A Path Dependency Approach to Governance Practices at a Public University of the Western Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

This paper investigates the governance practices embedded within governance structures at the disposal of students at a public tertiary education institution, and student unrest as a mechanism to sway decision-making and reform policy at the case study institution of higher learning. In particular, the study is guided by a qualitative research paradigm using a structured interview tool to gather primary data using the University of the Western Cape (UWC) situated in Cape Town, South Africa, as a bounded case study, against the backdrop of the 2015-2016 #FeesMustFall (FMF) protests. It is suggested in this paper that student unrest is not the main reason, but rather a symptom of the broader inadequacies of the current participatory mechanisms available in university governance structures in general, and at the UWC. Employing a Path Dependency Theoretical (PDT) Approach. The article concludes by analyzing the findings of the empirical research, by identifying several themes and sub-themes.

Keywords: governance, shared governance, co-operative governance, protests, participation, policy, stakeholder, path dependency

1. Introduction

Broadly, De Jager (2015) would argue that public participation can be a means to improve development, the delivery of services, deepen democracy, and the subject of [this] paper, governance. Protests in general, and protests at public universities as a mechanism to participate meaningfully (from a student perspective) in governance structures within the South African context, has led to the loss of life, and property damage (both public and private) costing millions of Rands to replace and/or repair. Protests at public universities often infringe on the rights of non-protesting students and the loss of valuable academic calendar time. This study is therefore important to add to the body of knowledge and understand why students choose to revert to protests as a mechanism to participate in university governance structures, using a bounded case study research design within a Path Dependency theoretical framework.

2. Review of the Literature

Path Dependency Theory: a micro- organizational perspective to higher education governance

It is accepted that Brian Arthur and Paul David are the founders of Path Dependence Theory (PDT) in the literature. In his seminal work, David commented that "Path dependence" [quotation marks in original] is an important concept for social scientists in studying the processes of change. This process that David refers to as Path Dependency Theory and consequently the process of path dependence is a dynamic process whose evolution is governed by its own history and by utilizing Path Dependency Theoretical principles, the historical evolution of technologies, institutions (the subject of this study), and firms could be studied, and better understood. Arthur (1989) further identified two concepts that underpin PDT, increasing returns and historical lock-in, and defines path dependence as being locked-into historical events. Margaret Levi makes the following pertinent observation about path dependence:

Levi (1997) as cited in Pierson (2000) suggests:

> Path dependence has to mean if it is to mean anything, that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice. (p.28)

Scott (2014) concurs with Levi and does suggest that for the institutional theorist it is important to take cognizance that the actions and/or decisions of current protagonists within institutional settings, do not take place in a vacuum, but are influenced by historical events or patterns of behavior. Furthermore, what we refer to as the "present" [italics in original] context is the residue of the work of those that came before (Scott, 2014). Luckett and Naiker (2019) concur with this view when these authors suggest that it is critical to take into account that public spheres as defined by Habermas are located in historical and culturally specific institutions that accommodate some voices and cultures and not others. In terms of governance, which comprises the physical and managerial decision-making structures, Pfeffer

and Salancik would argue, and of significance to [this] study, institutions differ in their commitments to the past, with some believing that what worked in the past, will work forever. However, most institutions build up traditions, mythologies, and rituals combined with the entrenchment of the beliefs of the successes of the past (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

Many researchers have utilized the principles underlying PDT, for example in economics, finance, agriculture, technology, public policy to better understand and explain why certain decisions were made at a particular time in history, and the exogenous and endogenous factors such as cultural preferences, legal and other institutions which guided such decision- making and set an organization or institution on a particular trajectory (David, 2006).

According to Vergne and Durand (2010), path dependence is a central construct in organizational research broadly and is used to describe a mechanism that connects the past and the future in an abstract way, which [this] study will attempt to do. Vergne and Durand furthermore identify three systems levels at which the underlying principles of Path Dependency can be applied to better understand organizational or institutional behavior namely: the macro, meso, and micro levels.

