WHAT ARE UNIVERSITIES FOR?

ON THE CURRENT STATE AND THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITIES

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Preface

Keijo Rahkonen

> There is a war on the future of the university [as an institution] worldwide. The stakes are high, and they reach deep into our social condition.
> – Thomas Doherty, *Universities at War* (2015)

The University of Helsinki last year celebrated its 375th anniversary. This publication, which is based on an international seminar organized by the Department of Social Research in spring 2015, is our Department's contribution to the anniversary of the University of Helsinki. The motto or slogan of the anniversary was: "The Power of Thought 1640-2015". We could pose the question in a different way: what is the power of the university today? Or as the title of our seminar was formulated: "What are universities for?" – a well-known borrowing from Stefan Collini's book *What Are Universities For?* (2012). We think it is worthwhile to reflect on the current role of universities.

As we all know, the modern model of the university was founded in Europe. Wilhelm von Humboldt's great vision of the university – *Universitas litterarum* – was based on the unity of teaching and research with the provision of a comprehensive humanist education for its students. It was manifested in the University of Berlin in 1810, and then spread throughout the Western world.

The university is a rare institution which has survived over hundreds of years, although the European model of modern universities was not conceived until the 19th century. Since then, the basic structure and research purposes of the universities have remained more or less

constant, they "are among the least changed of institutions", as Clark Kerr put it in his renowned book *The Uses of the University* (1963; 5th edition Harvard UP, 2011). But are we now on the edge of a radical change? Are our universities losing their long-held position?

In the last few decades, most European universities have experienced retrenchment, which has meant constant budget cuts that have hit academics and professional staff. In this process, universities have been pushed closer to a corporate management and commercial model, being forced to meet tangible and visible criteria of particular types of success/productivity and to adopt a business mode of research and staff management. In so doing, the traditional role of the University, that of critical research and research-based teaching, has been undermined.

The question is now how we can uphold Humboldt's legacy and how do universities can remain sustainable and survive in a period of such great political and economic upheaval in Europe?

In a nutshell, there are some more or less universal expectations about what we are supposed to do at the university:

"Nowadays, universities must still of course pursue knowledge for its own sake, and create a stimulating intellectual environment for students, but they must do a whole lot more too: act as a forcing ground for economic growth, become central nodes in urban and regional economies, produce social equity, demonstrate research 'impact', work as fire fighters for global problems, become international entities, all of this while holding an acute responsibility to provide benefits for the broader public realm."

The above quotation was formulated by Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor at The University of Warwick at the annual EUA (European University Association) meeting in 2012. It applies today fully to Finland as well as to the University of Helsinki.

However, it is not only in Finland and Great Britain that one complains so much about the underfunding of public universities. Today this is the case in most European countries. While many traditional academic disciplines in the UK have been thrown into an almost Darwinist competition, in Finland the university system is still basically publicly financed by the government, but for how long?

The present Finnish centre-right government is applying a very harsh austerity policy in higher education, leading to the termination of hundreds of positions. At the University of Helsinki alone, over 500 hundred people were laid off in the early 2016.

As far as I know, in Europe only three countries, Finland, Norway and Germany – plus Scotland – currently charge no tuition fees for regular degree programmes – regardless of your nationality. There is a growing pressure to introduce tuition fees at Finnish universities, too. As the first step, the new Finnish centre-right government decided to introduce tuition fees for non-EU/EEA students, starting from 2017.

All in all, it seems that nothing can be taken for granted in higher education any longer.

The developments in the UK universities are often used as a reference point for the university reforms in Finland and elsewhere. This is the case both in university administration, where the policy of New Public Management has been widely applied, as well as in the measurement of the impact and efficiency of academic research. The methods of the UK Research Assessment Exercises have been copiously studied by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland.

In this publication three senior UK academics, Peter Golding, Sarah Green and Sue Scott – all established professors in their own fields and highly experienced participants in the UK Research Assessment Exercises – discuss the British experience and the lessons that can be learned from it. Their contributions bring much needed critical insight to our discussion in Finland and help us to reflect on our experiences in the context of the wider British and European developments. Pekka Sulkunen also adds a Finnish contribution, pointing out strategies for the promotion of critical social research in these difficult times.

I wish to thank our keynote speakers for not only attending our seminar, but also for agreeing to submit their presentations for publication.

The UK Experience in Higher Education: A Negative Model for the Twenty-First Century?

Peter Golding

This article is both a narrative and a warning. For students and academics in the UK the recent past has been a period of rapid change and severe 'challenge', to use one of the period's favourite euphemisms. Once proudly regarded by both its staff and students, and indeed by others, as a leader in university principle and practice, UK higher education has now become an exemplar of much that has degraded the very core of what the academy as an institution could and should be. We have seen the future and, no, it doesn't work and we hope it will not be yours.

We should begin by reminding ourselves that higher education is not a field of interest only to the privileged few. In many countries the sector has expanded rapidly in recent years. Whether this has been engineered cynically as a way of containing youth unemployment, or as a result of vague hopes that it might foster a higher skilled workforce, numbers have mushroomed. The OECD estimate that entry numbers to higher education increased by over 20 per cent between 1995 and 2011. By 2012 over 23 million students were beginning a university programme in OECD countries, and they therefore anticipated that "[b]ased on current trends in graduation rates, 39% of today's young adults on average across OECD countries are expected to complete tertiary-type A (university level) education during their lifetime" (OECD, 2014: 74).

But this expansion was against the background of two rather contrasting ideal types of what a university actually *is*. Classically the ideal expressed of a university as a place where people learn to think, and which offers a civilised society an institution of comprehensive learning and research, a self-governing community of scholars, was

expressed by John Newman in his frequently cited 1852 lectures. In his view "A University is a place … whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge; … a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse. … It is the place …in which the intellect may safely range and speculate. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, … discoveries verified and perfected, and … error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. …" (Newman, 1852). How quaint this now sounds, but as an ideal it has long been paralleled by a second ideal type, the so-called Napoleonic university, closely integrated into a centralised state both by administration and direction, functional in form and purpose (see Graham, 2008: 12-13). It is a version of the latter, but much changed, that has driven recent UK policy.

Four Shifts in UK University Policy

There have been four marked shifts in the direction of higher education policy in the UK in recent years. These are: a more utilitarian emphasis to the purpose and content of universities; the promotion and protection of 'STEM' (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects; a tighter link between universities and industry and commerce; and the marketization of the system as a whole. Each of these is briefly described:

1. Utilitarian focus. It has become increasingly clear that the focus and purpose of university education is skills based, vocationally driven, and employer-led, or at least employer-informed. While no academic wishes to see their students become unemployable, and it behoves a university to ensure its graduates are equipped to succeed in the labour market, a narrow interpretation of this remit can, and has, led to a watering down of much critical or theoretical work, not least in the social sciences and humanities, under pressure to render them more 'market-facing' and of immediate translatability into the particular (and possibly short-term) needs of the more influential employers. The same calculus is increasingly levelled at research,

whose 'impact', that is utility and especially immediate economic application, is valued, rewarded, and indeed required, both in research applications and in calibrations of the quality of completed work.

2. The rise of STEM. It has become axiomatic that there are useful and essential subjects on the one hand, and frivolous and indulgent subjects on the other. Public funding for teaching on arts, humanities, and social sciences degree programmes was removed completely in the UK in the last parliament, while that for other subjects, though reduced, was protected, with loans to students replacing block grant funding to universities for delivery of programmes. As the then Minister for Science and Innovation put it in March 2009, ""We have to demonstrate to children that STEM subjects in school are the start of a route to exciting and rewarding jobs." His colleague John Denham, then Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, writing to the Higher Education Funding Council, insisted that "I would like you to work with the sector as it finds innovative ways to support business. Promotion of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines should be a factor in all of your activities, since these are subjects that employers consistently tell us they will need in the long term."

3. Rethinking the purpose of the University. If universities are increasingly integrated into national policy, but that policy is interpreted as meeting the needs and ambitions of major employers, then the university increasingly becomes redefined as a higher training institute, providing R&D and skilled labour for the business sector, and tightly integrated into that sector's activities. A government report published in 2009 spelled out the mechanism for this: "Business and employers need to contribute more. They will do this through joint research programmes, vocationally oriented courses that they part-fund, sponsorship of students and much greater use of universities for management and leadership training" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2009). But the UK was not alone in this. Three years earlier the EU Commission had argued that "entrepreneurship should be

incorporated in various subjects, particularly within scientific and technical studies, in order to provide students with specific training on how to start and run a business."

It is worth explaining that the UK research councils and the Higher Education Funding Councils are 'executive non-dependent public bodies sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills'. The nomenclature and organizational structure speak volumes. The administrative and political realities represent quite plainly the alignment of academic practice and purpose to industrial and business policy. In 2013 a further report on business-industry collaboration argued that "The economic and social prosperity of the UK depends upon a healthy knowledge-based economy … Universities are an integral part of the skills and innovation supply chain to business" (DBIS, 2012), while a subsequent report underlined that "Universities should assume an explicit responsibility for facilitating economic growth, and all universities should have stronger incentives to embrace this "enhanced Third Mission". ..[They] have an extraordinary potential to enhance economic growth." The Report recommended that "Universities…develop and commercialise technologies which can win in international markets… from working together to develop and commercialise technologies which can win in international markets to partnering with innovative local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)." (DBIS, 2013).

4. Marketization. Academics have become increasingly accustomed to spending huge amounts of time 'selling' their programmes to students, or 'customers' as, without a hint of irony, they are labelled by the increasingly common and influential marketing departments in universities. Following the 'Browne Report ' (DBIS, 2010) much higher fees were introduced for undergraduates, replacing public funding directly to universities, and supported by income-contingent loans. This was intended to seem like a transfer of market power to the 'consumer', and a reduction in public expenditure. In practice miscalculations mean that the cost to future governments

in providing the loans to students will exceed what would have been required in direct funding, while students leave university with very large debts that continue for years to feature dominantly in their personal finances.

With students paying ever higher fees the notion of education as a commodity bought by individual customers to whom providers were obligated became central. The purpose of education became for the individual customer to secure, by purchase, a marketable commodity (accreditation) of value in the labour market. The past was forgotten. When the medieval university initially provided tuition, there arose what we would now call a hitch in the business plan. Knowledge could not be sold as it was considered a gift from God. However, students paid the teachers a "*collectio*", a voluntary gift, which in time became the basis for salaries. Methodologically suspect surveys of student opinion (see Cheng and Marsh, 2010) have become hugely prominent markers of academic merit and individual professional competence, with a corollary and, many would argue, insulting implication that teachers are motivated by the level of fee their students pay, and were unwilling to commit sufficiently to teaching when fees were low or nominal.

In 2013 the then Coalition government announced the ending of student number controls, the system by which, via the Funding Council, universities had been instructed how many students they might recruit each year, subjecting them to penalty if they either under- or over-shot prescribed targets. Now able to recruit however many they could attract (and of course the fees that came with them) universities have gone even further down the competitive selling route, offering laptops, mobiles, tablets, books, discounts, and other enticements to increase their 'market share' (Hillman, 2014). The change meant not merely the further marketization of the sector, but a green light for elite universities to 'over-recruit', reducing the pool available for the rest, allied with a fear that the change could lead to rising drop-out rates, especially among poorer students.

