

The international alliance strategies of French universities and prestigious civil service schools: What the analysis has contributed regarding coopetition

*Les stratégies d'alliance à l'international
des universités françaises et des écoles de service public:
l'apport de l'analyse en termes de coopétition*

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation of the knowledge economy has modified all references of French higher education institutions as well as their potential opportunities. In this context, the question of the relevance of existing strategies for positioning abroad becomes even more significant. It is especially significant for collaborations between public training systems in a sector that is both increasingly competitive and strictly supervised by the government (specifically political orientations, resource allocation, & diplomas). Coopetition analysis helps further our understanding of the conditions and challenges related to certain forms of cooperation that are

being established between public stakeholders in training on an international level. This article explores the opportunities and collaboration logic between rival stakeholders through the case study of a coopetition strategy in the Middle East. It also provides context for the difficulties faced by these cooperation efforts resulting in a public management training.

Key-words

Internationalisation, Cooperative competition, Coopetition, Higher education, Public management.

RÉSUMÉ

La mondialisation de l'économie de la connaissance a modifié l'ensemble des référentiels des établissements d'enseignement supérieur en France ainsi que leurs champs d'opportunité. Dans ce contexte, la question de la pertinence des stratégies existantes de positionnement à l'international se pose avec acuité, notamment pour ce qui est de la collaboration entre les dispositifs de formation

publics dans un secteur à la fois fortement encadré par l'État (orientations politiques, attributions des ressources, diplômes) et de plus en plus concurrentiel. L'analyse en termes de coopétition permet d'approfondir les conditions et les enjeux relatifs à certains modes de coopération qui se mettent en place entre acteurs publics de formation au niveau international. Cet article, illustré par un cas de stratégie de coopétition au Moyen Orient, explore les opportunités et logiques de collaboration

entre des acteurs qui se trouvent *a priori* en situation de concurrence et met en perspective les difficultés de telles coopérations avec pour résultat l'aboutissement d'une formation en management public.

Mots-clés

Internationalisation, Stratégie de coopération, Enseignement supérieur, Management public.

INTRODUCTION

In a globalised market, all stakeholders in the training sector are confronted with challenges as well as new opportunities. For the past twenty years, France, like other European countries, has had to comply with joint rules (such as the bachelor's master's doctorate system reform that came out of the Bologna Process) and manage constraints relating to the open market (Musselin, 2008).

There has been widespread competition for access to talented pools of people (e.g., teachers, researchers, and students) as well as pressure from widespread use of assessments (Knight, 1999, p.256) or other means of measuring the performance of these actors both on a national and international level, often in the form of ranking and distinction policies (such as excellence initiatives). These methods place universities and other institutions responsible for initial and continuing education in an increasingly competitive situation (Veltz, 2007; Leverd, 2011). Furthermore, the quest for better performance (Lafarge, 2009) and the tension between needs and public resources have led to a quest for external funding, whether that be in the form of research contracts or advising and training services for external clients. Following changes in public policies, some countries such as England have chosen to increase tuition fees for students receiving their initial training in universities (Casta, 2010). In France, provinces and territories are supporting

access to new funding and the internationalisation of universities (Jean, 2017). These changes are not without consequences on the evolution and behaviour of various actors in the French training system. In fact, there is a distinct dichotomy in France between the university system and the Grandes Écoles which have historically developed in opposition to one another. Each of these two groupings has its own defining characteristics and mode of operation.

The objective of this article is to study why certain stakeholders choose to develop cooperation strategies internationally on targeted projects--despite their different positions and interests--in the context of the globalisation of the training market. The study on which the article is based relates to a specific field of activities: public management training. This type of training is connected to both the university model (for academic training and research) and the Grandes Écoles model, specifically civil service schools which ensure the practical training of government workers and which traditionally operate using the Grandes Écoles model (Desforges *et al.*, 2011)¹.

As it happens, both the academic training and the practical training in public management provided in French civil service schools enjoy an excellent reputation abroad. As a result, they are in a potential rivalry and a situation where they offer complementary services. Moreover, the field of public management is of particular interest for the issues examined in this article given that it studies the principles, mechanisms,

¹ The general civil service schools include: the Ecole nationale d'administration (ENA), the Institut nationale des études territoriales (INET), and the Ecole des hautes études en santé publique (EHESP) responsible for training executives and leaders in the three major aspects of civil service, namely: French government administration (for the ENA), provincial government (for the INET), and public health & hospitals (for the EHESP). At all three schools, public management is an essential part of the curriculum [URL: <https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/score/ecoles-de-formation>] (link in French). Twenty-eight General Administration Preparation Institutions (IPAGs) and General Administration Preparation Centres (CPAGs) are also located across France [URL: <https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/score/preparations-aux-concours/instituts-ipag-et-centres-cpag>] (link in French). In universities and other Grandes Écoles, public management is taught in different management schools and in Instituts d'administration des entreprises (IAEs). Business schools (such as HEC, EM Normandie, and EM Lyon), on the other hand, have chairs dedicated to this theme. It should be remarked that while the ENA belongs to the Conférence des grandes écoles (CGE), it is not authorised to award national diplomas. Furthermore, it falls under the purview of the Prime Minister's department, not the Ministry for Higher Education and Research.

and stakeholders that control management of public services and the public sector more generally. Through paradigms driven by new public management, the tools of the public sector have themselves profoundly affected the field of higher education and research. The article endeavours to improve our understanding of how rival French public actors have formed an alliance to answer an international call for tenders in public management training.

