

# Thirty years of crisis?

## The disputed public value humanities research in the Netherlands 1982-2012

**HERAVALUE (Measuring the value of arts & humanities research)  
Country Report.**

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# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ARTS &amp; HUMANITIES RESEARCH VALUE</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1	INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER.....	7
2.2	THE RISE OF THE VALORISATION AGENDA .....	8
2.2.1	<i>Valorisation and the rise of the ‘third mission’ for universities</i> .....	8
2.2.2	<i>Valorisation as research’s contribution to innovation</i> .....	9
2.2.3	<i>The complexity of the valorisation case: a clear example of ‘public failure’?</i> .....	10
2.3	VALORISATION WITHIN ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH .....	11
2.3.1	<i>From public values to public values in public policy domains</i> .....	11
2.3.2	<i>Is valorisation policy facing a public-value failure?</i> .....	13
2.3.3	<i>The resistance within the field – arts &amp; humanities research as different</i> .....	14
2.4	PUBLIC VALUE AND VALORISATION IN ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH.....	15
2.4.1	<i>The case to answer for a public value failure in arts &amp; humanities research</i> .....	15
2.4.2	<i>Towards a public value approach for understanding valorisation in arts &amp; humanities</i> .....	17
2.4.3	<i>Operationalising the idea of a public values failure in arts &amp; humanities research</i> .....	18
<b>3</b>	<b>HERAVALUE AND THE RESEARCH METHOD</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.1	FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST METHODOLOGY TO THE INTERVIEW METHOD .....	21
3.2	THE EMERGENT DECISION FOR A HISTORICAL METHOD .....	25
3.3	INTEGRATING PUBLIC SOURCES AND INTERVIEWEE ANONYMITY .....	26
<b>4</b>	<b>THE CRISIS OF THE HUMANITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS</b> .....	<b>28</b>
4.1	INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY: THE NETHERLANDS.....	28
4.2	HUMANITIES IN DUTCH UNIVERSITIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	28
4.3	THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF HUMANITIES IN UNIVERSITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS .....	29
<b>5</b>	<b>HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM FOR SOCIAL ENDS: THE BACKGROUND TO THE ‘CRISIS OF THE HUMANITIES’</b> .....	<b>32</b>
5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	32
5.2	REFORMS IN THE AREA OF SCIENCE POLICY 1970-90 .....	32
5.2.1	<i>Nota Wetenschapsbeleid (1975)</i> .....	33
5.2.2	<i>Nota Innovatie (1980)</i> .....	34
5.2.3	<i>The shift from Pure to National Science Council (1988)</i> .....	35
5.3	REFORMS IN THE AREA OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY 1970-90.....	35
5.4	IMPACTS OF THE REFORMS ON HUMANITIES .....	38
<b>6</b>	<b>THE CRISIS OF HUMANITIES AND THE SMALL LANGUAGES</b> .....	<b>45</b>
6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	45
6.2	COMMISSIONING A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS?.....	46
6.2.1	<i>Staal Commissie</i> .....	46
6.2.2	<i>Commissie Vonhoff</i> .....	47
6.2.3	<i>The Gerritsen Commission</i> .....	49
6.3	THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE SOCIAL VALUE OF HUMANITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS, C. 2002. ....	51
<b>8</b>	<b>UNIVERSITIES AND MANAGEMENT</b> .....	<b>55</b>
8.1	DEFINING RESEARCH QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE IN ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH.....	55
8.1.1	<i>Key features of Dutch definitions of academic excellence</i> .....	56
8.1.2	<i>Debates and forums shaping the evolution of ideas of A&amp;HR excellence</i> .....	58
8.1.3	<i>The issue of exceptionalism: A&amp;HR as homogenous or heterogeneous</i> .....	60
8.2	IMPACT AND EXCELLENCE IN DUTCH ACADEMIA .....	63
8.2.1	<i>The idea of impact and its relation to academic excellence</i> .....	63
8.2.2	<i>Differences in impact in Dutch humanities</i> .....	64
8.2.3	<i>The strategic dimension to humanities impact in the Netherlands</i> .....	65
8.3	USERS & AUDIENCE IN HUMANITIES RESEARCH .....	66

8.3.1	<i>Understanding the audience: how perceptions of stakeholders shape action</i> .....	66
8.3.2	<i>Conceptual models for knowledge transfer in A&amp;HR</i> .....	67
8.3.3	<i>Stakeholders and users for knowledge transfer in arts &amp; humanities research</i> .....	69
8.4	SYSTEM PRESSURES AND POTENTIAL FUTURE EVOLUTIONARY PATHWAYS.....	71
8.4.1	<i>Perceived future directions and pressures for humanities</i> .....	71
8.4.2	<i>The future evolution of the strategic place of humanities in Dutch universities</i> .....	72
<b>9</b>	<b>POLICY DEBATES CONCERNING THE VALORISATION OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH POST-2007</b> .....	<b>75</b>
9.1	THE BACKGROUND TO CONTEMPORARY POLICY DEBATES.....	75
9.1.1	<i>Valorisation as a serious government industrial policy</i> .....	75
9.1.2	<i>The rise of science system assessment and impact assessment</i> .....	77
9.1.3	<i>New kinds of institutional solutions – digital humanities and LMIs</i> .....	78
9.2	THE FIELD OF POLICY ACTORS.....	79
9.2.1	<i>Who are the key government actors in research policy as it affects arts &amp; humanities research?</i> .....	79
9.2.2	<i>What are their key interests in an abstract, political and practical level?</i> .....	80
9.2.3	<i>Who are the non-governmental actors that are involved in shaping arts &amp; humanities research policy, and what are their interests</i> .....	82
9.3	THE HISTORICAL PROCESS OF INTEREST NEGOTIATION .....	85
9.3.1	<i>What were the defining events in the process of policy intervention?</i> .....	85
9.3.2	<i>How did government perceive the arts &amp; humanities research sector in the Netherlands?</i> .....	86
9.3.3	<i>What were the reasons that government chose to intervene in terms of the logics for intervention?</i> .....	88
9.3.4	<i>What were the mechanisms that defined the process, what were they trying to achieve?</i> .....	90
9.4	TOWARDS A STYLISED MODEL OF THE PROCESS .....	95
9.4.1	<i>What are the determining interests in debates concerning arts &amp; humanities research value?</i> ..	95
9.4.2	<i>How are ‘publics’ defined in this process , who represents the public interest?</i> .....	97
<b>10</b>	<b>SOCIETAL STAKEHOLDERS AND THE USE OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>100</b>
10.1	HOW DOES SOCIETY VIEW THE EFFECTS FROM HUMANITIES RESEARCH?.....	100
10.1.1	<i>How does humanities research affect society?</i> .....	100
10.1.2	<i>What is the role of Dutch humanities research in society?</i> .....	102
10.1.3	<i>How is public performance in A&amp;HR perceived, long versus short term?</i> .....	106
10.2	CARRIERS FOR KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER.....	109
10.2.1	<i>How does society express a demand for knowledge from humanities scholars?</i> .....	109
10.2.2	<i>What are the carriers of knowledge from A&amp;HR to various societal contexts?</i> .....	110
10.2.3	<i>Who funds the knowledge transfer/ exchange activities?</i> .....	112
10.3	WHAT IS SUCCESSFUL HUMANITIES RESEARCH FROM A SOCIETAL PERSPECTIVE? .....	113
10.3.1	<i>Does A&amp;HR need to have economic effects for society?</i> .....	113
10.3.2	<i>Public influences in defining academic research questions</i> .....	115
10.3.3	<i>‘Relevance’ as a criteria for value</i> .....	116
10.4	TOWARDS A MODEL FOR THE ‘PUBLIC’ VALUE OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH.....	118
10.4.1	<i>How does society view knowledge interlinkages between universities and civic society?</i> .....	118
10.4.2	<i>How can publics value for humanities research be understood?</i> .....	119
<b>11</b>	<b>DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>123</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>126</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>127</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>GLOSSARY</b> .....	<b>131</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP A&amp;HR INDICATORS</b> .....	<b>134</b>

## **Table of Figures**

FIGURE 1: MODEL OF DYNAMIC SCIENTIFIC GOVERNANCE SYSTEM CONSTRUCTING A&HR'S VALUE .....	6
FIGURE 2 THE PROBLEM OF PUBLIC VALUE BETWEEN INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC VALUES .....	16
FIGURE 3 A MODEL OF PUBLIC VALUE-MAKING AS SEGMENTED PUBLIC-ELITE INTERACTIONS.....	19
FIGURE 4 THE ORGANISATION OF THE HERAVALUE PROJECT .....	21
FIGURE 5 UNIVERSITY VALUATION OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE IN A WIDER VALUE SYSTEM .....	23
FIGURE 6 SEGMENTATION AND DISTANTIATION OF ACADEMICS FROM USERS: A HIERARCHY .....	58
FIGURE 7 THE PERSISTENT NEWSWORTHINESS OF HUMANITIES IN DUTCH PUBLIC MEDIA .....	73
FIGURE 8 THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SCIENCE POLICY NETWORK IN THE NETHERLANDS. ....	83
FIGURE 9 A SKETCH OF A SYSTEM OF QUALITY INDICATORS FOR DUTCH HUMANITIES .....	92
FIGURE 10 THE CONFLICTING LOGICS OF THE PUBLIC VALUE SYSTEM FOR HUMANITIES RESEARCH .....	94
FIGURE 11 THE SEGMENTED POLICY NETWORK (HORIZONTAL/ VERTICAL) OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH VALUE IN THE NETHERLANDS. ...	97
FIGURE 12 HOW DUTCH HUMANITIES RESEARCH FLOWS INTO SOCIETY. ....	101
FIGURE 13 HUMANITIES RESEARCH AT THE CENTRE OF A MORE COMPLEX ECOLOGY MODEL: .....	103
FIGURE 14 THE FILTERS APPLIED TO HUMANITIES RESEARCH PROJECTS IN REACHING USERS. ....	105
FIGURE 15 THE LIMITED VISIBILITY OF DUTCH HUMANITIES RESEARCHERS IN ONE HIGH PROFILE THEMATIC HUMANITIES CULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE NETHERLANDS.....	106

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The fundamental question with which this report is concerned is:

“what is the public value of arts and humanities research?”

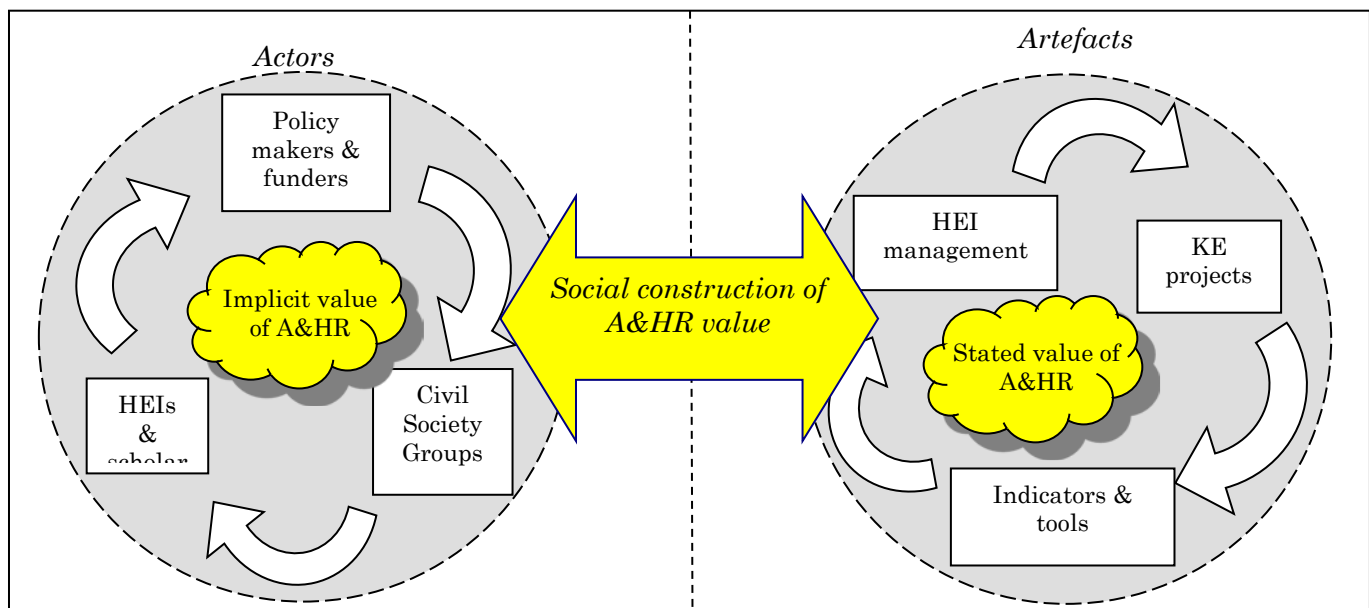
This question is asked because it provides a useful lens through which to understand the wider effects arising from governments’ increasing demands on universities and publicly-funded research organisations to demonstrate the usefulness of their activities. There is clearly across OECD countries a realisation that debates about the value of research in general, and arts & humanities research in particular, have been exclusively framed by economic definitions of value. Although various groups have tried to advance definitions of research’s value more related to wider concepts of social development, definitions which in a broad sense are not resisted, these definitions have failed to become operationalized in the more narrow activities which define research’s value more operationally.

There has been a growing sense of unease in academic communities over the narrow, functional perspectives that have been taken in defining research value. At the same time, those concerns have been easily dismissed as the special interests of a selfish producer group, that of academics seeking to resist the accountability and efficiency requirements that are now common across the public sector. The report therefore asks the overarching question of why are public values more generally – such as the promotion of human rights, public health, social inclusion and cultural awareness – are not more visible in the way that research is valued.

In parallel with this, evidence is starting to emerge that this narrow framing of value is creating tensions with wider publics. In the realm of new biotechnology and nanotechnology applications, there have been significant public resistance where governments have been perceived as rubber-stamping the public release of contentious new developments with extensive societal ramifications where the benefits are restricted to the private owners of those products. The public protests and resistance that emerge can be understood as symptoms of a “public value failure” (*cf.* Bozeman, 2000) where market-efficient outcomes are nevertheless not publicly optimal when considering publics’ non-economic values (such as ethics, politics or conscience).

To answer this question, this report conceptualises the wider public value of arts & humanities research in terms of a constructive process in which producers, users and regulators together negotiate and perform value through its meaning. The users, producers and regulators in this public value system are scholars & universities, publics & cultural organisations, and governments & research funders respectively. On the one hand they debate the value of arts & humanities research in the public policy process. On the other hand, those debates shape the practices and artefacts of arts & humanities research. There is thus an interactive between its discursive and performative construction, which over time create particular valuations of that research. Better understanding the way publics value that research requires better understanding the way that this constructive system (see figure 1 below) operates.

Figure 1: Model of dynamic scientific governance system constructing A&HR's value



But there is a problem in understanding this system, in that many of the pathways and channels are hidden and not easily revealed, because they relate to the intangible idea of what the public values. When one talks about the economic value, there is a clear definition of what that means, which is to say that research is applied to create economic growth. A direct connection can be traced from a piece of biotech or materials engineering research to a company that innovates, increases employment, turnover and profits, they increase aggregate economic activity, and hence drive economic growth. The public value of that – or at least its economic value – cannot be disputed (although some would argue that those direct economic benefits might be outweighed by greater indirect disbenefits such as energy consumption or shifting property rights).

This report therefore focuses on what can be called ‘public value failures’, that is to say moments where the disconnect between the values performed by narrow elite groups have become so out of step with public values that there has been a crisis. In this crisis, consensus and norms dissolve, revealing much more clearly individual actors’ and groups own positions, and allowing a much clearer specification of public interests in the problems. This report is specifically concerned with a country where publicly funded humanities has been in almost perpetual crisis for several decades, the Netherlands.

From the early 1970s, the Dutch government sought to address a deep-seated crisis of its own legitimacy by reforming the public sector to be more business-like. This has consistently worked against the humanities in universities, who have sought special protection from the damage induced by market-working. Humanities have been able to do this because they benefit from a high public valuation in the most general terms. This report therefore studies how these debates in public have unfolded, and how various publics have made their voices heard in these debates. This provides a means to map the system by which the value of arts & humanities research is created, and in particular the ‘public’ element of that value. That in turn provides the mechanism to reflect more generally on ‘public value’ of research, and its relationship to valorisation activities.

## 2 THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH VALUE

### 2.1 Introduction to the chapter

This paper is concerned with the question of what is the value of arts & humanities research. This question has become increasingly salient for policy makers in recent years in the context of fiscal stringency. There is increasing emphasis on the importance of science in the context of the knowledge society. Investment in a research by government is seen as investing in the knowledge capital necessary to drive innovation, productivity growth and ultimately rising living standards. But this debate has favoured those disciplines which are able to capture the imagination as driving this economic growth. In particular, the physical and life sciences are able to tell a compelling story of their impact on growth. Spin-off companies and science parks allow policy-makers to see first-hand and close up how their 'science investments' are creating these economic benefits.

But this new consensus has not benefited all disciplines equally. There are clear disciplinary divides in rates of commercialisation activity when measured in terms of license deals, patenting activity, spin-off company creation and external income generation. This has led to a reification of the idea that in the context of the value of research being the creation of these wider economic benefits, that research can be evaluated and funded in relation to its proportion of these benefits. And this makes the question of what is the value of arts and humanities research. Crossick (2006, 2009) makes compellingly the case that attempts to understand the value of arts & humanities research in terms of these very reductionist metrics (which have their own story, *cf.* Benneworth & Charles 2012) is doomed to failure.

What has therefore emerged is a series of attempts by arts & humanities researchers to make claims for their wider societal value by following a number of strategies. Firstly, there has been an emphasis on interdisciplinary programmes and in particular in ensuring that thematic research (for example on sustainable energy) involves humanities dimensions. Secondly, arts & humanities research funders have enthusiastically embraced practices of knowledge transfer pioneered in the physical and life sciences (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2009). Thirdly, attempts have been made to quantify the economic impact of humanities research through its diffusion into (for example) the creative, public and third sector (Hughes *et al.*, 2011). Fourthly, there have been attempts to argue the contributions which arts & humanities research makes by contributing to the public good, in terms of improving non-economic intangible social variables such as democracy or culture (Bate, 2011a).

But at the same time, these attempts to articulate an instrumentalist value for arts & humanities research have stimulated a considerable backlash from academics who feel that this emphasis on emphasis, valorisation or knowledge exchange traduces established economic norms (*cf.* Collini, 2009). Holmquist (2011) argues that this equates to a massive process of standardisation of humanities across national borders that risks the opportunity that humanities research has to contribute to the education of the student rather than their mere training, thereby reducing humanities research and scholarship as an input to training rather than a domain of enlightenment. Even the very attempt to value arts & humanities research is seen as being part of a neo-liberal approach to control society's unruly forces, and therefore a threat to the nature of arts & humanities disciplines.

To get beyond this problem – the instrumentalisation of arts & humanities research, in this paper we instead focus upon valuation processes. Rather than starting from the point that all value is economic and can be measuring via pricing processes, we instead look at other kinds of value beyond the purely economic. The usual way that this distinction is made is between intrinsic value and extrinsic value, that is between things that are valued because they create satisfaction in themselves, or things that are valued because they become a way to achieve a goal or acquire an artefact that ultimately brings satisfaction. But the problem

that this raises is that this distinction is a conceptual rather than practical one and critically is a philosophical distinction which can at best provide a framework for guiding discussions rather than a recipe for measuring value.

Discussions around value have been framed instead by one particular perspective of value, that of economic value. As an economic theory, it is based around transactions and activities, and principles are derived from (ideal forms) of these transactions, and critically assuming that the transactions reflect preferences. The problems that economics have in trying to deal with creating values for non-transaction-based 'values' is well-acknowledged, and are dealt with – as economic solutions – through techniques such as shadow-pricing, expressed-value pricing and time-pricing, that is seeking proxies which ultimately create variables which are somehow comparable to other values.

## 2.2 The rise of the valorisation agenda

### 2.2.1 Valorisation and the rise of the 'third mission' for universities

The question of the value of arts & humanities research has to be understood in terms of a longer-term shift in the nature of the state and the way that funding for research and technological modernisation is provided. It is worth making distinction between changes at three levels or scales. In the long-run, there has been a shift away from a national technological policies focused on national champions towards innovation policy, creating the conditions for the emergence of new high-technology champions. In the medium-term, there has been a shift in decision-making from government in hierarchies with states directly specifying services towards governance in hierarchies, with states creating frameworks to exploit the capacities of wider fields of expert providers. In the short-term, a concern with national competitiveness and the immediate pressures of the financial crisis have seen the extraction of value from knowledge capital as a way of maximising returns to scarce state investments.

The first and most long-term shift came with a change in government orientation towards technology systems away from regarding them as a pipeline for modernisation towards managing innovation systems (Lundvall & Borrás, 2005). Vanvar Bush's *Science: the endless frontier* (1945) set a context where investments in science policy and supporting technology businesses through procurement were validated (Etzkowitz, 2008). The problem of this approach was the implicit notion this had of a science pipeline from basic research to economic development, and there came increasing recognition that user-producer interaction in innovations meant alternative approaches were necessary (Lundvall, 1988). Nemeta notes (2009) the shift from technology-push to demand pull models in technology policy, with governments moving away from supporting particular successful technology businesses and instead trying to create conditions supporting systemic evolution with the best interactions between businesses and the research base.

This latter shift came at a time of a change in the nature of government in advanced economies, and in particular the increasing use of market principles for the organisation of public services. The background to this change was that the increasing complexity of modern societies meant that governments were no longer sufficiently knowledgeable about the kinds of services and solutions necessary. In order to avoid rampantly increasing costs and taxation, government would instead ask users and producers to come together in policy-networks to collectively develop solutions drawing on the best knowledge and collective agreement of the value of the service. Service provision could be governed through market instruments which would likewise hold down costs and stimulate innovation, by rewarding the best producers. Key tenets of this approach were in transparency, accountability and comparability between services allowing competition to reward the best providers and ensure public funding only flowed to the most efficient providers.



In the last decade, there has also been an innovation turn in public policy, in the case of Europe driven by the Lisbon Agenda and policy efforts to ensure that European economies retain their competitiveness in the rise of new competitor countries. “Innovation” has become regarded as the means that advanced economies will sustain their competitiveness, and public policy has increasingly focused on ensuring that innovation levels within national economies are rising as well as trying to make the public sector itself more innovative. This has achieved an added salience with the onset since c. 2008 of the global financial crisis, and there is an increasingly dominant perspective that because of the cuts required to state expenditure levels by the demands of austerity it is only the most innovative public services and those public expenditures that are vital to innovation which should be spared from these cuts.

These three shifts have all pushed advanced economies in a common direction towards emphasising innovation as a domain demanding public support, demonstrated in the OECD publication the Innovation Strategy (2010). The OECD Innovation Strategy was a key document not only because of its endorsement at the Ministerial level, but also because it was explicit in the role of science and innovation in solving the Grand Challenges currently faced by society. The overall effect has been an increasing stress on the public value of science and research in its contribution to innovation. This can be seen in the Horizon 2020 programme which at the time of writing has been designed around a series of problem driven themes to maximise the usability and hopefully therefore the eventual use of that research, and its contribution to innovation.

### *2.2.2 Valorisation as research’s contribution to innovation*

Against this context, the idea of valorisation has emerged as an important discourse in science and research policy, albeit with different names in different countries and national contexts. The roots of the idea lay in the last significant downturn in advanced economies, in the 1980s, when Europe and America became worried about their potential economic eclipse by the newly-emerging Japan. It is at this time that science policy emerged as a European competence, with ESPRIT the first European technology programme (1980-1994), and the first Research Framework Programme in 1987 (Sharp, 1990; 1998). In the USA, the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act allowed patents to be registered on Federally funded research, and therefore allowed the commercial exploitation of university research, leading to many states funding universities to create business development officers and managers (Mowery *et al.*, 2001; Turner, 2005).

The 1982, the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation published an influential report *The university and the community*, reporting on how universities’ various activities could be managed to improve their various societal impacts. The CERI report pointed to the success that the University of Leuven had had with its technology transfer office, and argued that universities themselves could benefit from their efforts to bring the research to a wider audience. The 1980s emphasised the importance of technology transfer from universities to businesses (and also to society) very much framed by the linear conception of its use from pure research into wider innovations. Although there were a wide range of approaches and activities included, the overarching paradigm was of the *transfer* of *technology* as a unidirectional process involved embodied objects.