The Audit Culture

In such a climate, calibrating the success and value of higher education becomes essential. However, while no-one would doubt the fairness and pertinence of such work, the indicators used and their construction matter enormously. Measuring the worth and results of teaching and research form part of any worthwhile academic practice and culture. But if reduced to a callow measure of commercial value and popularity this is buttressing ideology rather than signifying social value. The National Student Survey, already alluded to, has come to play a vital role in the assessment of value imposed both by institutional managers and by government. It is completed by final year undergraduates and is intended to inform both public opinion and university policy.

Even more high profile is assessment of research, through a periodic (every five or six years) process known as the Research Assessment Exercise (or, in 2014, the Research Excellence Framework – REF). This has run seven times since the first in 1986. It requires universities to submit detailed documentation on their research activities (funding, support, postgraduate students, infrastructure, organisation, and so on) as well as up to four 'outputs' (books, articles, chapters, etc.) by each of the academic staff submitted. Universities can choose who to submit, and therefore play a difficult game calculating the relative advantages of having fewer staff of the highest quality submitted, or a large number of staff but with more at lesser quality (funding is determined by both variables but the arithmetic is not known in advance). The submissions are assessed by panels of subject specialists grouped, in the most recent exercise, into 36 panels. Their detailed scrutiny of the submissions produces a score for each 'unit of assessment' (i.e. a subject area submission from a university) under the three headings of outputs, environment, and impact. The score (which initially is assessed for each and every element, including each submitted output) is on a fairly crude five point scale from U for not definable as research or disqualified, up to 4*, meaning 'world-leading', with (in 2014) the three headings weighted 65% for outputs, 15% for environment, and 20% for impact. The last of these, newly introduced in the most recent

exercise, produced particular anxiety and opposition being, initially at least, cast in a very economistic and utilitarian form. Debate and lobbying significantly diffused this between 2009 and 2013, and in the event arts, humanities, and social science subjects performed relatively well in this category, though it is anticipated that in a future exercise its weight will increase and its focus on rewarding more narrowly economistic and immediately applied research will be re-emphasised.

Research assessment has become, over 30 years, a 'normal' if tyrannical feature of academic life in the UK. The author declares an interest as a panel member or chair in the last four exercises. It can be defended on several grounds. It is rooted in peer review in which the primary driver is the quality of outputs assessed by fellow academics. It may deter other forms of scrutiny ("better we do it ourselves than have it done by civil servants or politicians"). It is not unreasonable that public investment in research is accountable (though how much public funding is there and what are the terms of accountability?). It regularly demonstrates the extremely high quality, and wide dispersion institutionally, of excellent research. On the other hand the downside is not difficult to discern. It encourages 'playing to the test', for example 'salami slicing' research to get more publications from the same project. It spuriously measures the unmeasurable. It can easily discriminate by both gender and age. It is increasingly used by university managers (in an ever-more managerialist culture) to bully academic staff into particular kinds of work, or even to control recruitment and employment, not least by setting absurd thresholds demanding, for example, that "nothing less than 3* work will do", even though 2* is defined as "quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour", by any standards, surely, a pretty good level of performance. The crux is probably peer review, which, while it remains the core of the exercise, assures at least a minimum level of 'ownership' by the academic community.

Teaching too is subject to continual scrutiny and audit, in most institutions by regular reporting from students and the requirement that all forms of teaching are subject to assessment by their recipients, a form of audit open to endless forms of distortion and exploitation,

and much objected to, not least by teachers of unpopular but important subjects, which inevitably receive weak scores unrelated to the quality of teaching. The risks of such 'popularity referenda' are palpable, but can readily be translated into tools of management and indeed remuneration or employment. The latest manifestation of this is the construction of a 'Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to parallel the REF, and I return to this below.

Recent Trends

Universities were not prominent in the debate during the 2015 election campaign (other than recriminations over the Liberal Democrats' volte-face once in coalition government over student grants), and higher education policy was scarcely mentioned in the manifesto of the victorious Conservative Party. The newly appointed Minister with responsibility for universities is Jo Johnson, brother of the Mayor of London, member of parliament for a leafy south-east England constituency, and educated at the exclusive private school Eton and at Oxford University. The election manifesto hinted at little, beyond probable encouragement for universities to offer more two-year programmes, to foster further marketization by giving prospective students more 'consumer rights', and reforming the student visa system, "with new measures to tackle abuse and reduce the number of students overstaying once their visa expires".

What this would mean became clearer with the publication in November 2015 of a 'Green Paper', a consultation document setting out the government's proposals in detail (DBIS, 2015). This once again emphasised the role of university education in economic policy, especially in relation to productivity. The green paper insists that universities should be "teaching students the transferrable work readiness skills that businesses need". It proposes a new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to parallel the REF, which it claims would provide more transparent information about teaching quality so that consumers (students and employers) can make informed assessments

of university products (programmes and graduates). Producers who do well in the TEF would be allowed, encouraged even, to increase their fee levels.

The Green Paper ignores or simply totally neglects any relation between research and teaching, indeed if anything continues to see them as antithetical, and where mentioned at all suggests a 'simpler' mechanism for research assessment based more substantially on metrics. Research funding might be centrally directed through a national research council and further concentrated and integrated with government priorities, (it is already the case that two-thirds of government provided research funding goes to the top 16 (out of 130) universities. How much more concentrated could it be, if one conceives research assessment as essentially a resource allocation system, as it has become?). There will be at least one more REF, but it will be even more focused on the economic impact of research.

The Green Paper also proposes removing many of the 'unnecessary barriers' to new 'alternative providers', in other words ensuring many new private, for-profit companies (who would not be encumbered with research costs even if they spent large sums on marketing and administration) be allowed to provide higher education and to acquire the title of 'university'. It is expected that this would mean the disappearance of some existing courses and even universities. The Higher Education Funding Council would almost certainly disappear, and be replaced by an Office for Students.

The Green Paper has generated widespread dismay in the academic community in the UK. As one letter to the Guardian newspaper summarised, it "is likely to lead to higher tuition fees for many, increased state intervention into the organisation and delivery of HE, more bureaucracy for staff and less autonomy for student unions." The letter goes on, "Universities will be fundamentally transformed by these proposals, and the sector will be further disaggregated. Funding will be concentrated on a few leading institutions, and higher education will once again become available only for a minority who can afford to bear heavy debts. Open scholarship, collaboration and the sharing of discoveries for all are set to be displaced by objectives that privilege

corporate interests and employability. The framework advocates the further embrace of metrics, the use of price as a proxy for quality, the relaxation of conditions of entry to the sector for private providers…" (Hickey et. al. 2015).

Some Principles

Four principles might guide our thoughts in protecting and developing the academy. First, university education is a public, not a private or individual good, representing an investment by society in its future. Secondly, it is also a national system, not one in which competing providers tout for custom (Collini, 2015). Thirdly, universities provide education not training, and while always wishing to ensure their graduates are employable, they are above all concerned to impart the knowledge, insight, and capacity to make them capable, informed, and reasoning citizens. Fourthly, research means asking awkward and sometimes unexpected questions, but not always promising helpful or immediately applicable answers. It would be hard to argue that recent trends in Higher Education in the UK are rooted in these principles. There is much to learn from the UK example, but most of it is cautionary.

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Interdisciplinarity and its Contradictions: The Case of Sociology

Sue Scott

Introduction

Interdisciplinarity and its relations: trans, cross, multi and post would seem, on some readings, to have replaced the narrower rigors in the disciplines in the 21st Century Academy. There has been much academic debate, especially in the context of the post-modern turn about the need to move beyond the 19th century disciplinary order of things to a post disciplinary world of emergence. I this short paper I do not intend to focus primarily on the intellectual/theoretical arguments about the need to move beyond disciplines, but rather on the organizational and managerial processes, relating to *interdisciplinarity*, and their effects on the social sciences and on sociology in particular (Holmwood 2010).

> '... It is the very obvious appeal of interdisciplinarity that makes it dangerous to weaker, critical disciplines since it can become the Trojan horse for the dissolution of particular disciplines by bringing them into a hierarchical relation with more powerful disciplines. It can become the basis for a narrowing rather than widening of perspectives, especially when the university is in crisis and restructuring is on the agenda.' (Burawoy 2013)

Intellectual Interdisciplinarity

I have a very broad understanding of sociology and see it, at its best as being highly multi faceted and drawing on a range of other 'disciplines'. Nevertheless, I would argue that there is something special about the way in which theories and methodology come together under the umbrella of the sociological imagination, which is both specific and important and is in danger of being lost in the 'post' disciplinary world of general social science and their 'applied' variants. Sociology is in my view, at its best a reflexive and critical discipline, and it is this sociological self-critique and its skeptical disposition which are endangered.

What does 'inter-disciplinary' actually meant? As the the University College London website has it 'combining subjects together in new ways.' Literally 'working between different academic disciplines.' It has become almost a truism to state that – many of the world's great problems require an interdisciplinary approach in order to solve them. The website goes on to say 'This is true of problems in the "real world" – e.g. problems to do with health, politics, engineering or cities – but also important intellectual problems – e.g. the relation between reasoning and emotion, the study of culture and identity, the link between music and learning…' Of course saying that something is important doesn't make it happen as Theodore Zeldin (2014) points out: 'Advances in knowledge come from the marriages of different disciplines and we have not developed methods to get them to meet'.

I do not dispute the need to see around the corners of existing assumptions about the nature of a given problem – to look at it from all angles and to bring different sets of explanations and skills to bear on it. I still hold onto the view that ideas can and should help to make the world a better place although not necessarily immediately, or even soon! It would be my view that all problems/issues need sociological interrogation at the outset because the best intellectual starting point is to question existing definitions of the situation

Why would we object to the idea of bringing disciplines together to examine social problems such as poverty, inequality, climate change,

etc. It would be churlish of academics to refuse to work together to, as Michael Burawoy puts it 'to juxtapose the different disciplinary lenses to cast light on a complex world'. The logical argument would seem to be that this is an additive solution – interdisciplinarity will complete the jigsaw thus expanding our understanding, at least of the world as represented in the picture of the problem as given. Burawoy goes on the issues a warning with which I have a deal of sympathy:

'The danger of interdisciplinarity, therefore, is to abandon disciplines for a superficial fusing of incompatible frameworks, repressing the elaborate structures that have been created in a painstaking fashion by the collaborative work of generations of scholars. Wallerstein's dissolution of the disciplines is to return to a spurious positivist framework in which science is said to be founded on an empirical world alone, without theoretical, methodological, value assumptions.' (Burawoy 2013)

Much of the current push towards interdisciplarity is the perceived need to solve social problems and the social scientific, and especially sociological tendency to question the construction of the problem is often seen as a sure way not to gain research funding – as an increasing proportion of research money is allocated to applied/strategic investigations rather than blue skies research. Alison Pilnick (2013) provides a very useful discussion of the positive and negative aspects of interdisciplinary problem solving and raises and important issue for sociology in this context. She says:

'The project I have described is, I think, a fairly classic example of interdisciplinary work. As in this case, such work is often problem driven, coming about to address or explore specific issues or contingencies, and is therefore very specific. As Abbott (2001) argues, these characteristics of interdisciplinary work mean that it does not in itself create enduring, self-reproducing communities. Interdisciplinary studies are ultimately dependent on the specialized disciplines on which they draw to generate new theories and methods. The end result is that interdisciplinary work requires a strong sociology, but it may not necessarily contribute much to the strength of that sociology itself. Such a relationship might at worst be categorized as parasitical.'