We will put forward the concept of cooperative competition, or cooptation, as a mechanism for understanding forces that push organisations that are rivals in certain aspects of their training operations (namely, the French market for training) to cooperate on a specific, innovative project abroad². We will subsequently analyse the modalities of this type of cooperation as well as the challenges it poses and the opportunities it creates. The first part of this article provides the context and theoretical framework for cooptation. The second part presents the methodology and results of a single case study before entering into an analysis of cooptation between public actors.

1. A NEW CONTEXT

for implementing international strategic cooperation on training

The globalisation of the knowledge economy challenges the established balance between two types of French higher education institutions: universities and the *Grandes Écoles* (Menger *et al.*, 2015). Universities are among the most globalised

institutions (Marginson, 2008) and as a result, they try to position themselves well internationally (Bourcieu & Léon, 2011). Transnational teaching establishments are developed by traditional, world-renowned universities (Knight, 2006, p.21) with varying types of contractual agreements regarding name usage³ (franchising, double degrees, etc.). Some agreements (e.g., New York University & La Sorbonne) have remained in place in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while others have been dissolved (Gueraiche, 2012) due to financial difficulties or issues with the quality of teaching⁴.

French higher education establishments are faced with foreign stakeholders, some of whom are very powerful and operating on a global scale (Marginson, 2008), as well as significant changes in the demand for training around the world (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008). These establishments must therefore establish their place among the international competition and assert the high quality of their training, their experience, and their reputation (Strassel, 2018). At a governmental level, this positioning is in keeping with France's political willingness to defend its economic interests and its cultural model⁵. For their part, French civil service schools (operating using the *Grandes Écoles* model but aiming to train directly operational civil service managers) are also involved in these issues given their continued involvement in public management training as well as their growing involvement in the professional training market. The context for this situation includes a dual desire to influence and contribute to promoting the French model of public administration at the same time that there is a general decrease in operations allocations granted

² It should be noted that universities and business schools that teach public management are not truly in an overtly competitive relationship with civil service schools in the French job market given that these two types of actors serve different segments. Based on the results of specific competitive exams, civil service schools primarily train civil service agents. The training provided by universities and business schools, on the other hand, is aimed at: people who may take the competitive exam for civil service training (in which case the training is simply training prior to the training offered in civil service schools), people who will be working in the parapublic sector (consultants, semi-public companies, etc.), or people who may join the civil service as contract workers (a category that accounts for approximately 20% of Category A positions across the civil service field. Rapport annuel sur l'état de la fonction publique, Faits et chiffres, [Annual report on the state of civil service: Facts and figures] DGAFP, Ed. 2017, p.185).

³ Knight, 2006, *ibidem* p.23-26.

⁴ In 2005, Michigan State University, one of the Ivy League universities, decided not to establish a branch in Dubai; Southern Queensland University (Australia) decided the same for the UAE; in 2009, George Mason University withdrew from the Emirates.

⁵ As evidenced by having activities relating to sustainable development, promoting companies, international economics, tourism, culture, education, and research grouped together under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Development since 2016 within a Department for Globalisation, Culture, Education, and International Development (ex. Department of Globalisation). Decree n° 2016-1889 from 27 December 2016 modifying Decree no. 2012-1511 from 28 December 2012 regarding the organisation of the central administration of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

by the government and a growing need to develop supplemental financial resources⁶.

This evolution involves a clear vision of the strategic issues and an explicit willingness of establishment leaders to develop training activities in other countries. Such an objective requires a paradigm shift to bring together skilled actors and share the essential resources (both intellectual and material in nature) so that innovative training projects can be proposed and foreign markets can be accessed.

This reflection examines the implementation of joint projects and alliances beyond the coexistence of French universities and the Grandes Écoles in professional networks relating to a specific theme or discipline⁷. More specifically, this study is interested in the conditions for developing a coopetition strategy internationally between an administration school and a university in the field of public management. After providing a reminder of the definitions and scope of the concept of coopetition, we will examine elements of its strategic and managerial implementation. The reference literature cited here highlights that these strategies are particularly appropriate for organisations in networks, international activities, and research and development projects.