In the 1990s, there was an increasing recognition that the relationships between universities and firms transcended the simple transfer of technology and was increasingly related to interactive processes of knowledge sharing. Knowledge was produced in social interactions between individual undertaking learning and supported by formal institutional structures which used that learning to achieve their institutional goals. This shifting emphasis to knowledge was related both to a realisation of the importance of tacit (as opposed to codified) knowledge in the innovation process, but also to its looped nature, involving feedback (*cf. inter alia* Klein & Rosenberg, 1985; Gibbons *et al.*, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This was partly taken up in policy approaches which increasingly began to talk of knowledge

transfer rather than knowledge transfer. Knowledge was ‘transferred’ through different kinds of transaction, from formal collaborative research projects, to consultancy, at conferences and seminars, and through student placements.

The weakness with the idea of the knowledge transfer approach was that it emphasised a one-way flow of something produced in social interactions, which were clearly non unidirectional. The idea of knowledge exchange emerged to replace knowledge transfer with the idea that there was interaction between knowledge producers and users, and even that individuals could play different roles in the knowledge exchange process. Although it might make sense to think of universities as knowledge producers and firms as knowledge exploiters the distinction in reality was not always so clear-cut (*cf.* Cooke, 2005). A firm might notice a curious anomaly in their production processes which raises an interesting question for academics to solve, partly inverting the usual roles of who asks and answers questions in knowledge production processes. A final iteration of knowledge exchange was that of knowledge co-creation, more formally recognising the fluidity of these different roles.

### *2.2.3 The complexity of the valorisation case: a clear example of ‘public failure’?*

It is important here to distinguish three levels in the way that the various concepts around technology transfer, and also valorisation have been used and the kinds of change that their emergence represented. The first level is that these concepts did represent a change in the way that knowledge was being produced and exploited, in part facilitated by internationalisation and the rise of new technologies. A second level is that these changing models reflected a changing normative view in policy debates on what was important about innovation from the policy perspective (reflecting the shift from technology to innovation policy). The third was that there was a shift in policies actually adopted in practice to try to create value from past investments in research. These three shifts were by no means synchronous nor did they necessarily all move in a common direction.

It is likewise possible to distinguish valorisation being referred to in quite different ways corresponding to these three different levels. The first is that valorisation represents an emerging set of behaviours from those involved in research management with increasing interaction with social partners around research. The second is that there has been a valorisation policy debate in which there has been a consensus developed that governments should be supporting firms and universities to work together to exchange ideas and create knowledge collectively. There has been a third change in the raft of policies that have been used to encourage and support valorisation in different policy contexts.

In a sense, there has been a ‘normalisation’ of the idea of valorisation along the following lines. Universities and firms work together and this supports business innovation which in turn supports economic growth. This is a desirable end in itself, and therefore governments should be supporting this activity. Governments may choose to encourage universities to be more sensitive to users’ needs, create policy instruments to encourage interaction, or incentivise user exploitation, because all of these ultimately support innovation and hence economic growth. The valorisation challenge is therefore in ensuring that the right incentive systems and resource measures are in place in the particular national contexts to optimise and ideally maximise the amount of knowledge exchange, innovation and welfare gains. Demerit (2000) argues that this reached the extent of representing a new form of social contract between science and the state which requires “that science pay monetary dividends” (p. 319).

This is a rather unsatisfactory situation, because the issue is not that there is the uniform imposition of a reductionist perspective rather than there is a duality between the broad statement that research produces economic and social benefits, along with an emphasis on the economic over the social in the ways in which policies develop because of the assumption of an economic rationale. We argue that this is part of an elision that has been made between the various levels of valorisation. Whilst the normalised version has been convincing for policy-makers of the importance of investing in science and technology (*cf.* Donovan,

2008), it is both a poor model of how knowledge exchange takes place in practice, as well as a poor guide to the kinds of instruments that are appropriate to stimulate knowledge exchange in practice (Bozeman, 2000).

Bozeman (2002) argues that there are conditions under which this economic version “may not do”, and argues that what is missing is not a high-level concept of public service, but rather a “middle range conceptualisation of public value, one pertaining to a wide range of policy and public value domains, but at the same time anchored by diagnostic criteria” (p. 146). A further problem with valorisation is that under the present crisis conditions, conformity to the normalised valorisation model is seen as a proxy for creating value. When funds are being allocated on the basis of perceived relative utility, there may potentially be a discrepancy between the fit to the normalised model (the second level) and the actual use of knowledge by users (first level). This therefore raises the risk for activities which are a long way from this ideal model are disadvantaged because of their poor fit to a policy model and not because their knowledge is less useful in practice. It is this problem and the tensions that it creates that lies at the centre of this research project and report.

## 2.3 Valorisation within arts & humanities research

### 2.3.1 *From public values to public values in public policy domains*

The core of the paper is seeking to understand if there has been a systemic failure in research policy with the aforementioned changes settling around a consensus which whilst convenient, is insufficiently wedded to real activities. There is a *prima facie* case can be made that a reductionist version of how research benefits society has become unduly influential in policy circles (Bozeman & Sarewitz, 2005).

“The tension between the public value embodied in promise of science and the market value realised through its commercialisation is real and pervasive”

That model has framed other discussions in ways that are skewing current decisions in ways that are not necessarily rational, and for which an underlying rationality is desirable. Kickert (1996) has argued that the way that public values have been embodied within new public management has been to take one of three main approaches (following Hood, 1991 and Harmon & Meyer, 1986), “to deal with more value patterns than business like effectiveness and efficiency criteria, such as legality and legitimacy, social justice and equal rights” (p. 748):

- Efficiency in terms of minimising the waste involving in producing collective services,
- Embodying a fair and balance relationship between the state and the individual
- Balancing internal robustness and resilience with openness and transparency for external scrutiny.

Notable amongst these three is that the first is the only that is normatively biased – the latter two are negotiated. More efficiency is always better (in the sense of being more legitimate) than less efficiency, where the other two categories involving finding a balance that best fits with expressed social demands, and maximises legitimacy. This has become embedded in the idea that public value is always generated through greater efficiency in expenditure (or at least never destroyed). This has in turn enabled the resurgence of the ‘Treasury view’ of public expenditure as crowding out private expenditure, and hence only justified by interventions in cases of market failure (*cf.* Peden, 1984). Likewise, Bozeman (2002) points out that the assumption of Pareto optimisation in efficiency analysis is not concerned with distributional issues which are at the heart of government and policy.

To address this, we take a step back and reflect very briefly on the idea of ‘public value’ in Bozeman’s sense, which gets beyond the restriction of public value as the private value of public things, to a wider view of public value. The debate about valorisation as a policy field

has been very strongly framed by the idea of a particular kind of use of research, that as an input to an innovation process that leads to economic growth, i.e. creates private value from public things. This has not only led to the rise of the normalised model outlined about but also to a framing of the terms of the debate in terms of ‘valorisation’ as a cause-effect transaction:

**Value arises from research where it can be used as an input to a growth-producing innovation process**

There is thus a requirement in this formulation that ‘value’ is clearly visible, demonstrable and attributable, that is that the value is evident because someone does something differently. That is quite a different meaning of the idea of value to the way that idea of ‘values’ emerge in the public policy debate as things that are held to be important (Sen, 1987). Bozeman & Sarewitz (2005) highlight both the difficulty that public policy has in encompassing both public values and economic value, and also the range of policy-failures that this produces in science policy from a preoccupation with the latter at the expense of the former. As Bozeman (2002) notes

“ [P]ublic policy analysis more easily speaks the language of economics than the language of public interest, public value, or for that matter politics. Policy analysis in use typically translates decision alternatives into benefits, costs, discount rates and transitive economic values, none of which easily accommodates ‘public value’” (p. 147)<sup>1</sup>

There is a problem here that in this analysis, ‘values’ are seen as synonymous with ‘interests’ held by actors in policy networks, and because actors need power, legitimacy or knowledge to get their interests represented in policy, the values of those actors that are successful are assumed to be represented in public policy decisions. Seeking to get beyond this, and identify the conditions under which economics-based public policy approaches are clearly shortcoming, Bozeman & Sarewitz (2005) define public values as values:

“those that embody the prerogatives, normative standards, social supports, rights and procedural guarantees that a given society aspires to provide to all citizens... not the same as a public good [but also] ...not Platonic ideals, rather they vary across cultures and times depending on the common values prized in the culture” (p. 122).

Jørgensen & Bozeman (2007) attempt to provide an insight into what public values actually are by undertaking what they term an inventory of public values. This has two components, a hierarchy and a system. The hierarchy defines a series of dimensions for what they term elicited public values, with high level categories such as public sector’s contribution to society, and the value set of altruism and human dignity. They also offer a structure for the ‘public values universe’ in which there is a core network of politicians, government and citizens, embedded within ‘society at large’: society at large benefits from those public interventions and shapes decisions to reflect those wider values. So the ‘normalisation’ of the idea of innovation can from this perspective be regarded as a dissonance between the public system and the wider public good, embodying the economic transactions which create benefits and ignoring the other ways that public knowledge creates benefits which the public appreciate.

Bozeman & Sarewitz propose this as the idea of a “public failure framework”, akin to that of a market failure, to identify when outcomes are failing to provide an essential public value. What this does is provide a means to understand the circumstances under which particular policy processes may not be producing optimum public value. They offer a framework of criteria which characterise ‘public value failure’, including mechanisms for values articulation and aggregation, imperfect monopolies, scarcity of providers, short time horizons, sustainability vs. conservation of resources, and benefit hoarding (p. 17). Their

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<sup>1</sup> See Bozeman & Sarewitz (2011) pp.10-11 for a more detailed version of this analysis

argument is that science policy – because of its nature – is prone to these kinds of failures. One example they cite is energy R&D policy which typically only considers price-to-market as the gap to be subsidised and not the costs of doing nothing (via climate change).

### 2.3.2 *Is valorisation policy facing a public-value failure?*

So bringing these various elements together we argue that it may be possible to understand public values with respect to some domain by exploring where they do not perfectly map to the economic visions prevalent in policy-making. In another one of their examples, Bozeman & Sarewitz cite the terminator gene (a gene introduced into GM crops to force farmers to buy seeds from breeding companies instead of retaining part of their harvest for replanting) generated substantial public resistance to the technology (*cf.* Ubalua, 2009). The whole idea of public understanding in science in the UK emerged as a response to a loss of public belief in the integrity of the government faced with scientific scandals. This can be interpreted as challenging the two non-economic values of government (efficiency, legitimacy, citizen relationship)

“The ‘mad cow’ outbreak and other disasters reinforced the notion that neither governments nor their authoritative science could be relied upon to protect the mass public, especially when corporate profits were at stake” (Herring, 2008, p. 461).

Bozeman & Sarewitz (2011) offer 6 failure criteria, and each of those can be used to generate a potential public values failure. This in turn provides a means to analyse the roots of a public failure, and hence to gain an insight into the dynamics at hand in rejection. The table attempts to depict the kinds of scenarios which might emerge out of a failure of public values.

*Table 1 Public failure and public policy, a diagnostic model for valorisation*

	Failure definition	Example from valorisation
Mechanisms for values articulation and aggregation	Policy processes and social cohesion insufficient to ensure effective command processing of public values	Policy debate becomes framed in terms of benefits for business, these firms are synonymous for business
Imperfect monopolies	Private provision of goods and services permitted through Government monopoly deemed in the public interests	If public authorities do not regulate new technologies adequately, spin-offs can cause breaches of trust
Scarcity of providers	Despite recognising public value and agreement on public provision, no actual services available because of shortage	Cherry-picking of research base by private sector sees offshoring of important technological firms and sectors, undermining economy
Short time horizon	Leads to missing costs that feature in a long-term horizon	Race to patent and license hinders longer term accretion of knowledge and encourages knowledge abandonment
Substitutability vs. conservation of resources	Policies focus on substitutability or indemnification even where there is no satisfactory substitute	New technologies are developed using public money that restrain freedom or aid oppression
Benefit hoarding	Public commodities are captured by individuals or groups, limiting wider public benefits	Socialisation of costs and privatisation of the profits of public research

*Source: after Bozeman & Sarewitz (2011), p. 17 modified by authors.*

The idea of valorisation is the process through which research creates value, and creates an explicit link between public investments and beneficial market outcomes. The reality of the final model for this valorisation process was rather complicated. As Bozeman (2000) put it:

“In the study of technology transfer, the neophyte and the veteran researcher are easily distinguished. The neophyte is the one who is not confused. Anyone studying technology transfer understands just how complicated it can be” (p. 627).

Taking the example of GM foods, then it becomes possible to understand how the process of valorisation led to a process where ‘public values’ were mobilised and created a resistance to the economic values. In the case of GM foods, there was a focus on the technical aspects and the economic justification of their introduction rather than with latent public values. These latent values were activated by a community who created an economic crisis for the companies, but more importantly within government a crisis of legitimacy that overshadowed subsequent attempts to reframe the rationale of GM-food (STSC, 1999, Lezaun, 2004; Wilsdon *et al.*, 2006; Herring, 2008). The public values universe therefore influenced the governance system in the language of Jørgensen & Bozeman (2007), and created a situation where the UK government fundamentally overhauled its approach to dealing with scientific issues raising potential public values issues.

Tracing the conflict becomes a means to identify the public value: relating the GM crisis back to the Jørgensen & Bozeman’s (2007) inventory of public values. The early crisis was based on a failure to live up to the public value of collective choice, as well as there being a problem of advocacy-neutrality by politicians and public servants. The later closure of politicians around GM issues infringed on public values of citizen involvement and openness. The wider point is that studying the public failure, as evident in the crisis, becomes a means to better understand what it was that the public valued. Given the normalised version of valorisation that emerged from policy deliberations across a number of countries at once, there is a *prima facie* case that this ‘normalisation’ has represented a public value failure, by emphasising the purely economic value of that knowledge. If there is a public failure, then it is important to understand that failure better in order to understand how ‘public values’ affect valorisation, to get a better sense of what should be produced.

### 2.3.3 *The resistance within the field – arts & humanities research as different*

The question of a public policy failure, pointed at compellingly by Bozeman can be addressed by considering if there is a *prima facie* case for a series of events that suggest this kind of crisis as a response to that failure. One area where there is clear dissatisfaction with the trajectory of valorisation activities has been in the field of arts & humanities research. It is not possible to claim that this represents a public value failure, but it does at least suggest that there is a case to answer. Our claim to this failure is based on three elements:-

- A failure to agree on sensible valorisation measures and metrics, and falling back in policy documents to complicated, unoperationalisable schematics (*cf.* Dassen & Benneworth, 2011).
- A disagreement between different groups that is not resolving over time, suggesting that there is something unreconcilable, which might indeed be a public value failure
- A discordance between the perspectives of the different arguing groups that is resorting to stereotyping and attacks, reflecting the value-laded nature of the problem.

With respect to the first element, Dassen & Benneworth (2011) present an overview of the various conceptualisations of arts & humanities research’s public value in circulation. They highlight that there is a clear dissonance, that they describe as between intrinsic and functional values of arts & humanities research, in 31 reports that they review. These reports reviewed are presented in Appendix A at the end of this document. The second element arises in the fact that there is a persistence of a set of arguments that in some way

arts and humanities are different to other areas of science, which means that there is not the loose coupling of humanities scholars to the problem owners (Peñuela & Benneworth, 2012). The corollary of that would be that there would be a limit on the amount of public value added that arts & humanities research would be able to provide.

There are also arguments to be made around **the nature of humanities research effort** and the intensity of contact and communications, and the nature of co-ordination in the field. Scholarship in humanities remains a relatively individual and quantised activity, that is to say far more progress happens through single scholarly monographs often years in production that change the way people regard a particular topic, than a regular, intense exchange of ideas, discussion and debate within a community. Thirdly, there is a very **different set of relationships with problem owners** to the exact sciences which reduces the requirements for humanities scholars to obtain funding from problem owners. “Ideas in humanities” represent a product which can be directly sold, under some conditions, so many academic publishers also operate a separate commercial operation which directly sell academic books to a mass market.

Our evidence for the third element of the case lies in public discourse around the debate, and in particular the extremely negative portrayal of opposing positions within this debate. In the UK, there has been a clear polarisation of the terms of debate between those who criticise academics for working in ivory towers, or administrators for bureaucratic philistinism. So the person evoking the lack of impact of “gender studies in New Guinea and the relevance of 10th-century chandlers' bills in Inverness” (Shepherd, 2009) is not an academic, but a manager from a Research Data Management company (Thomson Reuters). At the same time Bate (2011) is able to point to a range of areas where research in similarly esoteric ideas does indeed create public value. Thus our contention is that there is a conflict that masks a deeper point that there is an agreement of the need for accountability of public funding for arts & humanities research, but that attempts to articulate it sound weak or small in comparison to other disciplinary areas.

## 2.4 Public value and valorisation in arts & humanities research

Let us return to the initial question in our paper, and that is “what is the value of arts and humanities research?”. In one sense, it is an odd question, because all kinds of claims are made by a range of institutions for this value. It is possible to invert this question, and ask what it is that makes it an interesting research question, and why would we ask it in the first place. From the introduction, this is clear because the answer is non-trivial – there are problems in understanding what is the value of arts and humanities research. Therefore, to gain insight into the question, it is necessary to understand what are these problems or barriers to understanding that value. A ‘first-cut’ answer to this is that there is a tension between the ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ values of arts & humanities, and by implication, arts & humanities research (McDonald, 2011).

### 2.4.1 *The case to answer for a public value failure in arts & humanities research*

Our argument here is that one explanation for the failure to agree might be that there is a problem in finding a way to articulate the impact or public value of humanities. One potential way of understanding this is that one or other group is clearly in the wrong, and in particular, that academic resistance is based on trying to make a special plea for protection from being held accountable by the state. A distinction can be made here between the intrinsic values that academics have in their research, and the extrinsic values that governments have, and by implications, wider publics have in arts & humanities research. This is portrayed in the figure below. As good governance in the new public management model requires that special interests are resisted and disassembled, then the necessary prescription is that external models of impact based on ideas of extrinsic value are imposed on academics to resist that special interest pleading and maximise the efficiency of public

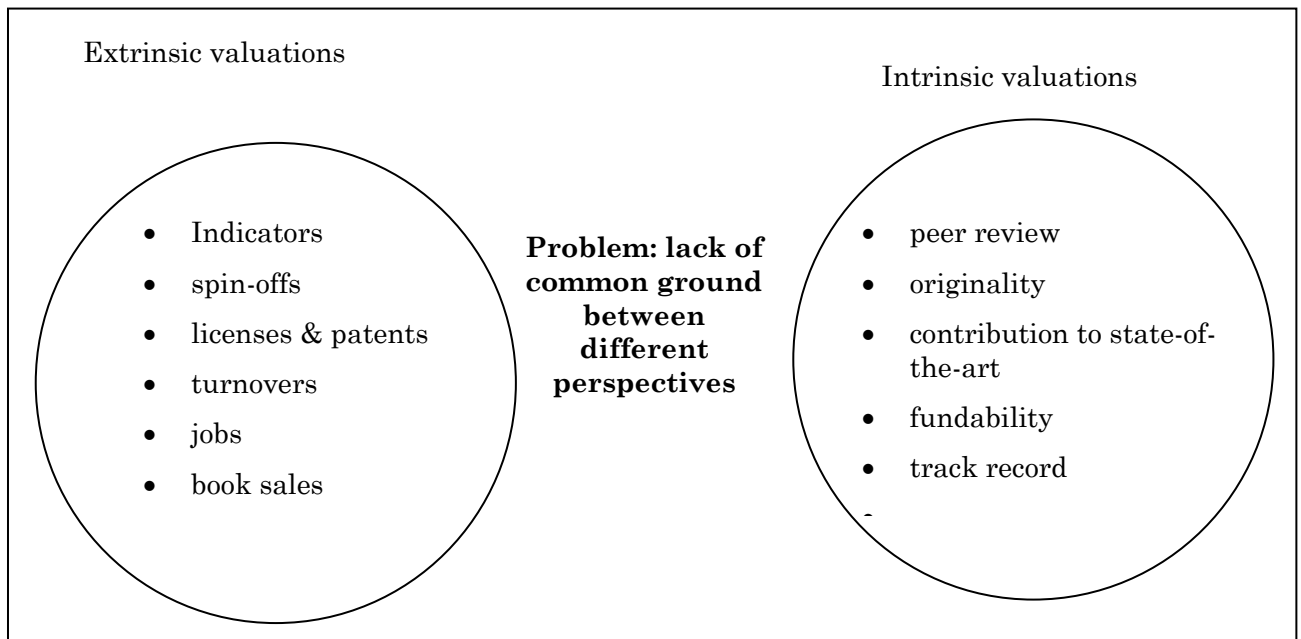
resources. Thus, conflicts between the different groups can be regarded as reflecting the different valuations of arts & humanities research that the different groups have.

It is possible to see in contemporary debates in the public sphere a formalisation of the division of intrinsic and extrinsic value into two irreconcilable camps (e.g. Sweeney, 2011). On the one hand there are those who say that arts & humanities research is publicly funded, and those that receive public money should be prepared to be held account for it, and therefore its value need be measured. On the other there are those that say that the value of arts & humanities research is immeasurable and therefore cannot be measured, yet is at the same time substantial and self-evident.

The problem that is created by this disagreement is that it reduces discussions about the value of arts & humanities research to a series of epi-questions, which scratch the surface of the problem rather than get to its heart. The reification of these positions leads to the articulation of positions that arts & humanities is of no value, which is clearly self-disproving, set against the argument that arts & humanities and its research is so positive, and so self-evidently valuable, that it makes huge contributions to society and civilisation (Howells, 2011). What this represents is a self-perpetuating disagreement, in which there is no resolution of the tensions and contradictions between the positions, rather than a debate which seeks to understand the two positions, synthesise and progress beyond them in response to the valid elements of each perspective.

Each of these two positions can be clearly critiqued. On the one hand, public accountability does not have to reduce to measuring things: there is a particular reason that measuring the value of arts & humanities research has achieved political salience in debates. On the other hand, the idea that arts & humanities and arts & humanities research is good in itself is also clearly disprovable, because every articulation of the intrinsic value of arts & humanities can either be reduced to an instrumental value, or a highly dubious moral claim around which there is no agreement. In order to better understand the question of why we cannot effectively value arts & humanities research, it is helpful to look at these two positions and understand the more nuanced grounds under which these relatively strong claims are made.

Figure 2 The problem of public value between intrinsic and extrinsic values



But at the same time, there is a sense amongst governments and research funders that the problem is that these extrinsic impacts are not the only things that matters, and that there is indeed a much broader spectrum of contributions that arts & humanities research makes.



The problem can therefore be instead regarded as one of a kind of internal dissonance within the communities, between a feeling of what is important, and the acceptable language, concepts and models for framing policy approaches.

On the one hand, there is an intrinsic value to arts & humanities, that is to say they are good in themselves, and on the other, there is an instrumental value to arts and humanities, that is to say they are good for something. This division in the nature of the value of arts & humanities has a number of effects, one of which being the destabilisation of the idea of value, that is that arts & humanities' value might be many values, and different people may themselves value arts & humanities research in different ways. But another manifestation of that debate is a reification of the 'values of arts & humanities research' (people value it in different ways) into a disagreement over the 'value' of arts & humanities research.

#### *2.4.2 Towards a public value approach for understanding valorisation in arts & humanities*

This is where we believe that a public value approach might have utility, in attempting to resolve this issue, and in particular, to understand the persistent failure to agree the public value of arts & humanities research as a public value failure as defined by Bozeman & Sarewitz (2011). Returning to the Bozeman & Sarewitz classification, the nature of the disagreement could potentially be explained in terms of a failure around mechanism for values articulation and aggregation, where public policy processes do not translate what really matters to the public into the public realm. Certainly, the effects of that public value failure, that public debate becomes captured by one of the producer perspectives, and hence framed in terms of business benefits, or in terms of how academics articulate their impact.

From the perspective of this failure, the problem – the lack of consensus, can be regarded as a consequence of a dissonance between three elements, between the policy process, the public, and academic valuation chains. The result is that it is clear that existing definitions are not satisfactory, but at the same time there are factors which prevent more satisfactory definitions emerging. The starting point for the project was that 'value' had to be understood as being constructed discursively between three groups of actors, between funders, producers and publics, or to put it another way, between government, universities/ academics and civil society. Our argument is that the problems in agreeing how to measure the public value of arts & humanities research is the result of a deep-seated fault in the system, and using the public value approach, that this results in a failure for policy processes to properly aggregate what matters into the system that emerge.

In the introduction, we set out the social constructivist perspective we used for understanding how the value of arts & humanities research was discursively constructed. These problems point to a dysfunction in that system that in turn can provide insights into how that system operates. The public value failure could represent a moment when the existing consensuses and agreements which obscured underlying relationships dissolve, thereby better revealing those relationships. Latour & Woolgar (1979) argue that the moments when the 'tribe' disintegrates and their shared meanings and patterns of understanding break down provide a useful insight into the perspectives and attitudes of the individual participants. Likewise, the public value failure associated with arts & humanities research provides a means to understand, by understanding how the system is not working, the different demands that each of the actors have on this system, and therefore what their 'value' of arts & humanities research is.