At the macro-level scholars view institutions as 'carriers of history' which maintain existing behavioral norms and cultural patterns throughout time (David, 1994). At the meso-level, Williamson suggests that at the level of organizational governance (the subject of this study) path dependence is also recognized as a serious issue that can account for persisting inferior governance structures, or [this researcher] would argue, less inferior governance structures.

At the micro-level, which Eisenhardt and Martin; Helfat and Petraf; Schreyögg- Eberl and Teece as cited in Vergne and Durand describe as the resource and capability level, path dependence is a central concept from a resource dependency view and the dynamic capability perspective. However, from a dynamic capability view, capabilities are construed both as path-dependent and as remedies to path dependency (Vergne & Durand, 2010).

Governance

There is undoubtedly a plethora of literature addressing the concept of governance in both the private and public sectors. The literature indicates that governance as a concept in and of itself can be viewed through various lenses, including financial, ethical, trust or democratic, or even from a private sector perspective, commonly referred to as corporate governance (King IV Report), or a Public Administration or public sector perspective (Ferlie, Lynn & Pollitt, 2007; Pillay, 2016).

Governance is therefore argued, context-specific and according to Mkandawire, cognizance should be taken of the role of African scholars in the formulation of the concept of governance, which was acknowledged by the World Bank in 1989, although the concept of governance as it is interpreted in current discourse, is a significant divergence from the understanding appended to it by African scholars. In this regard, Olanya as cited in Khan et al would argue that, what is perhaps more applicable to developing countries, is an approach to developmental policies that steer away from the "one-size fits all"[quotation marks in original] solution type of governance, rather than an externally imposed solution on local institutions,

which has been shown to violate and devastate formally known and trusted local institutions. According to Kauffman as cited in Bitzer, governance is about how power and authority are used, and how it is dispersed in the institution.

From Governance to Shared Governance: Linking Shared Governance and Path Dependency to Higher Education

The democratizing of the university as espoused by Thompson would necessarily follow the same principles as that of a democratic society, although cognizance should be taken of the fact that universities cannot be fully democratic. A cornerstone of a democratic society says Thompson, is the principle of participation in decision-making by all stakeholders which is also a characteristic of "good" [quotation marks in original] governance as alluded to by UNESCAP. To give effect to the principle of a democratic university and underpinning participation, is the notion of "shared governance". Love (2000) concurs with this view and refers to the notion of shared governance as describing the work of faculty senates, university councils which include student representation, and other university-wide committees that make policy recommendations to the chancellor.

Hollinger (2001) makes a pertinent point about shared governance and about who makes what decisions. In this regard, Hollinger argues that in some American universities, for example, faculty senate leaders are purposefully kept occupied with such issues as parking policies, in other words, who gets what parking, while university administrators do the actual governing of the university. Of relevance to [this] study is Hollinger's finding that given the particular historical circumstances of any given campus, although this was about the authority of faculties, this will either foster or frustrate the faculty's attempts to maintain or increase its role in campus governance.

However, it should be borne in mind that this notion of "shared governance" is underpinned by the idea of the authority to make certain decisions about certain issues that have a direct or indirect impact on the individual or group of individuals. Woven into the fabric of shared governance within the context of higher education, of necessity is the role of students and how the role of students within the notion of "shared governance" is perceived by both students and university management (Boland, 2005).

Boland (2005) further argues that underpinning shared governance is the practice of democratic decision-making. This is particularly true if higher education is to prepare students for democratic citizenship (Boland, 2005). However, of significance to [this study], is Boland's assertion that shared governance on its [own] is an "insufficient condition"[quotation marks in original] for the realization of the democratic ideal within higher education and should run parallel with other strategies, including statutory measures.

