

# **Creativity as an organizational issue**

**The transformation of the French higher education  
landscape**

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- Creativity at the level of a national system
- The emergence of new forms of regulation
- The creation of new organizational forms aimed at becoming the future French Universities

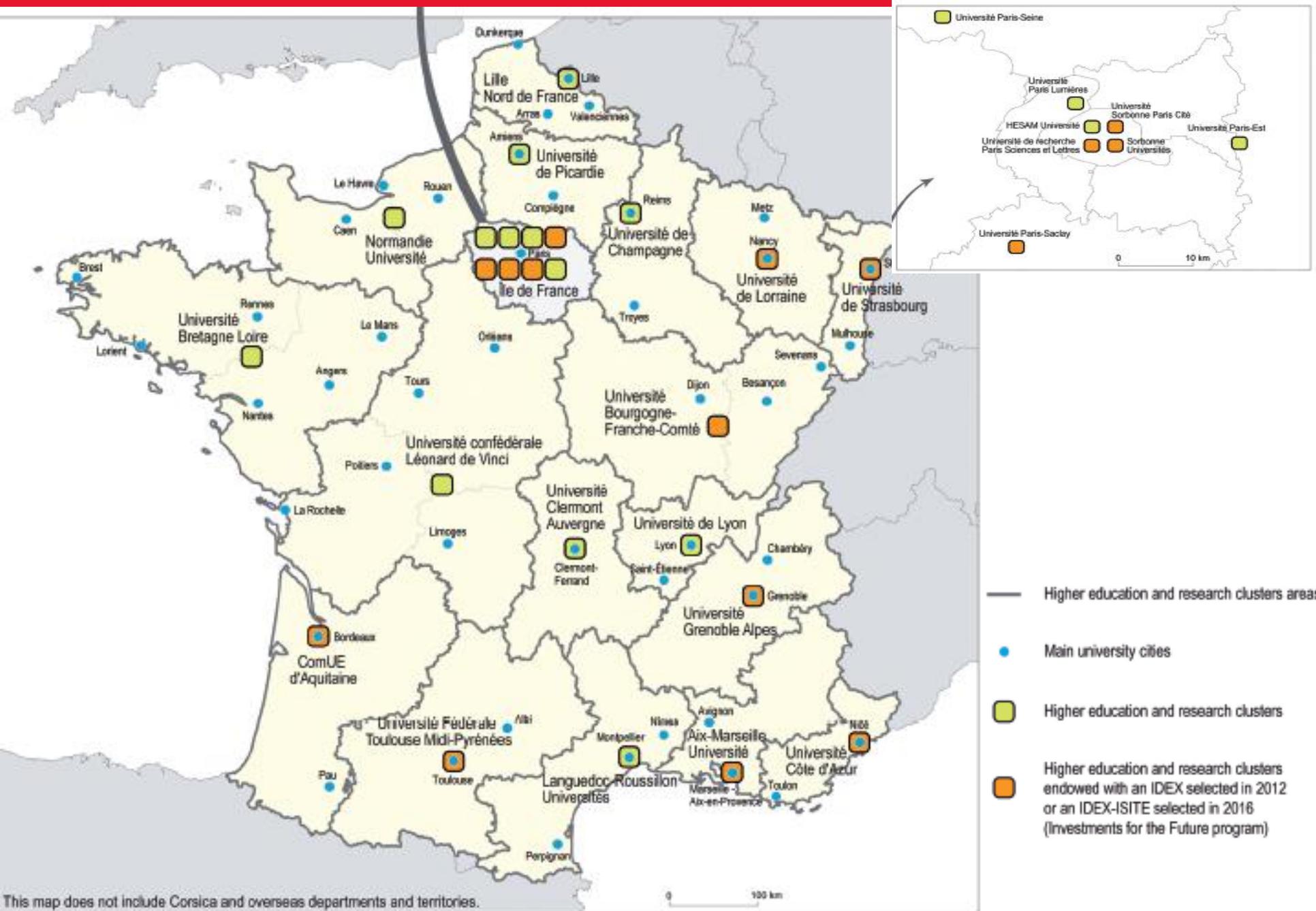
# **RAPID PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