The focus for this research report is therefore to take a single example of the crisis in the humanities, and one where there is clearly a strong public valuation of humanities, the Netherlands. The Netherlands as a country is one in which there is clearly a public 'valuation' for the humanities, in that issues surrounding the humanities are evident and visible in the public sphere. . This is not so much that there is an active civic debate in the role of the humanities in Dutch public life, rather that when there are tensions and problems, there quickly become evident in the public realm. This is was shown in the course of the research, where the public face of humanities became visible through various kinds of

crisis. This can be interpreted as meaning that the system generally functions well, but when there is a mismatch between what groups or individuals do, and particular norms held by public groups, then there can be an outcry.

One crisis, from which this report its title, is the ongoing crisis of the position of humanities professors within Dutch universities, and one which took a novel wending in March 2012. The most influential newspaper (the so-called paper of record) in the Netherlands, *NRC Handelsblad*<sup>2</sup>, had published in its weekend edition of 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2012 a report that around 30 humanities courses at universities were being scrapped in the wake of government financial reductions. This was followed up two weeks later by coverage by the national news broadcaster NOS, and a segment in the influential Sunday lunchtime current affairs programme, *Buitenhof*, watched by 416,000 viewers. This was an example of journalists setting the agenda, determining that universities cancelling courses was a legitimate matter of public concern, and creating a story which then spread across various media platform including radio, TV, the internet and teletext. But of course their reason for doing that is a belief that this is something that will interest their audiences

At the time that the fieldwork for this report was being undertaken, Dutch science was also gripped by the ‘Stapel affaire’, in which a young, mediagenic and successful professor of psychology was revealed as having forged his results with which he had captured the headlines. The crisis provoked a rash of stories in the newspapers, and a series of appearances on a late-night chat show by one of Stapel’s research collaborators, Rose Vonk, and then later the President of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, Robbert Dijkgraaf. The independent inquiry concluded that Stapel had acted alone out of a desire to fulfil his own promise and potential. This was a public crisis of the duty of scientists towards their publics, and a sense that they had a duty to behave in a proper way. This highlighted a fear that academics had lost sense of common-sense ethical perspectives in seeking to succeed in the increasingly competitive university environment.

Both of these stories illustrate the revealing nature of the crises with regard to the public value system. In the former, tensions were evident between the public perspective of the wider value of Dutch universities offering substantial numbers of humanities courses, and the value universities placed on their humanities professors in terms of their earning potential. In the latter, there was a tension between professors creating publicity and their adherence to social norms of truthfulness and reasonableness. Thus, it becomes possible to say something more nuanced about the way that the Dutch public value arts & humanities research in the tension between the narrow, elite formal valuation system outlined in the introduction, and the public values revealed through other systems. To answer our overarching question regarding the public value of arts & humanities research, we therefore propose exploring a specific failure in the discursive model. We draw on Bozeman’s & Sarewitz idea of a failure for values aggregation and articulation as explaining this disjunction.

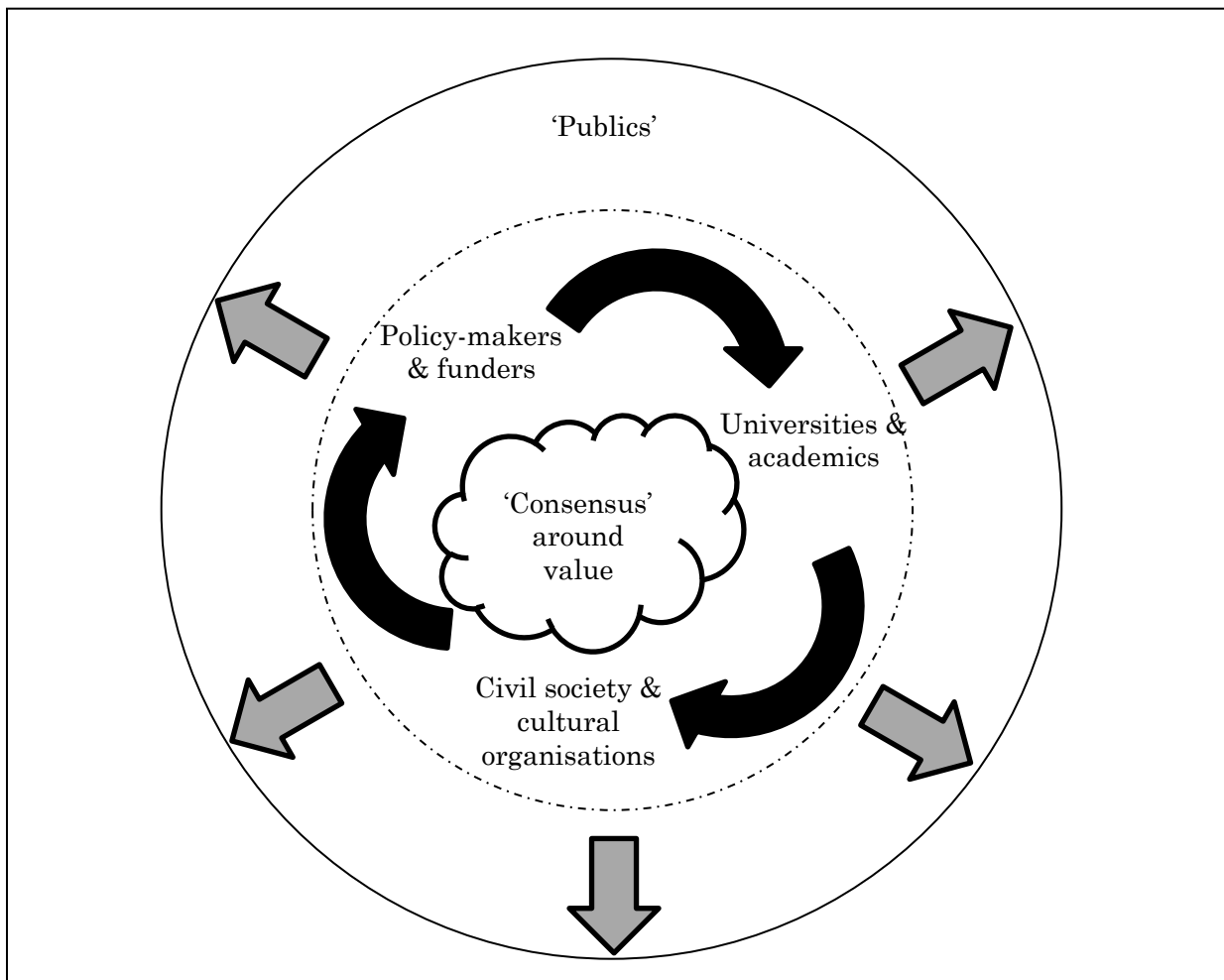
#### *2.4.3 Operationalising the idea of a public values failure in arts & humanities research*

In this report, we regard the persistence of a sense of crisis in the humanities as the result of an on-going tension between decisions embodied in discussions and practices of elites at one level, and public acceptance of those norms and practices on the other. The elite process failures to adequately express public views on the one hand, and is at the same time still sufficiently sensitive to their wider publics to remain driven to seek a suitable solution. This is represented in the figure below, which makes a distinction in the discursive model between the elite actors, and the relationships that they have with particular publics.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.motivaction.nl/content/de-lezers-van-nrc-handelsblad>

*Figure 3 A model of public value-making as segmented public-elite interactions*



It is necessary here to point out here that there is an assumption of rationality embedded within this approach, and that partners in the process are guided by two things, firstly to achieve a stable consensus within the elite group, and secondly, to sustain working relationships and legitimacy in the eyes of the relevant publics. Arguments could be constructed that actors in this value construction system have their own interests which are served by entirely individualistic activities, that governments may seek to discipline unruly academics and cultural institutions, academics may seek to preserve their own ivory tower privileges and that cultural institutions seek to remain unchallenged as privileged and powerful high cultural institutions. It is the breadth of activity seeking to identify public value and the fact that it is a question that is continually returned to that suggests to us that these crises are indeed manifestations of a public value failure rather than a specific strategy by one actor group seeking to impose their own values on the wider debate.

Having made this assumption, it then becomes possible to understand the question of whether there is a public value failure, and whether it is a result of an aggregation failure, by exploring two distinct elements of the system. The first element is the elite value construction process as set out in the Introduction to this report, the way that the policy makers, scholars and civic society organisations interact in discussing and determining the value of research. But the second, and arguably more important element of this system is the relationships with the publics, and in particular:

- the relationships that these elite groups have with publics, how the actors **relate with publics**,
- the way that 'their' publics ascribe value to arts & humanities research, how the actors **interpret public value**, and

- how that in turn affects the roles played by these actors in the discursive process, how those actors **aggregate public value** into the elite discursive process.

Therefore, this report asks five operational questions in seeking to understand the public value of arts & humanities research through exploring the public value failure, namely:

- Where have been the critical moments or crises which might be suggestive of a public value failure around humanities research?
- How do universities and scholars' relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?
- How do civil society and cultural organisations' relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?
- How do policy-makers and research funders' relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?
- Where are the lacuna in the current state-of-the-art around the public value of arts & humanities research as framed in economic/ metric-based definitions?

These five operational research questions frame the remainder of the report, which has the following structure. The next chapter provides some information about the research project on which this report is based, and the methodology used in preparing the findings. Chapter 4 provides some background information to the case study, that of the Netherlands, and explains the positioning of humanities in Dutch universities, and its relationships to other publicly funded bodies. Chapter 5 details the evolution of the crisis in the humanities, from its origins in 1970s austerity measures to its contemporary manifestations. The fieldwork seeks to uncover what the key lines of force are in this relationship system in terms of:

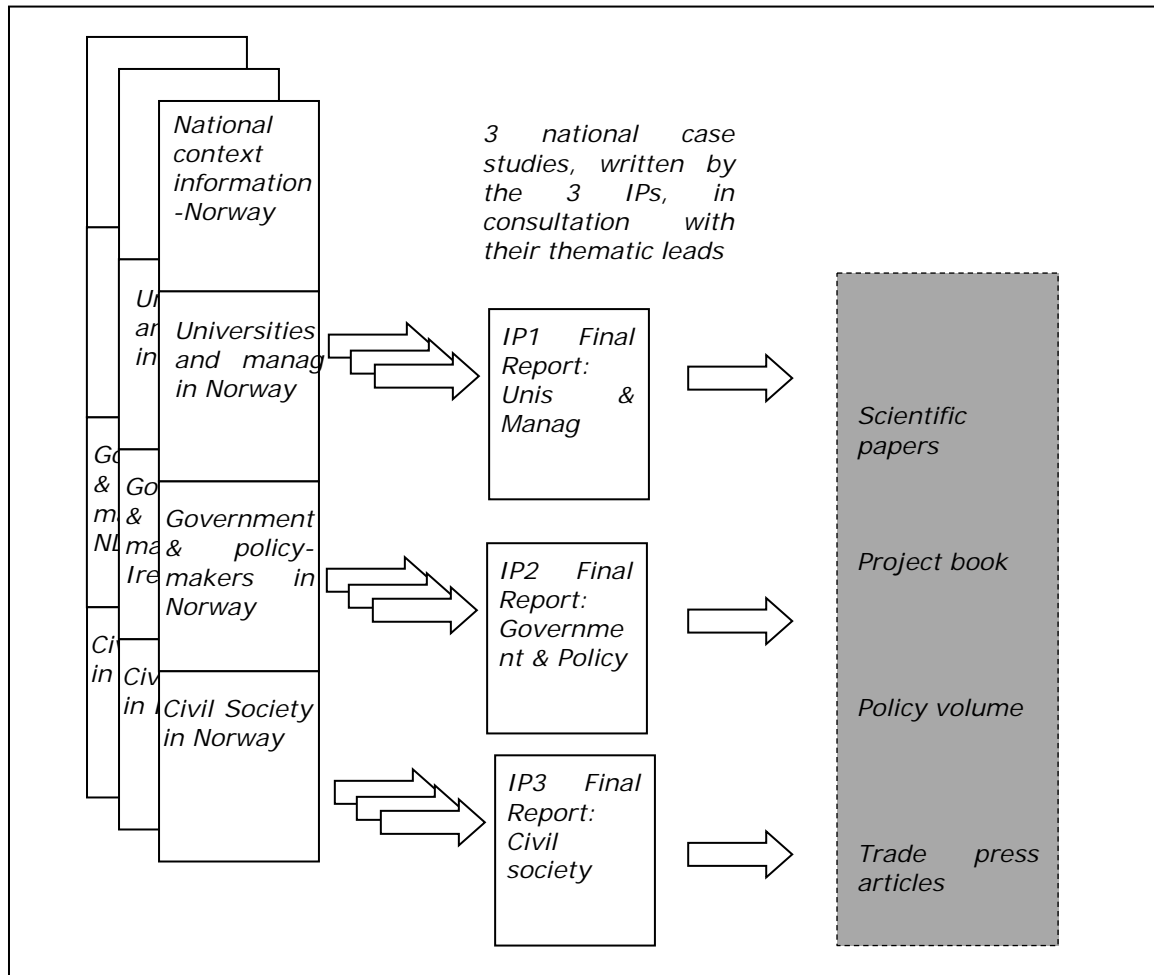
- Which are the stakeholders and structures to which universities are most sensitive?
- What are the dynamics of the relationships in terms of how universities perceive them?
- How do universities respond to their perceptions of the pressures they feel from outside?
- What scope is there within this value construction system for 'impact' and extrinsic societal value to figure within the general way within which value is understood?

Chapters 6 to 8 each look at the relationships of particular sectoral groups to their publics, and in particular details the ways in which demands from 'their' publics, broadly put as research users, culture consumers and voters, influence their understanding of the idea of the value of their research. Chapter 9 in turn looks at the way that these different versions of public value have come together to influence the debate in the Netherlands, and in particular, which elements of public value have proven influential in that debate. This provides the basis for the final analytic section, in Chapter 10, which reflects on the role of public values in the way that arts & humanities research is valued in the Netherlands, and reflects on a possible improved framework for understanding the public value of that research.

### 3 HERAVALUE AND THE RESEARCH METHOD

This report forms part of a larger research project exploring the issue of the public value of arts & humanities research in Europe, funded by the HERA ERA-NET research project. This research project involves a two phase approach. The project as a whole separates out three key elements of the process by which humanities research is valued by society, between universities and their scholars, between the wider policy network and civil society as a whole (*cf.* Chapter 1). This is explored in primarily a national context, because the locus for the various policy debates has been primarily national, although we see that there is an international dimension, for example with the abolition of the office for social science and the humanities in the 8<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (Horizon 2020), but also a degree of homologisation of debates between countries by transnational contacts between key actors, including for example the HERA ERA Network, a collaboration of 28 national European research councils responsible for arts & humanities research. The fit of these three national project reports into the project as a whole are shown below.

*Figure 4 The organisation of the HERAVALUE project*



#### 3.1 From a constructivist methodology to the interview method

The starting point for this project is that 'value' is not something that exists independently of societal structures, and that it is discursively constructed between societal actors who agree or dispute that value, and those agreements or agreement failures become embedded in artefacts such as laws and policies. Those artefacts in turn have their own logic and change the nature of the environment, and alter the opportunities that exist for the future

negotiation of that value, becoming layered into structures of meaning and power within society. What we are therefore attempting to understand in this project is the dynamics of an evolving system within which a group of actors attempt to ascribe value to something. In that negotiation process, they in turn shape the system.

Actors have their own beliefs, values, goals and resources: in our approach we take a non-instrumental approach, focusing on the observable results of interactions and exchanges, and do not assume that there is necessarily a clear link between what actors want to achieve and the outcomes that become embedded. By observing a dialectic process in which actors come together and results emerge, it becomes possible to gain insights into the topology and dynamics of the 'value system of arts & humanities research'; understanding that system in turn makes it possible to speak more meaningfully about one element of that system, the 'public value', in terms of who are those publics, and how do their interests, beliefs and values shape the evolution.

From this diagnosis, the approach chosen is to talk to the agents – the actors in this system – to understand the choices that they make and the influences on those choices. This also provides a means of identifying the artefacts by which cohesion in the system is provided – the interviews seek to tease out what are the important influences from within the system on their own behaviours. By aggregating individual analyses and responses, it becomes possible to get a glimpse of the way that the system as a whole operates. However, it is important to be clear that the concept of the 'system' is a way of explaining stickiness within a network, through the idea of 'systemic properties'. The 'system' is an intellectual construct that is used to make sense of reality, and it is important not to reify the 'system' and ascribe that system with explanatory power. Reality is produced with actors influencing and exerting power over one another, and our argument is that taking a systemic perspective is necessary to understand a variable as intangible as that of public value.

The underlying methodology in this project has been of critical realism, that is to say that there is a 'reality' that is external to the way that it is conceived of individually and collectively. That reality can never be entirely understood, but as scientists our job is to make sense of it by developing theories with explanatory and potentially predictive power. However, human agency and intentionality mean that it is important to have an explanatory framework that can explain intangible and emotional relationships. However, these intangible characteristics are only a legitimate object of study insofar as they have a visible manifestation. Thus, when we talk of emotions we are not claiming to understand emotions, but rather use the concept as a way of approximating to a set of similar intangible responses to situations that nevertheless produce observable behavioural shifts. It is in particular highly important to retain this distinction and limitation that our human behavioural models are in reality based on this criterion.

Figure 5 shows the basis for our heuristic for understanding actors' decision-making process – by understanding which of these influences, and the manner by which influence was exerted, it becomes possible to better understand the system as a whole.

*Figure 5 University valuation of research excellence in a wider value system*



To operationalize this into a method, the approach demands an understanding of agents, the influence on them, but also the separate analysis of artefacts by which meanings, agreements and disagreements about public value circulate. The basis chosen for this was to interview a group of key actors involved in debates about the public value of humanities research: there was a distinction made between elites who were active within the narrow debate and public actors who experienced and saw their own activity shaped by the decisions taken in the elite policy network (*cf.* Figure 3). The split between universities, policy-makers and public actors was also used, to create a 2x3 classification of actors to be interviewed.

*Table 2 The classification used for interview sampling (including examples).*

	Universities	Policy-makers	Publics
Elite	University senior managers	Education Ministry, Research Council	National academies Editors Cultural lobby groups Political parties
Mass	Scholars	National academy University collective bodies Science dynamics researchers	Journalists Museums Companies

For the selection of interviews, two separate snowball methodologies were used. For the elite interviews, the Research Council were interviewed, and as part of that asked to define who were the key decision-makers in the debates about humanities research policy, including in universities and to wider public. These interviews allowed the mapping of the elite policy network. For the mass interviews, a number of humanities scholars active in public engagement works were selected (on the basis of having projects involving societal partners, or a track record in publishing popular works), and then asked to talk about the influences they faced. Those interviews allowed an analysis of how those elite policy decisions created change in practice. The sampling framework provided a guidance in the course of the ‘snowballing process’, when interviewees were asked to recommend others to speak to or those with which they had worked with in knowledge transfer activities.

In total, 45 interviews were conducted in the course of the project – most of those were undertaken in September 2011, and the period November 2011-February 2012. The interviews followed a semi-structured course:

- elite interviews followed a series of questions relating to the particular policy process from start to finish, and the influences on the elite actor at each stage in the process;
- the mass interviews with academic actors looking at how they defined research excellence, and how public engagement and valorisation fitted with that;
- public user interviews looked firstly at their own ‘business model,’ and how that related to interacting with academics, followed by the stages of the academic collaboration,
- non-governmental policy bodies were primarily a set of interviews with researchers involved in the development of protocols and methods for impact evaluation, and these talked through the way they developed and trialled those tools.

The nature of the snowball meant that it was not always possible to neatly ascribe individuals to one category: there were a number of cases of active engaged humanities scholars who had been university senior managers as well as serving on collective organisations, inquiries, and evaluation panels nationally. The snowball took us towards a group of interviewees doing research on the humanities, and separately to a group doing research on the development of indicators. As it emerged that the media were important, the decision was taken to speak to scientists involved in writing about academic humanities (what we later refer to as ‘humanities-as-science’. We also interviewed two spin-off companies and the R&D manager of a museum. Within the universities, we also interviewed two people responsible in different ways for public connections of the researchers, the general manager of a research institute and a press officer.



### 3.2 The emergent decision for a historical method

The initial choice in the research was to focus on changes in the last five or six years, to try to understand the functioning of the value system in a time of reasonable cohesiveness and similarity. The first interview was with a research council interviewee, who was able to map out the current debate and provide a series of potential avenues for further research. However, in the first interview in the elite snowball, the interview took an unexpected turn. Having introduced themselves, the interviewee immediately moved back in time to what with the benefit of hindsight can be identified as 2002 (*cf.* 9.1.2).

“We were involved with the ERiC project because research quality and research policy were important to us as a resource institution...the KNAW had developed the Sci-Quest method for measuring research impact, but there was a realisation that that would have to be modified fairly extensively if it was going to work across all the disciplinary fields”. (Interview September 11<sup>th</sup> 2011)<sup>3</sup>.

This was significant: the interview had sought to understand the process of the Evaluating Research in Context (ERiC) project, something highlighted by the first interviewee as an interesting *contemporary* phenomenon. But this second interviewee pointed to the fact that ERiC was itself dependent on a much earlier activity, with its own dynamic and explanation. In the fourth interview of the elite snowball, which touched upon Sci-Quest, the interviewee noted that its roots lay in a department of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), Science Dynamics, which was in a later interview to be revealed as being created as a response to try to generate metrics for public impacts of science dating back to the early 1970s. Likewise, the sixth elite interviewee – before even introducing themselves – launched into the interview with historical context, saying:

“The Cohen Commission has to be understood as the latest in the line of several reports, written since the 1980s onwards, all addressing the problem of ‘the humanities under pressure’” (Interview, 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2012).

The interviewee then produced from their briefcase a number of these reports, including the reports of the Staal, Vonhoff and Gerritsen Commissions, and a sector plan for the humanities in 2003 (*cf.* 6.2). At this point, it seemed that any attempt to understand the present therefore needed to understand the past insofar as it influenced the present, and so attention was paid in interviews into trying to identify which of these older events had become embedded and could be regarded as ‘institutionalised’ in the context of the research, to understand in turn how these artefacts and institutions continued to exert influence. In the course of the research, there were a number of these classes of ‘collective referentials’ which people used:

- The Commissions of Inquiry: three attempts made by National Commissions to identify how the problems faced by elements of humanities scholars could be addressed
- Changes to the funding system: attempts to reduce higher education costs and rationalise course organisation in the 1990s and early 1990s
- Policy statements about valorisation: the widespread acceptance by government from the 1970s onwards that public research investments had to produce economic benefits
- Changes to the policy system demanding indicators: the desire for the Dutch government to manage technocratically, the creation of advisory bodies and the wish for effective data for decision-making
- Changes to Dutch culture: liberalisation in the 1970s, recession/ misery in the 1980s, multi-culturalism in the 1990s, and fear of extremism in the 2000s.

The decision was therefore taken to place more effort into understanding the first four of these. It was decided not to try to understand changes to Dutch society as a whole, because

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<sup>3</sup> Caveats apply to the way that quotations are used in this document. For more information, see 3.3.

such a broad topic clearly lay outwith the scope of the project, although it was a clearly important referent for a number of the interviewees. To better understand these events, we decided to undertaken documentary analysis, of laws, policy documents, and the academic, soft and journalistic literature to try to gain an overview of what each of these events or referents was. This was intended to ensure that there was clarity in analysing the interviews – because interviews were conducted primarily in English, interviewees sometimes translated similar Dutch concepts into different formulations. Providing a historical overview of these events therefore provides a second reference point to understand the wider significance of the interviewees’ explanations of how they felt influenced in taking their decisions.

This decision has had consequences for the organisation of the report, and in particular, has led to the inclusion of a somewhat lengthy historical section. This was a piece of social sciences rather than historical research, and therefore the point of Chapters 5 and 6, the two historical chapters, is to attempt to explain the things that interviewees claimed were important to them, on the basis of a contemporary evaluation of them. The selection of events and phenomena was as indicated above made on the basis of what people talked about, and therefore we make no claims that these are an attempt to write a history of this period. Rather, they seek to provide some context, flavour and depth to the explanations that actors made of decisions in the principal period under investigation (2007-12).