1.1. Is cooperative competition, or coopetition, a paradigm shift for higher education and training establishments?

A coopetition strategy is a combination of cooperation and competitive confrontations (Koenig, 1996). It involves simultaneously developing links based on competition and cooperation with the same partner-adversary (Dagnino, 2007). Research into coopetition is caught between the competitive paradigm that recommends confrontations between organisations (D'Aveni *et al.*, 1995) and the relational

paradigm that suggests cooperation is the best method (Smith *et al.*, 1995; Teece, 1992). The ability to be cooperative could then become the basis for competitiveness, creating a beneficial relationship and a reputation as an ally, unlike the opportunistic behaviour of profiting unilaterally from the cooperation efforts taken by the partner (Cabon-Dhersin, 2003). According to game theory, an adversary can become an ally in a future interaction and vice versa (Brandenburger *et al.*, 1995, 1996). Coopetition represents an alternative strategy that allows organisations to manage the paradox of being both rivals of and partners with other organisations (Astley *et al.*, 1983; Dagnino *et al.*, 2002; Dyer *et al.*, 2008; Gnyawali *et al.*, 2008; Le Roy *et al.*, 2013).

Initially driven by game theory, this dual strategic behaviour allows organisations to benefit from both relationship modes and combine the advantages for several reasons:

- the organisations have complementary resources or services (Brandenburger *et al.*, 1995, 1996),
- the organisations have complementary resources or services (Brandenburger *et al.*, 1995, 1996),
- a strong position in a sector combined with a significant need for resources leads an organisation towards a strategy of coopetition (Bengtsson *et al.*, 1999, 2000).

Cooperation and competition can therefore both come into play at different points. This is the most complex and the most advantageous relationship that allows actors to enjoy the benefits of both cooperative and competitive relationships (Le Roy *et al.*, 2011). Several forms of associations can enter into the framework of coopetition strategies: a horizontal agreement between fairly similar

⁶ It should be noted that like universities and the other Grandes Écoles, civil service schools offer what is referred to as initial training (for people who do well on the civil service access competitive exam, since it is an application school). However, it also offers continuing education, both in the form of regulatory training (mandatory training to access certain positions or responsibilities in senior management) and training for people who wish to improve themselves or reorient towards the public sector.

⁷ Like many French and foreign universities with training for public administration or public management, certain civil service schools like the ENA or INET are members of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) or its specialised branch the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA).

organisations (Le Roy *et al.*, 2011) that can be described as organisms operating in the same market coming together; vertical relationships (Depeyre et Dumez, 2009) such as the relationship between customers and suppliers and between organisations that are fairly different from one another (Luo, 2005; Tsai, 2002); and organisations coming together at different levels (Gnyawali et Park, 2009). These strategies, mostly studied in the context of the private sector, can now be observed in the associations formed between public actors.

1.2. Network-based strategies and cooperative behaviours

Unlike the two schools of thought that dominate the theoretical field and that related to the rivalry paradigm (D'Aveni *et al.*, 1995) or the cooperative paradigm (Smith *et al.*, 1995), more recent work on cooptation seems to put forward another consensus. It is that

cooptation has positive effects on the performance of institutions that adopt it as a strategy. When it comes to rivalries, cooptation makes it possible to preserve competitive pressures that foster innovation (Bengtsson et Kock, 2000). Furthermore, much research highlights the superior performance obtained through cooptation strategies (Child et Faulkner, 1998; Fjeldstad *et al.*, 2004; Lado *et al.*, 1997; Luo *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, other studies on the behaviour of companies tend to show the opposite (Maltz et Kohli, 1996; Rindfleisch et Moorman, 2003). These differences can be explained by the multidimensional nature of cooptation, the methods of measurement used, and the theories mobilised (Table 1). Reading these tools helps provide us with elements for analysing performance, but it also helps highlight the criteria that lead to adopting the strategy in question and the mechanisms that can augment its effects (e.g., resources, networks, etc.).

According to Dagnino *et al.* (2007) cooptation is: “the relationship strategy that leaders should

AUTHORS	HYPOTHESIS DEFENDED	THEORY MOBILISED	MEASUREMENT OF COOPTATION
Tsai (2002)	Appropriate coordination mechanisms make it possible to promote the exchange of resources and knowledge between units in a firm.	Resources approach Organisational learning theory	Knowledge exchanged
Bengtsson and Solvell (2004)	Coopetitive relationships within clusters encourage the innovation process.	Industrial economy Social networks theory	Customer relations Relations with suppliers
Gnyawali, He and Madhavan (2006)	Coopetitive networks influence the competitive behaviours of companies.	Competition-based dynamic Social networks theory	Total number of competitive actions Competitive variety Market diversity
Luo <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Cooptation promotes organisational learning and indirectly impacts the performance of companies.	Organisational learning theory	Coopetitive capacity Coopetitive intensity
Andrevski, Ferrier and Bras (2007)	The competitive behaviour of a company is determined by the characteristics of the network in which it operates.	Competition-based dynamic Social networks theory	Intensity and complexity of competitive repertoires

Table 1 – Information provided by the major efforts to measure cooptation

Source: extract from *Stratégies de coopération*, Fernandez *et al.*, 2010 in (Yami *et al.*, 2010, p.107)

favour to boost their company's performance". These strategies often develop in sectors: where actors need to demonstrate creativity and share information (Gnyawali *et al.*, 2008), where products and services are complex or high-intensive in terms of research and development (Gnyawali et Park, 2009; 2011), where a breakthrough strategy needs to be implemented (Mariani, 2007), and in network-based industries (Fjeldstad *et al.*, 2004). However, in opportune situations or sectors, certain organisations deliberately choose not to work with their rivals (Gnyawali et Park, 2009) while others base their entire strategy on coopetition. In fact, belonging to networks strongly influences the competitive--or cooperative--behaviour of institutions. When an institution is accustomed to exchanging information, working in a network, and collaborating with others, it views adopting a coopetition strategy more favourably than an institution that is closed off from others.