Important to [this] study, is that Fish concurs with Hollinger's finding and emphasizes the role of the historical context of any given university about its governance structure or how authority is distributed. According to Fish (2007), there is no general model of shared governance that can be replicated from university to university. In this regard, the notion of Shared Governance within the context of HEIs across Sub-Saharan Africa, would therefore

consequently be derived from the institutional models established by former colonial administrators, while over time, would have been modified to suit various cultural and political philosophies (Nur-Awaleh & Mtegha, 2005). However, according to Nur-Awaleh and Mtegha the overall role of the university, and consequently governance, shared or otherwise, would have been national development. Nur-Awaleh and Mtegha's study included governance practices from Mzuzu University, Malawi, and Amoud University, Somaliland involving 62 subjects, but was limited to faculty and staff, therefore, excluding other stakeholders such as councils, students, etc.

The value of their study nonetheless lies within the differences found between these two institutions about shared governance against the backdrop of their individual political-historical contexts. Although both these higher education institutions were founded in countries previously under colonial rule, the impetus to the differences in governance structures as it relates to shared governance lies primarily within the context of governmental versus non-governmental realms. It was found for example that at Mzuzu University, which is a public institution, several aspects which Nur-Awaleh and Mtegha consider to be conducive to shared governance structure was missing, which included:

➢ Communication up and down the hierarchy was a problem, with important information about the institution being withheld from faculty and staff;

➢ Highly centralized decision-making, with channels of communication flowing one-way, from administrators to faculty consequently also negatively impacting on innovation.

Conversely, at Amoud University, a non-governmental initiative, founded primarily by the community, shared governance is an important characteristic displaying:

➢ Clear channels of communication up to and down the governance structure;

➢ Faculty and staff are highly involved in decision-making (Nur-Aweleh & Mtegha, 2005).

From Shared Governance to Cooperative Governance in higher education

Mathieu (1996) contends that within the African context, university governance is characterized by the politicization of university campuses, combined with lack of funding amongst other issues, which according to Mathieu (1996) results in internal bitterness, tension and resentment, and divisive behavior of internal stakeholders. Although Mathieu's account is perhaps a bit more nuanced, Zeleza does concur with Mathieu's account and suggests that African universities have been characterized by authoritarian top-down approach terms of governance which could be indicative of the authoritarian nature of the state itself, combined with the fact that in many public universities, senior university administrators are state appointees, whom in turn appoint unit heads down the administrative hierarchy. This does lend credence to the notion that the case study university (UWC), being a creation of South Africa's Apartheid past, is in some respects, from a student perspective, path-dependent.

The South African Constitution introduces the notion of co-operative government. Within the context of Chapter 3 of the African South Constitution and Moja, Cloete, and Olivier suggest that the notion of co-operative government was proposed as a model of governance, which

requires all organs of state and any institution performing a public function to co-operate with one another in mutual trust and good faith regarding decisions.

Linking Good Governance to Higher Education

Governance as a concept is not new to Public Administration broadly. However, governance as a concept in South African Public Sector gained prominence since 1994 and in the Public Higher Education arena specifically since 1997 with the promulgation of the White Paper on Public Higher Education.

In this regard, Barac and Marx concur with Shattock and contends that the nature of HEIs as public institutions can be described as unique entities, with an extraordinary character which can be described as being private associations recognized by the State, pursuing a public interest whose role in society as a stakeholder, is to encourage the dissemination, advancement, development, and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry (Barac & Marx, 2012). Notwithstanding this noble role in society, is the question of the management of HEIs in South Africa which according to Barac and Marx should be embedded in sound corporate governance practice.

Bitzer (2009) delineated governance in higher education to the institutional level and refers to the notion of institutional governance. Peterson (1986) as cited in Bitzer (2009) also refers to governance within the context of higher education and suggests that governance is about the decision-making processes within academic organizations. Sifuna (2012) concurs with Peterson as cited in Bitzer's view, and also links governance which includes leadership, and management to higher education governance. While leadership, management, and governance are often used interchangeably, they generally do not mean the same thing (Sifuna, 2012). In this regard, Sifuna would suggest that leadership is a complex, multi-dimensional concept and process, often perceived to be encompassed in the leader's own set of values, qualities, and behaviors directed towards the encouragement of the participation, development, and commitment of those that are being led. Therefore, leadership, within the context of higher education governance, would from a normative perspective, encompass the legitimated authority afforded to higher education institutional leaders to make decisions within the policy framework of the institution (Sifuna, 2012).