### **3.3 Integrating public sources and interviewee anonymity**

In planning this research, we aware that this is a project involving human subjects, and are aware that we have an ethical responsibility to those subjects not to recklessly endanger them, and to ensure that they participate with full informed consent. This research project was designed to meet the British Sociological Association’s ethical guidelines. The interviews were arranged to ensure that there was no physical or medical interventions involved, no deception or misrepresentation, did not involve minors, and to ensure that the interview was not unpleasant, confrontational or otherwise potentially psychologically damaging. A risk assessment was undertaken using a standard ethical protocol.

The assessment was that there was a relatively low risk to individuals except in the specific case of releasing attributed comments in cases where where there were conflicts and disagreements, something quite common in policy processes. Some of the interviewees were of such a status that the broadcasting of their critical remarks of others could be seen as newsworthy, and therefore it was essential specifically to prevent that from happening. Therefore, to protect the interviewees from being damaged by an accidental disclosure, it was decided that the interviews would be anonymous, confidential, and difficult to transmit. Interviewees were approached initially by email, followed by a reminder after one week and one month; if nothing had been heard at that point, it was assumed the invitee did not wish to be each interviewed.

Each interview started with an explanation by the interviewer of the terms of the interview, which had been made explicit in the invitation, which explained the project, the reason for the approach, an outline of potential themes. The terms for the interview which were sought in the invitation were that it would be anonymous and confidential – that it would not be disclosed that the interviewee had participated in the research, and that if the research team wished to use quotations, then the interviewees’ permission would be sought. Interviewees were clearly aware of their right to decline to be interviewed (a number of potential interviewees exercised this right) and to refuse to answer any question if they so chose.

The interviews were not recorded (with one exception in the pilot phase), because of the risk of data security: following the first transcription, the evident ease with which files could be moved around, and potential difficulties in ensuring absolute privacy, led to a decision to work on the basis of contemporaneous notes. These notes were not fully rendered into natural speech, and therefore less potentially harmful by disclosure. The paper notes were

stored securely within the research centre; the digital notes were stored in the secured computing space of the university, and also on the standalone drive of the principal investigators (password protected) laptop. Therefore, it is important to note that what appear as quotations are reconstructions by the researchers based on contemporaneous notes, then presented to those interviewees for their approval, before appearing in the text.<sup>4</sup>

A final point is that information about valorisation activity was gathered separately from the interviews, and has been included on the basis of the references made in the text: the inclusion of information about a research project or activity in the humanities in this report cannot be taken to infer that the research project spoke with the subjects.

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<sup>4</sup> In the confidential draft, it has not yet been possible to secure agreement to use all the quotations. Some of these may be deleted in the final version if approval is not given.

## 4 THE CRISIS OF THE HUMANITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

### 4.1 Introduction to the case study: the Netherlands

Diversity and cosmopolitanism are important to the contemporary place and identity of the Netherlands in the world. With a population of a little under 17m, the Netherlands is a relatively small, and very densely populated country. The Netherlands is also a relatively rich country measured in terms of GDP, with a relatively generous social security system, high education levels based on free or heavily subsidised education, and low unemployment rates. Its location at the delta of the Great Rivers (the Rhine, Maas and Waal) and its vulnerability to the sea made it an early technological culture, reclaiming vast tracts of land from the sea, using these polders for high productivity agriculture, and creating a substantial agricultural surplus. Its location at the mouth of one of Europe's great waterways has made the country a great trader, as well as one of the first countries to undergo substantial urbanisation.

Established as a confederation of rebellious provinces in 1575, the Netherlands has always been a country of great diversity. Parts of the country were affected by the Reformation with both Lutheranism and Calvinism attracting substantial followings, primarily north of the rivers. The modern Netherlands was formed in 1831 when the distinctive southern provinces, Catholic and with a French speaking elite, broke away from the north to form Belgium. The Netherlands has since then placed a great premium on negotiating and balancing that. Increasing democratisation from the 1880s saw the Netherlands develop a distinct system of pillarisation whereby different collective identity groups, including Catholics, workers, Calvinists and liberals developed their own cultural services and political organisations.

As a strongly urban and mercantile society located at a trade crossroads, the other important dimension of the Dutch culture has been internationalisation. The long 16<sup>th</sup> Century – the Golden Age (*Gouden Eeuw*) saw the Netherlands rise to replace Spain as Europe's strongest economic power, but on the basis of trade rather than conquest. An administrative elite emerged in this period based around co-ordinating trade and facilitating the accumulation of traded, rather than plundered wealth, and leading to the famous Tulip bubble. The Dutch developed their own empire, primarily around the Indonesian colonies, the one-sidedness and brutality only belatedly being officially recognised despite Multatuli's famous exposé *Max Havelaar* (1845). More recently, the Netherlands has sought to protect its place in the world through a strongly multilateralist policy, remaining neutral in WWI, founding the Benelux union after WWII, and playing a leading role in the formation of the European Economic Community, the Schengen agreement, the Single European Market and the Single Currency.

This chapter seeks to put this into context by providing some back to the place of humanities within the Dutch science system, and the changes through which that system was progressing in the 1970s and early 1980s which first led to the public questioning of the value of those humanities, in the Report of the Advisory Committee of Small Languages, Baby Krishna, in 1991. But this debate did not emerge from nowhere. The introduction of outcome-based financing in the early 1980s had placed irresistible pressure on a certain group of humanities which were strong in the Netherlands (in a number of ways, such as scientific quality and political influence) but which attracted substantial numbers of students. The solution which emerged was special financing for the humanities, the so-called *Staalgeld (qv)*, named after Professor Frits Staal, an émigré philosophy professor (*cf.* Staal Commissie, section a.b.c). This created the idea of 'exceptionalism' in Dutch humanities, which created in turn a dynamic which drove the evolution of the context.

## 4.2 The historical evolution of humanities in universities in the Netherlands

The modern idea of the university emerged as an institutionalisation of the Faculty of Humanities in the 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Ruegg, 1992) and in the Netherlands, humanities were at the heart of the first universities, and have developed a symbolic salience as something important to the idea of a Dutch university. This emerged in part because humanities were seen as continually being ‘socially useful’ for the Netherlands, or particular elements of the Netherlands. But in parallel with that, the institutionalisation of humanities in highly specialised chairs within broad faculties has driven more recently a distantiation of humanities from society, that has culminated in a pervasive sense of doom occluding the humanities disciplines in recent decades (*cf.* Belfiore, 2011).

Higher education systems are continually evolving and the Netherlands is no exception to this rule. It is therefore hard to provide hard and fast distinctions in a system that has been continually evolving, but in order to provide a set of basis definitions the current situation is used. Humanities research in the Netherlands is concentrated into two kinds of institution: the public university sector and public research institutes. For the basis of this report, the term university covers the fourteen publically funded universities, and excludes the ‘accredited’ universities (including the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht) as well as the polytechnic sector. The justification for this is that in the discussions around the social value of humanities research, there is a dominant perception of humanities research, shaped by the norms of the ancient universities and Leiden in particular (*qv*) with many diverse research chairs grouped together into a Faculty of Humanities. At the same time, humanities is both important to the ‘idea of a Dutch university’, as well as the ways through which these universities deliver their societal value (primarily through their education missions).

The connection between universities and social development has always been present and often explicit in the Netherlands, with universities being formed as a response to particular crises, and in each phase of the development, humanities have had a role to play in the responses. The first Dutch university, Leiden, was created in 1575 following the fall of the southern Netherlands to Spanish occupation: the suppression of the low countries’ first university (Leuven) encouraged an exodus of academics to the free North and the government of the *stadshouders* appreciated the need for an instrument of elite formation to provide the general education. When the Amsterdam *Athenaeum Illustre* became the University of Amsterdam (1815), this was with the support of the local municipal council who both funded and were involved with the appointment of the professoriat<sup>5</sup>.

The foundation of the contemporary Dutch university system was laid by the 1876 *Wet Hoger Onderwijs* (Higher Education Law) and this opened the door for a revitalisation of the professoriate to encourage not merely the independently wealthy, but those from more modest backgrounds and with a greater interest in social activism. This was not specifically the purpose of the law, but with its passage newly emerging social groups became aware of the value of a university as means of producing their intellectual elite as part of their involvement in a wider emancipation process. So it was around this time that communities serving both the orthodox Protestant (*gereformeerde*) and Roman Catholic communities were created. The *Vrije Universiteit* (The Free University) was founded by prominent *gereformeerde* politician Abraham Kuyper in 1880 to address specific doctrinal complaints from the *gereformeerde* community about theological education and evolved over time to become a comprehensive university with a medical school, fully paid for by the Dutch state.

In 1905, the St. Radboud Foundation was set up to create a university specifically oriented towards the Dutch Catholic communities, primarily located in the south of the country, as part of the wider trend towards emancipation of various social communities, which was to

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.uva.nl/over\\_de\\_uva/profiel-en-missie/object.cfm/0F882B7C-1321-B0BE-6897018007848CB3](http://www.uva.nl/over_de_uva/profiel-en-missie/object.cfm/0F882B7C-1321-B0BE-6897018007848CB3)

culminated in the consociational pillarisation system (*verzuiling*, cf. Pellings, 1996). In 1922, the first Catholic university was established in Nijmegen, and in 1927, a second institute followed in Tilburg, also in the South of the Netherlands. The Catholic University of Nijmegen (from 2004 the Radboud University, Nijmegen) began life as a comprehensive university focusing on the humanities, whilst Tilburg University was more directly specialised on humanities and social sciences, directly connected to their mission to create a highly educated Catholic elite able to participate more actively and influentially in Dutch public life.

A second stream of social connections behind universities came through the creation of the Technical Universities. The first of these was created in 1842 in Delft as an academy for the education of engineers, becoming in 1863 a full university institution. TUD was created by King William II as part of his attempts to improve national competitiveness – as Crown Prince, he had undertaken commercial study tours of Europe and had been shocked by the Netherlands relative backwardness with respect to in particular Germany, and on assuming the throne committed to a serious economic technological modernisation of the Netherlands (Hospers, 2002).

Similarly, in the post WWII reconstruction of the Netherlands, where it was realised substantial numbers of engineers were required to create a mass technical workforce, a second technical university was created co-located with the Philips engineering company in Eindhoven in the south of the Netherlands. In 1961, the University of Twente was created in an effort both to increase numbers of engineers being trained, in new disciplinary areas, and also to try to prevent the decline of the region’s textiles industry (which for the first time since King William II had supported the sector was facing murderous international competition). The final specialised university is located at Wageningen, created in 1918 out of a former agricultural college to provide research, technology transfer and extension services to support the development and growth of the Dutch agriculture and horticulture industries.

Another group of universities were created for primarily economic reasons. In 1905, a higher trade school was created in Rotterdam to assist with the education of a technical class associated with the increasing complexity of the port activities, trade and related services. This evolved from a business faculty into a much broader university including hosting a university hospital. The University of Maastricht was created in 1976 in part to provide future economic perspectives for the region of Limburg, which was heavily hit (on both the Netherlands and Belgian side of the border in the 1960s and 1970s by the rundown and closure of the coal industry. The Open University of the Netherlands was created in 1984 in order to offer second-chance education in the Netherlands, and has a headquarters also located in Limburg, in the former industrial town of Heerlen.

For primarily historical reasons, the humanities in the Netherlands are concentrated in ten universities, each of which having a faculty of humanities, although the other four universities are active in humanities research. The 14 Dutch Funded universities can be divided into four groups depending on their background and the importance of humanities to their mission. For each of the four groups, humanities occupy a different institutional position within the university, and are justified in different ways within the institution.

*Table 3 The role of humanities in the 14 Funded Universities in the Netherlands.<sup>6</sup>*

Sector	Universities included	Rationale for humanities in university
Ancient	Leiden, Groningen, University of Amsterdam, Utrecht	University originally primarily humanities. Humanities retain symbolic and prestige value alongside more useful new areas.

<sup>6</sup> These are the names that are used in the report, although the various institutions have had various names through their histories.

Consociational	VU University, Radboud, Tilburg	Humanities education important for access to the professions and higher public life: creating a new intelligentsia
Socially motivated	Maastricht, Rotterdam, Open University	Relatively inexpensive to build up, bring student numbers and help to build profile and prestige of institution
Non-humanities	Delft, Wageningen, Eindhoven, Twente	Humanities remain tangential to university profile but can become important to some study areas e.g. philosophy of science and technology

*Source: authors' own design*

The other noteworthy element of the Dutch science system which houses humanities are the KNAW research institutes. These began life as independent research institutions: the Fungal Biodiversity Centre was founded in 1904 to host an international collection of fungal and algal cultures, and in 1968 it became adopted into the KNAW as a formal research institute. Since that time, KNAW has created or incorporated a total of 17 research institutes, employing 1,300 staff. A total of ten of these institutes are involved in research activity in the humanities and social sciences (see box A below). Although the NWO (*Nederlands Wetenschappelijke Organisatie*, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) also runs 8 research institutes, these institutions are not active in the field of humanities research and therefore no further explanation is provided of these activities.

The social sciences and humanities research institutes of KNAW

- Data Archiving and Networked Services (DANS)
- Fryske Akademy (FA)
- Huygens ING
- International Institute of Social History (IISH)
- Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV)
- Meertens Institute
- NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide studies
- Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI)
- Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS)

Source: <http://www.knaw.nl/Pages/DEF/27/128.bGFuZz1FTkc.html>

The ways this delineation has taken place is important for the way humanities has come to be defined in the scope of the public discussions around the future of the humanities, and the importance of humanities research. With the possible exception of art history and music science, arts research in the Netherlands takes place outside of the university sector, and is reserved to the University of Applied Science sector (“Hogeschole”), in Conservatoires, Art and Theatre Academies. The UAS sector only recently acquired a mandate to undertake research, and it is only funded on an extremely limited way for near-to-user, highly applied research. Therefore, in the context of this report, the debate about the social value of arts & humanities research is limited to the humanities, although in particular contexts it has been further restricted (*cf. Kleine Letteren*, TOP-sectoren policies).

## 5 HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM FOR SOCIAL ENDS: THE BACKGROUND TO THE 'CRISIS OF THE HUMANITIES'

### 5.1 Introduction

The backdrop to the Dutch context are the enormous efforts that have been placed in the last forty years into the modernisation of the higher education system, which have had profound consequences on the place of humanities and humanities research in the Dutch higher education system. Jenniskens (1997) argued that higher education in the Netherlands was largely unchanged from 1876 to 1960, which saw the introduction of the first Scientific Education Act, which equipped the government to intervene in higher education as it became an increasingly important part of the public realm. Huisman (1995) noted that the changes of this law were not as great as had been previously expected. A second law followed in 1970 as an administrative change, moving the power centre of universities away from senate groupings of professors towards Central and Faculty-level executive structures.

This has to be understood in the context of a wider shift in the nature of Dutch policy from the early 1970s onwards towards four goals, rationalisation, democratisation, integration and differentiation (Hoogerwerfe, 1989). This crisis was driven by the economic crisis related both to the oil crises globally as well to the particular problem of 'Dutch disease' where the discover of gas led to increased governmental spending in parallel with inflation and stagnation (Economist, 1977). There was both an expansion of public administration research into the consequences of these policy changes as well as more applied research seeking to promote a broad modernisation agenda (Van Mierlo, 1990).

An additional element related to the introduction of the market environment to the higher education policy terrain came with the increasing of student fees in the Biesheuvel-I government (1971-3). Student fees were substantially raised from f.200 to f.1000 in the so-called "Thousand Guilder Law"<sup>7</sup>. This was an application of the *profijtbeginsel*, a key principle in government in the early 1970s reforms that paying for public services makes beneficiaries more selective and demanding of producers. Although substantially less than the costs of provision, and at least partly covered by public support, they created a specific link between the value of the courses and the willingness of users to pay for them.

This broad shift impacted on both policy areas which framed higher education, namely science policy and higher education policy. The policy areas were in practice closely intertwined, partly because there was a single lead Ministry responsible for both areas, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap*, or OCW). However, these developments followed quite different logics, involved very different communities as well as other government bodies, and pulled the humanities in rather different directions. This section sets out how these changes impacted on the two policy domains, and the consequences that this had for the state of humanities in the Netherlands at the time of the first comprehensive crisis, around 1990.

### 5.2 Reforms in the area of science policy 1970-90

Science policy reform was a central part of the Den Uyl cabinet, which can be regarded as the first of the modern Dutch cabinets. Elected on a wave of popular support for a change to the old order following public protests in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Cabinet included members of socialist, Christian democrat, left-liberal and Green parties. The Governing Accord of the Den Uyl Cabinet included a commitment to the development of a comprehensive science policy white paper, to be developed through intensive discussions between the key players in the national science system, notably the university and non-

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. <http://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/9353000/1/j9vvhfxcd6p0lcl/vh8lnhrouwxc>



university research organisations as well as business research funders. The interest of a left-leaning government in science policy came as part of an agenda to involve the state and unions more closely in firms by involving the state more closely in the development of technology, also seen in the UK and in slightly different form in France, as a primarily statist programme of national revival.

The basis for the reform in the Netherlands was the observation from a variety of science policy advice bodies in the Netherlands that the system was starting to work against itself in certain areas, and therefore a simplification against a clear set of political choices was necessary in order to restore the dynamism to the systems. The solution chosen, which remains the guiding principle to this day, was that the government should set the goals, and the scientists should decide the means of best delivering those goals. The policy sought to weaken the autonomy of the universities as institutions, and strengthen two additional groups, the researchers themselves as well as the wider grouping of societal stakeholders in those university activities, bringing together the universities, government and social partners in pursuing the optimal research mix. This can be considered as the start of a period of 'bureaucratisation' of research in the Netherlands, with the introduction of external policy tools to shape and guide research activities towards particular (socially or governmentally desirable goals). This created a number of characteristics in the system which have persisted to this day.

### *5.2.1 Nota Wetenschapsbeleid (1975)*

The government document that initiated this changed was the 1975 *Nota Wetenschapsbeleid* ('Science policy white paper') which sought to initiate a shift from universities being funded by the Government through an increasingly convoluted cameral funding mechanism towards clearer social purposes for universities which would be rewarded through funding mechanisms. There was a sense that because of the cameral system (*cf.* Jongbloed) of funding universities had become excessively close to government and closed off from society (Maassen, 1996). In the revolutionary spirit of the Age which saw the Ministry of Education occupied by students in 1970 in protest against the closed nature of higher education, the 1975 science white paper sought to reform higher education and increase its sensitivity to these wider social pressures (Daalder & Shils, 1982).

The *Nota* is a remarkable document in having marked a fundamental shift in the direction of policy for higher education that has continued, and indeed increasingly intensified since its publication. Although the political horizons of policy-making have become increasingly shorter, and the differences between governments increasingly polarised, the complexity of the system has to some extent provided science policy with the stability necessary to evolve and grow in a common direction. The *Nota* set the principle and the mechanisms for ensuring that university research was directly focused on and coupled to societal problems through a complex web of interest intermediation, which was later to contribute directly to one half of the crisis of the humanities. Indeed, there has been a slow and steady adjustment over time by the system towards this new changed direction. This was not a big bang in higher education that forced open universities, but a continual pressure which sought to counter the autonomy of universities and compel them to address their apparent lack of interest in societal contribution in the way that single policy interventions could not.

The *Nota* specifically ruled out attempts to shape research efforts within business for two reasons, because of the dominance of large corporations with interests in other countries, and because of the incompatibility of governmental interference with free business choice. A distinction was also made between university (and polytechnic) and non-university non-commercial research on the grounds that this latter group were directly guided by their research funders (such as the department of health for health research) in ways inappropriate for the universities, and also because this group were more applied in their approach than in the universities, and therefore represented a different kind of input to scientific decision-making, in the form of 'demand' rather than as 'supply'. Nevertheless, the

*Nota* appreciated the risk that segmenting the science system raised for introducing a streamlined and integrated science policy, and therefore emphasised the need for the creation of intermediary organisations to ensure that universities felt compelled to respond to the demands arising from non-university and business research organisations.

In the first *Nota* much was made of the introduction of research programming, a shift away from allocating block grant financing for research towards large research programmes focused on dealing with complex areas of strategic national significance. The *Nota* highlighted four such areas where programmatisation could take place, in energy, environment, labour market and demography, and signalled that successful programmatisation depended on the existence of both an urgent social problem as well as academic interest in solutions to that problem. Although the programmes were in this instance defined in a very broad way, this raised for the first time a desire to shape and coordinate research activities towards societally useful activities. Moreover, as is visible in these four programme areas chosen, this created a problem for the humanities in that their contributions to the solutions of these societally useful problems were not always immediately obvious. This also made university research funding dependent on social definitions of what problems were, and tied the long-term development of university research capacity to a much shorter-term vision of political problems (increasingly problematic as traditional Dutch social institutions disintegrated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

### 5.2.2 *Nota Innovatie (1980)*

A further impulse in this direction came with the 1980 Innovation White paper (*Nota Innovatie*). The Netherlands was one of the first countries to explicitly promote the desirability of innovation as a policy area (rather than exclusively in terms of science and technological development). This White Paper explicitly envisaged that there should be systematic links between the knowledge infrastructure and knowledge users, and although knowledge users were primarily regarded as firms, the White Paper noted the role of the public sector and civil society organisations as key lead agents in particular domain areas. The White paper announced a broadening of the domains funded by the Dutch Research Council to include the technological domains undertaken by the Technical Universities. This also introduced the principles of innovation research programmes, creating knowledge centres, foresighting and supporting the use of ICT.

This White Paper explicitly included as one of its policy accents “increasing the orientation of Dutch research towards society, in particularly to the business sector” (*Nota Innovatie*, 1980, p. 17). This meant that it saw innovation policy primarily as something for technical, engineering, medical and agricultural sciences. At the same time, the policy paper notes two further things which have been influential in Dutch innovation policy. The first is that the solution of technological problems are not purely technological, but rely also on social and organisational changes, and in particular, the ways in which social groups react to technological change. Secondly, the importance of social and cultural changes (and culture was explicitly named) mean that the government have an important role to play in ensuring that there is a balanced approach to technological development that produces wider societal benefits. This emphasises the conundrum at the heart of the Dutch government approach to innovation, the knowledge of the importance of social and cultural aspects for successful innovation but the allure and the attraction of the purely technological dimensions of that research.

It is important to mention here the introduction of Conditional Financing of Research (VFO) introduced in 1983 (Jongbloed & Salerno, 2003) to allocate first stream (core) research funding to universities. This was the first practical introduction of peer review as a distribution mechanism for first stream research funds, although it neither led to widespread concentration of resources nor to direct control over research (De Boer *et al.*, 2005). The VFO mechanism originally envisaged a paper quality measurement exercise, but extended that to include site visits and interviews, expanding into the Exploratory Commissions

(*Verkenningcommissies*) (cf. a.b.c). As part of the shifting autonomy and accountability imposed on higher education (cf. HOAK), from 1993, the VFO exercise was rolled into the external review of Dutch research, the standard evaluation.

### 5.2.3 *The shift from Pure to National Science Council (1988)*

A third milestone was marked with the creation of the NWO, the Dutch Research Council, or rather, the re-establishment of the Research Council. Prior to the creation of the NWO, the Research Council was entitled Pure Research Council (ZWO, *Zuiver Wetenschappelijk Organisatie*), and had been established at the same time as the Dutch Institute for Applied Natural Science Research (TNO, *Nederlandse Organisatie voor toegepast-natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek*) whose focus was on applied, and business facing research in the Natural Sciences. The statutes establishing the NWO from the ZWO gave it four primary functions:

- Promoting research quality, and initiating/ stimulating new developments in scientific research
- Executing these tasks by the granting of resources, primarily to universities
- Promoting knowledge transfer from NWO research to benefit society
- Co-ordination and promotion work as necessary.

Source: [http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0004191/geldigheidsdatum\\_01-01-2012](http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0004191/geldigheidsdatum_01-01-2012)

Clear within these new tasks was the intention that the valorisation or transfer of the knowledge generated by NWO-funded into society, was an important task, and NWO should be concerned with that knowledge exchange role. In the context of the focus on societal partners being primarily regarded as economic, as far as the concentration on innovation was concerned, this framed the idea of knowledge exchange as being primarily knowledge exchange to companies. Nevertheless, there was still a recognition, later evident, of the point in the *Innovatie Nota* that other areas of innovation are necessary in order to achieve effective societal transformation and respond effectively to the challenges facing the Netherlands. This created a tension in NWO knowledge exchange activities between the reality of very broad kinds of knowledge exchange, and the stated priority for knowledge exchange with direct commercial benefits.

By the time of the formation of the NWO from the ZWO, university research as had been constituted a research domain separation from other research execution organisations. The second, in part arising from the above distinction, is the great complexity of the system, with a split between research funders (funding councils), advice bodies and interest representatives (including business interests but also the interests of the universities through the University Association (VSNU) and Rectors Conference. Single organisations may have multiple roles in this division, as is the case with the KNAW, (the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences) which both advises on science policy and represents the interests of its member academicians.