Managerial/Organizational Interdisciplinarity

Disciplines have not actually been the 'silos' they are often made out to be. They can be open to good ideas and new methods developed outside of their immediate purview. Also, universities have not historically produced rigid disciplines, behind stockades, but rather have fostered conversations and collaborations. So why is it often said to be difficult to get academics to work together across disciplinary boundaries, and why are there so many 'top down' initiatives aimed at 'creating' an interdisciplinary working environment. In the UK the majority of Universities have moved away from single discipline departments particularly in the social sciences and humanities, although these are still more common in the most 'elite' institutions.

There, seem to me to be three main strands to the 'pressure to become interdisciplinary'. On the one hand Universities are increasingly complex, audited and managed organizations and senior management find it 'easier and more efficient' to deal with a relatively small number of Deans or Heads of School rather than many Heads of Department. There is also the rationale relating to teaching economies – shared modules across a number of degree programmes, more integrated degree structures and Master degrees with a shared core and a number of pathways. The third main incentive and/or justification, for these organizational moves, is what I would call 'interdisciplinarity as magic dust'. This is the expectation that creating larger units and 'bringing academics' together will engender exciting new and fundable research ideas. This process while it can be successful, may also have the opposite effect – the wagons are circled, the drawbridge is pulled up, or whatever metaphor you prefer – with disciplinary boundaries being much more clearly marked in order to maintain identity and also to justify the continuation of specialist appointments. And other funds one example comes to mind of the creation of a School of Criminology and Sociology, where despite the obvious common interests and the fact that many of the criminologists had degrees in sociology, there was much opposition to integrated teaching, supervision and research. Thus while academics may be quite happy to explore interdisciplinarity,

and even to describe themselves as post-disciplinary, from within the comfort of a discipline based unit, if this is threatened via re-organization and merger then lines in the sand are likely to be drawn. It is also the case that, while individuals may work across disciplines with those outside of their own University, they may be reluctant to do this in contexts where they see themselves to be in competition for resources or indeed they may simply not have any intellectual common ground with the colleagues down the corridor.

My own experience, of working in seven UK Universities over 35 years may be instructive here. The University of Lancaster in the late 1970s and early 1980s was organized around discipline based Departments and Colleges – the latter were primarily for the purpose of student residences and social life but all had Senior Common Rooms and all academics were allocated to one of them. The University was fairly small by today's standards and colleagues met in bars and café's across the Campus as well as in College's as tutors and at meetings to organize joint degrees. There was also the almost unique Independent Studies degree, which had an interdisciplinary team to support it. Many of the staff in Sociology had first degrees in other disciplines as was common in the years when undergraduate demand was growing rapidly and new Universities were being established. When deindustrialization struck establishing a cross-disciplinary Regionalism Research Group wasn't particularly difficult. In short the University was small and collegial and Departments were not in dire competition with each other. At the University of Manchester in the mid 1980s and early 1990s there was a Faculty undergraduate degree structure and a fair amount of joint/ shared teaching across the Faculty of Economics and Social Science, but very little research collaboration or even discussion across departments. Sociology and Anthropology had been a joint Department up to what was described as the 'great blood letting' when they went their separate ways. My memory tells me that one or two colleagues still had intellectual links with Anthropology, but that I was the only one who ever crossed the road to the Department of Social Policy! I moved to Stirling and 1992. To a School of Applied Social Science, which included Sociology, Social

Policy, Social Work and Housing Studies as well as Centres focusing on Drugs and Dementia. This was a completely different environment where disciplines had been brought together in a School with a view to creating teaching synergies and improving research ratings. There was a prestigious; Research Council funded 'Social Work Research Centre', on the one hand and a sociology group, which had been awarded a very low score in the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise. In this instance there were, both literally and metaphorically, disciplinary divisions in the School, but also genuine collaborations and the whole was much more than the sum of the parts. However there was also a perceived loss of disciplinary identity. In the 1996 RAE submission (this time to the then Social Work Panel) the result was a 5* - the highest grade. In my view the School was a success at this time because it had developed in adversity and those leading it were strongly committed to its success and to the representation of disciplinary differences as well as inter-disciplinary synergies. My experience of the University of Durham from the late 1990s to 2005 was of, what had been a strong core sociology, and later sociology and social policy department, being added to and transformed into a School of Applied Social Sciences and losing its sociological identity as a result. The additions were various; including social and community work and then sport and exercise – the later at the time included very little social science. This was primarily a case of the Department being seen, as a home for units deemed too small to stand-alone. During this period Durham moved from sociology to social work and social policy in its submission to the Research Assessment Exercise – of which pattern more below.

As Dean of Humanities at Keele, in the later 2000s, I was responsible for fostering multi disciplinary Schools and cross-cutting research institute many of the issues already outlined pertained, but as a relatively small University with a history of dual discipline degrees there was a fair degree of intellectual debate across disciplines some of which followed the lines of the reorganization and some of which took their own routes! In my last institution - Glasgow Caledonian University – the social sciences had for some time been grouped together with a common degree structure, but were during that period

struggling to maintain an identity in a large school primarily focused on Business and Management.

Based on the above experiences I have become increasingly interested in the effects of these organizational patterns on the development and assessment of research, especially in relation to sociology of which more below.

UK Research Funding, Research Excellence and Interdisciplinarity

The most significant funder of social science research in the UK is the Economic and Social Science Research Council. Decisions on funding are made by a panel of disciplinary experts, underpinned by peer review by, in the main, disciplinary experts. This is what ESRC says about its intentions:

'As part of our portfolio, we also expect to support new and exciting research which combines approaches from more than one discipline. We recognize that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and between the social sciences and other areas of research. However, we also remain committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline.'

However, given that most of the people involved in assessing research applications are representing disciplines it can be difficult to find champions for interdisciplinary research through the standard responsive mode. In order to encourage interdisciplinary research the ESRC puts out calls for applications focusing on particular themes, sometimes jointly with other research councils, and these have indeed produced some excellent research bringing hitherto disparate areas together. However, when it comes to assessing research excellence we are back to disciplines again. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK is made up of, primarily, disciplinary panels under umbrella main panels. Sociology, Politics, Social Work and Social Policy came under the Social Science main panel as did Anthropology,

whose panel also included a sub panel for Development Studies. There are multidisciplinary areas with there own panels such as Sport Studies and Media and Communications, but these panels would include disciplinary experts. This in the main the research outputs in UK HE are, in the main, assessed in relation to the criteria for excellence in a given discipline.

The Unintended Consequences of Institutional Interdisciplinarity: Sociology as a Case Study

Andrew Abbot (2001) warns of sociology's inability to keep 'judgments about the rightness of things separate from judgments of their actual nature' - value judgments become mixed with scientific ones. He suggests this is a potential strength and a potential problem, since it enables sociology to be co-opted by other disciplines for their own purposes. These are strong words, but given the apparent decline and actual vulnerability of Sociology – as a visible entity – in the UK, perhaps they were prescient.

In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise submissions to the Sociology panel reached a high point of 68, whereas in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework they were at an all time low of 29. To an external eye such as the government or to Vice Chancellors with no or little knowledge of social science this looks as though the discipline is failing, but as so often, the reality is much more complex. The kinds of organisational changes which I have outlined together with the pressures of the REF – in particular the need to include 'impact case studies' and the assumption that submitting larger units would improve the research environment scores, meant that Universities often sought to make 'best fit' submissions. In Schools of social science/applied social science and similar this has meant and increasing move towards one submission to the Social Work and Social Policy Panel, because it would be difficult to submit, for example, Social Work to the Sociology Panel, but possible vice versa as Sociology is seen as a discipline which provides some of the theoretical underpinnings for social work. Thus

submissions to the Social Work and Social Policy Panel have grown over the same period with 69 submissions in 2014.

Alongside this development is what has come to be called the exporter issue (Holmwood 2011) and which relates to Abbot's comment quoted at the beginning of this piece. During the 1980s when there were few jobs in Sociology Departments many sociologists took up posts in Business Schools, which were expanding at that time, and this trend has continued. In addition there are many sociologists in Health, Social Geography, Culture and Media, Gender and in Sport and Leisure Studies etc. – indeed in relation to the latter the panel report suggested that sociology was the strongest aspect of the REF in this field. Being an exporter discipline is a measure of success, an indication of integrated interdisciplinarity, but it is also a potential problem. In some areas, and Science and Technology Studies would be a good example, new theories develop and a new interdisciplinary field emerges, but in others, especially in applied areas, there is an need for theory and methodology to be refreshed from within sociology.

Given that relatively few members of University senior management teams are social scientists there is an increasing danger in multi disciplinary units which - for appropriately strategic reasons - submitted to say the social work and social policy panel in the REF that this 'strategic decision' will be forgotten later. So when it comes time for a new/replacement post then senior management won't see a case for a sociologist, as there was no REF submission. Appointments are then more likely to be made in policy/applied areas, despite the fact that in most cases the funding which underpins appointments comes primarily from undergraduate student numbers and these are mostly in sociology as there are very few undergraduate degrees in social policy and social work numbers are relatively small. It also means that in order to produce a more coherent research story sociologists may feel obliged to undertake more applied research than otherwise. It is also the case that, if there is no ranking for Sociology at a particular University, intending students – particularly doctoral students will assume that it isn't a good place to study even though there may be a large group of sociologists and a doctoral programme. Or worse, as has already

happened in at least one major institution, there may be a increasing likelihood that sociology will not be offered in the Doctoral Training Centres linked to some Universities because there is no REF submission so there will be no funding for UK and EU students to undertake PhDs in sociology there. I am stressing worst-case scenarios to make the point, but these are the unintended consequences that are beginning to play out. Thus, in the UK, in the name of both organizational and intellectual interdisciplinarity coupled with strategic decision making sociology may be in very real danger.

Conclusions

It is strategically as well as intellectually important to develop interdisciplinary strategies and research applications, especially in relation to ensuring that social scientists are seen as genuine partners and not as 'handmaidens' research in Medicine and STEM. The recent report on the importance of social science (Wilsden et al 2015) stressed the need for the Economic and Social Research Council to lead in relation to collaborative work. The report also recommends that 'that in preparation for the next research excellence exercise, the funding councils allow researchers to submit outputs to more than one assessment panel, in order to support interdisciplinary ways of working'.