1.3. Characteristics and influences of coopetition strategies in a globalised economy

As we move towards globalisation and increasingly open markets, the environment of organisations is continually evolving. The turbulence and

environmental instabilities inherent to this process must be controlled by moving from a collective strategy to a more competitive one and vice versa (Bresser et Harl, 1986; Ibert, 2004). Public actors, like the private companies studied in the literature, have been led to collaborate to improve performance (Lorino, 1999).

The simple existence of a dialectic relationship between collective & competitive strategies entails organisations: remaining vigilant regarding possible malfunctions in their strategies, maintaining their ability to alternate between collective and competitive strategies, remaining alert regarding their ability to adapt and the reactivity of their partner-adversaries, and being able to take into account their own interests and those of their partner-adversaries. A coopetition alliance is a cooperative or collaborative policy framework that establishes a link between at least two institutions. This link may involve exchanges, sharing, co-development, and more (Gulati, 1995) with the understanding that this type of alliance requires several criteria in order to succeed. However, relationships between institutions are rarely perfect despite efforts undertaken to plan for and anticipate any areas of potential friction. There are also several negative aspects associated with the criteria for success. They are indexed by the reference literature (Table 2).

AUTHORS	Criteria guaranteeing the success of a coopetition strategy	AUTHORS	Risk factors for a coopetition approach
<p>Gulati & Singh, 1998; Chin et al., 2008; Jorde & Teece, 1989; Teece, 1992.</p>	<p>Shared objectives Confidence Equity Transparency Co-specialised resources Institutionalisation Joint complementary nature Self-discipline</p>	<p>Parkhe, 1991, 1998; Hamel & Prahalad, 1989; Hannachi et al., 2010; Hamel, 1991; Chen, 2008.</p>	<p>Asymmetric information Imbalance Dissimulation Conflict of interest Race for learning Preservation of specific advantages Hidden agenda Lack of institutionalisation</p>

Table 2 – The risk factors and success factors of a coopetition strategy
Source: Compilation by the authors

The place of a truly “constructive” strategic effort here must be highlighted—constructive in the sense that it tends to consider cooperation as an opportunity for learning (Hamel, 1991; Tsang, 1999) and technology transfers by defining specific internalisation goals aimed at rectifying a “knowledge gap” or gaining specific skills (Hall, 2000). The concept of leadership seems essential to leading new projects and adopting new models. In fact, the ability to motivate the collective in an atmosphere of trust and transparency is a determining factor (Shamir *et al.*, 1993; Chin *et al.*, 2008). Transparency, an indispensable element for consolidating alliances and promoting learning, is influenced by:

- The design of organisational interfaces between partners;
- The content of contracts; they detail the terms for coming together and the rules for resolving conflicts;
- The structuring of joint tasks;
- The control of daily interactions (e.g., role of staff at interfaces, limitations on areas of contact and fields that can be controlled, etc);
- The self-discipline of employees and assurance of their loyalty;
- The ability of the staff in contact with the partner to protect and get information.

First and foremost, choosing a coopetition strategy involves paradigm shifts at several levels regarding the strategic behaviour of an organisation. It involves working jointly with other operators (who may be rivals) in the same market. The actors must ensure that an innovative joint project between rigid institutions in cumbersome structures is institutionalised with a structure that can evolve. The entire effort must be based on shared project management practices for mobilising teams because differences in management cultures between organisations can be noticeably felt on this point.

The study of coopetition strategies as presented in the academic literature as well as the characteristics of the research and higher education sector lead us to wonder to what extent these strategies can be found in the sector. Through an example in the field of public management training, we will show how certain institutions in this sector have appropriated these strategies and how they have implemented them.

2. EXAMPLE OF COOPETITION

in the field of public management training

In the field of training, coopetition strategies between major schools and universities mainly pertain to the creation of joint curricula. These actions often take the form of high value-added trainings such as master’s programmes targeting a specific public, especially working executives and leaders. Before presenting a case of cooperation involving universities and major schools, the context in which these forms of coopetition are adopted must be mentioned. Specifically, the existence of incentives from public authorities to promote the development of strategies that move in this direction must be examined.

