may choose the third option, loyalty, that is, to stay in CEUNE so that their voice can still be present in discussions even if it is not heard or taken into account, and even if it can be manipulated by the government to further their own interests. For Thomson (2011), student voice can be understood as the right and opportunity to freely express their opinion, participate in the channels of deliberation and consultation and influence the

decisions of those in power. Student participation, through their voice, can contribute to the democratization of university organization and governance, to the renewal of campus life and, in short, to universities providing a better public service to society (Susinos Rada & Ceballos, 2012). This requires the consolidation of a civic community with a radical collegiality with the other university agents and actors in the higher education system (Fielding, 2011).

Method: Reconstructing contexts through qualitative analysis

Our objective is to reconstruct the context in which the student agenda is defined and to understand the internal workings of the CEUNE. Therefore, our analysis will be based on the debates, agreements, and disagreements that have taken place in the Council, following the theoretical approach of Hammersly and Atkinson (2019). Through discourse analysis (Luque, 1995), we will analyse the voice of students in the definition of the university political agenda in the CEUNE. We carry out our analysis of university policy beyond the classic descriptive and empirical approach of the ideas and proposals of the student representatives themselves, and integrate an evaluative approach (Muñoz Arnau, 2010) that endows the analysis with a critical rationality (Jover, 1999). Thus, the university policy exercised by students is justified through their participation in decision-making together with other partners in the system such as rectors, faculty, support staff or the government itself.

This research was made through the epistemological framework of hermeneutic narrative. This narrative understands that reality has a meaning and is oriented towards the creation and search for second-order interpretations based on the understandings that the actors themselves have of their reality (Howarth, 2005; Nigar, 2020). In order not to fall into interpretative reductionism we will contextualize the discourses of the students and other intervening actors at the historical, social and political levels (Glynos and Howarth, 2008). Likewise, our work was conducted using the qualitative and interpretative paradigm, which pursues a holistic understanding of the object of study from the perspective of the actors themselves (Simons, 2009).

We performed an analysis of the minutes of the CEUNE plenary sessions since its creation until the end of 2017. A reconstruction of the contexts and debates was also made from the students' own manifestos, media coverage, and university legislation in the form of royal decrees, organic laws and strategies, and EU recommendations. In addition, interviews were conducted with key informants (student representatives, politicians and other actors) that allowed us to complete and saturate the discourses. The results will be presented following historical and chronological criteria and on the basis of the categories described above.

Context

The Spanish Constitution of 1978, through Articles 23.1 and 27.7, ensures the right to student participation, either directly or through their representatives, in the governing bodies of the university and the State, as established by current regulations (cf. Jiménez Soto, 2009). This right is further described in sections 46.2 and, especially, in 46.5 of the Organic Law of Modification of the Organic Law of Universities (LOMLOU) of 2007, which mandates the Government to approve a University Student Charter (EEU) containing the constitution, functions, organization and operation of the CEUNE. In the LOMLOU, the CEUNE was defined as a collegiate body of student

representation, attached to the ministry with responsibility for universities, equivalent to the Council of Universities (CU) for rectors or the General Conference on University Policy (CGPU) for councillors of the Autonomous Regions. As part of the “Estrategia Universidad 2015” (University Strategy 2015, ME, 2010, pp. 90-91), Royal Decree 1791/2010 of the EEU was issued, chapter XI of which is dedicated to the CEUNE. Article 47 defines its nature as a body for deliberation, consultation and participation of university students before the Government. Among other functions contained in Article 51, CEUNE is to be a channel for complaints and demands, and a body for interlocution, for students to make pronouncements and raise proposals before the Ministry.