Mark Walport, the UK Government's Chief Scientific Advisor, recently strongly acknowledged, in relation to Ebola, the need for a social scientific approach to major problems. This resonates with the view of, the then Chief medical officer – Sir Kenneth Calman – in relation to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, but the value of social science has sadly not increased in the intervening decades. So Walport's words were heartening, but we still need to convince him and many others of the importance of sustaining and developing social science capacity in order that it can play this role, and also of fostering criticality in order that it can not only fill in the gaps but lead in the formation of knowledge and in asking the best questions. Sociology has a crucial

role to play here if only it can remain strong enough to play it. In order develop the best strategy to ensure this I am co-ordinating some research on behalf of the British Sociological Association and the Heads and Professors of Sociology Group to explore the strategies and intentions and the consequences, intended and unintended relating to REF 2014 as well as plans relating to the next REF and related changes. Let us hope that Sociology will emerge from this difficult period with its critical faculties intact so that sociologists can continue to develop theoretically and methodologically and make a significant contribution to research both within the discipline and in willing combination with many others.

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A New Twist in the Development of the Knowledge Economy: The Impact of 'Impact' in the UK's Research Excellence Framework 2014[1]

Sarah Green

Introduction: the Changing Relationship Between Universities and Knowledge

One of the difficulties in getting to grips with the reforms currently underway in universities across Europe, not to mention in many other parts of the world, is a disagreement about what these reforms are *for*. Delanty (2001), one of the more optimistic commentators, has suggested that the purpose of the knowledge that universities generate has never been straightforward, as it changes in line with wider conditions. In his view, universities now have a vital role to play in the current 'democratization' of knowledge, in this period during which an overwhelming quantity of information is being generated and made available on a daily basis to everyone via the Internet (Delanty 2001*:* 155). For him, universities should help to make sense of this endless flow of data; and the process of making sense of it should not be simply for creating economic opportunities, but also for encouraging democracy and cosmopolitanism, for drawing out the liberating potential of this new widespread availability of all these data.

1 An original version of this paper was presented to a symposium organized by the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki on 26th May 2015. I am grateful to Keijo Rahkonen for inviting me to give the paper. It has been considerably changed since that presentation; any errors are my own.

At the opposite, and most negative end of opinions on the reforms, Bill Readings has suggested that universities in the USA have been reduced from the Humboldtian ideal of a place in which a community of scholars generate new knowledge into nothing but crudely economic instrumentalism (Readings 1996). And it is not only the type of knowledge being generated within that economistic model that is the problem; others writing at the same time have argued that US universities were becoming 'diploma mills,' designed to make a rich profit from automating and standardising the process of generating academic degrees, most especially through computing and the internet (Noble 1998a; 1998b). An important part of that standardisation would involve making the delivery of the teaching cheaper by de-professionalising the academic staff. Once a degree course had been designed, universities could then package it as an online course that could be delivered by a teaching assistant rather than by a professor. This would be a bit like replacing a skilled craftsman with a machine run by an operator who is simply taught how to use the machine, not how to design what the machine produces. In short, Noble presents us with something akin to a Fordist nightmare of higher education.

Wright and Rabo suggest that a process of de-professionalization has also been underway in Europe, even though European countries have a much stronger tradition of public universities supported by the state, and thus a much shorter and more contested period of being influenced by profit motives (Wright and Rabo 2010). As an aside, it is worth noting that in that context of publicly funded universities in Europe, the ideals of improving efficiency, raising standards and cutting costs have been far more acceptable justifications for implementing university reform than any arguments involving profitability or commercialisation. Indeed, most academics working in European universities have never experienced a time which has *not* involved a period of cuts and economizing, which coincidentally always seem to accompany major restructuring of their university's activities and objectives.

Nevertheless, and whatever the justification for delivering the changes (profit motive, some form of business process re-engineering,

or cost cutting), Wright and Rabo's introduction to a special issue of *Social Anthropology* which focuses on university reform around the world shows that while there are significant differences in how the changes are implemented, there are also some common threads in the rhetoric used to describe what all of these changes are supposed to achieve. For Wright and Rabo, these rhetorical similarities can be traced back to the phrase 'knowledge economy.' This phrase became popular in the mid-1980s in the Anglophone world at least, but it began to significantly affect university policies in Europe after 1998, the year when the OECD published a report on the issue (OECD 1998). That report suggested that the 'knowledge economy' would divide the world into 'head' countries (those that would produce and deliver the knowledge) and 'hands' countries (those that extract raw materials and produce material goods). In order for countries to maintain their 'head' status, they would have to develop a workforce with a capacity to constantly and flexibly innovate and change. These new economic conditions (globalization, neoliberalized capital, the digital revolution, etc) meant, or so it was predicted, that anything learned at university would be out of date by the time the student finished their studies, so new forms of training were needed. Wright and Rabo argue that in response to the OECD's call, disciplinary expertise in the European universities has been steadily eroded and replaced with the pursuit of generic 'soft, transferable skills' (Wright and Rabo 2010: 3). The logic behind this policy is that in the 'knowledge economy' it is better for students to learn generic techniques and skills unattached to any particular disciplinary specialism than it is to learn something about, for example, Medieval history or philology.

That last argument, whose echoes are still present in many contemporary European government state policies on reforming higher education (including in Finland) has been strongly and convincingly critiqued. Two examples should be sufficient to demonstrate the point here. The first is Alberto Corsín Jiménez's ethnographic study of the restructuring of the social sciences and humanities (SSH) within Spain's National Research Council (Corsín Jiménez 2008). The restructuring was officially intended to bring Spain's SSH into line with

the requirements of the new 'knowledge economy.' This involved many procedures that will be familiar to academics across Europe: a move to a newly redesigned building, which invariably has a fraction of the book shelving and storage space than was available in the previous building; a series of new targets to be achieved that are regularly audited; and a reorganization of the administration and structure so that there would be an emphasis on transferable skills and interdisciplinarity. During his fieldwork, Corsín noticed a strong disconnection between the requirements of the new policy and the experiences of the humanities academics, particularly philologists, with whom he was working. The absence of access to their books meant they felt they were being denied the tools of their trade; and the requirements of the new targets were so different from what they understood scholarship to be, and so beyond the resources that they had available to them, that they felt there was a complete lack of proportion between their own reality and what was expected of them.

In exploring what might account for the sense of disproportion between the academics' understanding of their job and the expectations of the new policies, Corsín outlines two different understandings of what 'knowledge' might mean in the knowledge economy. The first he calls a 'relational economy of knowledge', which is the one he most closely identified with the new 'knowledge economy' policies. In this view of knowledge, the more knowledge that is made freely available, the greater will be the new uses to which that knowledge is put, and thus the amount of knowledge that exists will naturally incrementally grow (Corsín Jiménez: 232). All one needs to know is techniques for collecting and processing the data. To me, Corsín's description is reminiscent of the idea of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' of the market: the sheer quantity of material available, and the sheer number of people engaging in transactions with that material, will somehow generate a good (proportionate) outcome. Importantly, in this model, the invisible hand (the collective, statistical outcome of millions of transactions) is the agent causing the overall effect of the market's activities: it is not the individuals who buy and sell (or who do academic work), but the statistical effect of their collective actions – i.e., the market.

In contrast, an alternative model of knowledge is what Corsín refers to as an 'engineer-based paradigm of knowledge'. In this approach, knowledge can only become genuinely innovative (let alone useful) if it is put into meaningful relation with a great deal of other knowledge by people who actually know what they are doing. Here, the significance of knowledge, in Corsín's words, "is the engineers' capacity to put knowledge to work rather than the simple availability of knowledge" (Corsín Jiménez 2008: 232). This second model relies on the existence of skilled people with particular knowledge built up over the years in order to make knowledge into something meaningful and useful. In this model, it is particular human beings who make relations between one piece of information and another, and they achieve that through judgement based on their expertise. This is in contrast to linking data endlessly using some kind of algorithm, with the assumption that eventually, something useful may come of it. Incidentally, the widespread use of algorithms in stock exchange software, so that computers can automate buying or selling decisions in microseconds based on the stock exchange trends around the world from second to second has sometimes had spectacularly catastrophic results (Mackenzie 2011). This is a demonstration of the value of the warning made since the 1960s by computer software engineers about computing: all digital data follows the GIGO principle (Garbage In, Garbage Out). It also suggests that knowledge is not the same as information, and it is not the same as widgets; acquiring knowledge involves something other, and more than, organizing information into complex patterns: it also involves ascribing meaning and value.

The crucial difference between the two models of knowledge (the relational and engineered form of knowledge generation) are expertise and time. The first model produces new knowledge simply by the sheer quantity of knowledge and the velocity at which it can be circulated and processed. In that model, there is no concept of what kind of person receives the knowledge, what kind of knowledge it might be, nor any interest in what a person might do with it: it is a 'big data' approach towards knowledge. The second model sees the generation of new knowledge emerging from people who have been through a lengthy

apprenticeship in order to build up understanding within a given field of learning, and who then enact their expertise in drawing together different threads of information and bodies of knowledge to create fresh relations between them that are meaningful and valuable within that field.

Corsín illustrates this kind of crafting of expertise through the new knowledge created by the notes that the Spanish philologists he interviewed had written into the margins of their thousands of books. The notes create a complex web of relations between the books, and the knowledge that comes from this is built out of years of particular relations created by the scholar between one book and another, a deep knowledge built over the years with care and attention. This kind of knowledge cannot be replicated, or replaced, by the electronic availability of everything (the Google Books model, in which all books should be made available online). Corsín concludes that the academics' understanding of the requirements of this form of craftsmanship is what led to the sense of loss and disproportion in the changes introduced in Spain. It was not so much the new technologies as such, but the model of knowledge that informed the changes to the research environment of the social sciences and humanities in Spain that was at issue. Indeed, both Corsín and Wright and Rabo note that drawing on a different model of knowledge, the new technologies offer enormous potential for universities; their objection is not against change, but against the implementation of an understanding of knowledge that runs counter to what they believe is needed in order to make sensible use of the industrial scale of data production that has been made possible with digital technologies.

This approach suggests that the skill and understanding gained through disciplinary expertise remains an essential part of what universities provide, even in this era of a highly flexible world in which people need to be able to constantly and creatively respond to ever-changing conditions. Knowledge is not generated simply by having a generic technique or method of doing something, modeled perhaps on the algorithm that drives the Google search engine, the idea that through sheer big data processing power, you will always find what you

need; it also requires a deep learning, what Bourdieu famously called a 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1995 (1990)). And as Wright and Rabo note, this need for high levels of sheer craftsmanship – knowledge built up over many years – is even recognized in many of the reforms made in the academy. While there is an increasing push for generic transferable skills and a gradual removal of organizational structures that support distinct disciplines, at the same time, auditing of academic research requires academic staff to have highly specialized expertise in particular fields in order to score well (Wright and Rabo 2010: 3). Moreover, as McSherry pointed out some years ago, the drive towards making the knowledge that universities generate directly profitable (even in Europe) has led to some radical developments in intellectual property rights law: the particular new knowledge created by researchers is increasingly subjected to patent and property legislation (McSherry 2001). Academics are expected to simultaneously belong to no disciplinary units in their universities and teach generic transferable skills while also being expected to excel in particular fields and win international prizes for their achievements in those fields.