2.1. From globalisation to internationalisation: incentives to implement a coooperative process in training

The globalisation of the knowledge economy calls into question the existing balance between the various French higher education institutions. Public training in public management is also subject to the cumulative effect of several factors:

- Widespread access to education (Scott, 1998);
- Global diffusion of knowledge by digitalising information (Kapur et Crowley, 2008);
- International mobility of students and researchers (Eyebiyi *et al.*, 2014);
- Digitalisation of knowledge (Smeby et Trondal, 2005);
- The impact of classifications in research, budget allocations, and international visibility (Carayol *et al.*, 2015);
- Public policies of decentralisation and territorial issues (Ingallina, 2012);
- The internationalisation and academisation of the Grandes Écoles business schools (Menger *et al.*, 2015);
- Increasing alliances and mergers of high-level business and management schools (Durand et Dameron, 2008);

- Competition between university centres and research incentives (Martimort, 2015).

From the perspective of public authorities, all of this contributes to the necessary identification of new ways to develop and strengthen French national institutions competing globally. The change is profound even if it is due to external pressure and influenced by the dominant model provided by international assessments and classifications: training becomes a service like any other for universities, and their services are subject to competition from the market (Badie, 2011; Lynch *et al.*, 2012).

In addition to the challenges posed by the effects of these factors on the French higher education and research system, there are also the changes brought about by a series of reforms, notably the so-called LRU reform (on the liberties and responsibilities of universities) that affected the organisation of management of these establishments in the sector⁸. Furthermore, there have been initiatives aiming to overcome the rifts between universities, the Grandes Écoles, and research organisations like the CNRS by regrouping them within structures such as the COMUE⁹.

The government cannot remain indifferent to this type of issue. It has notably sought to build a visible strategy for higher education and to define a short-term/long-term, local, national, and international vision as well as clear missions for each of its establishments. The development of continuing education is part of this strategy¹⁰. The government moreover hopes to create a real influence policy on a global scale and to ensure that French higher education establishments are taken into account by international classification operators. More generally, in relation

to the government's goal of influential diplomacy, it is seeking to help the various higher education establishments active abroad to better understand one another and cooperate amongst themselves so as to offer increased visibility and to strengthen the reputation of France abroad. For these reasons, the government redrawing of the map of higher education does not only meet the criteria for distribution among French territories but also falls in line with the international competition rationale (Cytermann, 2004; 2011). Notably, there is an increase in the clarity, visibility, and differentiation of universities supported by the territories.

2.2. Research methodology

We are conducting this research using a constructivist paradigm (Le Moigne, 1990) and a recursive abduction/deduction/induction process. It aims to improve understanding of and assistance for a phenomenon based on a research-intervention process (David, 2000). The latter includes four steps: modelling, experimentation, observation & intervention. These are associated with different empirical spaces in a co-construction dynamic of the collective action. Two of the co-authors of this article have been involved in a cooperation programme. That form of participative observation has itself fostered a reflective process on the fulfilment conditions analysed through the prism of coopeitition¹¹. A qualitative methodology was the one most appropriate given the subject matter. We are presenting a unique but very detailed case study based on observations by the two researchers involved in the project in question as well as witness statements and documentation collected during the project.

⁸ This reform framework relies generally on the precepts of new public management. Over the last twenty years, these reforms have been one of the main drivers of the changes observed in many countries, with a major impact on university professions (Altbach et Levy, 2005; Enders et Musselin, 2008; Rhoades, 1998).

⁹ The Communities of Universities and Institutions (COMUE) established by law no. 2013-660 from 22 July 2013 regarding higher education and research was created to encourage these institutions to group together in a given territory, for a joint project, and to coordinate available training courses and the research and transfer strategies of public higher education establishments. It followed in the footsteps of the PRES decree on research centres and higher education that was created in the framework of the 2006 research law that aimed to strengthen the efficacy, visibility, and attractiveness of the French research and higher education system, especially abroad.

¹⁰ On the basis of recommendations from the Germinet report on continuing education at university, the Secretary of State for Higher Education and Research, Thierry Mandon, launched an experimentation network of twelve universities and pilot university groupings to develop continuing education. The objective is to obtain 5% of the establishments' budgets through continuing education within three years.

¹¹ In doing so, they sought to put into practice Armand Hatchuel's idea that "*the researcher can only produce relevant knowledge if they are an actor and stakeholder in the collective action process*" (Hatchuel, 2000 cited by David Albert, "Décision, conception et recherche en sciences de gestion [Decision, design, and research in management sciences]", *Revue française de gestion*, 2002/3 (n°139), p.173-185).

2.3. A partnership between the ENA and the Aix-Marseille University to answer a call for tenders in Bahrain

Generally speaking, international calls for tenders open interesting windows of opportunity for partnerships (Ramanantsoa and Delpech, 2016). In some cases, they may encourage organisations that are potential rivals to combine forces in a temporary alliance by playing upon their complementary aspects to optimise their chances of winning over a market that could otherwise prove elusive, especially when the competition is steep. That is why in 2014, two French public management training stakeholders – the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and the Aix-Marseille University (AMU) – came together. The context was a competitive procedure, a call for applications, to fulfil the requests of the Bahrain Institute of Public Administration (BIPA). The request was to conduct a feasibility study on the design and implementation of a degree-awarding training course for civil service executives from Bahrain and other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The oil-rich nation of Bahrain was aiming to professionalise the training of executives in the public sector, which is essential for employment and business in the country¹². Beyond creating a training programme that could meet the needs of Bahrain and the region (as there were no programmes for this subject matter until this point), this call for tenders aimed to contribute to the modernisation of civil service in the kingdom so that it could reach the political and economic goals for development that it had set. The call for tenders was widely spread and aimed to tap into the international expertise of well-known actors in the public management training world. In addition to the financial aspect, the selection criteria related to the quality of the offer (e.g., consistency, relevance, etc.) and the institutional excellence of candidates, and the quality of people that could be mobilised to conduct this study of its merits and legitimacy.