At the organizational level, the CEUNE plenary is mainly made up of student representatives from every Spanish university, public or private. University students who are members of the state school board, regional student councils, confederations and persons appointed by the government are also present. As *ex officio* members of the plenary, the presidency is held by the minister of the branch, the first vice-presidency by the general secretary of universities, the second vice-presidency by a student representative elected by the plenary and the secretariat by a general directorate of the Ministry. CEUNE also has a Permanent Commission, specific commissions and representation in other forums or bodies such as the Advisory Council of the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) or the Observatory of Grants and Scholarships. As one can see, the composition of the CEUNE reflects the plurality and complexity of voices and ideological perspectives through two models of student organization: the representative and the associative (Parejo and Lorente, 2011).

Findings: An uneasy relationship through an uneasy decade

9th Legislature: The second administration of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero - Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) (2008-2011)

On April 5, 2011, five months after the approval of the EEU, the Ministry of Education called the first CEUNE meeting. At the plenary session, Minister Ángel Gabilondo remarked on the historic nature of that day. It was fulfilling one of the essential aspects of the EEU: placing students as full partners in the governance and modernization of the Spanish university system.

The entire university community is represented in equal proportion and with equal importance at all levels of government. You represent more than one-and-a-half-million university students. You have democratically deserved their trust. [...] The approval of the EEU is the beginning of a new stage in understanding the students' participation in the university and in the policies that affect you. [...] This body does not intend to be deliberative or representative; it is a participatory body (Europa Press, April 5, 2011).

According to the minister, the CEUNE would make it possible “not only to do things for the students, but to do them with the students, requiring us to coordinate processes and harmonize differences” (MECD 2011a, p. 13). This body was to be the framework that would provide not only legitimacy, but also efficiency and effectiveness to the normative agreements. Hence, participation was considered a democratic element. He also emphasized that the CEUNE should be a space of freedom for it to fulfil its purposes. It should be a space to make university policy, a

space —as stated in Art. 47.1. of the EEU —for information, consultation, dialogue and participation in decision-making on matters concerning students. Finally, he stressed that university students, with their representation in the CEUNE, “are participants in the social and ethical responsibility that is required of universities” (ME, 2011c).

Minister Gabilondo liked the CEUNE. He ended up believing in it, and he respected it at all times. He gave it its place and granted us the meetings we requested to discuss some aspects and listened to us attentively (...) For those of us who lived through that time, the CEUNE meant a lot. The Ministry who legislated for the EEU believed it was useful, and conversations proved it. The technical structure to support this project was useful as well. We were all beginners. I remember how I was invited to the opening ceremony of the universities in Santander, with the King, with Revilla, with the top brass. Although at first they were against it, the Ministry finally decided to pay for my trip because they considered it appropriate for someone who represents all university students to be there, for the first time (Interview with the Second Vice President of CEUNE in 2011-2012).

The main item on the plenary agenda was the election of the governing members of CEUNE, especially the Second Vice President. Each candidate requested votes through oral arguments. For instance, the student representatives of the private universities highlighted their experience of collaboration in the university and their links with the business world. Secondly, the FAEST association remarked on their role in the processing of the EEU. And thirdly, the representative and president of the Student Council of the University of Seville (CADUS) stated his critical position regarding government university policy and the necessary historical reconstruction of student representation. The fourth speaker, María José Romero Aceituno, president of the Student Council of the University of Cordoba and general secretary of the CREUP association, requested the vote based on her experience in student representation at the national level. She stated that she had the support of many of her colleagues and mentioned the CEUCAT (autonomous body of student representation in Catalonia) as an example of how the CEUNE should work. Finally, Estifen Tedejo, president of the Council of Delegations of the University of Salamanca and president of CIRECYL (autonomous body of student representation in Castilla y León), asked that the CEUNE should not be politicized, but rather, that it should simply be a body for dialogue between students and the Ministry. After the speeches, the representative of CEUCO and secretary general of CREUP, María José Romero Aceituno, was elected. “My speech was short, but I did claim that the only card I could play was that of my own identity and not that of any political party [...]” I did not understand anything that did not have to do with what I had been working with, that is, regulations on education and universities” (Interview with the Second Vice President of CEUNE in 2011-2012).