This question of knowledge as property raises an additional issue about the reforms underway in universities, and how that might alter the way in which knowledge is generated in them. Marilyn Strathern, while considering the question of who 'owns' academic knowledge, outlines the difference between the logic by which scientific knowledge is generated and the logic of patent and copyright law. In her words:

Scientists have used the term 'gift exchange' for a prestige-reward system through which scientists both ensure the circulation of information, and gain recognition for doing so. The individual supposedly shares findings with the scientific community at large, so that knowledge taken out of a public domain is returned to it. […] what is being called *knowledge* in this context is defined by its belonging to … an academic 'community' – a community that is not at all the same as the university. (Strathern 2004: 59)

In this comment, Strathern is noting two things. First, that scientists constantly circulate what they know amongst a community of specialists. The key difference between that and the 'big data' model

of free exchange of information is the need for the existence of the community of specialists: what counts as knowledge is collectively generated through a constant process of sharing information between particular experts, which generates relations between them and between them and the knowledge. It is a form of the notes in the margins of the philologists' books in Spain. And Strathern's second point is that this method of generating knowledge also means that the knowledge is collectively owned by that community of scientists. They are all part of making it. Strathern points out that the logic of intellectual property rights (ownership of knowledge), whether in terms of patent or copyright, "is actually antithetical to this kind of accreditation" (Strathern 2004: 59). It is antithetical because property rights over knowledge, which gives just one individual or entity the exclusive rights over a particular finding, denies the existence of the dense web of relations built up over the years between the community of scientists which makes it possible for the knowledge to be generated in the first place.

The implications of Corsín's argument, when combined with these additional points, is that disciplinary expertise, and the community of scholars that is required to create it, is still very much needed in order for scientific knowledge to be generated, and therefore disciplines are still very much needed. However, this argument, which bears a striking resemblance to the Humboldt model of scholarship (and for a reason: it is more or less the same thing), has often been dismissed as being 'antiquarian', as resisting change for the sake of it, of sticking to 'old fashioned' techniques of generating knowledge that are not suitable to the twenty-first century. So it is important to note that neither Corsín nor many others who argue in favour of this crafted/engineered model of knowledge are against change. On the contrary, the argument is that in order to be truly innovative and creative, in order to genuinely provide the means to flexibly and quickly respond to ever-changing conditions, a commitment to much higher levels of expertise is required than the reverse. New technologies might indeed assist with that aim; but only if the logic and ideals guiding their use do not contradict such an aim.

Another critique against the idea of maintaining disciplinary expertise is that disciplines create rigid boundaries between themselves and other disciplines, and between themselves and the wider world. The argument goes that in the current fast-changing conditions, such boundaries hold back innovation and need to be removed. Yet both McSherry (2001) and Strathern (2004), amongst a number of other scholars have demonstrated that this is a rather limited understanding of both disciplines and the way in which communities of scientists develop and transform over time. Strathern uses the analogy of kinship, in which one scholarly community can, through collaborations with another one, give birth to a third, which can then create alliances with different ones, which then give birth to yet more combinations (Strathern 2004: 45-6). There is nothing in the logic of specialist scholarly communities which suggests that people must stay within their disciplinary boundaries: if their understanding is enriched by collaborating with others, that is often exactly what will happen.

This is where my second example of how the fostering of communities of specialist expertise should be a key part of what universities are for: Tuija Pulkkinen's recent paper on the inherent trans-disciplinarity of gender studies (Pulkkinen 2015). That example shows that there is no incompatibility between innovative collaborations between disciplines and the need for training in scholarship as an artisinal craft. In the course of this paper, Pulkkinen outlines Derrida's reasons for founding the multi-disciplinary *Collége international de philosophie* in Paris. She describes how Derrida's key aim in setting up the Collége was to institutionally and structurally bring philosophy together with other disciplines so that they could creatively intersect. Pulkkinen concludes that "this idea of intersection (in this case the intersection of philosophy with other disciplines) and transdisciplinarity does not put the discipline of philosophy in doubt, it does not suggest that we need to question the idea of 'artisanal' forms of disciplinary institutions in order for this new transdisciplinarity to be realized." (Pulkkinen 2015: 196-7). Instead, it involves ensuring that space is provided for the development of a deep engagement with a particular body of

knowledge, so that one becomes an artisan, which can then be put to work in collaboration with other disciplines.

In sum, this argument about what universities are for suggests that they are there to provide the scholarly environment for a detailed, lengthy, apprenticeship into specialist knowledge and the exercise of people's minds. That not only involves the learning of techniques and skills (though inevitably that is a part of it); it also involves developing a deep and enduring knowledge of specific fields and disciplines, of circulating knowledge within an enduring community of scholars, all of which can *then* be drawn upon in other contexts in order to flexibly and intelligently collaborate with different disciplines and even outside the academic sector altogether. Along with many other scholars, I find this argument considerably more compelling than the idea that knowledge creates itself through some kind of invisible hand mechanism, or that knowledge is created by removing all the differences between disciplines altogether.

The UK's Research Assessment Exercises and Research Excellence Frameworks: Proving the Case

The reason I find the argument so compelling is not only the strength of the points made in this literature; it is also, and perhaps a little ironically, my experience over the last few years with the UK's rigorous (and some would say relentless) auditing of the quality of British universities' research. These audits, carried out every few years by the UK's Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), examine, in detail, the quality of research carried out within all disciplines in all universities in the UK. The outcome of the audits determines the level of 'quality related' (QR) government funding that each discipline receives for the following five years until the next audit.

After the first two relatively 'light touch' audits carried out in 1986 and 1989, much more detailed and intensive audits, called Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) were held in 1992, 1996, 2001 and 2008.[2]

2 http://www.rae.ac.uk/aboutus/history.asp

The most recent audit, carried out in 2014, was renamed the Research Excellence Framework (REF). I was an external assessor for RAE 2001, in which I was asked to assess the research of particular researchers; in 2008, I was an actual member of the RAE panel that assessed anthropology for the whole of the UK; and in 2014, I was a member of the REF panel that assessed anthropology and development studies for the whole of the UK. These experiences, and particularly through the RAE 2008 and REF 2014 panel memberships, in which I was exposed to a detailed analysis of the structure and research activities of every anthropology department in the UK, have persuaded me that what universities do best (irrespective of what they may be for, as such), is to provide the strongest possible collective environment of scholars in which to develop specialist expertise that can then be combined with, brought into relation with, translated into or deployed in a variety of ways, and often in unexpected ways. The RAE and REF audits have been central parts of the UK government's process of changing the practices and structure of its universities since the mid-1980s. As exercises, they provide a powerful window into the thinking and workings of how one country's government is realigning the relationship between the state and higher education. Yet my experience has taught me that however differently the criteria are defined from one audit to the next, the results repeatedly showed that it was where rigorous specialisation in particular disciplines was structurally supported by the university, combined with the existence of open channels of communication and collaboration between disciplines, that generated the most consistently high results in all of these audits of research quality.

Given that many believe the real underlying purpose of the RAE and REF audits was to engineer a fundamental change in British universities along the lines that I have been discussing above (and see also Brennan and Shah 2000), it may seem strange that this has been the outcome: a reinforcement of the basic ideals set out by Humboldt rather than their breakdown. Yet there were also major structural and even intellectual changes in the workings of British universities during that period, changes which were indeed brought about in part because of the audits, as Shore, amongst many others, have commented

(Shore 2008). This repeats the paradox discussed above, in which universities are increasingly discouraging disciplinary distinctiveness while requiring their staff to become increasingly internationally recognised for their disciplinary expertise. In this case, the paradox is that while audit systems are increasingly rewarding managerialism and a centralisation of power over academic freedom in universities, and encouraging strategically-oriented research aimed at winning the audit game (Power 1997), in fact the results have highlighted once more that provision of the resources for the maintenance and autonomy communities of scholars willing to collaborate and share knowledge, who work collectively to generate new ideas, and who do that predominantly because of a combination of a commitment to scholarship and the sheer joy in carrying out research, is the kind of environment that generates the best results. Although the RAE audits drew a great deal of fire from the academic press and individual scholars, there was one aspect of these panels that remained unchanged from the normal process of peer review that all scholarship undergoes: the people carrying out the assessment of the quality of the research was a panel of scholars from the same field. The assessment criteria were somewhat different (and controversially so at times); and the uses to which the results were put by university managers was objectionable to many; but the basic process of assessing research quality was done in the same way as in the normal way of establishing the quality of research. That is why I was on this panel: I was chosen as being one of my colleagues' peers.

The Impact of Impact

That process of auditing through peer review remained unchanged until REF 2014 was introduced, which brings me to the most recent and most radical iteration of these UK audits. Although there was still a panel of academic peers, there was a new element introduced in REF2014: a measure intended to evaluate the 'Impact' of academic research outside of the academic context. And that new criterion came

with the appointment of panel members who were non-academic assessors of the Impact of academic work on non-academic life.

For the purposes of the audit, Impact was defined as "an effect on, change or benefit to, the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia."[3] And Impacts were to be assessed by their 'reach and significance' "regardless of the geographic location in which they occurred, whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally" (*ibid*, paragraph 144, p.27). Needless to say, there were endless debates on what the precise meaning of 'reach and significance' might be, and how such 'reach and significance' might be demonstrated. In simple terms, 'reach' referred to how widespread the effect was – how many people, or how many places, were affected by it; and 'significance' referred to the importance of the impact: if it changed people's lives, it was of very considerable significance; if it only had a minor effect on something, then it was of minor significance. Many academics as well as university managers expressed particular consternation about how to deal with Impact because it was a criterion that had not been in existence when the research was carried out, and nobody predicted that their research may be assessed according to such criteria. Yet, although nobody was quite sure how to tackle this new form of audit, there was a great deal of attention paid to it, as Impact accounted for 20% of the entire grade awarded to each discipline in each university (or Unit of Assessment, as disciplines were called in REF-speak). It was originally suggested that the percentage should be 25%, but after sustained and heavy objections from the universities, this was reduced to 20%. Nevertheless, that percentage had the potential to completely change the results of any given university's anthropology department.

The addition of Impact as a criterion for measuring the quality of research was not only controversial for these reasons; it was also because, for the first time in the history of universities in the UK, research carried out by academics would be assessed directly by people who were not a part of their scholarly community, but instead from the non-academic sector.