## 5.3 (Funding) reforms in the area of higher education policy 1970-90

There was a substantive shift in Dutch higher education policy in the 1980s which was primarily driven by funding considerations but was framed in much broader policy debates and was to have profound and far-reaching consequences for the Dutch higher education system to date. The significance of the changes is best understood by understanding the previous situation, in which universities were funded by government. . It became evident in the 1960s that universities should change, in response to massification, the emergence of new disciplines, and the new powers for the government under the 1960 law, governments created new funding streams for universities. Governments reflected this in the funds they individually negotiated with the universities, with ministers approving budget plans for each

institution (Jenniskens, 1997). At first, this was an effective means to develop the system, but over time, the system became complex, with universities stimulated in many directions – often conflicting – simultaneously (Maassen, 1996).

A number of problems emerged in this system in the 1970s: with the wider fiscal problems faced by the Dutch government, the decision was taken to cap funding at the level of the system, and divide it between institutions on a formula basis from 1975 onwards (Davids & Van Herwaarden, 1993, cited in Jenniskens, 1997). These were allocation models rather than intended to shift behaviour, and quickly became very complicated, leading to the government withdrawing from that model and adopting a four year plan model for 1979-1983. Van Vught (1991) characterised this as a restrictive approach to steering – reforms came through the imposition of government intentions upon universities, although throughout this period, universities retained complete autonomy to spend their budgets once the allocation – through whatever method then in place – had been made.

One interesting innovation in this period, which was to become a reference point for interviewees speaking about impacts on humanity was the Task Reallocation and Concentration operation (*Taakverdeling en Concentratie*, TVC, 1981). Jenniskens (1997) that a central element of this was shifting tasks between universities, to reduce the financial burden of the system, and increase the quality of research and education. The Minister at that time was Wim Deetman, who held the position from 1982-1989 in the first two Lubbers cabinets (Christian Democratic-Right Liberal). His science and higher education policy throughout this period had the hallmark of directing resources to excellence in teaching and research. Under Deetman, the TVC policy evolved into a means of achieving this, and was also used to imposed a much stronger steer on universities from the centre.

The Minister wanted to reduce funding, but sharing cuts across all departments would affect quality, so the intention was to concentrate activities in the best departments. This had to be done between universities, with universities collectively developing a plan to allocate tasks between them. The Minister rejected the universities' plan as too cautious and imposed the result, which saw several subjects discontinued at a number of universities. The model, that new funds were provided to stimulate concentration, and so there was selective growth as well as cuts, evolved into a principle of the sector. Van Vught described this shift as from corrective to facilitative policies, in the funding of Dutch government, introducing the principles of "financial incentives, market anticipation and steering within a framework of local constraints (Foppen, 1989, cited, in Jenniskens, 1997, p. 124).

The 1985 policy paper *Nota Hoger Onderwijs: Autonomie en Kwaliteit* (HOAK, Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality (1985)) was explicit in its continuation and deepening of the use of market mechanisms. The aims are evident in the ambition of the *Nota*, to provide a means of steering higher education but without imposing a bureaucracy on top of universities that would in fact deepen their dependence on the state (sec. 2.3). The solution that was chosen was to make universities more sensitive to societal partners and sub-systems and hence to maximise quality, and using evaluation to allow societal stakeholders to hold universities to account. The basis for the evaluations was that they were to be within the institution, at the level of the department, faculty and university, involving users in education evaluation, and the evaluations were intended to be used by the universities in reporting back to government in their annual reports how the universities' internal decision-making processes. HOAK introduced the principle that the government would publish a Higher Education and Research Plan (HOOP) every two years as the basis for the high-level dialogue between universities and the government.

A further iteration of the principles of concentration came with the Selection Contraction and Expansion Operation (*Selectieve Krimp en Groei*, SKG, 1987-91). This was a plan directly imposed by the Ministry, in contrast to the TVC proposals in which Minister Deetman used a set of proposals from the university as the basis for the Ministry plan. De Boer *et al.* (2005) argue that this was a consequence of university disappointment with the fact that they had been promised that the TVC exercise would be the last round of cuts and closures. The

instrument used by the Ministry was in this case a version of the peer review that had come in with Selective Finance for Research, in peer review committees. The plans applied concentrated a set of cuts across all universities, across a number of discipline areas where there was felt to be an oversupply of graduates, where research was not of good quality or the social added value was in question; Wageningen was completely spared and the technical universities only faced cuts in their provision of pure (rather than applied) sciences. These cuts are shown on the table below, and the biggest losers in this process were the classical broad universities, Nijmegen, Leiden, Utrecht, the VU, UvA and Leiden.

The leitmotif of Deetman's changes as applied to higher education was to steer universities towards these goals by increasing the sensitivity of universities towards a broader selection of societal stakeholders whose more sophisticated demands would require universities to modernise in the way that a governmental-university negotiation could never achieve. A good explanation of his thinking is provided in his statement to the Second Chamber science and technology committee, and also the potential ramifications this had for science policy.

“Whenever you reinforce your strengths, a critical element of our science policy that I have emphasised in recent years, is that you have to trim other areas, and that can create tensions. A good example of this recently where I have had a clear position is in the *Kleine Letteren*. A number of newspapers have already written about this. Look at the costs, benefits and the pure economic value and then ask critical questions. Look at the scientific level and international recognition of many of these areas, and it must be recognised that we are doing the right thing. I have already expressed my concern that many drivers are reducing interest in these areas. So it is easy to say you have to set priorities but I have set the level as being prioritising excellence in education and research. We have to promote and not lose sight of that, which is why I have used the *Verkenningen* to be explicit about the instruments necessary to decide priorities, and not get drawn into a “pruning here or here will strengthen it overall”. I have chosen space technology because amongst other things we have a strong international profile. A minister must be careful not to simply say “what is its value for a small country?” I do encounter that but I have always avoided it. The decisions are indeed much harder than you might think, and hopefully the *Verkenningen* will help us – and I use the word cautiously - to get a better grip on the situation.”

Minister Deetman, (16<sup>th</sup> November 1987).

The two changes, both pushed through by Deetman represented a comprehensive shift in the nature of Dutch funding, and one which a number of interviewees came back to as being important in terms of the emerging sense of crisis in the humanities. Both Van Vught (1991) and Teichler (1989) described this shift representing a shift from corrective to facilitative policies, by introducing the principles of “financial incentives, market anticipation and steering within a framework of local constraints (Foppen, 1989, cited, in Jenniskens, 1997, p. 124). The net effect over time was ultimately to favour growth in the smaller, and more specialised institutions and constrain growth on the universities more focused towards the humanities. The full data is reproduced in the table below, which shows that in a time that the total government contribution shrank and then recovered, some institutions saw substantial increased in their budgets, whilst others saw considerable shrinkage.

*Government contribution to universities, by institution, 1983-1993, exc. Wageningen, 2003 prices*

	1983	1988	1993	Change
Delft	187,345	193,034	214,865	14,7%
Eindhoven	91,89	97,025	111,403	21,2%
Groningen	177,408	164,156	163,27	-8,0%
Leiden	173,776	156,462	151,018	-13,1%
Maastricht	39,85	57,022	62,077	55,8%
Nijmegen	154,78	133,762	128,102	-17,2%
Rotterdam	89,37	98,623	98,697	10,4%
Tilburg	33,993	39,253	42,565	25,2%
Twente	66,414	79,392	92,027	38,6%
Utrecht	254,621	221,885	234,468	-7,9%
UVA	215,924	200,246	204,11	-5,5%
VU	138,41	124,018	125,47	-9,3%
	1623,781	1564,878	1628,072	0.3%

*Source: Jongbloed & Salerno, 2003, author's own calculations*

## 5.4 Impacts of the reforms on humanities

In analysing the impacts of these reforms, and the shift in the steering system of higher education in the Netherlands, it is necessary firstly to highlight the fact that the continual tinkering with the system. Although the funding cuts in the second decade in this period were certainly real, driven by high levels of government debt, there is some scepticism about the extent to which the principles supposedly underpinning the reforms can be embedded in the wider science system. There was also clearly a shift towards payment on the basis of results for education funding, and in research for supporting innovation, although the persistence of the underlying problems to which these changes were a perceived solution must raise questions about the extent to which the system did indeed accept the principles of change. In analysing the impacts of these changes in the science system, and their later impacts on humanities, it makes sense to distinguish between changes at the level of concepts and principles at the system ('soft' changes) and changes resulting from shifting funding allocations ('hard' changes).

The 1977 Science Budget provided an oversight of the fundamental research base of the Netherlands in the humanities on a discipline-wise basis, and this provided a good benchmark for understanding the baseline from which these changes emerged.<sup>8</sup> This identified 31 areas of strength in the Dutch research base, and also pointed to the distinctiveness of humanities research, in terms of its relative diversity, the long gestation time of building up expertise, and the good international reputation of Dutch research internationally. This defined the exceptionality of humanities and laid criteria under which it would still be a valid function for the Dutch government to fund, when it was ensuring the sustainability of the research base through forming new students effectively, and creating new teachers and lecturers for the field. The report pointed to the considerable increases in resources going into the humanities and divinity in this time and sketched a relatively bright picture of the future

The main soft changes to the system applicable to arts & humanities research in this period came in the orientation of the science system, and the definition of a series of purposes for the kinds of research that the public should be funding. In common with other public

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<sup>8</sup> [http://resourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19761977/PDF/SGD\\_19761977\\_0003043.pdf](http://resourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19761977/PDF/SGD_19761977_0003043.pdf)

services, there was a wholesale reorientation of the science system around a set of efficiency-driven principles drawing on ideas of competition and steering-by-networks. This had a particular view of the way that public funding should operate (broadly neo-liberal in outlook but with a clear national flavour), and that was to make investments in useful services, and to make those services more sensitive to public users. One effect of this was the need to reframe 'services' as things that could be managed to deliver usability, and for that usability and customer sensitivity to be clearly made visible by the government.

Thus we see the introduction of a new split into public discourse around the value of higher education, between 'useful' and 'other' subjects. Usefulness was defined in terms of a number of key criteria through the different policy processes:

- *Nota Wetenschapsbeleid* defined usefulness in terms of the capacity to contribute to businesses
- *Nota Innovatie* defined usefulness in terms of the capacity to contribute to innovation in businesses and public services
- *TVC* defined usefulness in terms of the capacity to contribute to excellence through being able to attract substantial numbers of students
- *SKC* defined usefulness in terms of the capacity to deliver graduate employability both in the present but also into the future.

In some cases, this had no explicit implications for humanities in the way that policy was defined, whilst in others, notably the *Nota Wetenschapsbeleid*, there was caveat that in some way defined humanities' contribution as being less important than that of the hard sciences. In the *Nota Innovatie*, there was a lacuna around social sciences and the humanities, in the way that the discussion was framed: despite noting the social and cultural consequences of technological change, the policy prescriptions focused primarily on the hard sciences, and what was useful for the hard sciences. It is in this *Nota* that for example the idea of valorisation as coming through patents, licensing and technology transfer to small businesses emerges rather than in contributing to societal development more broadly.

These changes can be considered as constructing 'Dutch science' as a field that had to be managed at a distance by the government, and which as a field, had a number of homogenous features. One of the most important of these was that a university was comprised of production units which had to be managed to maximise resources, through student numbers, research activities and third-stream income (after 1980). However, different 'production units' had different earning capacities in terms of the price paid per student (which partly reflected capital budgets), the size of research project investments and the availability of a strong market for the knowledge produced in these institutions. Humanities units here had a clear resource dependency, primarily dependent on student numbers to balance budgets, with little earning capacity through research projects or third stream income. This meant that humanities found itself having to plead within universities for its preservation and cross-subsidy at a time when its wider legitimacy to the government was under challenge for its more limited usefulness.

At the same time, it is important to make a distinction between the way that these soft concepts and definitions circulated in practice, and the change that they brought about in reality. In both science and higher education policy, the government may have had the intention of engaging on a substantial reform programme, but the reality was more modest. In part this was because all the funding mechanisms used by governments in this period left substantial amounts of discretion to university managers and it was therefore possible for cross-subsidies to emerge within institutions. Part of the reason for the survival of the humanities under the pressure of the cuts of the 1980s was that institutions themselves valued the humanities (and for some institutions, notably Leiden and Utrecht) they were politically or at least symbolically powerful and were able to mobilise that symbolism to ensure their survival.

The national parliament was sensitive to these changes. The Permanent Parliamentary Commission on Science Policy raised its concerns as early as 1981<sup>9</sup>, in particular through the increasing emphasis on Science Council funding as a source of research. Commission member Beinema (Christian Democrat) raised the concern that:

“There is still a risk that these reforms place pressure on humanities, where the results are less easy to measure, and the social value is more often indirect than direct.” (*Ib. authors' own translation*).

The changes proposed under Deetman from 1982 onwards raised considerable concern amongst Parliamentarians of the damage that could potentially be done to the national research base in the hum by the new costing systems and the cuts. The result was that Deetman commissioned a working group to produce a report on humanities, research, which reported in February 1983<sup>10</sup>. This report began by problematizing humanities, and framing the cuts as an opportunity for dealing with those problems. The problems in humanities research were named as high teaching loads, limited Science Council resources, rising costs for library services and publications, and the lack of appropriate organisational structures. The problem was framed as one of self-regulation and organisation within the field, and the Commission report placed much emphasis on the sector coming together to sort itself out and make a stronger case for the humanities with respect to other disciplines. The subsequent parliamentary discussion of this report took a slightly different approach, noting that there was a need to ensure that a different and appropriate treatment for humanities<sup>11</sup>.

Beyond the discursive domain, there were also practical shifts in the higher education system in this period through tough fiscal settlements. Table B below highlights neatly that those universities that were more oriented towards useful subjects (physical and medical sciences, and engineering) were those that grew the most over the period. Maastricht and Tilburg both saw a substantial increase in student numbers through the creation and expansion of modern humanities and social science courses: the three technical universities saw the creation of new technical disciplines, whilst the 6 broad universities all experienced shrinking government contributions in this period.

*Table B Change in University government remuneration 1983-1993 (TVC, SKG) by university*

University	Change 1983-93
Delft	14,7%
Eindhoven	21,2%
Groningen	-8,0%
Leiden	-13,1%
Maastricht	55,8%
Nijmegen	-17,2%
Rotterdam	10,4%
Tilburg	25,2%
Twente	38,6%
Utrecht	-7,9%
UVA	-5,5%
VU	-9,3%

Source: Jongbloed & Salerno (2003)

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<sup>9</sup> Handelingen, 5<sup>de</sup> Vergadering, Vaste Commissie voor Wetenschapsbeleid, 14th December 1981, UVC 5. [http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19811982/PDF/SGD\\_19811982\\_0000461.pdf](http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19811982/PDF/SGD_19811982_0000461.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>OCW (1984), Alfa-onderzoek, Tweede Kamer 1983-84, 18532 Nr. 1-2. [http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19831984/PDF/SGD\\_19831984\\_0008588.pdf](http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19831984/PDF/SGD_19831984_0008588.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19841985/PDF/SGD\\_19841985\\_0004229.pdf](http://ressourcessgd.kb.nl/SGD/19841985/PDF/SGD_19841985_0004229.pdf)



As a baseline for interpreting these changes in more detail, it is useful to have a baseline for the importance of humanities in the Dutch science budgeting process. Although immediately comparable data was not easily to be found, the 1975 *Nota Wetenschapsbeleid* gives a sense of Dutch research budget allocations at the start of this period. Social sciences and the humanities in this period received around 100% of the total Dutch budget, which as the table below shows, was around twice the average in the European Economic Community, at that time six members. Humanities in this period was therefore comparatively strong although representing a small overall proportion of the science budget.

*The Dutch Research Budget allocations, 1973 for the university sector, from core funding*

NABS-categorie 11	NL (1973)		EEC 6 (1973)	
	f. m	% All	f. m	% All
General	-	-	118,3	1,8
Life & Exact Sciences	619,6	39,9	2 230,6	33,3
General	(-)	(-)	(189,0)	(2,8)
Physics	(246,6)	(15,9)	(926,6)	(13,7)
Engineering Sciences	(137,3)	(8,8)	(307,5)	(4,6)
Medical sciences	(146,1)	(9,4)	(555,2)	(8,3)
Agricultural Sciences	(52,4)	(3,4)	(124,0)	(1,9)
Other	(37,2)	(2,4)	(13,8)	(0,2)
SSH	150,0	9,6	363,7	5,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>769,6</b>	<b>49,5</b>	<b>2 712,7</b>	<b>40,5</b>

**Note:** The total government expenditure on science policy across the three sectors (university, non-university and business at this time was f. 1700m)

*Source: Nota Wetenschapsbeleid, 1975.*

These changes were driven through by the two plans TVC (Division of labour) and SKG (Selective shrinkage and growth). Both of these plans originated in the Ministry and focused resources closely around the vision of legitimacy advanced by the government. The TVC plan proposed f. 279m of cuts (€126.6m), of which just under f. 24m were to be borne by the humanities, along with f. 4.7m of resources for promising new activities. As noted above, the TVC process had started with the universities being invited to make a proposal for mergers and closures themselves, but the proposed plans were too cautious, leading the incoming Minister Deetman to abandon those plans and adopt a new, more stringent set of cuts. The cuts for the humanities are set out in the table below; in all cases, the cuts made were at least as deep as those proposed by the universities themselves.

Table C shows the disciplinary focus of those cuts, primarily on the old humanities, and in particular for the *Kleine Letteren*. The *Kleine Letteren* are languages in which the Netherlands had a number of established chairs, and in some cases very high-quality research, but for whom the student intake fell (far) below the established norms for staff-student ratios. In such cases, the plan was to concentrate activities in a single university and close the chairs in other universities. In the case of Spanish at Leiden, the degree was to be converted from a single subject Spanish language and literature degree into a *doctoraal* (Masters equivalent) in Latin American language and culture, reflecting labour market demands. The growth funds involved creating centres of excellence and critical mass in research in the humanities, as well as trying to stimulate more universities to move towards offering broader humanities degrees than the much narrower subjects attracting extremely limited student numbers.

*Table 4 Final TVC proposals for the Humanities, 1983*

<b>CUTS (total f. 23.477m)</b>		
Overall	More concentration than in original plan	-
Dutch, English, history, art history	Await decision of disciplinary plan	Disciplinary plan involves creating thematic focus

Classics	More concentration than in original plan	Closure at Utrecht, co-operation with Nijmegen
Spanish	More concentration than in original plan	Closure at Leiden
Italian	More concentration than in original plan	Closure at Groningen and Nijmegen
Slavonic Languages	Merger not in original plan	Concentration at Leiden
<i>Kleine Letteren</i> (small letters)	-	-
<i>Modern Greek</i>	Leave unaffected	Remains at Groningen
<i>Scandinavian Languages</i>	More concentration than in original plan	Closure at Utrecht
<i>Arabic, Semitic Languages</i>	Await decision of disciplinary plan	
<i>Indian/ Iranian languages</i>	Follow original plan	Concentration at Leiden
Language/ Literature science	Follow original plan	Creation of thematic focus
Phonetics	More concentration than in original plan	Concentration at Utrecht
<b>Investments in reform (total f. 4.763m)</b>		
Strengthening Indonesian languages at Leiden (f. 400,000 per annum for ten years)		
Utrecht to receive f.3.75m 1984-87 to establish a liberal arts programme.		
UvA to receive f. 1m pa for ten years to establish an institution for European Humanities		
Leiden to experiment with <i>propadeuse</i> Spanish and <i>doctoraal</i> in Latin American language & culture		
Creating centres of excellence over ten year period on basis of a discipline plan: Leiden f. 200,000 pa. Groningen f. 700,000 pa Nijmegen f. 463, 000 Rotterdam f. 100,000 pa VU f. 400,000 pa.		

Source O&W (1983)

In reality, the TVC proposals did not represent a substantial shift in resources *between humanities and other fields*, but clearly involved a rebalancing of resources within humanities to those fields which conformed to the government's vision of what the scientific endeavour involved. The table below shows the allocation of the science budget on a disciplinary basis in the TVC round, before and after the proposed cuts. The net effect of TVC allocated the cuts in ways that more or less reflected the share of funding received, and arguably the worst-hit of the disciplinary fields was dentistry and veterinary science, which lost 20% of its overall allocation.

*The Net distribution of budget by discipline, 1982-83 cuts round*

	Baseline	Baseline	Proposal	Proposal
	gld.	%	gld.	%
Humanities	269,2	8,0%	245,723	7,9%
Exact & Earth Sciences	451,3	13,4%	406,7	13,1%
Social Sciences	466,1	13,8%	435,34	14,1%
Technical Sciences	411,4	12,2%	390,7	12,6%
Agriculture	125,2	3,7%	120,9	3,9%
Medical sciences	482,9	14,3%	438,2	14,2%
Dentistry and veterinary science	127,2	3,8%	99	3,2%
Other education and research	27,6	0,8%	27,6	0,9%

General services	441,7	13,1%	414,75	13,4%
Interuniversity institutions	44,4	1,3%	34,1	1,1%
Academic Hospitals	528	15,6%	483,8	15,6%
Total	3375	100,0%	3096,813	100,0%

*Source: Deetman (1983)*

The second round of cuts that took place was the SKG round from 1987-1991. The focus of this for the humanities was explicit in the document, was that labour market considerations made restructuring and profiling unavoidable, both via differentiation between institutions as well as the closure of some of the smaller departments. For each of the universities, a detailed plan was presented for all faculties. There were seven faculties affected in the SKG round, and the details are provided below (O&W, 1987).

- Leiden: German will be preserved: complementarity will be developed between history at Leiden and Social History at Rotterdam.
- Utrecht: Restructuring of faculty continued: new agreement follows in 1992 after evaluation; complementarity will developed be in history between Utrecht and UvA.
- Groningen: Integration of separate Romance languages courses
- Rotterdam: complementarity will be developed between history at Leiden and Social History at Rotterdam.
- UvA: Reorganisation of study trajectories: complementarity will developed be in history between Utrecht and UvA.
- VU: Complementarity will be developed with art history at UvA and the VU.
- Tilburg: Closure, unless particular conditions are met in 1990.

Despite the mild language of these proposals, these were accompanied by hard cuts: the development of complementarity of Leiden's history with Social history at Rotterdam involved cuts of *f.* 500,000 to the university budget by 1991. The underlying vision of SKG was a differentiation between faculties, with some offering very broad liberal arts type courses and others more focused around traditional disciplines.

There was also the proposal to close the entire Humanities Faculty at Tilburg University if it did not meet a number of specific criteria by 1990. These criteria, agreed between the Government and University board are interesting not least because they hint at the ways in which governments and university managers regarded the humanities faculties in the late 1980s in terms of their teaching, research and wider value.

- Education: at least 120 students, 70% first year completions, and graduation percentage above the national level
- Research: Researchers maintain output with respect to 1984, substantive amounts of externally evaluated research, 3<sup>rd</sup> stream funding is more than 7% of first stream funding.
- Other points: good performance in terms of Huygens awards, KNAW Academicians and co-operation with other regional HEIs.

The full scale of the cuts across all disciplines (humanities highlighted) is shown in the table below. Again, the cuts are relatively evenly distributed across the various fields, with dentistry being particularly hard hit as a result of a labour-market led decision to restrict dentistry education to Amsterdam, with a small second training establishment elsewhere in the country. In that context, the cuts which were made to humanities were much more moderate.

*Total cuts proposed by Selectieve Krimp en Groei per jaar, 1991*

Disciplinary Area	UL	UU	RUG	EUR	UM	UvA	VU	RU	TU	TUD	TUE	UT	Tot
Medicine	4	1.8	–	2.3	–	1.7	5.7	–	–	–	–	–	15.5
TKV	2.4	2.4	0.4	1.4	–	1.7	1.3	1.4	–	–	–	–	11
Dentistry	–	–	6.6	–	–	0.6	0.5	7.3	–	–	–	–	15
<b>Humanities</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>7.7</b>
Social Sciences	1.1	1.6	0.5	1.1	–	1.5	–	2.2	2.1	–	–	–	10.1
TU pure sciences	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1.5	0.8	0.8	3.1
Admin cuts	1.2	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	15.4
<b>Total staff</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>77.8</b>
Other costs	3.2	4.5	3.3	1.7	0.9	3.9	2.4	2.7	0.5	4.7	2.4	1.8	32
<b>Total cuts</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>109.8</b>
Uni Hospitals	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	16.6
Res Council	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0.3
<b>Total cuts</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>126.7</b>

Source: Tweede Kamer, 17649/82, p. 16.