At the organizational level, the Secretary General of Universities (SGU) and First Vice President of the CEUNE, Màrius Rubiralta, explained the existence of joint commissions with the other two collegiate bodies (CU and CGPU): on financing, for the promotion of employability and on governance. He also explained the suitability of the creation of ad hoc commissions to deal with specific issues and in the four branches of education. Finally, he described the presence of students in other areas: in the Observatory of scholarships, grants and academic performance, in the Forum for the inclusion of students with disabilities, the ANECA, the Universidad.es Foundation, etc. For the participation of students in the different committees, a period for the presentation of candidates was established in coordination with the Standing Committee. Even so, the

model of organization and internal functioning of the CEUNE was to be specified in future Regulations. There was a gap between the functioning of the General State Administration and the students themselves, who did not have enough advice or experience.

And there I was, asking myself what I was doing there, a rural girl, studying veterinary medicine, because when the Minister or the State lawyers spoke, you felt out of place next to these people with so much training and experience. But I was clear about what I wanted and what I didn't want. Because everything I said in the negotiations or the plenary were CREUP decisions, and the student councils from universities backed me up (Interview with the Second Vice President of CEUNE in 2011-2012).

From the beginning, the students expressed their concern about the processing of the Law on Access to the Legal Profession. They asked for the information CEUNE had and debated its implications at the academic and professional level. They also asked questions about the increase of tuition fees in a period of economic crisis and the tightening of income-lending.

The second plenary session of CEUNE was held on May 17 (ME, 2011b). A key aspect of this session was the presentation of the draft regulations for the organization and internal functioning of CEUNE. Second Vice President María José Romero Aceituno presented a draft following the University council model. This regulation had to define which associations were to be part of the CEUNE that were not present in the State School Council. The substitutes, the commissions, their functioning, the composition and election of their members, and the working groups were to be defined as well. The regulation proposed that the plenary of the CEUNE should meet quarterly, like the other two collegiate bodies. It also proposed that, when regarding issues that concern public universities, only students of those universities should vote, and vice versa. He explained that a period of five months of allegations would be opened through an online system.

Another essential point of the plenary session was the public tuition fee policy. This policy is set by each Autonomous Community within a range set by the CGPU according to the degree of experimentality of the university course. The First Vice President pronounced himself in favour of a broader scholarship policy, based on the principle of social dimension, which contemplates a system of salaried scholarships so that no students are forced to work, as well as enabling a certain mobility in the field of study chosen by the student regardless of where it is taught. Students asked why regional governments restrict their investment in universities when tuition fees are raised according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Beatriz García, from the Student Union, and Manuel Gómez, from the University of Seville, criticized the current system for being unfair and abusive, especially to the children of the working class. They opposed the penalization of second and third enrolments during a crisis of unemployment, and the distinction between full-time and part-time students, the former being considered elite and the latter second-class. Likewise, García requested a public pronouncement from the Ministry in view of the police violence and eviction of the youth involved in the 15 M movement. Gómez requested a review of fiscal policy so that the system of university funding would be more powerful and progressive.

Finally, joint parity commissions were established, and representatives to the Scholarship Observatory and the Inclusion Forum were elected. The election of members and the organization of the teaching branch commissions are still pending.

10th Legislature. The administration of Mariano Rajoy – People's Party (PP) (2011-2015)

On the elections on November 20, the PP comfortably won with an absolute majority. In the new administration, led by Mariano Rajoy, the education portfolio was assigned to José Ignacio Wert, a sociologist by profession who would also act as spokesman for Mariano Rajoy's administration. In a context of severe economic crisis and great pressure from the European Commission and the Eurogroup to reduce debt through public spending, budget cuts were made in practically every sector of public spending, among which universities were particularly affected. Through the Decree-Law 14/2012 on the rationalization of public expenditure a significant increase in tuition fees was approved. Although the measure was enacted by the Council of Universities, the CEUNE was not called to discuss and report on this decree. By this inaction, the Council of Universities failed to comply with Article 51.a of Royal Decree 1791/2010, which requires it to inform CEUNE, and for it to report on the Government's policy proposals on student affairs. However, there was a meeting between the Minister and the Standing Committee, which the students left due to an inability to reach an agreement.