3 REF 02.2011, *Assessment Criteria and Guidance on Submissions*, paragraph 140, page 26.

That crossed an extremely strong intellectual and moral line in the UK, and the level of discontent it created amongst academic staff there still reverberates today. The intellectual line it crossed was the Humboldtian conviction that the key criterion for testing the quality of research is the judgement of one's peers, which establishes both the value of the research, and its significance. The Impact criterion was suggesting that there should, in addition, be a completely different measure of the value and significance of the research, which is the effects it had somewhere other than within the field of the community of scholars who produced it. And the moral line it crossed was the principle that academic scholars should have an absolute freedom to choose what they wish to research, within the condition that it should make sense to the collectivity of scholars who are working in the same field; the criterion of non-academic relevance should not enter into the matter. Yet now, disciplines were being asked to select two or three 'case studies' of impact from research that their staff had done within the last few years, which should present the impact, with evidence.

Each case study included a written description; the itemisation of the research that was done which led to the impact (called the 'underpinning research'); evidence of reference to the research by non-academic users, and also peer-reviewed scholarly publications showing the academic quality of the research on scholarly grounds; details of the 'significance and reach' of the impact; and evidence of sources that could corroborate the impact.

During 2012 and 2013, when the universities in the UK were preparing their submissions to the REF panels, there were workshops, training days, conferences, trial runs and regular mutual consultations with colleagues about what 'counts' and what does not 'count' as Impact. And although enormous amounts of work went into producing all this data, in the end, the main description of the impact (called the Impact Template) was just three pages long, and each case study was less than four pages long, including all the references. The level of effort, expertise, and innovation that went into creating these documents was highly impressive, and easily on a par with the skills used to carry out standard research. Whatever else it proved, it demonstrated,

once again, the powerful capacity of the collective efforts of an expert scholarly community to address new problems presented to it. Groups of scholars were able to reorganize their knowledge into the newly required form.

Amongst the titles of the resulting case studies of Impact that were submitted to the Anthropology and Development Studies panel were: Improving Public Understanding of the Effects of Aircraft Noise (University of Manchester); The Use of Expert Evidence in Asylum Procedures (the University of Edinburgh); Genocide prevention In the Great Lakes Region of Africa (University of Sussex); The Gashaka Primate Project: Conserving the world's rarest chimpanzee (University College London); Refugee Integration Programme (Queen Margaret Edinburgh), and; Value, Debt, Direct Action and Participatory Democracy (Goldsmiths College London).[4]

So what was the impact of Impact? I have no access to systematic research results as yet. From my own experience of this one social science panel, the reverberations are still being felt, and few of them are positive. The most immediate and worst effect has been on those departments which miscalculated how to tell their Impact stories, and as a result their overall mark was pulled down considerably lower than it would have been without the impact criterion. As the REF audit had set up the element of competition between universities, the usual sharing of information across the discipline (which is normally highly efficient in anthropology, as it is a small discipline) was severely curtailed, and that inevitably resulted in some people interpreting how to play the game differently from others.

In addition, the sense of disproportion that Corsín mentions for the academics in Spain was powerfully and literally felt in the assessment of Impact. The assessment of research publications involved assessing four publications (normally) for each member of staff in each university department assessed; for a department with 15 staff, that would amount to 60 publications (books and articles) and thousands of pages of text, representing many years of research. Yet for Impact, the same

4 All the REF 2014 results, and the full descriptions of the Impact templates and case studies can be found at http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results, last accessed 20.10.2015.

department would submit either two or three case studies of four pages each, plus a three-page Impact template. For those eleven or thirteen pages, the department would receive 20% of their total mark. For most people submitting their applications to the REF panel, it felt completely out of proportion. The reaction of many university managements and administrations, both to having to carry out the Impact task and in dealing with the results, has also, by all accounts, been experienced as highly disproportionate by the academic staff.

At the same time, the impact of Impact brought some unexpected positive results as well. The first was the realisation by many that their research, which they had designed and carried out using the usual standards of intellectual curiosity, and which had been judged in the usual way by a community of their peers, could be rethought and brought into a different kind of relationship with other forms of knowledge outside the academy. It was a demonstration of how that community of scholars which is more usually there to deepen and broaden disciplinary expertise and maintain academic standards can extraordinarily easily be put to work on another task. To me, this was an admittedly unexpected and quite surprising outcome of participating as a panel member in the REF 2014 assessments of Impact. It actively demonstrated to me the point that Strathern made in *Commons and Borderlands: working papers on interdisciplinarity, accountability and the flow of knowledge* (Strathern 2004): that having a deep understanding of a discipline and a dense web of relations with both a body of knowledge and one's peers provides the most powerful potential for meaningful communication, collaboration and the deployment of artisanal skills in new fields, and even across sectors where that is needed.

These are academics who are committed to their disciplines and are open to making their expertise and knowledge available to others; who are committed to their books, to rigorous scholarship and to insisting on the right to pursue their intellectual curiosity simply because they want to know the answer and for no other reason. These scholars are not old-fashioned people who have failed to understand the needs of the knowledge economy: they *are* the knowledge economy. And they are what universities are for.

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Sociology's Critical Awareness of the Present

Pekka Sulkunen

The title of this conference, *What are universities for?*, is a good question at this moment for Finnish research policy, but it has wider international relevance, especially for sociology. E.N. Setälä, the author of the still authoritative grammar of modern Finnish, complained in 1925 when serving as the Minister of Education that university professors are loaded with so many responsibilities for teaching, administration, and other duties that they can hardly be expected to efficiently produce the scientific knowledge that was necessary for the prosperity and secure future of the young nation. For this reason, he proposed that publicly funded research should be placed in state research institutes, and that the universities should only play an auxiliary role in training scientists and should assist them in other ways (Vähä-Savo, forthcoming). Finnish research policy followed these guidelines for decades. The first efforts to produce science-based knowledge for the state started in the fields of geology and meteorology in the 1880s, and the number of research institutes increased rapidly after the 1920s. By 1960, the state had established research institutes in all major areas; in agriculture alone there were about 50 research units and laboratories in the country. The most recent institute to be established was the Centre for Social and Health Research Institute (Stakes) in 1992, soon (2009) to be merged with the National Institute of Health.

After a long debate on 'sector research', in 2012 an expert group appointed by the National Council for Science and Innovation recommended that most of the institutes be merged into bigger units and that the major part of their research activities be moved to universities. This policy has been implemented ever since, and much

of the research has been halted in the remaining institutes. In 2014 the Council of Strategic Research was established within the Academy of Finland to deliver part of the funds thus saved to research consortiums in areas defined as priorities by the national Government.

From the perspective of the universities, the reversal of science policy in their favour might seem flattering. It appears to recognize the value of academic freedom and to respect researchers' need to maintain a disinterested distance from policy and politics.

Before jumping to such conclusions, it is worth observing a kind of Luhmannian paradox in this policy change. The state's gaze on reality, as transmitted by scientific research, has changed over the course of these transitions. The early research institutes were founded to respond to concrete needs for knowledge: the potential of mining and metallurgy, meteorology, the agricultural sciences and forestry (several institutes were established in this area), engineering, the economy, education, health, home economics, and most other fields. These fields were also represented in the universities as disciplinary departments and established in the international scientific community. However, as science policy gradually took shape as an autonomous area of governance, with its own designated institutions of planning, funding, and evaluation, these concrete needs were replaced by abstract measurements of output, complemented with periodic in-depth evaluations by international panels. As science policy became more differentiated from other spheres of governance, it started to obey its own code, partly copied from economics, of numerical measurements of output and, to some extent, quality. But the state no longer asks questions of a concrete nature, as was the case earlier when Setälä expressed his doubts about the capacity of universities to produce useful knowledge.

The desire to attain practical and deliverable knowledge remains, but what is 'strategic' or 'relevant' has itself turned into highly abstract notions such as environmental sustainability, equality, security, health, and technological innovation. This desire is expressed as claims for object-centred rather than discipline-based knowledge to

stress its practical value, but these claims have very little substance compared to the research institutes of the early twentieth century.

Sociology is one of those areas of knowledge whose identity in terms of its object has faded away, at least in science policy discourses. To assess how well universities are equipped to respond to society's knowledge needs in this field, we must first take a look at what lies behind the new practicality of non-disciplinarity, not in terms of the interactions between disciplines but of the objects of knowledge they address.

Why is Disciplinarity a Problem?

Disciplinary identity among the social sciences was important in the formation of the institutional divisions between them in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was closely related to the object of their research agendas, in the same way as for the state research institutions in the same period. Working across disciplinary boundaries has never been a problem within the sciences themselves, with the possible exception of economics (cf. The Gulbenckian Commission 1996). For sociology, only the partners have changed over time: from economics to political science, geography and history, to the cultural sciences, the sciences of language, biology, evolutionary theory in particular, and even to the medical sciences in various ways. Psychology and philosophy in their various branches have always been indispensable ingredients. Just think of the busy cross-border traffic of ideas between sociology, anthropology, history, political science, and philosophy, especially in Europe throughout the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the plea for transdisciplinarity has appeared in science policy, most importantly in the concept of *Mode 2 science* developed by Helga Novotny, Michael Gibbons, and others in the 1980s and 1980s (Gibbons et al. 1997; Nowotny et al. 2001). We should remember that the issue then was *evaluation*, not really disciplinary closure as such. And as we all know, we did get evaluation, for good and bad.

Today the plea for inter-, trans-, or multidisciplinarity would be even less well founded than before if it were directed only at disciplinary closure. It does not seem to aim at evaluation either. The plea, as far as I can see, is now more radical: it no longer aims to promote disciplinary cross-fertilisation nor evaluation but *steering and control* by extra-academic criteria and by non-academic institutions and processes. In this way it is directed at the university itself as the institution of knowledge production, diffusion, and application. Recent science policy documents, for example, the work programme of the recently established Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland, formulate this ambition by declaring its mission to be issue-based (ilmiökeskeinen) research funded for immediate practical uses.

This emphasis has two functions. The first is, obviously, power. Like the programme-based science funding of the European Union, strategic research is open to lobbying from outside the academic community, and in this way opens the gates to whomever has the interest in and the means to steer the public funds for research and innovation. The second is navigation of the ship of science *by political* justifications of the assumed utility to payers. While everyone agrees that science should be useful to society, however this is understood, the practical weaknesses of programme-based research funding are obvious, so I need to say little about them as they have been thoroughly discussed, and the principle itself has been rejected also by those who were part of developing the Mode 2 model (Helga Novotny was very firm on this when she was leading the European Research Council, for example). Scientists are not so blind to reality that they need to be reminded by the Government about the importance of the strategic goals that everyone shares. The most concrete effect of programme-based research funding is probably that scientists have to rewrite their research proposals every time the Government decides on a new wording for what are universally agreed to be the most serious political issues in society. The substance of the research plans, in so far as they are based on the current state of the art in the field, probably change very little.

The Sociological Mission

As the disciplinary identities of the social sciences sink into the systemic differentiation of science policy and the ocean waves of political justifications, have their objects faded away as well? The relationship between knowledge and practice is not a question of scientific autonomy alone. If it were, those who are recruiting members from outside academia to governing boards and to the management of universities and research funding bodies might have a reason. The link between scientific knowledge production and its practical use could be established directly by controlling funding, However, the relationship between the production of knowledge and its practical use is complex and cannot be reduced to the control of resources. Scientific knowledge is a triple representation of reality: of its object, of the knowledge interests of society, and of the epistemic as well as institutional position of its subject, that is, the scientific community.