The process of coming together was considered for various reasons such as reputation, relationships, synergy, complementary natures, and expertise. While the ENA and AMU had each contemplated submitting an application alone, they finally decided to submit a joint offer to be better positioned to meet the expectations of the client and maximise their chances compared to other international actors. However, there had never before been a collaboration between the two organisations. The ENA had drawn closer to the university milieu when implementing regional centres of higher education starting in 2010 and subsequently establishing COMUEs. It had also developed institutional cooperation with the University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne and the University of Strasbourg. Generally, the ENA sought to forge alliances with French universities in the field of public management and administration. For its part, the AMU had developed international cooperation efforts without specific partners, or at least institutionalised ones, through its Institute of Public Management and Territorial Management (IMPMT). In fact, these two organisations were already engaged in on-site training efforts in the region and in the Middle East more generally. They were therefore in a theoretically competitive situation, with the ENA organising international programmes for administrative cooperation in countries such as Lebanon, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia and the AMU organising university assessment missions for the Bahrain Ministry for Higher Education in the early 2010s and a research network project in public management around the Mediterranean and in the Middle East.

The two came together through contacts that already existed for scientific work between the two managers of these institutions. The addition of key points from the two establishments respectively allowed them to win the call for tenders despite the steep competition, especially from well-known Anglo-Saxon and Asian training organisations present. Retrospectively, this calculated move paid off. The client had “*previous rather unfavourable experiences*” with Anglo-Saxon consultants and hoped to be able to “*rely on the public*”

¹² Public sector employment accounts for 50% of jobs in the country. “Market Study”. *Feasibility Study for a Master in Public Administration*. Confidential report, Bahrain Institute of Public Administration (BIPA).

administration model of continental Europe” and thought that “the alliance of the two French partners was particularly promising in that regard given their reputation in their respective fields”¹³.

It is interesting to note the complementary nature of the areas of expertise of the two organisations which proved to be an advantage¹⁴:

- For the ENA: excellence in professional training provided by a civil service school; network of speakers from major civil service roles; proximity to leadership; international prestige and recognition of a school that embodies the French public administration model and a school that has trained most of the high-level civil servants in the French government (Eymeri-Douzans, 2003);
- For the AMU: ability to mobilise well-known French and foreign university actors for the project (115th in the Shanghai ranking of world universities in 2017)¹⁵, experience with degrees, recognised in the framework of the French excellence initiative, reputation of the IMPGT in the field of public management.

Once the market had been conquered, the cooperation between the two organisations was established without any issues, alternating phases of collaborative work during market research missions and contact with local partners, distributing tasks relating to preparing the deliverables requested by the client in the framework of the feasibility study. Exchanges with the client were fluid thanks to the ongoing efforts of the two French partners to work in tandem and coordinate their efforts. The prefiguration mission finally began in 2016 on an even more developed form of cooperation, namely opening a Master in Public Management (MPM) programme in Bahrain co-organised by the AMU and ENA in partnership with the BIPA and a local university. The consortium endeavoured to build a training programme based on the master in public administration programme developed by the IMPGT at the AMU while also adapting it to the regional context.

2.4. Analysis

The operating mode of this international cooperation strategy between two stakeholders that were initially rivals calls for a detailed analysis of factors that could explain its success as well as the potential risks and limitations it may encounter.

The ENA and AMU (through the IMPGT), two specialised training institutions for high-level civil servants, help bring together a network of high-level officials and universities, making it possible to provide a degree-granting public administration management training based on the AMU’s master degree with certification from the ENA. The benefits are obvious for both parties. The university is appearing alongside an institution with a stellar reputation experienced in training high-level officials. As for the ENA, through this collaboration, it can gain familiarity with the design and implementation of a master’s curriculum and the constraints and advantages related to managing a degree-awarding training course. The two project managers at the ENA and AMU respectively rubbed shoulders in the same international research networks. Their reciprocal respect for each other’s institutions fostered the cooperation efforts. This pre-existing connection was a source of trust and confidence. It facilitated reaching this partnership and was also useful when other participants from the two establishments became involved and for whom the project was an opportunity to develop skills at an international level. The cooperation efforts were therefore the result of combined institutional and individual factors. The cooperation was based on an understanding that the two partners were equal, even if during the prefiguration phase, the consortium was formally directed by the ENA, the signatory of the contract with the BIPA. Finally, the same level of professionalism could be found on both sides in terms of the project management and in the relationship with the client.