## 6 THE CRISIS OF HUMANITIES AND THE SMALL LANGUAGES

### 6.1 Introduction

Although interviewees were to convey a sense of the crisis to hit the humanities being rooted in the period 1970-1990, there was not obviously a crisis in humanities in the early 1990s any more than there was in other disciplinary areas. The budget reductions were not out of line with those affecting the majority of other disciplines, and were far less savage than those imposed on dentistry in response to predictions of strongly declining labour market demand for dentists. But there was a shift in the attitude of government towards science, and in particular to its utility, which impacts on the humanities. These impacts became more visible as in the course of the 1990s and 2000s, the government increased funding to the university sector in very instrumental, policy-focused ways. Those disciplines which benefited from a perception of being useful were then able to grow and thrive, whilst those that did not faced both stagnation, but also a sense that their future was worsening in that no new resources would be made available for them.

This led to a split *within* the humanities in the 1980s, between the ‘modern’ humanities, such as international relations, media studies and communications sciences, and the traditional humanities, notably modern languages in which the Netherlands was extremely strong. The ‘modern’ humanities in this period conformed with the idea of ‘useful science’ in that in the 1980s, their recruitment of students was sustained and even rising. But at the same time, the smaller humanities disciplines began to become increasingly ‘subsidised’ and protected within institutional model with low student numbers. This created tensions between the two sub-fields: modern humanities faced rising student numbers and staff-student ratios, whilst the old humanities enjoyed a privileged position validated and legitimated through appeals to a sense of tradition and excellence of the older disciplines.

These tensions came to the fore in the late 1980s, when Minister Deetman appointed a special advisory commission on the “small letters” (*Adviescommissie Kleine Letteren*) to deal with the identified problem in the SKG. Because of the small size of the field, there was the risk of relatively small savings eliminating global expertise which could later prove invaluable but would not easily be recoverable once lost. An interviewee reported that there was an opinion piece published in an influential weekly newspaper, Elsevier, leading to discussions in Parliament which in turn led to the establishment of the Commission<sup>12</sup>. Van Delft reported in NRC some thirteen years later that it was the closure through SKG of the Institute for Art History and Architecture in South- and South East Asia in Amsterdam that precipitated this crisis (Van Delft, 2000). There was already some discontent within Parliament around the effects of SKG on the humanities and social sciences, and the Permanent Parliamentary Commission on Science and Technology policy certainly criticised these effects in their meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> March 1987.

The result of the Staal Commission was a report published in 1991, *Baby Krishna*, which developed a ‘sector plan’ for the *Kleine Letteren*, to ensure their survival in the face of these external pressures. In the course of the next decade, there were at least two further Commissions appointed to explore the future of the humanities in the Netherlands, and examining these commissions provides a useful window to understand the contours of the Dutch debate. The second Commission was the Commissie Vonhoff, established by the then-Minister of State Job Cohen (who was to chair the later Cohen Commission in 2008). The third report was the KNAW Commission on the *Kleine Letteren*, chaired by Professor

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<sup>12</sup> Staal, F. (1987) “De toekomst van de wetenschap in Nederland: open brief aan Minister Deetman,” Elsevier 29 augustus: 62-64. Cf. Delft, D. v. (1994) “Een cordon van Staal” *NRC Handelsbald: Wetenschap en Onderwijs* p. 4, October 6 1994.

Gerritsen, in response to a sense that the Staal solution was no longer protecting humanities, and a new system was required. The following section provides an overview of these three Commissions, their backgrounds, their findings and the response to them, as a means to understand what was significant in the context of the Dutch debate.

## 6.2 Commissioning a way out of the crisis?

### 6.2.1 *Staal Commissie*

The stimulus to the Staal Commission came with an Open Letter to Minister Deetman from a Californian philosophy professor, Frits Staal, who was at the time a Professor of Philosophy and South Asian Languages at University of California, Berkeley. Staal made the argument that very small cuts to the small letters were having a disproportionate impact on the Dutch research base, and a relatively small additional sum invested by the government could have considerable benefits for the Netherlands as a whole. Following supportive discussion, the Parliamentary Order establishing the Commission was laid on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989, and gave Staal as chair two tasks:

- Developing proposals for strengthening education and research in the *Kleine Letteren* to ensure and strengthen its survival including around libraries, recruitment and career development, and
- Giving advice over the future positioning and the role of Institutes in this scientific domain.

The report was delivered to the Minister on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1991<sup>13</sup> with the title “Baby Krishna”, and refused to make a summary set of recommendations, instead recommending the reader to read the full report to see its recommendations in context. The report did mobilise an argument around the value of humanities, although devoted a considerable portion of its deliberations to the problem of the definition of the humanities and in particular the Dutch language terms *geesteswetenschappen* and *Kleine Letteren*. The report adopted the justification from a preceding report from KNAW, *Tegen de stroom* (Against the current), which made the relatively straightforward point that the value of studies of other cultures was in understanding those places in order to be able to interact effectively with them. The corollary was that in order for the Netherlands to fulfil its international duties in the fields of *inter alia* trade, foreign aid, and diplomacy.

The Minister had changed at the time the report was presented, following elections in November 1989, Jo Ritzen from the Labour party (PvdA) succeeding Wim Deetman. The report was positively received by the Ministry, and c. f. 20m was promised for the rescue of the *Kleine Letteren*, in terms of an additional grant made to the affected university. The report appeared shortly after one of the final publications of the RAWB, which was replaced from 1 Jan the following year by the Science and Technology Advisory Council, on the future of humanities in the Netherlands. This report was much more positive than the Staal report, arguing that the changing cost model had allowed humanities researchers to increase their time undertaking research, whilst Staal’s report highlighted the problems that static staff and student numbers and falling costs had brought<sup>14</sup>.

Although the AWT repeated their brighter prognosis for the humanities in an official Advice of June that year, in the Higher Education Teaching and Research Plan (HOOP) of 1991, Ritzen announced an additional f. 10m for the *Kleine Letteren*, with f. 5m for Leiden University, f. 2m for the establishment of the European Institute of Asian Studies, and the

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<sup>13</sup> “Twintig miljoen voor letterenstudies”, *Reformatisch Dagblad*, 11 jan 1991, p5.

<sup>14</sup> Koolwijk, Q. v. (1991) “Docenten mogen etters zijn zolang ze de studenten maar prikkelen. Van alfa-wetenschappen staat alleen het maatschappelijk belang buiten kuif”, *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 February 1991, p. 6.

remainder being spread over the other five Letters faculties (Groningen, UvA, VU, Utrecht, Nijmegen). The EIAS plan was taken directly from Baby Krishna, and evolved into the International Institute of Asian studies, established in 1993 as a collaboration of the KNAW, Leiden, the UvA and the VU. That money was provided directly to the universities as part of their lump sum allocations from government, and was governed by the Covenant for the Consolidation of the *Kleine Letteren*. This was an agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as the individual University Boards, the NWO and the KNAW.

The issue with the Staalgeld was that over time it became indistinguishable from the general funds, despite the Covenant between universities and the department of education, except the contribution made to the IIAS. There was a review in 1995 by professor Erik-Jan Zürcher of the implementation of the process, and there was the full intention to review scientific progress in 2000 under the leadership of Professor Gerritsen, a Celtic Studies specialist. This scientific review was not completed because of a change in the funding system which would see the withdrawal of the special protection for the *Kleine Letteren* in the system. This led instead to the third Advisory Commission, the KNAW-sponsored Gerritsen Commission which published the report *Venster op de Wereld (qv)*.

The Staal Commission highlighted a number of realities about the debate about humanities in the Dutch context. The first was that there was a strong acceptance of the social value of some humanities research, and a legitimacy for solutions to threats to that research. However, because the defence for that in the context of the increasing marketization was made in the case of the Staal Commission in the case of a plea for exceptionalism, this had two consequences. The first was that it was not possible to defend all the *Kleine Letteren*, and those who were symbolically important, and in particular, located in Leiden, were most easy to defend. Secondly, it was hard to create a permanent position of exceptionalism – the Staalgeld faltered in the face of antipathy from a new Cabinet and strong pressures on university budgets.

### 6.2.2 *Commissie Vonhoff*

The Commissie Vonhoff came out of a specific fear that the provision of the Staal Committee had failed to provide a protection for the *Kleine Letteren* in the faculties where it was specifically under threat<sup>15</sup>. The Commission was installed by the then-Minister of State Cohen on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1994 (Vonhoff, 1995) to address the pressure facing all of humanities, not just the *Kleine Letteren*, but also the modern humanities, because of a claimed relationship between the various elements of the field. The report had to be based on the role of humanities in society, and cover the various education and research demands within the realms of financial possibility, and create a framework for development to the year 2000. The Chair of the Commission was Henk Vonhoff, a former Mayor of Utrecht, and the Queen's Commissioner in Groningen. Between 1979 and 1981 he had chaired a highly important but little-known Commission on the Machinery of Government in the Netherlands, (Schulz, 2010, p.20). The expectations were therefore high that he would be able to resolve the tensions in preserving the place of humanities in Universities given public sector reforms and the partial protection for the *Kleine Letteren*.

Vonhoff chose in his report to make a differentiation between the traditional and modern humanities, what he referred to as T-disciplines and S-disciplines respectively. The report then made an intellectual distinction between the T-disciplines as having an intrinsic value, whilst S-disciplines as being driven by demands of the market, such as new jobs in communications and public relations. T-disciplines operates for society as a 'semiotic databank', which provided a society with flexibility and vitality, and which needed protecting from excess pressure to prove value in the marketplace. . The report then mobilised a value judgement in which T-disciplines were seen as being as more worthy of support, and the S-

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<sup>15</sup> Delft, D. van (1995) "Red de echt alfa" NRC Handelsblad, February 16, 1995, p. 4.

disciplines as deserving to earn their own survival in the marketplace. The link between disciplines which had repeatedly been stated as a critical element of the value of humanities was seen as the modern humanities being a breeding ground and feeder for these more traditional humanities, which were argued to need more time, lower staff-student ratios and more protection from the immediacy of the marketplace than the modern humanities.

The practical implications of this distinction emerged in the report's conclusions and recommendations. The report effectively recommended that the classical humanities should be concentrated in the six Letters Faculties (Leiden, Groningen, Utrecht, UvA, the VU and Nijmegen) along with research in these areas. Other humanities faculties, including the Open University, would only undertake more general humanities teaching as part of broader courses. These six institutions would benefit from a generous financial settlement that allowed serious research efforts (including Ph.D. positions to deal with ageing), lower staff-student ratios, the selection of students by the faculties, and a longer time period for the completion of the degree. The purpose of this was thereby to protect the cordon which Staal had attempted to create, but which had not held against universities' autonomy to allocate budgets internally.

These proposals were to prove as divisive and controversial as they read today. The *NRC Handelsblad* reported at the time of the launch of the proposal that the Open University had already raised its opposition to the transfer of part-time education in the humanities to the six classical universities. The *NRC Handelsblad* printed several letters opposing the Vonhoff report, and in particular attacking the distinction between the T- and S-disciplines. One of these letters came from Thijs Pollmann, co-ordinator of education at the Faculty of humanities at Utrecht University, who as one of the potential beneficiaries of the plans, was scathing in his criticism. Particularly damning was his attack on the moralistic tone of the report in describing the development of the S-disciplines as being primarily opportunistic and market-led, and Pollmann instead pointed to the extensive effort his faculty had made in weaving these new courses into the fabric of humanities.

Very little concrete was to emerge from the Vonhoff report. Probably the most useful contribution that can be traced is the description of the social value of humanities as a "semiotic databank". This phrase, if not necessarily the full meaning, was translated across to a 2002 report from the AWT, the successor to the RAWB, in the report *Engaged humanities: perspectives on cultural change in a digitalising age*. The phrase was evoked to stake a counter position that despite the central role of humanities as this cultural reserve, there should be a much greater concern in humanities for digital infrastructure, and understanding the new databanks that were emerging as a result of digitalisation. Although subsequently there have been considerable government investments in digitalisation of the humanities, a direct link back to Vonhoff – either deliberately or as a side-effect, cannot therefore be claimed.

Certainly, the report failed in its main aim to secure the structures for a separate funding element for the humanities in the Netherlands. In Parliamentary debate, there was some support for the Vonhoff proposals to be included in the 1996 HOOP, the sector plan<sup>16</sup>. Part of this was for the purely political reason of changing responsibilities for science. Cohen was replaced in 1994 by Aan Nuis, but in early 1995, Science Policy was removed from the portfolio. However, resistance in the sector was to play a considerable role: given the emphasis placed on the sector – that is to say the humanities faculties and the universities themselves – exercising authority, the idea of ring-fenced funding was impossible to justify. Likewise, at a time when the Dutch universities were preparing themselves for the simplification and shortening of study times, leading to the Bachelor Master system being introduced, it was impossible to argue for a lengthening of the humanities degree as a special case.

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<sup>16</sup> 24 556 Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek Plan 1996 nr. 17 verslag van een nota-overleg, 31 January 1996, <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-24556-17.pdf>



The Vonhoff Commission also highlighted the realities of the situation in the Netherlands, and in particular the nature of the division between the traditional and modern humanities. There was a strong set of pressures for humanities to be considered as a single, academically rigorous discipline, and not to separate out the modern humanities from these. Part of this is because of the constitution of the humanities, and the existence of four relatively new humanities faculties who established themselves as scientifically rigorous, related to their specific domains, such as business ethics in Tilburg or philosophy of science in Twente, but nevertheless in their way as traditional as their cognate departments in the older universities.

The second inference that can be drawn from the process was the lack of widespread support for an intrinsic (or abstract) justification for public funding for the humanities in Netherlands. The idea that humanities scholarship was a vocation which required autonomous and empowered researchers was effectively floated and rejected, and left a situation where the humanities as much as other disciplines were required to justify themselves by pointing to concrete benefits. It would be a mistake to read this as humanities having to have the same kinds of concrete benefits, but that extrinsic benefits had to be validated with concrete outcomes and not merely justified or claimed with references to the indirectness of the benefits.

### *6.2.3 The Gerritsen Commission*

One of the consequences of the relatively limited impact of the Vonhoff was that it failed to address the fact that there was dissatisfaction in the sector in the way in which the Staal agreement had produced extra funds for universities without guaranteeing that it was devoted to the humanities. Vonhoff had failed to produce additional resources for the humanities or to gain a special protection for these subjects. The background to the report, already noted in the introduction to this section, was that the Staal Commission was intended to be reviewed after a decade to examine the extent of its effectiveness. However, because of the general antipathy of both universities and Ministry towards earmarked funding for the humanities, the decision was taken by the KNAW to focus on the future of the humanities rather than the effectiveness of the now-no longer functioning Covenant and Staal funding. In that sense, it differed from both Staal and Vonhoff in being a commission of the KNAW, part of their Commission for the Humanities, and being a public document rather than commissioned by a Minister.

The Commission was established on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2000, and was requested by the KNAW to look at four points in particular, over whether there was a difference between the *Kleine Letteren* and the remainder of humanities, the purpose of humanities in Dutch teaching and research, should they be given special protection, and how then could they be evaluated. The report was published in February 2002, and took as its starting point a need to break the vicious circle of declining student numbers leading to lower funding, that funding leading to less attractive facilities, and that driving student numbers down further. The report also began from the starting point of institutional autonomy, and the need for the universities themselves to support the *Kleine Letteren* and appreciate their wider importance if they were to be allowed to survive. That had implications for the way that government funding was to be provided, namely that it should focus on trying to reward institutional behaviour that worked towards these collective national goals, therefore allowing universities to retain their overall autonomy but also providing specific earmarked funding for the sector.

The report was interesting because it reiterated the notion in Baby Krishna that the *Kleine Letteren* provided the Netherlands with a ‘window on a large part of the world’, that being the title of the report (“*vensters op de wereld*”). The argument was that that made them important for the Netherlands as a whole, and even if individual institutions had difficulties in fitting these subjects into their institutional structures, universities should appreciate the national case for maintaining these subjects. Although the phrase carried forward into a project to assemble a Canon of Global Citizenship, and this was related to an important

project in Dutch humanities popularisation, the Canon of Dutch History, there is no direct link between the two. The report's recommendations also to some extent failed to respect the idea of university autonomy, in pleading for a special funding stream for humanities, as well as constraints on universities in seeking to make cuts. The report recommended that any university proposing to close a chair unique to the Netherlands would have to request permission, and that any cut to humanities department personnel would have to be tested against its impacts on the sustainability and quality of the teaching and research in the department.

The report generated some response and criticism in the Dutch press. Notable was a letter in NRC Handelsblad from the Press Officer of the UvA, which took exception to one claim in the report. Gerritsen had argued that one indicator of the ongoing crisis in the humanities had been the closure of their special chair in Hittite Studies. The letter rebutted that by pointing to the new appointee and the continuation of Hittite Studies as a course available to UvA students. The letter continued that the UvA had invested far more in the humanities than Staal had provided and therefore it did not make sense to talk of the failure of the Staal Cordon model. The letter reflected the point more generally that little was to happen with this report, a fact ascribed to at least one interviewee with the point that there was in the coming years a clear cultural shift in the Netherlands in which 'openness' became less of a shibboleth for Dutch politics.

Shortly after the report appeared, the terrorist attack on the New York World Trade Center ('9/11') sparked a furious debate in the Netherlands about security and culture, with some questions being asked about why the humanities had not forewarned of these problems, and had relativized the problems of Islamic radicalisation<sup>17</sup>. Another interviewee argued that there was a shift in this period, related to 9/11 but also to purely Dutch concerns, from multiculturalism towards integration. This undermined at the societal level the ability to mobilise an argument for the value of humanities research on the grounds of openness to other cultures. A third interviewee pointed to the fact that some humanities scholars were later recognised as instrumental in contributing to the Dutch understanding of the wider significance of 9/11 for globalisation and the Netherlands' position in the world<sup>18</sup>.

There was also an unexpected change in government in this period, with the assassination of Pim Fortuyn leading to the unexpected discontinuation of the Kok cabinets, a short-lived coalition involving the remnants of Fortuyn's party, and then in mid 2003, the election of a Christian-democrat/ Liberal coalition. Although Fortuyn's party collapsed to eight seats in 2003 and then from the Chamber in 2006, this marked a period of resurgence in right-wing liberal populism, with two leading lights in the right-liberal VVD establishing their own parties with populist agendas. Geert Wilders' *Partij voor de Vrijheid* emerged as the most popular of these, and was able to shift public discourse towards a more functional and efficient view of public services, in which claims towards general greater good were much harder to use to validate particular policy decisions. The report did form part of the justification that the Minister after 2007 (Plasterk) had for the installation of the Cohen Commission (*qv*) on a sustainable future for humanities<sup>19</sup>.

The Gerritsen report further demonstrated the demands that politicians and society had on the humanities in return for the public funding. Clear in the response to this report was a sense that the solution had to be generated from within humanities itself, within a wider framework for sciences as a whole – there was a limit to the exceptional position of

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bronkhorst, X. (2002) "Komt er oorlog, Mijnheer van Rossum", Ublad, 12th September 2002, <http://www.ublad.uu.nl/WebObjects/UOL.woa/4/wa/Ublad/archief?id=1018485>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Frits Abraham's weglob, De Pers, 27th September 2007, <http://weblogs.nrc.nl/dag/2007/01/24/de-pers/>

<sup>19</sup> Strategic agenda for higher education 2007-2011 <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-31288-1.pdf>

humanities. There was also a reiteration of the point about the need for concrete demonstrations of societal value arising from research, or at least not abdicating from the debate by claiming that societal value was not important to research. Gerritsen was not primarily a report over research – much of its motivation was driven by the negative effects of the funding model rewarding student numbers and the declining student numbers for the smaller disciplines. But it had clear implications for research – if the organisation of humanities research in the Netherlands was not sustainable in its current form, it needed to be changed to avoid either the disappearance of that research or the necessity of the highly undesirable form of a special funding mechanism for the humanities.

### **6.3 The environment for the social value of humanities in the Netherlands, c. 2002.**

It is necessary to be very clear concerning the purpose of studying historical commissions of inquiry into the future of disciplines. Our argument is that doing this a way to observe how particular claims are mobilised, and which are successful or unsuccessful in terms of being implemented. This in turn allows two things to be examined and inferred, firstly, what kinds of claims are ultimately successful in shaping the debate, and where the key turning points are in the overall direction of policy. All these reports were both studies of the humanities field, but at the same time served explicit purposes of both shaping policy debates both directing funding but also setting criteria for legitimacy and validity against which public funding and value in humanities research could be judged. This provides an insight into the way in which key actors judged the societal value of humanities research in a slightly longer-term perspective.

The overarching point here is that there was a dissonance between the perception of the treatment of humanities amongst affected scholars and beyond. All three Commissions pointed to the problems emerging from the imposition of output driven resource models on the humanities and the *Kleine Letteren*. These were used to validate claims of a crisis and for a need for exceptional treatment. However, there was very little resonance of these claims beyond those scholars, and indeed a number of universities, Utrecht in responding to Vonhoff and UvA to Gerritsen, argued that within the new funding models, universities had been able to provide support for humanities in some degree. There is little evidence that the mainstream press sensed a crisis in the humanities more general than particular problems associated with the closure of particular chairs in the *Kleine Letteren*. Parliamentarians were concerned with the effects of financial changes on humanities research, but around very specific issues of interest to them, such as in development issues.

Under such circumstances, there was no way to mobilise an argument for the exceptional treatment of humanities on the grounds that they deserved to be judged according to different standards to other disciplinary fields. The Staal commission was successful in arguing for the problems that would emerge if particular chairs were allowed to disappear. Very particular claims were made about the quality of Dutch research in these areas, and the acceptance of these claims led in turn to the necessity to be able to justify them. The validity of the value of humanities in the Netherlands in the public realm can be seen as being particular and contingent (there is some excellent research that should be supported to uphold the Netherlands' place in the world in various ways), rather than general and abstract (a civilised Netherlands should invest in research in the humanities).

This particularisation and contingency of the value of research becomes important in the 2000s with the spread of a culture of research evaluation, and in particular, given a mismatch between the way humanities are organised and the way research is evaluated. The important issue here was the emergence of the Standard Evaluation Protocol in 1993 which sought to provide a common basis for the post hoc evaluation of research in the Netherlands. The way that it evolved was that it was a retrospective evaluation of research units – departments or chairs – around their aims for the five year period as expressed in terms of a research programme. This issue of research programming was very important for

the treatment of humanities: the hermeneutic nature of humanities meant that in the majority of the traditional disciplines it was hard to identify and articulate common strengths and themes that were more than just a list of activities undertaken by individuals. In the course of the fourth Protocol period (2009-15), there was to be increased pressure to include more information on social contribution, sparking extensive discussions within humanities communities.

With the SEP from 1993 onwards, humanities felt for the first time a direct pressure to conform more to an external set of norms that were in a sense alien to their traditions. But at the same time, the SEP also acted as a technology that created a parity of excellence between the different disciplinary traditions. The SEP rated research on a scale of 1-5 based on the level of international excellence, although for nationally-based communities, the highest score of 5 could be achieved by being the best-regarded group in the country (KNAW, 2010).

- **5. Excellent** Research is world leading. Researchers are working at the forefront of their field internationally and their research has an important and substantial impact in the field.
- **4. Very good** Research is internationally competitive and makes a significant contribution to the field. Research is considered nationally leading.
- **3. Good** Work is competitive at the national level and makes a valuable contribution in the inter-national field. Research is considered internationally visible.
- **2. Satisfactory** Work adds to our understanding and is solid, but not exciting. Research is nationally visible.
- **1. Unsatisfactory** Work is neither solid nor exciting, flawed in the scientific and or technical approach, repetitions of other work, etc.

What the SEP did was create the possibility that the humanities disciplines could make an argument that they were *as excellent* as other disciplines. A number of interviewees pointed to the fact that there are clear prestige rankings between disciplines, as one interviewee noted “there is a status ranking with physics at the top: they feel able to criticise everyone and they don’t like criticism themselves”<sup>20</sup>. The SEP allowed a comparison to be made between disciplines that challenged this implicit prestige-based pecking order, and highlighted the value to the humanities, and to those charged with their sustainability, of being included and compared with other disciplinary fields as long as that comparison was fair.

An important feature of higher education in the Netherlands is the parity of institutions. Unlike in some countries where there are clear segmentations between types of institution, the fourteen universities were at the time of writing horizontally rather than vertically segmented (technical universities, broad universities, social mission universities)<sup>21</sup>. One interviewee reported that that leads to pressure for equality of treatment, and this can be seen in the fact that once the humanities were being evaluated as sciences then there were pressures to provide them with similar kinds of resources as other sciences, ensuring that they had appropriate research infrastructures and adequate second-stream (research council) funding. What is indeed evident in the last decade is a tendency for the funding for humanities to begin to resemble that in the hard sciences, with substantive infrastructure programmes, a doubling in cash terms of the research council budget, schemes for ‘industrial’ (user-led) Ph.D. positions and more emphasis of the exploitation of research in proposals.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview DYNAMICS 1, 24th November 2011.