[This] researcher, therefore, concurs that governance, implies both the structures and processes of decision-making, while management denotes the structures and processes employed to implement or execute these decisions (Peterson as cited in Bitzer,2009; Sifuna, 2012). Bitzer (2009) provides a more nuanced perspective and posits that the notion of power relations which is enmeshed within the governance, management, and leadership of higher education, and in general terms, governance is about power and authority – the distribution of power and authority within an organization, the structures, and relationships through which the power and authority are obtained and the processes through which the power and authority are used.

Fredericks et al. (1994) as cited in Bitzer suggest that this power and authority is employed within the context of governance, by different actors in different governance structures each

with its own explicit and implicit rules which determine behavior. Binsbergen et al. (1994); Balderson (1995) as cited in Bitzer (2009) posits that this power and authority referred to relates to the power and influence of the various stakeholders like academic and administrative staff, students, and the community which does lend credence to the notion of perceived differences in how the sample institution in [this] study have distributed power and authority to achieve, and to what Binsbergen et al. and Balderson as cited in Bitzer refer to as compromises reached among various role-players within an organization, intending to attain mutual goals.

However, it should be borne in mind that the African continent is unique in many respects and had to and still has to, contend with a higher education system that was not necessarily geared towards the needs of the local inhabitants or [this] researcher will argue higher education, institutional stakeholders. In this regard, Ashby, as cited in Nolutshungu and Joseph, alludes to the need for a university that would be responsive to Africa, much like Harvard, Yale and Stanford are American; Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, and London are English; Edinburgh, St. Andrews, and Dundee are Scottish. Furthermore, education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations, and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in their social life (Ashby 1964 as cited in Nolutshungu & Joseph 1999).

Minor (2004) argued, that despite the accomplishments of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), considerable criticism is leveled against the management of these institutions, and significance to [this] study is the criticism that university management is often being autocratic (although this might prove to be institutional and context-specific). Furthermore, the continued upholding of segregation while compromising academic quality combined with the constant dilemmas of maintaining financial stability, accreditation challenges, and of significance to [this] study, questionable governance structures of HBCUs (Hamilton 2002 as cited in Minor 2004) ;(Minor 2004).

It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that given the context of a higher education institution which is of significance to [this] study, as argued by Drewry and Doermann as cited in Minor, the mission and plight of HBCUs places them indistinctly varying contexts that potentially affect campus decision-making and leadership practices and consequently governance. Furthermore, leaders (both at national and institutional levels) of these various institutions situated within varying political and social contexts, must be mindful of the decision-making contexts which is affected by structural, cultural, or situational distinctions.

In this regard, Luescher-Mamashela posits that before the student rebellions that swept universities across the world in the late 1960s, students were largely objects of university governance (which speaks to the link of student engagement with university governance). However, these student protests had a significant impact on the structure of university governance and the democratization of universities (Luescher-Mamashela, 2010). So, while some universities in South Africa were experiencing extreme social upheaval others experienced relative calm (Duncan, 2016). It could therefore be argued that the notion as posited by Olanya as cited in Khan et al (2016) that governments should steer away from the

notion of "one-size- fits- all" [quotation marks in original] is applicable at the institutional level as well. Furthermore, Moja et al (1996) concur with Young, Hayton, Hodgson, and Morris that governance within the context of modern society broadly, and in higher education specifically, cannot be conceived only as external state control, but rather as co-production of "complementary and interdependent collectivities" [quotation marks in original].