[...] Indeed, when we arrived at the meeting it was a total mess. We were going to address the issue of the increase in tuition fees, and the Minister almost jokingly came to tell us that he had no problem in validating this measure in Congress because he had an absolute majority (Interview with the Second Vice-President of CEUNE in 2011-2012).

Despite this, the CEUNE Standing Committee, made up of a majority of students, did not sit idly by. The same day of the approval of the increase in tuition fees in the Council of Ministers, the Committee issued a press release showing its radical opposition to this measure, as it forced many students to abandon their university studies at a time of severe economic crisis. "We will not tolerate it," said the CEUNE student representatives, who threatened with carrying out public demonstrations if the government did not rectify the situation. In response to the call for a large protest on May 22, several conservative newspapers began to publish articles that targeted student representatives of the CEUNE. In particular, the newspaper *La Razón* on its May 9 front page showed the faces of five student representatives under the headline "Bad students shake up education" (Ruiz and Rodríguez, 2012). This article offered the profiles of several student representatives trying to point out, with little truthful information, that the students were linked to the PSOE and had poor academic performance. "I was singled out as a left-wing radical, a hooligan, a profiteer of the system. Insults and lies were widespread in those days. That moment was truly bitter [...]" (Interview with Second Vice President of CEUNE in 2011-2012).

Finally, the Minister appeared before the CEUNE on July 2012 in an atmosphere of strong social discontent and political protest in response to the budget cuts. The Minister stated that the measures had a "markedly cyclical character", due to the "financial situation that the Spanish economy is going through, which entails a demand for greater efficiency in spending, in which institutions such as universities [...] are faced with the need to search for new funding sources or modify the balance between government and state contributions to improve financial sustainability" (MECD, 2012, p. 5). The minister's speech was strongly contested by the students from different positions. There were those who reproached him for not having called the CEUNE plenary session earlier. There were also those who accused him of calling for a plenary session when all the decisions had already been taken without the possibility for CEUNE to make a pronouncement. They also questioned the motivation of these measures, which in the voice of some students "have been taken, not

for the improvement and rationalization of public education, but to seek its dismantling” (MECD, 2012a, p.6). They also criticized their exclusion from the Commission of Experts for the Reform of the University System, announced on April 13. They justified their position by stating the following: “We are the *raison d’être* of the universities, and you have to count on our participation” (Gabinete de Comunicación de la Universidad de Córdoba, 2012). The tone of the meeting rose as the students’ interventions followed one another. The representatives of the Galician and Asturian universities decided to leave the plenary meeting after stating “there will be no support from the students if the Minister does not rectify this, and the response will be overwhelming in the streets” (MECD 2012a, p. 7). Likewise, a representative of the Pablo Olavide University sarcastically and ironically intervened: “we thank the Minister, on behalf of the students of Andalusia, for his management and reforms”. The Minister considered this to be an insult and complained that the intervention was out of line (MECD 2012a, p. 7).

In this same meeting, the Second Vice Presidency and the Permanent Commission were renewed, and Gabriel Martín from Carlos III University was elected. It was a vote won by a margin of 3 votes (26 against 23) and in which several students made interventions pointing out that in this plenary session there have been “many emails with computer errors and official authorizations” (MECD 2012a, p. 30). The representative of FAEST “expressed his discomfort with the calling of this plenary meeting, exposing that there are still no updated listings” (MECD 2012a, p. 27).

This entire legislature was marked by strong student mobilizations across the country, with several demonstrations and two general strikes. In this climate of tension and protest, the second plenary session of the legislature took place on December 18, 2012. This time, the Minister was not present. In his place, the SGU, Federico Morán chaired the meeting. For the following five years, no Minister would attend any meeting of this collegiate body, whose presidency is held by the figure of the Minister, resulting in an irregular operation, and motivating continuous complaints from the students for the “lack of respect” by the Minister and the consequent “deficit of participation”.