<sup>21</sup> An introduction of more vertical segmentation was one of the recommendations of the Veerman Commission on the future of higher education which was developed to support the 2012 Higher Education and Research Plan (HOOP).

One good example of the way that this played out in influencing the field is in the rise of digital humanities in the Netherlands. The digital humanities field emerged out of the increasing use of computing in the humanities, and at the same time the increased opportunities that the ICT revolution offered for the practices of humanities research. In the case of the Netherlands, substantial sums of research funding were found for an e-humanities programme, for large-scale infrastructure investments (the CLARIN programme), the e-humanities initiative of the KNAW and an e-humanities strand in the European Research Network *Humanities in the European Research Area*. This focus on investment, internationalisation, collaboration and teamworking follow the norms of the scientific field more generally, and have been about trying to position humanities as equally worthy of funding to other fields able to make much larger scale and pressing demands on public funding.



## **8 UNIVERSITIES AND MANAGEMENT**

This chapter seeks to understand the operation of the field of the humanities, and in particular about how two groups understand the meaning of relevance and utility in arts & humanities research, namely scholars and university managers. This has been done on the basis of elite interviews, and therefore it is necessary to be extremely modest about the kinds of individual claims that can be made. This chapter talks about two very distinct kinds of activity. Firstly, there is the way that a series of fields and disciplines operate as selection procedures, that is to say the way in which the 'best' scientific questions emerge. The second is the way that university managers take strategic choices about the relative positioning of humanities in their own institutions.

It is therefore necessary to say at the outset that this also comes with a series of exclusions about what this chapter cannot say. This chapter cannot make definite statements about the beliefs and values of scholars in the humanities. What we report here are a series of statements made about humanities scholars about how they believe that their field operates into defining what quality means in a series of very particular contexts, in terms of what kinds of research are seen to make a valuable contribution to the field. The idea of impact and usability is therefore explored in terms of the way that the particular disciplinary communities relate it to acceptance criteria such as capacity to be published. A series of questions also explored how the interviewees regarded their duties as scholars to be publicly engaged, but because of the 'small-n' nature of the sample, this can only be used as suggestive evidence that can disprove the idea that all humanities scholars have some particular perspective, and certainly not to prove that humanities scholars behave in some way.

This chapter also seeks to gain an insights into the considerations that play in senior managers minds in their treatment of the humanities. Clearly, the role of humanities departments is continually shaped by a range of senior manager decisions at a variety of scales, from the strategic to the micro, and also those with unintended consequences. In this chapter, we are exclusively concerned with deliberate decisions taken by universities and faculties regarding their humanities activities, and the criteria that senior managers used in taking those decisions. This allows comment to be made around university responses to perceptions of humanities and how they in turn place humanities. The questioning sought to understand the balance between direct (e.g. income or project-based criteria) and indirect (e.g. prestige, importance of balance) criteria used in making these decisions.

This chapter addresses the operational questions previously outlined by presenting evidence in three areas, firstly how researchers define quality, how universities respond to pressures, and considering how the system might evolve into the future. The first section is concerned with the construction of the academic field in humanities, in terms of the way that excellence is defined in practice, and how these various different elements have been responding to pressures for increased impact. The second section considers the ways in which operational responses have emerged around impact, not just in the traditional academic areas, but around new topics (e.g. digital humanities), new activities (e.g. creating spin-off companies), and new behaviours (scientific communications in arts & humanities research). The third section considers how this is being managed within universities, and in particular how these changes, and attempts to improve the perceptions of utility of university research are changing the overall system.

### **8.1 Defining research quality and excellence in arts & humanities research**

The humanities has an important place in the Dutch academy, and although humanities in general may not have a strong narrative to equate with curing cancer, it was reported that academics realised that humanities was important to Dutch culture. The particular

emphasis of this in the Dutch case was in relation to the relative openness of Dutch culture, and the pluriform nature of its society. Both academics and societal/ policy partners did mention the role of the humanities in underpinning that openness and tolerance at home, as well as helping the Netherlands to perform well in the outside world, encouraging trade and commerce links but also helping the Netherlands to make a unique contribution to global civic society, for example in the case of international law, as well as the work undertaken by the Dutch Centre for War Documentation (NIOD) in making sense of preserving and interpreting the legacy of the Balkans wars of the 1990s.

The interviewees were clear that this corresponded with humanities having a definite place within Dutch universities, although at the same time there was an acceptance of the need for greater specialisation into areas of excellence. Although the Dutch university system was, in common with many other countries, founded on humanities education, there was a recognition amongst interviewees that there had been a shift (possible downgrading) in the relative status of humanities with respect to the exact and medical sciences. At the same time, there was a recognition that – possibly arising from the Netherlands’ rich ‘high culture’ Golden Age legacy, Dutch humanities were often more curatorial and conservative than in other countries, and that this traditionalism created a risk of being overlooked in the race for funding. At the time of Cohen, there was a settled gloom in the humanities in general that they were losing out politically to other disciplines, even where their own research was world-leading and excellent.

### *8.1.1 Key features of Dutch definitions of academic excellence*

The interviews with academics focused on speaking to those who had some kind of public discourse or engagement role, in two disciplines, philosophy and linguists, and therefore it is necessary to be circumspect about how generalizable are the findings of the discussions of excellence. What suggests that they were representative was that they replicated what was already known about how academics define excellence more generally, as well as specifically in the disciplines of humanities. The interviews focused on creating an emergent definition of excellence in research, therefore seeking to identify the kinds of hallmarks in the abstract as well as the particular sorting processes that individuals used in trying to decide whether some particular piece of work they defined was abstract.

At its most general, excellent research constituted a big idea, that is to say that it changed the way that a group of people understood something, and showed a reader more about the structure of a problem domain. This might be either by opening up a new domain entirely, such as the rise of the ethics of science and technology, or in overthrowing existing orthodoxies about a particular subject area, as in medieval French theatre. Part of ‘bigness’ lay in solving an important problem for the field, with which a lot of people were concerned. Part of its bigness was in terms of profundity, and the reasoning and arguments being used in the research having a wider applicability than in the domain initially being considered, so in sub-fields influencing disciplines, for example. There was also an element of ‘bigness’ in terms of the norms of primarily publishing books rather than articles, a consequence of the space being offered by a book to develop a larger idea, and to offer more points around which others could relate to and use the ideas than in the more fragmentary space of a journal article.

This ‘bigness’ was rendered by a number of interviewees related characteristics of good research in terms of what can be considered as four areas, namely its positioning, logic, balance and ramifications. Good research positioned itself well in the field, in the sense of identifying a relatively broad problem or domain, and identifying a substantial question or gap in the existing literature. Good research was also logical, and proceeded through a series of rational steps guided by an underlying sound logic. Balance was important in the sense of using appropriate methods and techniques to solve a problem, but also in balancing between using existing techniques without simply applying an old ‘trick’ in a new domain, but rather extending the understanding of techniques. Finally, good research had substantial



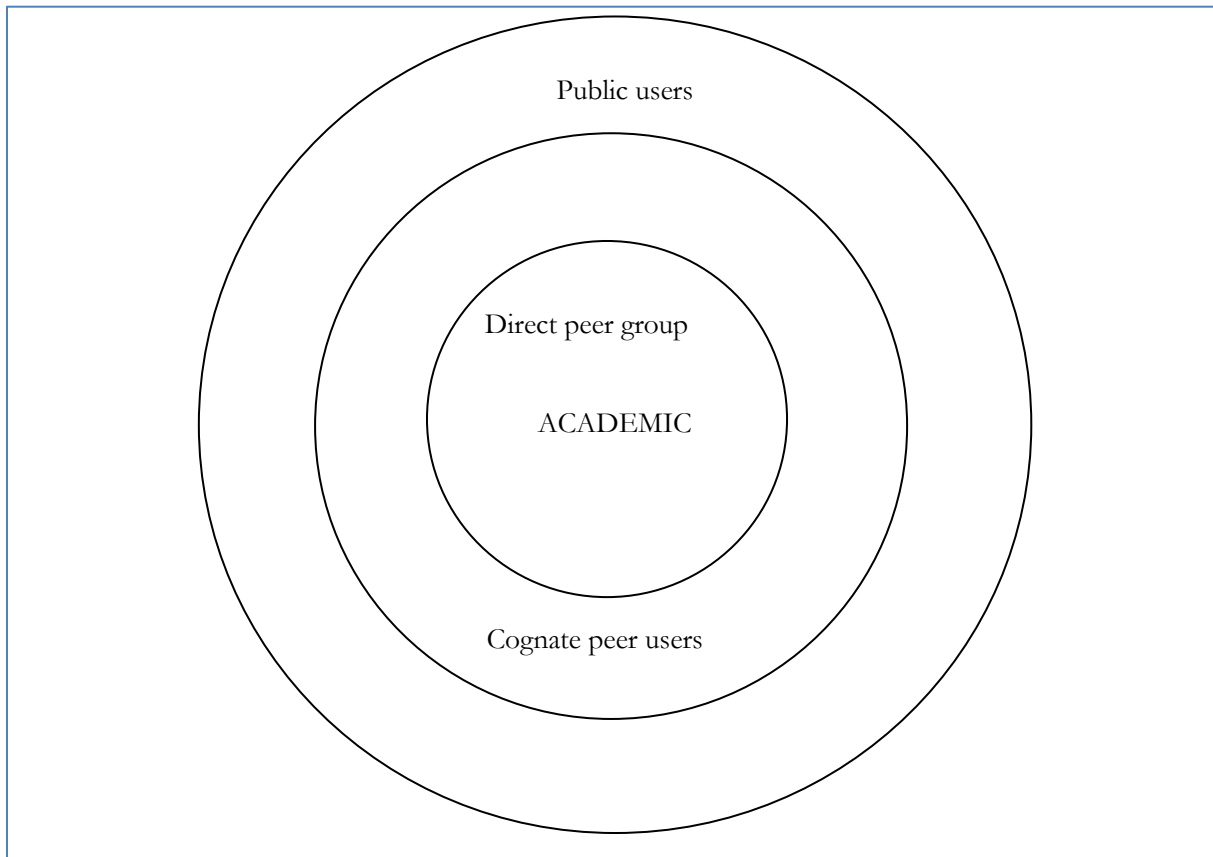
ramifications, in the sense that it provided answers to questions being asked by others, and in that sense contributed to scientific progress more generally.

What was interesting was that there was no simply one-to-one correspondence between ideas of excellence, and ‘pure’ research. The interviews focused primarily on researchers who were working on empirical humanities, and so it is unsurprising that the interviewees in both philosophy and linguistics reported that research being grounded in a practical problem was an important indicator of excellence. But at the same time, interviewees acknowledged that pure research was also very important for them, in helping them to address problems they faced in their own research. The corollary of this was that this more empirical research was also not less valid than pure research, because through the interplay of the purely theoretically and empirically grounded research, high-level theoretical advances were made in understanding problems with real societal relevance, for example in the ethics of technological societies. One interviewee defined a fundamental contribution as “one that deals with a real problem but can keep the right distance from it”.

But at the same time, interviewees also made a distinction between empirically grounded research dealing with real problems, and applied research/ development work. The philosophers interviewed made a distinction between public engagement in the course of their research from the role of a public intellectual. There were a range of relationships between these two roles, in the person of the academic, and in the role of the public intellectual work in building public support for academic research. There was also a spectrum of activities between the poles of purely academic and purely public-intellectual – from academic monographs through popular books and newspaper articles to magazine columns and TV appearances, that complicated distinguishing between these roles. There was both a realisation that popular media appearances were useful, but at the same time a general resistance to measuring or incentivising them as a general academic duty.

The final element of excellent research was in having relationships to others, on a variety of levels: but in all of these cases, the general rule was that more excellent research had as a characteristic the fact that it had more relationships than less good research. Within the narrow peer group, excellent research was transparent and allowed the researcher to be held accountable and for others to test their findings and claims, reducing the importance of personal authority. Excellent research could also challenge the peer group, and potentially through confrontation and challenge ensure that the peer group itself retained progressive and dynamic. Excellent research also offered connections to other academic communities, both being informed by as well as contributing to other cognate fields, or at least being sufficiently accessible for other fields to use and be inspired by that research. The final set of important relationships were with the problem owners, so that those who could ultimately use the research to solve a real problem or tension.

Figure 6 Segmentation and distantiation of academics from users: a hierarchy



It is important to nuance this last dimension because a component of it was that there was a shifting degree of responsibility the further one moved from the narrow peer group. In a narrow peer group, excellent research took the responsibility to engage with the community, and to be quite explicit that it was shaped by the needs and norms of that narrow community. Conversely, the further one moved from that core peer group, the more the responsibility on the researcher evolved towards opening the research up and creating the opportunity for others to use and engage the research. Thus none of the interviewees argued that excellent research had to make an impact in solving real problems, rather that excellent research was undertaken and presented in ways that made it easier for downstream users to take the tools and apply them. The ultimate valorisation therefore depended as much on informed intelligent users as on the work of the academic or scholar in ensuring that it was open to potential users.

#### 8.1.2 Debates and forums shaping the evolution of ideas of A&HR excellence

An important claim that emerged in the course of the research was that there had been a shift in the Dutch academy in terms of ideas of excellence, in two areas. The first, dealt with in this section, was that excellence in research was regarded as being much more concerned with the creation of knowledge in wider academic communities, and indeed that it was more important for academics to be excellent in their research as part of their work. The second, dealt with in the next section, was that there had been a growing recognition amongst humanities academics of the importance of valorisation, and creating societal impact as part of securing public support for their disciplines. There was some evidence from the interviewees that this was the case, but the interviews focused primarily on identifying the forums where notions of academic excellence were shaped and guided.

The most visible of these in the interviews with the researchers was in terms of the field, with interviewees identifying a number of mechanisms by which disciplines influenced and guided what was considered by be academic research. Disciplines were emergent, that is to

say individuals identified with a community of people with similar concerns and ways of working to their own, and from whom they could benefit by comparing their approaches and ideas. Disciplines were seen as being the organising principle for the intellectual trajectories into which research fitted, and therefore the way that disciplines defined which problems were interesting influenced how scholars designed and presented their research: good research fitted into an existing tradition but at the same time moved that tradition forward through logical and accountable practice. Disciplines in the Netherlands were important in the academic formation process with the introduction of graduate schools for Ph.D. training (although these had failed to become significant in the academic landscape), and there was sometimes an elision between ideas of disciplinary communities and the organisational units used by universities to manage their humanities activities.

Of course, the disciplines in the Netherlands were not purely imagined communities or groups of self-identified individuals, but groups that operated through established sets of activities such as conferences and journals. Although there was a recognition that journals were not always the optimal output for humanities research and that there was a clear ecological problem on judging individual articles on the basis of journal reputation, interviewees did cite journals in the field as being important as places where excellence was mediated. One of the important features of journals was the way they functioned in driving peer review processes and therefore represented a regular contact between researchers and their peer community, more regularly than with books which might appear much less frequently.

A number of interviewees noted that the way that this review process created a pair of important tensions that could potentially detract from research excellence. The first was that they encouraged conformity to norms rather than producing a coherent research message and therefore encouraged compromise behaviour by researchers. One interviewee stated quite explicitly that it was known that the best research was not always published, and therefore publication could not be taken as an intrinsic indication of excellence. A second noted that they had had to delay publishing their research for a long time until the field had caught up and what they wanted to say was acceptable to what the field desired to hear. The second was that journals were often very exclusive and focused on satisfying the most immediate users in the sense of the peer group, and that that could mean that supposedly excellent research was shaped through the publication process to emerge as something that was not immediately useful or relevant for more remote users, such as in cognate discipline areas or outside academia.

There was clearly a very different perspective taken to humanities' disciplines as a form of academic organisation within universities as institutions. The emphasis for 30 years in the Netherlands had been on building focus and mass around particular departments to ensure the (primarily financial) sustainability of academic departments, and in particular to ensure adequate recruitment of students. This was not necessarily a perspective that was shared by individual academics, other than a realisation that in a small country like the Netherlands there was not the possibility to fund all kinds of research. From an institutional perspective, of the universities, shaped and encouraged by government and funders, an important definition of excellent research was therefore research that was financially self-sufficient. This was not just a definition that was held for the humanities, but through the continuing savings plans and reductions in humanities fields there was certainly a tendency for an elision to emerge between research that was intrinsically excellent and research which was financially sustainable.

Funders have also played a role in influencing ideas of research excellence in the humanities. The interviewees noted that they were relatively restricted in their commercial funding, and therefore the research council and Education ministry were two very important funders for them. What was interesting about the way that research funders were reported by the scholars was that they did not necessarily concede that it was the funders that had driven a change in the way that excellence was defined. With the peer group remaining central to the

Research Council evaluation processes, the way that peer groups chose to interpret Funders' guidelines was important in shaping what research was funded. This research then became important in the norms and practices of Dutch researchers, as well as influencing what policy-makers believed what was possible to achieve with future research programmes. Thus, the interviews suggested that it is important not to take too instrumental a perspective on what changed Dutch research culture, but instead to acknowledge the active agency of the academic community in driving those changes.

The case of digital humanities was used as an interesting illustration of a dislocation in the field, between how academics and institutions respond to funding changes. Digital humanities emerged in part because there was a political will to allow humanities to benefit from new technologies, although interviewees expressed some belief that that enthusiasm was part of a wider programme to 'scientise' the humanities. With digital humanities, two approaches were taken, on the one hand particular new institutes were funded to 'do' digital humanities research, and at the same time, existing academics engaged with the technologies, tools and ideas emerging in digital humanities. The institutional side operated rather functional, being organised in discrete new universities and programmes that were easy to manage, reform and close at the end of their life. The academics involved with digital humanities were much less biddable, and so chose to challenge some of the ideas in digital humanities, such as its framing in terms of technologies and not in the way that researcher communities used those technologies.

Academics did feel that there was an attempt by the public realm to drive research to be much more applied, although it was not the scholars themselves who expressed specific disquiet about the TOP-sectoren policies. Some interviewees were aware of the fact that it was not just humanities that had problems in expressing their usability and excellence, and knew of attempts made by KNAW to get government recognition of this issue. At the same time, there was some concern amongst some of the interviewees that the need for KNAW to retain its role of a mandated advisory body to government necessarily restricted the amount of direct criticism it could make of government policy in that area, and hence the influence it could have on debates concerning impact.

Scholars were concerned that there was a visible public trend to encourage usability and commercialisation of research that was potentially problematic for what they felt to be important about high quality research. Interviewees cited two quotations from public figures which appeared to stress this, as being indicative of the fears that they felt that a pressure was being placed on them to be less scholarly. One interviewee mentioned a comment ascribed to Maxime Verhagen, the Minister for Economic Affairs, but actually spoken by his under-secretary, Halbe Zijlstra<sup>22</sup>, that the Netherlands needed fewer scientists like Niels Böhr and more like Louis Pasteur, referring to the importance of usability along with academic excellence. Under the previous government, the Minister of Education and Science had noted that whilst the humanities wrote about history, it was the technical sciences that actually made history.

### *8.1.3 The issue of exceptionalism: A&HR as homogenous or heterogeneous*

One of the main claims made of, if not necessarily by, humanities scholars, was that of exceptionalism. This is a claim that is made in many countries, that because of their different nature, that the humanities need a separate kind of treatment, and potentially special handling. In the Netherlands, there was clearly a functional issue of exceptionalism that dated back to the *Kleine Letteren*, which was that small class sizes for certain humanities disciplines necessitated a ring-fenced budget for those subjects. Part of the difference in humanities is therefore a difference in the fact that the humanities are

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<sup>22</sup> "Hoger onderwijs nu echt afgerekend op 'doelen'; Zijlstra blij met plan Fontys dat met prestatiedoelen komt; Kamer kritisch, vooral over onderzoeksgeld" *NRC Handelsblad* 27 september 2011, Accessed 26th March 2012.

threatened in the Netherlands, but at the same time the response to that threat is creating a situation where humanities are regarded as a problem far more than is warranted, as illustrated by the success that the ten humanities faculties had in developing strategic plans to ensure their sustainability in return for additional government funding following the Cohen commission.

But there is a more interesting question about the extent to which interviewees claimed that there were differences between humanities and other fields that necessitated a special treatment, and indeed the extent to which that special treatment should encompass a reduced burden to demonstrate the usability or usefulness of that knowledge. It is possible to identify three areas where claims are made about the nature of the difference between humanities and other science areas, in terms of the nature of the disciplines, the nature of behaviour of scholars, and the relative prestige and support for subjects. At the same time, it is possible to identify a number of areas of commonality between humanities and other subjects, and therefore it is not possible to seriously make the claim that Dutch humanities scholars believe that their difference from other disciplines means that they should be exempt from demonstrating their usefulness.

The first set of differences claimed lie in **the nature of inquiry**, and interviewees were quite open in that there was a clear difference between inquiry in the humanities and sciences. The most commonly identified issue here was around the potential to solve problems. A number of interviewees made the point that humanities was better at providing insights into novel problems, drawing on particular classic genres of solution, than in giving clear-cut answers to solve those problems. Interviewees acknowledged that there were differences in the ways that humanities disciplines used definitions such as theory, experiments and results, and behaviours such as peer review, and these could be very different, and apparently far more subjective, than in other scientific areas.

However, the position that these differences were sufficient to warrant humanities being totally different from other sciences were rejected by interviewees, with one interviewee citing the book by Rens Bod, a humanities professor, *De vergeten wetenschappen* (the forgotten sciences) as making a good case that the humanities could be considered as scientific in their method. At least two interviewees noted that for some humanities disciplines, particularly around history and linguistics, their methods were clearly as scientific as 'hard' sciences in terms of rules of evidence and argumentation. Some interviewees also criticised the 'hard sciences' for failing to fully understand the role played by intuition, creativity and community behaviours in their own scientific endeavours, arguing that for humanities at least this was more transparently visible.

A second set of differences related to **behavioural differences between humanities and other disciplines**. Part of this came in a greater perceived 'problem distance' between researchers and the issues being researched, reflecting and critically challenging the way problems were articulated rather than focusing on solving a particular problem. This was related to the fact that solution of the problem was not as important as better understanding the problem and aligning it with accepted approaches and genres of solution. This distance from problem users and the less exposure this gave to scholars of users' needs was further exacerbated by both the absence of commercial funding for research in humanities outside very specific areas, as well as relatively low success rates for grants where applications required that applicants think through how their research could eventually be used.

There was also difference came in the nature of the organisation of the academic research effort, with far less co-ordination between centres and groups, and much more work done by academic scholars. This was also reflected in publication cultures, in which far more effort was taken in publications to discussing the problems in the state-of-the-art rather than using literature to merely establishing a baseline for progress and the contribution made by the research. There was also far less of a journal article publication culture, but at the same time, this was not equated with a sense that this difference deserved special treatment and

exemption from quality measures, just that other kinds of quality measures needed to be found.

A third kind of behavioural differences lay in the perceived fragmentation of the field, and tensions between different disciplinary groups. One interviewee argued that the term humanities was particularly unhelpful because it lumped together three very different traditions in the Netherlands, between theology/ humanities, history and literature, with each having very different approaches and definitions, and unwilling and unable to collectively mobilise to better meet funders demands and needs. This fragmentation has also created a problem for the demonstration of excellence: one interviewee reported that fragmentation played to a sense that because they were diffuse, they lacked the necessary critical mass, and were in some ways intrinsically more wasteful than other discipline areas. One interviewee reported that the fragmentation has also become a problem in allowing the emergence of interdisciplinary, because there are far more opportunities for the interrelation between different but cognate in understanding particular fields. The issue is that of the determination of research problems, and that in the humanities is clearly heavily fragmented between disciplines and sub-fields.

The final class of differences which interviewees claimed with other disciplinary areas was in the field of **prestige differences with other disciplines**. A number of researcher interviewees, as well as those involved with the debates around social utility, noted that there was a distinct hierarchy in science between disciplines, that fed public perceptions but was also influenced by the structures of the disciplines. Several interviewees noted that the large size of funding awards made in the hard sciences, in particular to astronomy, where there was no immediate commercial value, meant that it was much easier to justify that expenditure as worthwhile, whilst humanities had a much more difficult case to justify comparably much smaller sums. One interviewee noted that the disciplinary spread of Nobel prizes worked against their apparent prestige, and that publishing norms on hard sciences with many, short, multi-authored papers gave an appearance of very high research productivity in the hard sciences and comparatively low productivity in the humanities.