As Christophe Strassel reveals in his analysis of geopolitical stakes in the globalisation of universities (2018, 22), the direct roll-out of programmes from Global North countries in other parts of the world

¹³ Statement from the main advisor to the director of the BIPA, February 2016.

¹⁴ As shown by the words of the BIPA director during the MPM opening ceremony in February 2016.

¹⁵ [URL: <http://www.shanghairanking.com/arwu2017.html>].

(for example, in the form of international campuses) allows them to meet several objectives: “*diplomatic objectives (e.g., training the elite, maintaining close ties with certain countries), scientific objectives (e.g., prior selection of students with incoming mobility), cultural objectives (e.g., spreading the French language, promoting a model of knowledge), and economic objectives (e.g., co-funding of research programmes, finding a demand abroad among a solvent public that is unmet due to deficiencies in the local training system, finding new funding in a period when public funding is drying up in Europe and the United States due to the crisis)*”.

Nevertheless, the implementation of a cooperative project presents as many obstacles as incentives as presented in Table 3.

Generally speaking, the sources of conflict in academic projects conducted bilaterally or in a

network are well known (Larat, 2008): a lack of trust in the project and between partners; insufficient abilities; little to no mobilisation of stakeholders in favour of the project objectives; and a lack of professionalism in one or both partners.

In this regard, it is important to note that the ENA and the AMU were able to capitalise on a number of factors that helped them reduce transaction costs and build the trust necessary to conduct a project like this one. The two project managers at the ENA and AMU respectively rubbed shoulders in the same international research networks. Their reciprocal respect for each other’s institutions fostered the cooperation efforts. The cooperation was moreover based on an understanding that the two partners were equal, even if during the prefiguration phase, the consortium was formally directed by the ENA, the signatory of the contract with the BIPA. Finally, the same level of professionalism could be found on both sides in terms of the project

EFFECTS ON COOPERATION	FACTORS INDEPENDENT FROM THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT	FACTORS CONNECTED TO THE PROJECT IN QUESTION
Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial rivalry ▪ Difference in status (AMU is a higher education establishment while the ENA is an administrative public establishment) ▪ Difference in terms of operational rationality (academic logic versus administrative logic) ▪ High transaction costs (information, communication, coordination, adaptation to the partner’s operating mode, establishment of trust) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investment (significant work necessary for the design and implementation) ▪ Limited resources available ▪ Difficulties related to the inter-cultural nature of the project ▪ Risk of losing credibility if it fails
Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General willingness of French public authorities to promote connections between universities and the Grandes écoles, including civil service schools ▪ Attachment of both parties to their civil service mission, including in the form of international standing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expected financial gains ▪ Benefits to their image ▪ Opportunities to enrich knowledge and skills ▪ Geostrategic nature of being established in the Persian Gulf region

Table 3 – The incentives and obstacles relating to the project

Source: authors

management and in the relationship with the client. A large number of the criteria that appear to promote the success of a coopetition strategy according to the academic literature were therefore met. As for the risk factors, they were limited (see Table 2). In this case, rules for monitoring and sharing were considered. The initial efforts to write studies on expertise and opportunities in the framework of the prefiguration contract made it possible to: anticipate reflection on the positions of the partners, organise monitoring conditions, and define collaboration rules for the implementation and roll-out of the project. To be precise, this includes complete and shared information, willingness and shared subjects of interest, a flexible but institutionalised structure, an expected added value above other alternatives for the parties, consistent incentives, a critical mass and sufficient time, complementary natures, and reciprocal emulation (Larat, 2014). Based on the multiplicity of interactions over time, Alexrod's work (1984, 1997) highlights the prevalence of the tit-for-tat strategy in dyadic relationships (i.e., *lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation). Alexrod proposes three conditions for promoting equilibrium and cooperation: an arrangement allowing the individuals to meet regularly, the ability of the individuals to accept each other, and the individuals sharing information over time about the behaviour of other actors. The recognition of specific rights for each actor regarding the collectively managed resource then precedes the implementation of standards (Schlager and Ostrom, 1992) and joint rules for collective actions when there is a high level of trust to be determined in advance (Oström, 2009b).

2.5. Reasons for coopetition

If one examines the possible reasons for engaging in coopetition in depth, one observes that in the case study presented, the motivation of the partners for entering into an alliance was the result of several factors. Taken independently from one another, these factors would not necessarily be sufficient to

convince the two actors to overcome their differences and potential rivalry to begin a joint venture, especially given the risks and uncertainties inherent to both cooperation and a project of this nature. However, when taken together (and considering the synergistic effect they may have), these factors justify the existing risks and costs. They represent a powerful tool for bringing together actors that share a common denominator but that come from very different backgrounds and are in very different positions. For public establishments like universities, the public *Grandes écoles* for engineering, and of course civil service schools like the ENA, the existence of individual interests for the actors (e.g., financial earnings potential, positioning in a new market or niche, or access to interesting information or knowledge) is added to a shared interest, namely that these actors all have a civil service mission and participate as such in promoting the public interest. Given the strategic and political nature of international cooperation in public management training, the competitive situation at an individual level (between the actors no matter who they are) is displaced to the group level (national affiliation or, potentially, attachment to the public administration model from continental Europe as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon model of new public management (NPM)).