According to El Said (2014):

> In higher education, the term 'governance 'is used to describe the different structures, processes, and activities involved in the planning and direction of the institutions and people working in tertiary education. Therefore, governance processes deal with multiple dimensions of an institution: how it coheres; how it exercises authority; how it relates to internal members (students and staff); how it relates to external stakeholders (government, business, local community, and international institutions; how it makes decisions and actions internally. The structure of governance includes the role of institutional governing boards, procedural rules, policies for resource allocation, the arrangements for performance management, as well as monitoring and reporting.

Yirdaw (2016) concurs with El-Said and suggests:

> Governance denotes the structures, relationships, and process of decision-making concerning issues significant for external and internal stakeholders, and in this regard governance in higher education institutions indicates the formal and informal arrangements that permit them to make decisions and perform actions combining both internal and external governance.

Of significance to [this], paper is Melu's assertion that governance in higher education encompasses a multifaceted network including the rules and laws, the resultant features of individual universities, and how these institutions respond to their missions in the context of national development. It can therefore be argued that not all higher education institutions will, in terms of governance, respond in the same manner. Therefore, the autonomy and the good governance issues and the resultant outcomes emanating from the individual governance structures installed and exercised accordingly, at individual higher education institutions is what is of interest to [this] study. Moving forward, the aforementioned definitions of governance posited by El Said (2014) will be used to guide the rest of the study.

Are Institutions Path Dependent? An Institutional Theoretical Approach to Path Dependency

Selznick as cited in Scott (2014) would argue, from an institutional theoretical perspective, institutionalization is a process. Organizations do not operate in a vacuum, and each organization is embedded within the particular history and historical context, to which the various groupings within the organization have a vested interest and which interests have become institutionalized. This according to Selznick as cited in Scott happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization's distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the various groupings it represents and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment. It is also interesting to note, that HE structures

worldwide, are more often referred to as institutions, rather than organizations. Stinchcombe as cited in Scott concurs with this view and seeks to define institutions as a structure in which powerful people within the institution are committed to some value of interest.

Of significance to this study are Meyer and Rowan's assertion that organizations are social systems embedded in an "institutional context" [quotation in original] where the state, professional associations, interest groups, and public opinion shape behavior. Universities, which are organizations within a sector tend to use the same organizational configurations and adopt similar behaviors and practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Putnam (1993) also suggests that history shapes institutions. Whatever other factors may affect their form, institutions have inertia and "robustness" [quotation marks in original]. History matters because it is "path-dependent" [quotation marks in original] (Putnam, 1993). Furthermore, Putnam argues that what comes first, conditions what comes later, whether it is intentional or unintentional and while individuals may "choose" [quotation marks in original] their institutions, they do not choose them under circumstances of their own making, and their choices, in turn, influence the rules within which their successors choose. Of significance to [this] study, is Putnam's reference to the study of Douglas North which traced the post-colonial experiences of North and South America to their respective legacies.

Putnam (1993) argues that although both the United States and the Latin American republics post-independence shared constitutional reforms, abundant resources, and similar international opportunities, what set North Americans and Latin Americans on different trajectories, was the governance institutions and environment within which the North American States and Latin American republics were subjected to before independence. North Americans benefited from their decentralized, parliamentary English patrimony, whereas Latin Americans were "cursed" [in original] with centralized authoritarianism, familism, and clientelism that they inherited from late medieval Spain (Putnam, 1993).

Concerning PDT, North's study as referred to by Putnam suggests that institutional patterns are self-reinforcing, even when they are socially inefficient. What North was referring to, was that firstly on the individual level, it is easier to adapt to existing rules of the "game" [in original] than to seek change, and secondly, at the organizational level, once development has been set on a particular course, learning, cultural habits, and mental models of the social world reinforce the trajectory (Putnam, 1993). Scott (2014) concurs with Putnam that on the individual level, actors become institutionalized to the extent that they orientate their actions to a common set of normative standards and value patterns as espoused by the institution.