The *first* of these representations, knowledge and its object, is complex because it is always based on earlier knowledge; they build on what Ian Hacking (2004 [1999]), following Foucault, has called historical ontologies, or what Imre Lakatos (1978) called research programmes. Our ways of conceptualizing social class and other categories to describe a population and our views of the nation, the state, the economy, and indeed of the social itself build and structure observations of social reality, and they are themselves always already outcomes of research programmes that have emerged from earlier knowledge interests that have prevailed in society.

I shall next discuss the *second* level more concretely as regards the discipline of sociology: knowledge represents not only its object; it also represents knowledge interests existing in the society that gives rise to them. Sciences always have missions, and the missions are encoded in their disciplinary identities. The missions of the social sciences have always been affected by conflicting interests, beliefs, opinions, and callings in society. The sociological mission, or if you like, its meta-mission, has been a response to troubles similar to what the world is facing today since the inception of the discipline in the Enlightenment

and even more so since its institutionalization as one of disciplines among the social sciences. What happens when the political iron belts of dictatorial rule are no longer strong enough to hold societies together? Shattering dictatorships do not by themselves transform into democracies, and even solid Western societies display signs of eruption, as we are observing before our very eyes today. What are the conditions under which societies can govern themselves so that the political society is no longer the necessary cause of social order but emerges from the social order itself and responds – or does not respond – to its needs?

Ever since the Enlightenment, social scientists have known that democracy is a field of friction between 'republican terror', or the compelling demand for uniformity in the name of the general will, and autonomous agency, which implies uniqueness and difference. New democracies tend to drift towards uniformity, old ones towards difference, and neoliberal governance combines elements of both, demanding the uniform self-responsibility of social actors while claiming their right to choose and be respected as unique and different. Jean-Jacques Rousseau invented the idea of the 'general will', *volonté générale*, that was carried into the republican tradition of modern societies. It was turned into an assumption of binding political will established through democratic processes, to be followed by all members of society. The work of Reinhart Koselleck, Jacques Donzelot, Claude Lefort, and many others have shown how easily this assumption gets twisted into claims for totalitarian uniformity. Even the Nordic countries have their Jacobinist traditions. Alcohol prohibitions, the regulation of sexuality, and the close relationship between the state and the Lutheran church are examples of this (Sulkunen 2014).

Critical Awareness of the Present

Any society, modern democratic ones more than dictatorships, is an arena of negotiation between opinions and loyalties. In order to negotiate, societies must have some shared principles of justification,

such as individual freedoms and rights, some understanding of justice and fairness, and demonstrate the responsible use of power – or as we would say today, political accountability. When these principles are compared with the current reality, they will always be found wanting, and a critical awareness of the present arises. Mutually understandable principles of justification never imply consensus; on the contrary, when these principles are compared with the reality of the present, they involve conflicts between groups and interests over what the dearths and failings are and how they should be resolved.

Intellectuals have always revolted against the compelling expectations of uniformity, but only the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s was strong enough to break the walls of the homogeneity demanded by cultural traditionalism in the name of national unity. The Nordic welfare state has been an individualizing project: it has assured protection against dependencies on traditional ties and been successful in gaining acceptance for this ideal. Agency, in the sense of self-direction, self-control, and citizen autonomy, has become the dominant principle of justification of the social order, and equality in the capacity to exercise it has served as a measure of justice within this order. But when people start taking their autonomy for granted as a source of inviolable pride, they start claiming the right to uniqueness and difference, not only to autonomy and equality. When these principles were compared with the actual reality towards the end of the 'three golden decades' after the Second World War, a critical awareness of the present was articulated in political confrontations concerning the state of society and how it should be changed.

Sociology was part of the intellectual movement to confront the issue of uniformity and justice with uniqueness and difference. Academician and Professor Erik Allardt's theory of the division of labour and the pressure of uniformity was an ingenuous analysis of what happens if this issue cannot be solved. If the pressure of uniformity is too high relative to differences, coercive force and violence will result; if the pressure is too low, anomie will be the consequence. Societies that are shaking off their political iron belts tend to drift towards the former, more mature democracies towards the latter. Coercive force to

maintain uniformity may develop into totalitarian rule, as in Turkey, whose republicanism has been a prime example of Allardt's theory, except that it has never been able to relax its compulsion towards uniformity, averred by all sides of the conflicting sections of its society. The Kemalist secularism based on the revolutionary French republican ideals of freedom has turned into conservative nationalism, confronted with an Islamist populism that tolerates difference perhaps even less. The potential of similar republican totalitarianism is a reality in other new democracies as well.

Anomie, or relatively low pressure for uniformity, appears today as experiences of differences that are unrelated to groups and interests. Instead, they are contingent, arbitrary, and highlight detachment and uniqueness. School shootings, individual acts of political terrorism, and part of the symbolic violence that appears on the Internet are examples of this, in combination with xenophobic attacks on immigrants and other outsiders that on the surface demand homogeneity but in reality are signs of difference rather than unity.

Symbolization

Differences and interests are expressed as images, or signs. They can be of two kinds: they refer either to real social relationships, or they are symbolic, in other words, images that are more or less arbitrary, imaginary, or otherwise fuzzy markers of negotiable interests and rights. Religion, ethnicity, nationality, and many other symbols often stand for real interests and rights that can be bargained for. But the same interests and rights can also be expressed in other, less transparent symbolic ways, and symbols themselves are not negotiable. Symbols are wicked signs. When differences and interests are articulated as non-transparent symbols, they cannot be negotiated, only defended and attacked. When belonging to a society is not articulated even as symbols, let alone collective action, mindless violence and cruelties will inevitably occur.

Sociology was born as an intellectual mission to explain why and how a society of autonomous agents is possible without political force backed by violence and coercion. This requires negotiations and concessions, which are more needed in the contemporary world than in the European society of the eighteenth century, when the idea of a science of society was born. The disciplinary tradition of sociology, even before its institutionalization, has centred on this issue. Its function has been not so much to achieve compromise as to see through and behind the symbols that are fuzzy and sometimes stubborn translations of differences and interests into wicked meanings. The mission of the sociological intervention has been to translate them back to negotiable issues.

Intellectual Autonomy and Its Object

The *third* dimension of how scientific knowledge represents reality directly concerns the question in the title of this book/conference: the epistemic and institutional position of its subject, the scientific community. This position determines what kinds of questions researchers can ask, what kinds of answers are expected of them, and consequently, how they are supposed to define its object. It is a mistake to believe that the mission of sociology I have outlined above is limited to political sociology, or even sociology of politics alone. It is an even more serious error to think that its practical implications could be squeezed into strategic targets of security and the national interest, just as the strategic tasks of geology cannot be understood only in terms of its contribution to innovations concerning the potential of the mining industry in a national territory. The intellectual task of sciences is constructed on the basis of their objects, like in the state research institutes of the early twentieth century, and not on abstract practical interests, however public and politically justifiable they may appear in science policy declarations. The object of sociology is society, and there is no reason to believe that the issues of unity and difference, negotiation and symbolization, justification and conflicts, and what follows from

them, are of less practical relevance today than they were when sociology was born in the Enlightenment. To see the object of sociology in this way does not preclude differentiation and specialization in the field. Consumption, control, culture, development, family, immigration, the labour market, mobility, policing, reproduction, sexuality, xenophobia, and the rest of the current specializations are all important aspects of contemporary society, but their pragmatic relevance comes from the object, not from political formulations of strategic goals.

The intellectual autonomy provided by universities is probably more important for sociology than for many other disciplines, because its object is torn with political and ideological tensions. According to Alexander Broadie (2009), the contemporary holder of Adam Smith's chair of Logic and Rhetoric at the University of Glasgow, modern social science including sociology was begotten in Scottish universities for a specific reason. Unlike France, the Scottish universities were relatively independent of the church as well as of the state. Therefore the Enlightenment in France became both artistic and political, mostly outside the institutional academic world, whereas the Scottish participants in the same debates used their academic freedom to participate in the philosophical and political debates on key issues in the emerging modern democracies in Europe and America.

Science policy that stresses the role of universities has great potentialities for enlightened democracy in the contemporary world of conflicts and violence. Sociology has an enormous responsibility to accept the challenge. The question is whether universities are themselves prepared to see the gravity of the problems we are facing, and if they will have the wisdom to accept that the practicality of science cannot be assured by abstract politically agreeable goals but by adapting the intellectual effort to its object.

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Afterword:
European universities in the 2010s: For What Purpose?

Hannu Nieminen

The main theme in this publication is the turn in European higher education policy in the last 20 years from policy based on democracy and culture towards policy driven by market-based ideals. Although scholars and policymakers largely agree that this major policy shift has occurred, they identify different reasons and consequences.
In this afterword, I discuss three potential explanations for the policy turn: structure, ideology and contingency. Furthermore, it offers a perspective connecting all three. I will conclude by analysing six different normative approaches that characterise scholarly attitudes towards university policy today.

Why the Turn in University Policy Has Occurred: Three Explanations

In broad terms, there are three main explanations for the policy turn; these include broad structural change in our societies, ideological change, and contingent factors. In what follows I explore these explanations a bit further.

1. Structural change

Shifts in European university policy reflect deeper changes in modern Western societies. Particularly in small countries like Finland, the university institution has played a central role in national development—not only in science and culture but also in social,

political and economic life. Universities have been instrumental in nation building, the production of knowledge, the formation of cultural identity, the promoting of national sciences, etc.

The structural explanation suggests that the national mission of universities has, more or less, expired for both political and economic reasons. European integration has meant that issues previously defined and solved on the national level are now discussed and decided in European Union bodies. National universities are no longer sufficiently adapted to the goals of knowledge production and identity formation. In a similar manner, the globalization of the economy and tightening global competition has led governments to cut public funding to universities. This has forced universities to participate in an uneven fight for financing from non-traditional sources—student fees, commercial ventures, industry endowments, etc. For obvious reasons, compared to major universities in the UK, France, Germany or the US, universities in small European countries are less competitive in this global market.

Regarding the democratisation of knowledge and university access, this shift has been assessed from two different perspectives. According to some scholars, this policy change has led to the expansion of democracy through the dismantling of the narrow paternalistic national framework. Today, information and knowledge are shared globally without national restrictions, and international and global networks, promoting new kinds of scientific and academic innovations, increasingly replace the old, national cultural and scientific structures. However, critics offer another perspective, suggesting that this shift amounts to the commercialization of knowledge production and, as a result, to the enclosure of common domains of academic information and knowledge. This means that the best possible information and knowledge is not be publicly available, and public discussion, necessary for healthy democracy, suffers. Higher education becomes a privilege of the wealthy and is detached from its previous national, regional and local background.