At this CEUNE Plenary meeting, the students once again expressed their dissatisfaction with the Ministry’s policy and its way of proceeding with the deadlines for the drafting of the Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE). They also criticized the fact that CEUNE was being asked to vote on the Royal Decree on Scholarships without having previously called the members of the Scholarship Observatory. The atmosphere of these meetings is characterized by a total lack of agreement. In every meeting, the resignation of the Minister was requested or demanded on several occasions and “the destruction of public education” was frequently invoked. However, there was also a group of students who, in the absence of effective dialogue, began to denounce the illegitimate nature of this body and decided to leave the meeting. This is how Adrián Dios, student representative of the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, let his “voice” be heard in the plenary session held on 18 December 2012:

Here there is no dialogue with students, there is a conflict, there is a curtailment of rights. That is the first thing we must be clear about. There is no dialogue here. This dialogue is false, it is merely lip service, as in the last CEUNE meeting: we came here to hear reforms that had already been approved by the Government, and once again we come here to be treated as merchandise. I am not going to stay! He [the Minister] has not even set foot in here in six months! How can we all be here, legitimizing an

unprecedented attack on public universities, on public education, and continuing to benefit the ones who always win? It is a shame that we are here! And it is a shame that we must listen to these speeches...! (Liga Estudiantil Gallega, 2012).

The protests against Minister Wert and its policies would continue during 2013 with the call for strikes and protests of different types, among which we must mention the protest by the students who received the national prize upon graduating. At the diploma ceremony, some of the student refused to greet the Minister and wore T-shirts with slogans in defence of public education. This climate of a lack of understanding permeated the functioning of the CEUNE, which in the meeting of July 10, 2013 an act of protest when the SGU proposed a change in the functioning of the meeting by discussing all of the agenda items in a row, and leaving the interventions for the end of the session. This provoked Daniel Ramón Lumbierres, representative of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, to start a symbolic act of protest by sitting on the floor of the Plenary hall together with several colleagues until, after some time, the SGU finally agreed to return to the original meeting format. During this protest, the minutes of the meeting reflect the emergence of tensions between the various student representatives. In particular, the work of the Second Vice President, the student Gabriel Martín and his defence of the interests of students is called into question. When calling the vote on the report on the Royal Decree on income thresholds for the 2013/2014 academic year, the Second Vice President abstained, differentiating his vote from the large majority of 34 votes against 4 abstentions and the presentation by the students of an alternative text. This disparity of votes would cause part of the students to start asking for the resignation of the Second Vice President because his votes were not correctly representing the ongoing work.

In this same plenary meeting, the document of the committee of experts on the improvement of the Spanish university system was presented, which among its final recommendations included “encouraging direct contact between companies and universities, facilitating internationalization and strengthening vocational training and Higher education” (MECD, 2013, p. 16). The Second Vice-President stated that the Permanent Commission had issued its own report, which was critical. For many CEUNE members the proposals of the Committee of experts “limit and exclude the role of students in the governance of universities” and dwelled on the scholarship system, stating that “[it] is insufficient and deficient, and so it requires more investment in scholarships, the opposite of what is taking place” (MECD, 2013, p. 15). They also complained about the decrease in investment in mobility programs such as ERASMUS. It was considered that the increase in tuition fees could increase the biases of inequity and expulsion of students with lower incomes. All the student interventions recorded in the minutes express a broad rejection of the contents of the report and call into question the intentions of the Ministry, expressing their distrust about how the reform is going to be carried out. The CEUNE report was negative, an alternative text of the students was approved, and a manifesto was presented by a group of students denouncing the Ministry’s unwillingness to listen. The manifesto is included as an annex to the minutes:

We understand that we cannot continue participating in this circus where we are treated as clowns and in which the feelings of the university community of the Spanish State are not reflected at all. We believe that we cannot maintain an open channel of communication with the Ministry until it withdraws the brutal increase in fees that creates an economic apartheid, rectifies its arrogant and Spanish-centric attitude of not attending to the requests and pleas of the educational community,

stops trying to enact the new scholarship policy and ceases its efforts to attack the autonomy and university democracy as stated in the latest expert report (MECD, 2013, Annex I).