Of significance to [this] study, is the notion as posited by Pierson's historical institutionalism and the durability of national institutions. In this regard, Pierson was referring to Path Dependency and the nature of decision-making or governance of national institutions, which Pierson argues are resistant to radical change and would rather stick to the tried and tested patterns of behavior. Pfeffer and Salancik(2003) supports Pierson's view, and suggest that what we refer to as the present context is the residue of the work of those that came before. In terms of governance of higher education, which comprises the physical and managerial decision-making structures as might be reflected in the sample university in [this] study,

Pfeffer and Salancik would argue that organizations differ in their commitments to the past, with some believing that what worked in the past, will work forever. However, most organizations build up traditions, mythologies, and rituals combined with the entrenchment of the beliefs of the successes of the past (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

More broadly, Chung and Thewissen concurs, and assert that in the context of Path Dependence Theory, the institutional legacy of a country strongly shapes future policies. Of relevance to [this], study is Chung and Thewissen's notion that at the macro-level (within the context of higher education, the political/national level) politicians have short time horizons, they have to deliver to their electorates and constituencies.

Scott (2014) links the values of institutions with PDT and argues that as organizations become infused with value, they are no longer regarded as expendable tools; participants want to see that they are preserved. Furthermore, by embodying a particular set of values, the organization acquires, what Scott refers to as a character structure, a distinctive identity. Maintaining the organization is no longer simply an instrumental matter of keeping the machinery working but becomes a struggle to preserve a set of unique values (Scott, 2014). Scott's (2014) argument does lend credence to the notion that, which governance practices are employed within the university context, is path-dependent.

Viewing governance of higher education through the Path Dependence- Institutional theoretical lens helps to create inter-and-intra-organizational order which is facilitated through structures and practices which are guided by institutional scripts which convey expected (Path Dependent) norms, beliefs, and values associated with a particular field example such as higher education (Austin & Jones, 2016). Furthermore, according to Austin and Jones, the higher education institution's particular environment will help shape governance structures, hence, institutions adapt their governance structures and practices to the environmental pressures and demands, for example, created by the pressures of competition in a market-driven higher education environment.

However, how and when higher education institutions will adapt or morph according to pressures in their environment can be attributed to three distinct scenarios, namely: Coercive isomorphism; Mimetic isomorphism; and normative isomorphism as delineated by Austin and Jones (2016 p 25):

➢ Coercive isomorphism refers to external pressure, usually from governmental laws and regulations or other social groups, to conform or adapt and typically will take place in institutions of higher learning where universities, for example, receive public funds and institutions are required to conform to a practice or a preferred set of practice- these practices are usually guided by regulations effective in a particular jurisdiction which will mean that institutions in a particular jurisdiction will have similar processes in place because these processes are required to obtain government funding. Governance and governance structures will therefore be similar;

➢ Mimetic isomorphism refers to an organization voluntarily imitating the structures, practices, and processes of other organizations in response to uncertainty in the

environment. Organizations therefore faced with uncertain environmental factors will emulate other successful organizations, typically universities facing uncertainty within their environment have adopted managerial practices from the corporate world and in other instances from other successful universities which in terms of benchmarking practices have been labeled as successful or have experienced similar challenges (Austin & Jones, 2016);

➢ Normative isomorphism according to DiMaggio and Powell refers to isomorphism which is professional-based, self-imposed conformance pressure in which key group members internal to the organization an occupational group and how they perceive their work conditions, subscribe to a set of associated values and have norms that determine what the organization should be like. In terms of university governance, typically key elements such as collegiality, academic freedom, and professional autonomy are elements with which the faculty of the university would identify with, and the university governance structures would tend to conform around (Austin & Jones, 2016).

Jansen (2017) also argues that historical events matter. In this regard, Jansen refers to post-independence Africa and highlights three major forces impacting on higher education institutions, namely: a decline of government funding, a steady increase in state interference, and the normalization of chronic instability which [this] researcher would argue is characterized by protest action.