- Main characteristics of the French higher education and research system
  - Three main institutional sectors: universities, *grandes écoles*, national research institutions
  - A central and uniform regulation of the university sector
    - Same missions, same structures, same status for the university staff
    - Principle of equivalence on whole France
    - Central regulation from the ministry
    - A mix of ministerial micro-management AND local autonomy invisible from Paris

- A tradition of centralized co-management of the ministry and the academic profession
  - Between the ministerial administration and some representatives of the academic profession
  - Focused on discipline-based decisions/procedures until the 1990s
  - Relying on discipline-based and institution-based issues since the contractual policies
  - Two main influences of these ministerial and academic centers
    - On the decisions made
    - On the transformation of the system

# **MAIN TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE RECENT YEARS**

- Two main transformations of the French higher education system in the last decade
  - Increasing competition and differentiation
  - Remodeling of the higher education and research landscape
    - National objective: bringing universities, *grandes écoles* and research organizations together  
Solution: consortiums of institutions located at the “same place” (PRES and since 2013 COMUE)
    - International objective: “Shanghai ranking”  
Solution: readability and visibility



# TWO DIFFERENT DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

- Increasing competition and differentiation:
  - New discourse about performance
  - New instruments: agencification (ANR, AERES now HCERES), national calls for proposals (Grand Emprunt, Plan Campus, ...)
  - New practices
  - But a rather traditional way of ministerial steering

- Remodeling of the higher education and research landscape: organizational creativity
  - Traditional forms of regulations, on the one hand
    - The PRES in the 2006 act
    - Calls for the creation of PRES
    - Call for Idex imposing the PRES (not the single institutions) as the applicants
    - The 2013 act and the consortiums (COMUE)

- But in fact a long trend of national and local initiatives or ideas

European poles of excellence 1991

CNE evaluation by sites mid 90s

Attali report of 1998

2004 national round tables

Réseau des Universités de l'Ouest-Atlantique 1998

Association Université de Bretagne 2001

Grenoble universités 2004

Merger of the Strasbourg universities

- Coming from different groups, or bodies, not only from the two centers

European poles of excellence 1991  
(**ministry**)

CNE evaluation by sites mid 90s  
(**agency**)

Attali report of 1998  
(**committee**)

2004 national round tables  
(**academics**)

Réseau des Universités de l'Ouest-Atlantique 1998  
(**universities**)

Association Université de Bretagne 2001  
(**universities and some grandes écoles**)

Grenoble universités 2004  
(**CPU, universities and INPG**)

Merger of the Strasbourg universities  
(**Universities**)

- Based on the same shared normative beliefs (Boudon)
  - Critical size
  - Complete universities for interdisciplinarity
  - Simplify and make readable
  - Strong governance

- Diffusion through normative isomorphism rather than coercive (ministerial) isomorphism. Mergers as a case-study
  - Strasbourg universities as one of the first movers... against the ministry
  - Some universities quickly decided to follow this example
  - The call for Idex as a further vector
  - The interpretation of the results of the call, as an incentive
  - The inscription of mergers as a possible choice in the 2013 act

- A diffusion facilitated by a nebula of reformers
  - A rather stable group of believers that diffuse their faith and occupy strategic positions
  - They act as mediators between the center and the periphery
    - Relay and support of local initiatives
    - Relay and support of national orientations

# CONCLUSION

- The French higher education system is going through a rather important remodeling
- Organizational creativity is at stake
- It is only partially successful (from the organizational point of view)
  - The management of the consortiums faces many problems
  - The mergers are limited to universities and the grandes écoles / universities / research organizations project is not working that well either
- Strong belief that organizational issues have an impact on performance (and creativity)

**Thank you for your attention**

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