In June 2015, Minister Wert, at his own request, was removed from office. This caused joy among student representatives who read it as a victory of their sustained student mobilization over time. Although public tuition fees did not decrease and public spending on scholarships is lower than before the crisis, the reform of the degrees into a 3+2 system and the expert report did not lead to a new university law. The new minister, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, introduced in the students some hope for an improvement in the functioning of the CEUNE. These hopes were quickly frustrated: in the meeting of July 17, 2015, the Minister once again failed to attend, and the dynamics of student interlocution continued along the same channels. The students continued to denounce the malfunctioning of the collegiate body, but also expressed their desire to participate more: “university students want to participate in the exercise of competences, management and everything related to university degrees” (MECD, 2015, p. 6). The claim to have their own regulations reappeared, but the lack of agreement on the text means that it was not voted on. The legislature ended and the CEUNE would not meet again until 2017, after a 2016 marked by uncertainty, electoral repetition and the temporary period of an acting administration.

Discussion and conclusions

The social dimension has been a constant concern of students at the European level since the declaration of the Bologna Process (ESU, 2011). Since the increase in public tuition fees in 2012, with rises of up to 66% in the cost of undergraduate and Master's degrees, the top demand of students has been reducing tuition fees to pre-economic crisis levels. Outside of CEUNE, the top demand within the core of the student movement has been disapproval of the elitist nature of this measure, the lack of protection for students from the most vulnerable families and, consequently, the expulsion of thousands of students from the university system. Within the CEUNE, students have confronted and called for the resignation of Minister Wert on many occasions, and after the end of the economic crisis they have developed an agenda to facilitate the reduction of public tuition fees, either by lowering the price of the ECTS credit in the negotiation of public tuition fees, or by eliminating the differences in fees between Autonomous Communities. Through motions in the plenary meeting, and above all, through negotiations in the permanent commission, the students have shifted from a situation of conflict to agreeing with the Ministry in some issues.

Likewise, the evolution of the scholarship system has been the other major topic of discussion within CEUNE. The creation of this body, with the capacity to report on Decree Laws on matters affecting students in a context of economic crisis and cuts in social expenditure, has acted as a vector for channelling the student sector. During Wert's mandate, the approval of Decree Laws without submittance to the CEUNE for review was a common practice, and so was not calling the Scholarship Observatory to session. According to the report *Las cifras de la Educación en España* (2022), during the 2013-2014 academic year, state expenditure on scholarships amounted to 1.444,5 million euros for the system as a whole. That amount is 258 million euros lower than in the 2011-2012 academic year.

There are two levels of governance in CEUNE. Internally, CEUNE has been operating without specific regulations since its creation. Although several drafts have been made, they have encountered

various administrative obstacles or have not reached the necessary consensus among students to be approved. The result has been that, since their operating rules have not been officially defined beyond the general regulation of law 40/2015, students do not have enough clarity to know in which framework they are operating. This has led to dysfunctionalities, such as the absence of Ministers and the alteration of agendas, the voting format or even the matters that could be included in the agenda, which depended on the political will of the Ministry. Externally, the discussion on university governance has been located in two specific moments in which the majority of CEUNE members have been against the government's proposals. During Wert's term of office with the *Report of the Commission of Experts* (2013), a managerialist model was proposed that gave more weight to the social councils, to the detriment of the current model of weighted representation of sectors and eliminating student participation (Luescher Mamashela, 2010). These developments have limited the student voice present in the representative student government through the CEUNE (Klemenčič and Park, 2018).