These theoretical approaches are particularly suitable to refute or support the hypothesis. Using the underlying theoretical principles of Path Dependency Theory as identified by Arthur namely, being locked-into historical events and increasing returns, the historical evolution which the sample university in this study could be better understood. In terms of increasing returns, Margret Levi in Pierson suggests Path Dependence could be defined as that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. Furthermore, although there will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements such one might find at universities, may prevent a turnaround of the initial choice. In terms of institutions such as in higher education, Scott would argue "The beginning of wisdom for the institutional theorist is the recognition that current actors and events are greatly shaped by past efforts and their enduring products.

The University of Western Cape: A historical and more contemporary view

The history of South African Higher Education is generally dominated by events that took place during the 1970s and 1980s. Based on the discussion above, it is hypothesized that governance practices at UWC are path-dependent.
The UWC, formerly the University College of the Western Cape (UCWC) situated in the north of Cape Town, South Africa, was established as a constituent college of the University of South Africa primarily for coloreds. In 1970 UCWC gained university status, and in 1983, through the promulgation of the University of the Western Cape Act of 1983, gained autonomy on the same terms as the established "white" universities.
It is perhaps the comment, by O'Connell the then Rector of the UWC, that the institution has a long struggle history, struggle generally referring to unrest and protest action, which in a sense sets the stage for the future of decision-making at UWC and the role students would

play in governance. This, within the context of governance practices, which lends some credence to the theoretical basis of PDT and the significance of historical events such as the Soweto uprising, events also sparked by students.

For example, the students under the leadership of a democratically elected SRC still found it necessary to launch the FMF campaign, characterized by at first glance, which seemed that students were ignoring all other participatory and governance mechanisms available to them, but as the empirical part of this study does suggest, was not adequate, in the opinion of students, which lead to the FMF protests.

3. Method

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

Students

Within the context of this study, UWC had 15 226 students, of whom 11 836 were undergraduate and 3 390 were postgraduate students. Structured interviews were conducted with 25 students across all faculties, 6 SRC members, and 6 staff/management who generally are involved with meeting with the SRC at council level or student affairs. There were approximately 5 000 second-year students from which a sample was selected using simple random sampling techniques and based on their availability and willingness to grant interviews to gain students' perspectives on current participatory mechanisms, against the backdrop of the FMF campaign.

University management

Structured interviews were conducted with six management/staff members at UWC to gain management/staff perspectives on what existing participatory mechanisms exist and the degree to which these mechanisms are being used, as seen in Annexure A, against the backdrop of the FMF campaign.

Students' Representative Council

Structured interviews were conducted with six members of the SRC to gain the perspectives of this Council, as elected representatives of the students, on the degree to which current participatory mechanisms are used, against the backdrop of the FMF campaign.

Sampling Procedures

According to Babbie and Mouton, a researcher may, before entering the field, set up certain criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of respondents. Babbie and Mouton (2001) also suggest that, as a rule of thumb, a South African master's level study in the interpretive paradigm requires a sample of between five and 25 respondents, depending on the nature of the study and the number of times data-gathering techniques, such as interviews, will be repeated with each respondent. Purposive sampling techniques were utilized to choose respondents to the questionnaire in terms of the SRC and staff/management, based on respondents' availability and willingness to be interviewed. In terms of students, the structured interview was only conducted with students who were first-year students in 2015, or with those students in which

2015 was a subsequent year of study at UWC, as these students would have been exposed to the initial surfacing of the FMF campaign in October 2015. In terms of sample size, given the nature of the governance issues and the milieu within which interviews were conducted, the researcher had to be mindful that students, SRC members, and management might not be that willing to participate in the research which was conducted amid a very contentious period at UWC, namely the FMF.