2. *Ideological change*

The explanation for this policy shift based on the change in ideas and attitudes springs from a belief that the majority of people are tired of a paternalistic state that uses public money inefficiently and without real accountability. In this approach, public education is compared to any other public service or utility such as water supply, electricity, communications, etc. Public educational and scientific institutions were necessary when national reconstruction required mass education and national control of resources and science; at that time, educational institutions served the consolidation of a national market economy. However, today, public educational institutions—like all other public services and utilities—are seen as hindrances to the efficient development of markets and private businesses.

This has led to a fundamental reconsideration of the role of universities. Traditional universities were regarded as conservative and backward looking, representing an old, elitist and nationalistic worldview, against a tide of increasing cultural pluralism and liberation. As public monopolies were dismantled in other sectors of society, the aim was to also dismantle them in science and academic education. It was believed that opening higher education and universities to competition would bring about efficiency and innovation and help to get rid of the old, redundant academic practices and branches of academia, especially in humanities and social sciences (such as rare languages and cultures, philosophy, social theory etc.).[1]

This has resulted in three kinds of development. First, there was an emphasis on creating 'lower' level higher education institutions such as Universities of Applied Sciences (previously called Polytechnics). These were designed to respond to industry needs for new practical skills. However, these institutions have not answered the demands for a

1 Why is Middlesex University philosophy department closing? The Guardian, 17 May 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/may/17/philosophy-closure-middlesex-university; University language department closures: 10 things you need to know. The Guardian, 9 October 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/09/university-language-departments-10-things-to-know; Social sciences and humanities faculties 'to close' in Japan after ministerial intervention. Times Higher Education, 14 September 2015, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/social-sciences-and-humanities-faculties-close-japan-after-ministerial-intervention.

more independent and theoretically oriented workforce needed in digitalized work environments. Second, there was a proliferation of private universities in many European countries that promised to offer an alternative to the anachronist public universities and an education designed to meet industrial needs. Third, public universities tried to respond to these challenges by restructuring their modus operandi, following the dictate of New Public Management and emphasising the role of 'hard' sciences in their strategies in order to increase external research funding. In answer to increasing international competition for students, universities started to design their degrees according to market trends and profit from increasing student fees.

Critics have remarked, however, that there is no evidence that the privatization and marketization of universities has made them more innovative and efficient. The weakening of the social sciences and humanities has led universities to lose these critical faculties, crucial for resisting increasing extra-academic pressures from politicians and industries. One additional disturbing factor is that the emphasis on competition and privatization necessarily leads to fragmentation of the policy field, hiding the big picture. This means that most, if not all, OECD countries we have experienced a downward spiral in both the quality and quantity of higher education. Against common wisdom, the average level of education in many well-developed countries is decreasing, not increasing.[2]

3. *Contingent factors*

The contingency explanation for this policy trend relies on the understanding that change is not linear but rather the result of the interaction of several parallel factors occurring simultaneously. The assumption is that a 'window of opportunity' allowed these factors to be realised under situational conditions. The end result is a compromise where intentions do not materialise as planned but are rather shaped by prevailing circumstances. The implications of decisions and

2 Nieminen, Hannu (2016) 'Digital divide and beyond: What do we know of Information and Communications Technology's long-term social effects? Some uncomfortable questions'. In European Journal of Communication 2016, Vol. 31(1) 19 –32.

choices cannot be fully predicted, as the original aims and foreseen consequences are replaced by situational compromises, the effects of which are only seen once change has occurred.

The more complex European societies become as the result of globalization and societal differentiation, the more difficult it will be to reconcile the aims and purposes of different actors and to foresee the implications of public policy choices. Rational consideration between alternatives has less and less explanatory power than before. From this perspective, explanations for changes in university policy are not derived from long historical processes but from shorter term conditions. The triggers are identified from different factors: incidental political trade-offs between major parties, the personal characteristics of decision makers, the unplanned accumulation of many small, separate choices, etc.

When a chance for decision making occurs, or in other words, when the window of opportunity opens, it is essential that choices are made quickly, utilizing the conditions that exist at that particular moment. This seems to have been the case when the Finnish government decided to cut down university funding by hundreds pf millions in 2015.[3] The risk is that these conditions will afterwards appear less than optimal, that the information used to justify the choice proved false, that the commitment of decision makers was weak, that the decisions were inadequate and the outcome was a failure. The problem is that after decisions are made, they are difficult to reverse; this requires the opening of a new window of opportunity, and a new opening under similar conditions is unlikely to take place.

The strength of the contingency explanation is its intent to locate the moment decision-making takes place and the different factors that influence it. Its weaknesses include the disregard of power relations and the long-standing processes behind their formation – as in the case of universities, the historical connection between human welfare and higher education. Contingent factors may impact what form decisions and choices take and the situations in which decisions are made, but

3 Universities face drastic cuts and tuition fees. University World News, 06 June 2015, http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150606081055889.

choices are always framed and conditioned by wider societal, economic and political power relations.

A connecting perspective

As seems obvious by now, none of these explanatory models alone is able to explain the changes in European university policy. However, each contains interesting and seemingly valid elements.

The strength of the *structural explanation* is that it helps us to compare the changes in higher education policy to developments in other areas and sectors. Along with wider societal changes, the role and significance of science and higher education also transform. In this context, the traditional role of universities in constructing and consolidating national identities weakens. Previously, university policy aimed to protect and endorse the university as a national institution in promoting national culture and democracy; today, this focus is replaced by economic ideals and values. This development can be seen in different forms across all European countries.

The weakness of the structural explanation, however, is that its explanatory power does not extend to the social and cultural consequences of these policy changes. This is exemplified by the two opposing interpretations of its effects, presented above; structural changes can be assessed either as part of the widening of democracy or of its narrowing.

The strength of the *ideological explanation* is that it helps to clarify the justification of neo-liberal university policy, promoted from the 1980s onwards. Previous science and higher education policy was seen to suffocate and restrict citizens' freedom of choice. Citizens wanted to get rid of the state's tutelage, and the freedom offered by the market provided a solution to this. The strength of the appeal of this market-led approach is demonstrated by the fact that it was embraced in nearly all European countries between the 1980s and 2000s.

The weakness of the ideological explanation is that it does not account for why this change took place when it did, why it was rooted only in neo-liberal ideology and not, for example, Marxism or neo-

conservatism, and why it occurred in similar forms in different parts of Europe. The structural explanation can illuminate this: in the 1970s and 1980s changes occurred in the structures of European societies—in the economy, social relations, politics—that promoted or 'invited' neo-liberal solutions, including in the sphere of science and higher education.

The strength of the *contingency explanation* is its ability to interpret the motives and negotiation processes behind individual decisions. As an example, we can consider the major lay-offs in Finnish universities in the spring of 2016; some 1,000 people were laid off in the University of Helsinki alone.[4] The background to this includes the results of the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2015, which led to the formation of the right-wing parliament, and the Finnish economic crisis, which led to the implementation of a large-scale austerity programme resulting in large-scale cuts across all sectors of public spending. One of the worst hit was education, especially universities. The University of Helsinki, which is the only Finnish university among the best 100 in the global university rankings, faces the loss of 106 million euros per year by 2020. Several years ago reforms to the Finnish university system had already begun with the aim of making it more competitive and effective in both education and in research. The key words that the university reformers and modernisers constantly repeat are 'profiling' and 'prioritizing'. For the university leadership, government policy seems to have opened a window of opportunity, allowing for a double strategy. First, university leadership has challenged the government by announcing major lay-offs in the hope that the government would back down from spending cuts. Secondly, the leadership can also promote their own agenda and utilise the opportunity in order to centralise their power by imposing major structural reforms—closing down departments, merging faculties, etc.—that have been resisted by university personnel until now.

Although the contingency model can help to explain single cases and the reasons behind them, which are often contingent and non-predictable, it neglects wider economic and political frameworks. These

4 Helsinki University to shrink payroll by nearly 1,000. http://yle.fi/uutiset/helsinki_university_to_shrink_payroll_by_nearly_1000/8628873.

create the conditions that determine which outcomes are possible in different historical moments and which are not. Despite the individual factors on which each specific policy change depends, the changes to university policy in different European countries are to a large degree comparable. [5]

The Challenge of Normativity: Research Perspectives

The study of university policy is necessarily normative. Its starting point is the conviction that science and higher education are essential for the functioning of democracy and general human well-being, and that democratic, social and cultural values are primary to the increasing economic and financial interests of universities today. At the same time, it should be said that within the scientific community there are different conceptions of what democracy means and how the balance between scientific and humanistic values and economic interests should be defined and maintained.

It follows that in the study of university policy, there are different opinions regarding the mode of assessing and responding to recent changes to policies concerning higher education and science. Roughly put, we can distinguish six normative approaches, reflecting different scholarly identities:

Democratic nostalgia: This approach demands a return to the welfaristic university policy. Many scholars see scientific knowledge and higher education as public goods, which should be freely and publicly available. This is why public authority—the government—should carry primary responsibility for science and higher education by safeguarding the autonomy of universities and guaranteeing free education on all levels. Many supporters of this approach are influenced by Jürgen Habermas's critical social theory.

Postmodern distance: Power is everywhere, and the task of critical academics is to dismantle its different manifestations. Largely influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of power, the followers of this

5 European higher education faces budget cuts. EUObserver 15. Feb 2010, https://euobserver.com/education/29371.

approach analyse the discourses around university policy and aim to make power visible. Rather than focus on policy proposals or plans of action, they seek to provide instruments for deconstructing prevailing power relations.

Radical enthusiasm: Digitalization and new information and communication technology (ICT) offer unprecedented opportunities for scientific research and higher education, breaking traditional academic barriers. This approach is often influenced by Manuel Castells's theory of the information society. Digital ICT is supposed to fundamentally transform societal relations in the realms of the economy, politics and culture. This means that major reforms are necessary for traditional social institutions, including universities; they are invited to reform their functional logics to act as spearheads of digital change.

Critical activism: The duty of academic scholarship is to assist civic movements aiming to make all knowledge and information free through open access and the public domain. The starting point for this approach is a conviction that current university policy is restricting people's right to knowledge and higher education. Scholars' responsibility is therefore to support the movements aimed at the democratisation of university policy.

Reformist expertise: The task of academics is to assist and advise decision makers and public servants in formulating policies concerning universities and higher education. By participating in the planning and implementation of university policy, academics can influence policy content and the forms of its implementation. The expertise of academic scholars is often utilised on the national level and in many international organizations (e.g., OECD, EU, UNESCO) to promote extra-academic political aims and agendas.

Scientific objectivism: Scholars should engage only in the observation of measurable facts and finding theoretical explanations behind them or connecting them. The mission of scientists is not to propose value judgements or to present recommendations for action but to maintain scientific neutrality. The role of academic scholars is therefore not to make policy proposals or to participate in extra-

academic policy activism. Because university policy concerns value judgements, it is therefore outside scientific expertise.

The approaches described above are ideal types, and in practice most scholars find their academic identity in more than one category. It would not be fair or even possible to order the approaches by preference as all they are justified from their own premises. Each individual researcher has her own personal points of interest and societal views that inform her approach to realising her perceived role in relation to university policy.

Contributors

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