The functioning of the CEUNE has gone through several stages. These stages have conditioned the expression of the students' voice, their leaving the CEUNE or remaining in it (Hirschman, 1986). From its promising and exciting beginning during the period of Minister Gabilondo, through its blockage, inoperability, and lethargy during the period of Ministers Wert and Méndez de Vigo. The discourse of student freedom and participation in the university system has been transforming from a reactive position to a proactive agenda. The arrival of progressive governments with Ministers Duque (2018), Castells (2020) and Subirats (2021) has enabled a progressive reactivation of the CEUNE and favoured student participation and dialogue in at least four matters: a more active participation in the scholarship policy, the negotiation of the new university law proposed in 2022, the increase in the number of meetings, and the introduction of motions for the expansion of student rights and freedoms. These issues shape a new model for a university that embraces the inclusion, sustainability and deepening of democracy required to address and face the challenges of the 21st century.

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Resumen

La agenda política de participación de los estudiantes universitarios en el Consejo de Estudiantes Universitario del Estado de España

INTRODUCCIÓN. En la última década, el movimiento estudiantil en las universidades españolas ha evolucionado desde un modelo de participación asociativo y asambleario hasta la formación de los consejos de estudiantes como órganos de representación estudiantil con fuerte influencia en los órganos de gobierno de las universidades. Además, la constitución del Consejo de Estudiantes Universitarios del Estado (CEUNE), como máximo órgano de representación de los estudiantes a nivel nacional para intermediar sus intereses ante el Gobierno, ha posibilitado el despliegue de una agenda política de sus miembros a lo largo de la última década. **MÉTODO.** El objetivo de esta investigación es reconstruir los contextos en los que se desarrollan las políticas universitarias estudiantiles para describir y analizar la evolución de los debates, acuerdos y desacuerdos que se han generado en el seno de este órgano. A través del análisis del discurso, se triangulará la información procedente de las actas de las reuniones del CEUNE, los manifiestos estudiantiles, la prensa y las entrevistas a informantes clave. **RESULTADOS.** En este artículo se discute el papel de CEUNE a la hora de influir en la política universitaria a través de temas clásicos (becas o precios públicos) y su capacidad para introducir nuevos temas en la agenda. **DISCUSIÓN.** Por último, analizamos si los distintos gobiernos han planificado sus actividades en colaboración con los representantes estudiantiles.

Palabras clave: *Participación estudiantil, Estudiantes universitarios, Toma de decisiones participativa, Organizaciones estudiantiles, Gobierno.*

Résumé

L'agenda politique pour la participation des étudiants universitaires au Conseil Étudiants Universitaires dans l'État Espagnol

INTRODUCTION. Au cours de la dernière décennie, les mouvements des étudiants dans les universités espagnoles ont passés d'un modèle de participation basé sur l'association et l'assemblée à la formation de conseils étudiants comme d'organes de représentation des étudiants ayant une forte influence sur les organes de direction des universités. En outre, la constitution du Conseil Étudiants Universitaire de l'État (CEUNE), en tant qu'organe suprême représentant les étudiants au niveau national et chargé d'arbitrer leurs intérêts auprès du gouvernement, a permis à ses membres de mettre en place un programme politique au cours de la dernière décennie. **MÉTHODE.** L'objectif de cette recherche est de reconstruire les contextes dans lesquels les politiques universitaires étudiantes sont développées afin de décrire et d'analyser l'évolution des débats, des accords et des désaccords qui ont été générés au sein de cet organisme. Les informations provenant des procès-verbaux des réunions du CEUNE, des manifestes des étudiants, de la presse et des entretiens avec les informateurs clés seront triangulées par le biais d'une analyse du discours. **RÉSULTATS.** Cet article examine le rôle du CEUNE dans l'influence de la politique universitaire par le biais de questions classiques (bourses ou prix publics) et sa capacité à introduire de nouvelles questions à l'ordre du jour.

DISCUSSION. Finalement, nous analysons si les différents gouvernements ont planifié leurs activités en collaboration avec les représentants des étudiants.

Mots-clés : Participation des étudiants, Étudiants universitaires, Prise de décisions participative, Organisations d'étudiants, Gouvernement.

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