4. Research Design

The researcher followed an explorative research design. According to Babbie and Mouton, a large proportion of social research is conducted to explore a topic and to provide a basic familiarity with that topic. Furthermore, exploratory studies are appropriate for more persistent phenomena and are typically used for the following reasons: (1) to satisfy the curiosity and desire for better understanding; (2) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study; (3) to develop methods to be employed in any subsequent study; (4) to explicate the central concepts and constructs of a study; (5) to determine priorities for future research; and (6) to develop new hypotheses about an existing phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

5. Results/Discussion

In **Table:1** there is a convergence of students', SRC, and management opinions on most of the themes explored. However, what is notable in this study is that on the issue of the feasibility of free higher education soon, there is a marked divergence of student opinion from the opinions of both the SRC members and management/staff members interviewed. A large percentage of the students interviewed believed free higher education is not feasible soon, which seems to contradict the fervor and urgency with which student protestors are insisting on an immediate state of free education for all.

Based on the aggregation of opinions of students (interviewed), SRC members (October 2015 – September 2016 interviewed), and management (interviewed) at UWC, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Main Findings:

1) Current formal participatory mechanisms at UWC are adequate. This thus then beg the question, why the protest was necessary? [This] researcher would argue, given the 'struggle' history of South African higher education, and the sample university, in particular, it could be considered to be in a 'historical lock-in' as espoused by Arthur as cited in David (2006).
2) Current formal participatory mechanisms at UWC had not been exhausted before protest action (violent or non-violent) had been initiated, which does seem to support the hypothesis that governance practices at UWC are path-dependent and history does matter and therefore does seem to support the hypothesis that governance practices at the sample university are path-dependent.

Secondary findings that might warrant further investigation and study:

3) Current participatory mechanisms can be improved.

4) Within UWC governance structures, the students, SRC members, and management should not have more autonomy.

5) There was some divergence of opinion among students, SRC members, and management on the question of whether other issues such as worker issues, e.g., in-/outsourcing, should be combined with student issues (consequently gaining broader participation in protest action). A large proportion of student respondents believed that it was not justified.

6) There was substantial convergence of opinions among respondents that the broader community does have an impact on issues at institutions of higher learning. How issues had been dealt with in South Africa's political history was the frame within which issues are presently dealt with and how students, in particular, are socialized and does lend credence to the notion of governance practices at the sample university being pat-dependent.

7) Unexpectedly, there was a divergence in the respondent's opinions between students, on one hand, and SRC members and management on the other, on the issue 'Is free higher education feasible soon?' Student respondents believed that free higher education is not feasible soon, while both SRC members and management respondents believed that free higher education is feasible soon. This result perhaps lends credence to the claim by several universities in South Africa which have been involved in the ongoing student protests that it is a relatively small group of students who are disrupting the studies of the large majority of students and university activities. This also seems to validate the survey carried out at Wits, where the results saw most students wishing to return to normal university activities.

8) Anecdotally, there was a political party element and political party ideology influencing student, SRC, management relations within UWC. However, what is not certain is the extent of the impact of party-political ideology on the 'normal' functioning of student–management relations and participatory mechanisms, with the result that, for example at UWC, the FMF campaign was operating outside formal student–management participatory structures which do set the stage for further research.

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Appendix

Table 1. Convergence/Midpoint/Divergence of students', SRC and management opinions

Theme/Sub-themes	Students	SRC	Management
Are existing mechanisms adequate?	60% said yes	50% said yes	83% said yes
Were all participatory options exhausted?	60% said no	80% said no	66% said no
Can mechanisms be improved?	76% said yes	100% said yes	100% said yes
Should the FMF Campaign be dealt with in isolation from other issues?	78% said no	67% said yes	50% said yes/no
Does the broader community have an impact on issues at institutions of higher learning	92% said yes	83% said yes	83% said yes

| Is free higher education feasible soon? | 92% said no | 100% said yes | 83% said yes |
| Should students, SRC, and management have more autonomy? | 64% said no | 67% said no | 67% said no |

Source: Author 2016

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