In the eyes of potential partners and the beneficiaries of their cooperation, the result is to identify a common denominator. As seen from the outside, these actors are in fact perceived by the foreign partner from the standpoint of their proximity and their complementary nature. Between partners, however, individual interests and particularities are relegated to the background given the shared interest (e.g., defending a certain conception of civil service) or national interest (e.g., securing French influence in this part of the world).

The attitude of authorities in charge of representing France abroad has, moreover, a unifying effect¹⁶. In some cases, this support can be decisive when overcoming obstacles that can arise when carrying out

¹⁶ The project and subsequently the implementation of the *Master in Public Management* were attentively monitored by the French embassy in Bahrain. The ambassador, for example, participated in the graduation ceremony for the first class in March 2018. It should be noted that the areas identified by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for creating a French strategy for higher education, professional training, and research in the Middle East include recognising the value of French public policy schools and promoting them (MEAE 2017).

the project in question (e.g., difficulties relating to the local partner, the role of the facilitator between the partners in the event of tensions, etc.).

Then, a key element to success for coopetition is establishing institutional arrangements between partners. In the case study presented, the consortium retained a teaching team in addition to creating the content of the training course. It did so using resources from the AMU, the ENA, the BIPA, and the University of Bahrain (UoB), but expanded to include people from other European and North American countries. Furthermore, establishing an academic board supported by a team of administrative assistants in each of the partner institutions helped develop working procedures and cooperation mechanisms that ensured the cooperation would last in the long term. The lessons learned from some examples reveal the difficulties an institution may face when attempting to tackle a market alone. In the Middle East, Harvard had problems managing its affairs in the UAE in the middle term, just like HEC (Gueraiche et Romani, 2012). There are a number of examples in part related to the lack of established trainers (Davidson, 2010). Conversely, the existence of an alliance as in the case of the MPM decreases risks, especially when it aims to train the local teacher-researchers of the future (who could one day take over for the French teachers) by creating a public management research centre¹⁷. Finally, it should be noted that public institutions (such as the ENA and AMU) often have long-term strategies that mean short-term financial yields are relegated to the back burner.

2.6. The limitations and opportunities associated with coopetition

Several questions arise, however, in connection to the specific case presented in this article. First and foremost, to what extent is cooperation on a shared curriculum likely to bring about a rapprochement between the two parties, both in terms of the managerial practices required for the project to run

smoothly and, more interestingly, in terms of understanding how to teach public management and train public sector officials?

This question leads to an examination of the limitations of our demonstration. These limitations relate to environment, economics, culture, behaviours, and competition and they deserve to be the object of more in-depth research. This would require examining the situation through its processes and conducting a detailed analysis of consequences of these methods of collaboration between institutions and countries at an international level. The purpose would be to understand how these cooperation efforts transform over time and if the so-called “coooperative” form can be sustainable and have a positive effect in the territories involved. In other words, can the exchange presented in our study as a “win-win” scenario given our results be sustainable and if so, what conditions for optimisation of resources should be implemented?

While coopetition has been widely studied in the context of private companies, the use of coopetition by two public actors demonstrates a paradigm shift at several levels regarding the strategic behaviours of public organisations. By working together with other (potential rival) operators on the same market, ensuring an innovative joint project is institutionalised with an adaptive structure between rigid public institutions, and relying on shared project management practices to mobilise teams with different management cultures, the case study illustrates that public organisations can be agile and innovative (Urio, 1998; Coblenz and Pallez, 2015).

¹⁷ Three years after it was launched, the Master programme can be considered a success given its persistent attractiveness (with 4 classes recruited to date) and positive feedback from students being trained, the first diploma recipients, and employers. Putting the project on a solid, long-term footing, increasingly empowering the local partner, and wearing down the teams are nevertheless challenges that must be overcome.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, several strategic and managerial dimensions can be retained:

1. In the case of international cooperation on public management and specifically high-level civil officials, creating an alliance between a well-known public university and one of the Grandes écoles constitutes a political decision.
2. By proposing complementary scientific courses (public management and administrative sciences), the training courses available were significantly expanded.
3. This experiment with a Master in Public Management programme shows the importance of research in training since a doctoral school for public management implemented in the framework of the University of Bahrain programme opened in January 2019. It should help create a strong pool of potential future teachers and researchers and thereby help make the programme viable and sustainable.
4. This collaboration has had a ripple effect in terms of collaborations between the AMU and the ENA, specifically within MENAPAR, the Middle East and North Africa Public Administration Research network.

This case study provides probative elements of interest that institutions that have a potentially or even officially competitive relationship can collaborate on international training as an inexorable process of internationalisation is taking shape in the sector.

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