Several interviewees also appeared to hint at a sense that the hard sciences were in some senses felt threatened or discomfited by the humanities, and portraying humanities as unscientific was part of a way of deal with those negative feelings. Several interviewees noted that digital humanities had an enduring tension between those who were interested in using tools and those who were more interested in studying how those tools were used, and the implications that that had for the generalizability of the knowledge created/ digital humanities seemed to threaten to undermine sciences claims about the generalizability of their knowledge claims. Therefore humanities scholars felt that their approaches were criticised, rejected and peripheralised as part of defensive strategies by academics in other disciplinary areas to protect their own authority claims.

At the same time, there were a number of areas where there was a recognition that there were **fundamental similarities between the humanities and other scientific areas**, and that some differences had in fact emerged out of a political resource-allocation process rather than reflecting intrinsic differences around the nature of knowledge production. Several of the interviewees made the point that the humanities were important to understanding the impact of technology on society, and that effective technology development was not merely a question of technical capacity but understanding how technologies evolve in and are shaped by society. This was not an abstract point: several of the interviewees in the field of the philosophy of science and technology noted that they had been able to make contributions to ethical debates (and solving problems like social opposition and resistance to nanotechnology or gene technologies). At the same time, their own situation within their discipline had evolved from being peripheral and seen as being applied to being a coherent discipline in its own terms.

There was a also a sense in the interviewees, echoing Bod, that the differences between humanities and other sciences were less fundamental than sometimes claimed. The common

points most often cited of similarity were around curiosity, transparency and shared effort. Interviewees argued that all scientists were driven by an attempt to better understand a phenomenon, and that meant that all scientific fields created knowledge about the world which could potentially be useful in guiding interactions in the world. This was related to the notion of transparency, and building claims about the value of knowledge created on the grounds that others could see how it had been constructed rather than on trust and personal authority. Thirdly, even humanities scholars who functioned independently saw themselves as part of a greater collective – the field – who collectively defined questions of interest and directions of travel to best co-ordinate the research effort and best produce new knowledge about the world. Other kinds of claims were made including that other scientific fields suffered from similar kinds of fragmentation, and were active within highly specialised and often closed communications, making the idea of a common scientific method from which humanities stood outside not sustainable.

## 8.2 Impact and excellence in Dutch academia

Having considered the way that humanities researchers in the Netherlands defined what they believed to be excellent, and whether this was used as the basis for a claim that the humanities should be protected from being useful, the chapter now turns to consider how impact fits in that value hierarchy. In the Dutch context, there can be a sense that researchers seek to claim that usability is incompatible with the excellence of research. In the interviews, which admittedly focused on publicly-active researchers, interviewees were able to articulate the place of ‘impact’ in their research. We here use ‘impact’ as a shorthand to refer to outcomes that serve public goals and for which the users are not exclusively academic communities. Impact did feature in a number of ways in how researchers thought of their research excellence, and researchers were able to articulate both how the activity fitted with wider research excellence, but also the kinds of duties and responsibilities that researchers had for the promotion and stimulation of impact.

### *8.2.1 The idea of impact and its relation to academic excellence*

The sample of scholars interviewed had neither practical or conceptual opposition to the idea of impact. A number of conceptual justifications were made for how impact fitted with the idea of research excellence. The most obvious point made by these interviewees was that there was already a huge amount of impact being generated by academic research, and interviewees were able to point to a ‘canon’ of those able to generate clear commercial impact (such as commercial sales of books) from their research activities. As part of that, it was argued that addressing an important problem – one that was important outside as well as within the academy – was an indicator of the breadth and profundity of that research. Dealing with reality in turn demanded a degree of conceptual sharpness and rigour that means that better treatment of empirical issues added to the sense of difficulty and impressiveness of high-quality research.

Alongside the absence of conceptual objections to the idea of impact, interviewees were able to cite examples of how working to create engagement was able to enrich the excellence of the research in practice. With excellence being at least partly defined in terms of the reach of the research into scholastic communities, a number of interviewees told an interesting story that their more practical work helped to augment the excellence of more fundamental researchers. One example cited was of fundamental formal research of those studying ancient philosophical texts had a potentially very limited reach beyond its immediate academic community even where its research and scholarship was impeccable. Where other philosophical scholars, in this case science and technology philosophy, used the ideas developed in this historical philosophy in contemporary questions, for example in the ethics of new technologies in society, this increased the applicability and hence the impact of that research. It is important to note that the interviewees did not phrase this as a split between pure and applied research, nor themselves as applying the pure research in practice, but

rather than their use of the pure research increased its scientific uptake, and hence its overall scientific excellence.

The final area was that a number of interviewees cited a series of practical considerations about impact that indicated that it was in principle at least potentially positive for research. The more general point was that producing public impact often came through ‘gatekeepers’ who themselves created pathways for academics to create impact – such as newspaper columns or TV shows. A number of interviewees had written newspaper columns or been interviewed and appeared in various media, and they noted that the public feedback can be potentially interesting in understanding where interesting questions lie. It was framed not so much as lay feedback being to useful avenues, but as a more nuanced guidance effect: positive feedback was suggestive of where public interest lay and public interest was itself sometimes suggestive of what might be potential important questions.

There were problems cited with impact, but those tended to be around a question of magnitude rather than an absolute incompatibility between excellence research and public-facing activities. The overriding problem was that academics felt pressurised themselves to define excellent impact rather than definitions emerging from what users wanted. The effect had been to create a pressure for a single form of impact, and in particular, that applicable in the hard sciences, being applied to the humanities, rather than something which captured what their users valued about that research. Related to that was a feeling that these pressures to quantify were not really about users, but about government, politicians and funders meeting their own needs: one interview expressed a view that some academics felt that the whole debate was taking place in its ‘own reality’ which more about creating PR images of useful research than using research. A final interesting point was that the interviewees, all of whom it must be remembered were publically active, felt that some of the negative responses to academic from within the academic community came from those that were not particularly good at it, and so it was resisted as a means of those individuals preserving established authority relationships.

### *8.2.2 Differences in impact in Dutch humanities*

There was not a sense in the interviews that creating impact was not something that the humanities could be doing, but there were a number of interviewees who raised some areas where there were substantial differences between the humanities and other scientific areas. The main issue here was the tension between the accepted duty to engage in the abstract and how that duty played out in the particular, particularly in the absence of strong user communities. An interviewee from a Research Council noted that the technical sciences had made great steps in defining how far the duties of their researchers went in terms of public engagement. But this was not purely an abstract definition, rather the details had been worked out through at least two decades efforts to increase user involvement in research projects, and on occasion to make them demanding customers for the research through having a financial interest in the research. The limits to what was reasonable – i.e. the norms and guidelines – emerged from the interaction between efforts to engage and perceptions of those efforts on the efficiency of the research effort.

Partly related to the relative separation of humanities research from direct problems and the reliance of humanities research on the government core funds and research council grants, a number of interviewees pointed to the problems that were raised by an absence of sponsored Ph.D. positions. This was a specific example of a more general problem in that because there were not other organisations undertaking substantial humanities research, there was not a domain in which non-academics were active in setting research questions. One cited example was of Philips and micro-electronics, with their R&D engineers being active in their own research and helping to shape which questions were prioritised in science. There were no other visible research funders at the level of the domain – there were very good collaborations between particular research users, and in particular between Museums and Galleries who were active in very specialised curatorial activities. But there was an



awareness that in the absence of users who were also involved in the research efforts, it was much harder for universities to be able to point to those kind of domain level impacts, as micro- and nanotechnology was clearly able to do.

But it is important not to overstress this degree of difference, as one of the interviews involved with the research visitations noted that the balance between scientific and social impact was something that had been a perennial challenge for the research visitations. That interviewee cited the first Physics Research Evaluation, itself one of the first experimental evaluations, as seeing the committee members debate whether the focus of impact should exclusively be on scientific users or extend to social users. A different interviewee noted that many of the problems facing the humanities in terms of enumerating their research were also faced in other disciplines. The example cited was research which led to changes in clinical practice, supposedly a fairly direct form of impact, was hard to directly attribute back to just the research as the source of the change. That is a similar class of problem to identifying public valuation of neuroscience as worthy of funding to any single scientific article, the problem being one of attribution and causality, not of the existence of the impact itself.

### *8.2.3 The strategic dimension to humanities impact in the Netherlands*

Much of the pressure on humanities has come through attempts to reorganise and strategically manage the sector, and impact has become intertwined with these efforts. The strategic cuckoo in the nest of impact and the humanities is that the strategic problem for the humanities for the last three decades has been their long-term financial sustainability, firstly of the *Kleine Letteren*, and then of the ‘modern humanities’, following the Staal concordat. The effect of this has been to frame the strategic dimension of humanities impact as part of a wider ‘problem’ with humanities, and to seek to deliver the solutions to the impact problem through the more general reorganisation of the field, which has been driven principally by the logics of focus and mass.

A number of interviewees related the issue of the empowerment of the idea of impact, and (independently) noted that for impact to become more important, it has to be granted power by other people. Two interviewees – as already noted – highlighted that there was some resistance to this amongst academics worried of the risk that this had for changing authority relationships. At the strategic level, a number of interviewees raised the resistance of university senior managers to having new tasks imposed upon them in ways that infringed upon their managerial autonomy. One university manager argued that because universities were forced to account for themselves in so many areas, that there was a tendency for them to what the interviewee referred to as “construct their own reality”. By this it was meant that the universities focused on constructing a case that they were upholding their responsibilities and in terms of impact, ensured that they could convincingly argue that they were creating social benefit.

Some interviewees argued that public engagement around humanities could be a useful way for universities to be able to demonstrate their contributions to society. An interviewee involved with the Cohen report noted that one of the aims of Cohen was to give university *Colleges van Bestuur* (the management teams) the feeling that the success of their humanities in reaching out were a success for the university, and to be more prepared to celebrate that success. There were examples encountered in the research of universities that had ongoing relationships with cultural institutions, and the strategic involvement of university senior managers was seen to help encourage and facilitate those relationships, which ultimately strengthened the university research base as well as being a visible contribution.

There were some examples encountered in the course of the research that identified examples of how universities had taken their strategic engagement seriously, and used it to help advance activities already taking place in the faculties. The example encountered in the course of the fieldwork was the *Spui25* project, which was a partnership project involving

UvA (including its Academic Foundation and University Press), NRC Handelsblad, NWO, KNAW and two other publishers. Spui25 was an Academic Cultural centre in Amsterdam which at the time of writing was active in presenting a series of open lectures for a broad public in the centre of Amsterdam. The idea behind the centre was to create a contact point between UvA and Amsterdam's cultural community, and to generate some media awareness of the university as a cultural resource, to help embed and upgrade the engagement activities already taking place around the universities cultural research institutes.

However, a number of interviewees argued that the drive to strategic management was more problematic for universities' external activities. A number of scholars argued that there was pressure on academics to become self-referential and introspective because of the pressures to demonstrate specialisation around critical mass. At least one interviewee noted that there was a tension between scholarship and managerialism, with the transgression and challenge being central to effective humanities research, and that need to allow disruption was inhibited by strategic needs for structures, plans, targets and predictability. Several interviewees questioned whether concentration of academic research made sense, and indeed whether it risked undercutting the dynamism and vitality of the humanities which had much lower returns to scale than other scientific areas (for where there could be a case for concentration).

### **8.3 Users & audience in humanities research**

The previous section dealt entirely with the internal perceptions of the interviewees to the nature of quality in research, and how that affected the scope for creating impact and social benefits in humanities research. This section turns to look at the question of users, and how scholars regarded users in their research effort. The issue that emerges in this theme is that the indirect audiences appear far more important to the humanities than the direct users, both in terms of mass audiences for cultural and humanities reporting in the media, but also key stakeholders for research, including funders and the KNAW. The findings were a clear dissonance between how publics judge humanities scholars, which is that on an individual basis they are very supportive, and how stakeholders regard universities and scholarly communities, which is that they were seen as a problem.

#### *8.3.1 Understanding the audience: how perceptions of stakeholders shape action*

A key issue for the research was that there was what could be considered as a 'user aggregation' issue for humanities researchers. Many of those interviewed were able to explain how they worked with individual users, even in detailed co-creation activities, and how that created direct value for the users. Direct public interest was indicated by the success of 'science cafés' in the humanities: one interviewee organised a regular monthly science café event, and humanities-themed events occurred regularly in their programme, indicating an interesting in the audience in these topics. However, direct 'users' of humanities research were not a particularly salient group politically, and so there was a fear expressed by some that the idea of the 'creative sector' in the TOP-sectoren plan was emerging unchallenged as a description of the archetypal user of humanities research. Although interviewees were working with creative industries these were not ideal users, often lacking the resources to fund research through Ph.D.s. This played to a sense that working with users in the humanities was more of a craft than industrial activity, and needed addressing on a case-wise basis.

One interviewee expressed a feeling that what the academics were hearing in terms of what was important in impact was not what was of interest to users, but decided by a group formed between university managers and funders. This hinted at the fact that a very important 'audience' for humanities research was the government, particularly given the increasing emphasis on functionalism emerging in the whole funding environment, that is to say receiving funding in return for concrete outputs. Government views of universities tended to be very broad and based on a sense that governments needed to change something,

and therefore university senior managers agreed to do new things. An interviewee associated with the Cohen report argued that that was the emphasis the report made, requesting the additional funding for sustainable humanities in return for the generic change of ‘opening them up for society’.

The third audience was the ‘general public’, as funders of research as taxpayers, and consumers of humanities research through the popular media. The issue with this audience was that it was largely a contented audience: as chapter 10 shows, coverage of humanities research in broadsheet newspapers increased out of a sense that it was valued by its readership. Humanities research coverage also moved into the domain of science journalism, notably in the area of linguistics but also around archaeology, history and literature. Both commercial and academic prints paid a range of academics to produce popular books in their fields of academic expertise, and this had created a range of well-known popular humanities professors including Maarten van Rossem, James Kennedy, Frits van Oostrom and Henk Wesseling. This was not an audience that was particularly demanding as long as it remained satisfied.

One area where the public were visible was where there was a public crisis around science, in particular with the Stapel affaire (*cf.* 2.4.2), where a psychology professor had literally fabricated boxfuls of research data, which had been analysed by Ph.D. students and turned into papers. Because the Stapel affaire was unfolding during the fieldwork phase, a total of 11 interviewees in all sectors researched mentioned its comparative importance. The problem for researchers was that the Stapel case raised the issue that academics were able to manipulate their findings, and that therefore public academics were not being independent but instead were unduly influenced by their funders. One interviewee noted that the problem was that it highlighted how much trust there was in science, and that the fact that he had published in top journals that were then withdrawn meant that it was almost impossible to put the issue into perspective for lay audiences.

### *8.3.2 Conceptual models for knowledge transfer in A&HR*

Knowledge transfer has been on the agenda in the universities for 25 years with the creation of the technology transfer offices in universities. In the last decade, there has been a more serious effort made to exploit knowledge, and at the same time, the Universities Organisation, VSNU, has worked hard to ensure that the idea is more than just the use of knowledge but exploiting knowledge for society, beyond spin-off companies. Nevertheless, there was a view amongst some interviewees that there was an excessive focus on commercialisation over valorisation, and that a new balance – and new means of communications – needed to be found to create value in society of that knowledge.

Many of the interviewees were able to point out conceptual models for how humanities research could benefit society, but at the same time, that not all academics should be involved in that research. As noted in 8.2, there was an agreement that academics had some kind of duty to be in society, but that there were differences between being a researcher and public intellectual, even if both were suitable roles for a university academic. Interviewees also made the point that the idea of public value was a problematic term, because it could refer to direct benefits such as education and training minds, or to more indirect benefits, such as contributing to the vitality of a culture through providing a ‘big story’ narrative.

The basic idea for the value of humanities research was that it provided an understanding of the relationships that one and society had over time and space, and those relationships retained a current salience. Likewise, research also influenced how others saw you because it provides a society with a means to construct its own narratives and understandings which others also pick up. This provided a framework for asking ‘big’ societal questions that hard sciences did not ask because they were impossible to answer through a deductive framework. This made the point that the benefits of humanities research were based on connectivity and additivity, so the fundamental researcher saw their benefits produced through their uptake by others who were able to make more empirical points. At the same time, this indirectness

prevented the development of a grand narrative for humanities research, akin to curing cancer, that all humanities researchers were working towards.

A key element of the conceptual model of knowledge transfer that emerged through the interviews was the importance of connection and valency (potential connectivity) for producing social benefits. Good research created impact where it was able to speak to other humanities disciplines, other scientific disciplines and also to public audiences in order to create better understandings of the world. What interviewees felt was underestimated or underemphasised in this was the role that humanities had to play in the development of technology sciences, and understanding what you could consider as the ontological domains shaping new technology developments. What is important is not just the technical and technological boundaries of the technologies, but people's trust, identification with them, their wider sense of identity and beliefs about ways of living. Implementing new technological interventions can benefit greatly from understanding how these interventions interact with a sense of humanity as well as the technological infrastructure.

At the same time, this means that in knowledge transfer in the humanities there is a complex ecology with different people playing different roles all necessary to create vital without it being necessary for one person to play them all. One interviewee noted that there was a clear tension between the public being interesting in the content, and the public wanting their academics to be engaged and to be visibly in society. These two issues were of course connected because if the content was engaging then more people would believe that academics were active and useful in society, but managing between effort and content was a concern for academics.

The media here emerged as an important mechanism for knowledge transfer in the media, and this is dealt with at more length in Chapter 10. Interviewees had been involved in television appearances, been interviewed for an written columns in broadsheet newspapers, and produced their own popular works based on their research. Where social use differs from scientific use is around the question of the personal authority, which is as much conveyed by the medium as by the *bona fides* of the speaker. Interviewees at the same time raised a concern that the medium might become the message: one interviewee avoided that by considering carefully how to package scientifically interesting findings as socially interested before media appearances and ensure that scientific novelty was at the heart of what was being communicated.

There were some problems identified around valorisation of humanities research and the conceptual model based on valency, making research available for uptake. The diversity of the system by which research reached users was a problem, because it provided no guidance for academics on how to find potential users and audiences, nor a sense of the duty or the comparative effort involved. There was no understanding of what 'ordinary' knowledge transfer in the humanities involved, contributing to the general sense-making within a culture, that would because of its indirectness not be immediately visible, and important from the perspective of managers, also countable and manageable.

The emphasis on mediagenic star performers was an issue because there was no sense of the relative scale or what was reasonable for an ordinary researcher: a Nobel-winning star researcher might publish in *Nature* and appear on television, whilst an ordinary researcher publishes in lower-ranked journals, but it is not clear then what sort of public engagement can be expected from them. There was a great deal of resistance to counting media appearances because of this unevenness and lack of comparability. Finally, because there was no sense of what the full spectrum of knowledge transfer activities might be, there was no sense of what the duties might be and therefore to what academics were prepared to be held to account.

This idea of the importance of valency to generating impact has been a blockage to the development of effective impact measures because of the indirectness of impact generation. Interviewees pointed to the range of activities by which impact is generated, from doing

empirical research involving ‘publics’, through to writing popular books, newspaper articles and media appearances. All these forms of communications involve a degree of intermediation between the research and the public, and in each case the role played by the academic in that process differs. There has been a learning process in the humanities over the last 20 years, and there has been progress made in the field in learning these skills, so there are now a set of experienced media performers. There was a particular appreciation of the typical audience for humanities research was, namely highly educated people with a certain baseline of knowledge in the area, and where the knowledge refines their understanding in the area.

### *8.3.3 Stakeholders and users for knowledge transfer in arts & humanities research*

The question of identifying who are the stakeholders, audiences and users for humanities research in the Netherlands is complicated by the fact that different groupings have different relationships with that research and its use. There is a set of those who are interested in research use because they are interested in managing the Dutch research environment effectively, including the Ministry of Education, and also potentially Economic Affairs, as well as politicians. There are then those that are concerned with how humanities research supports their own activities through teaching, including schools and graduate employers including the creative industry sector. There are then a set of direct users, including government departments who use humanities research, the media and wider public ‘leisure’ consumers of that research and the artefacts created.

The concern for central government, and in particular OCW, is being able to show that they are effectively managing the research infrastructure. This means that OCW has a very limited content interest in humanities research, but is concerned with how its plans for the sector as a whole affect the general vitality of the research base. Interviewees reported that OCW had long wanted to increase funding for the humanities in return for solving humanities structural problems of fragmentation and isolation. At the same time, OCW realise that they are the only real patron of humanities education and research in the Netherlands through their university and research funding streams, with very limited opportunities for additional income generation. OCW have a clear interest in being able to show that as well as being culturally useful, their research is increasingly socially relevant and useful (see chapter 9).

Alongside OCW, politicians (members of the Dutch Lower House, *de Tweede Kamer*) also have an interest in the humanities research base, again often in a very broad sense without an eye for the broader picture but instead being aware of politically sensitive issues. A challenge lies in the dynamics of Dutch cultural politics, which one interview described as being regarded as a left-wing hobby but at the same time being important to the conservation of Dutch cultural history, something supported from more right-wing perspectives. A number of interviewees across the three project areas agreed that there was a dearth of politicians who were supportive of the humanities as was seen for example in the times of TVC or SKG, as demonstrated by the muted political responses to the Gerritsen and Cohen commissions. The argument was made that this was because of the rise of populism, following 9/11 in the US and the assassination of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, had made a much more basic set of demands politically urgency.

Nevertheless, universities and their representatives (for example the VSNU), had placed efforts to try and build up support amongst Parliamentarians the Visibility was a key issue here, and in particular NWO, VSNU and KNAW placed a lot of effort into communicating more effectively with politicians. This was not exclusively in the field of the humanities, but across science as a whole. VSNU produced the report *The Netherlands: a country of colourful variety*, as an English and Dutch language publication to present an attractive portrait of Dutch science. One of the five areas covered was ‘broadly humanities based, “Society, then and now”, covering lifelong learning, religion in everyday life, demographic ageing, human rights in the market framework, and philosophers and archaeologists reflecting on the

meaning of life. One interviewee reported on the basis of meetings with the Lower House caucus leaders before the previous elections had seen most of the parties broadly supportive of university humanities.

Alongside these audiences without a direct interest in the content and primarily in the process of the research were a set of audiences with an interest in the outputs of humanities at university, that is to say the graduates. One of the specific recommendations of the Cohen report was that schools needed to be much more closely linked to universities, and the disciplines in school to reflect much more closely the curricular innovations in universities. The labour market also has an interest in the quality of the graduates from humanities courses, for the creative sector as well as in other areas. Two interviewees reported that employability in the 1980s for humanities graduates was so poor that there were almost no employment opportunities for them following graduation. By the mid-1990s, this had changed, and the idea has become embedded of a humanities degree as leading to employment rather than to Ph.D. study.

The third set of stakeholders were those that had a direct interest in using the content of the research produced by humanities researchers, either following the completion of the research or as commissioners or co-users of that research. The issue for the humanities more generally, as noted in 8.1, was that there were not many users in the humanities who were able to pay for humanities research in a way that even approximated to the costs it incurred, even publishing houses and media organisations. A significant exception was museums and other cultural institutions who themselves were engaged in research around curation and preservation which formed part of their natural business, or indeed around those institutions' own public engagement activities.

Serious attempts were made to facilitate better engagement between academics and government departments around the formation of policy. One of the barriers to this in the humanities was the existence of an array of intermediate advisory organisations, dating back to the 1970s reforms of scientific advice in the Netherlands (*cf.* 5.1.1). There was a professionalization of scientific advice that played against the valency value of humanities research, by encouraging the formation of relatively closed advice communities around government departments, and certainly not able to build on the strength of humanities research in identifying multiple linkages and dynamics relevant to particular situations. One interviewee cited the example of a group of legal scholars brought together to discuss the proposed Dutch burqa ban with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs, and highlighted the time that was taken for the two groups to build up an understanding before they could really have productive discussions. One interviewee raised the threat of 'open door' research where politicians seek answers from friendly academics to bolster a case not provide insights, and there was an unwillingness to be associated with that.

The second set of users with a direct interest in content, and which have already emerged as significant, are the media. The issue of scientific/ media relationships became important in the 1980s in part because of a deep-seated economic crisis in the Netherlands, and a feeling voiced in the media that scientists were not doing more to engage with society to address those problems. One interviewee reported that media at that time were urging scientists to become more engaged, but that the situation had greatly improved. There was a constructive relationship between humanities researchers and media outlets, and those interviewed felt that media outlets were a useful way of communicating their findings to a wider audience, and achieving an impact. The critical issue here was in the cognitive proximity of the researchers to the journalists involved, with greater proximity making the experience more useful and more rewarding for the researcher involved.

The third set of users with a direct intent in content were the public broadly defined. One interviewee reported that there was a strong set of data indicating that the Dutch publics were very interested in visiting 'high' and 'low' cultural activities as well as themselves actively participating in those activities. The Eurobarometer (2007) likewise showed that Dutch interest in visiting and participating in cultural activities was well above the

European average (130% and 123% respectively in 2007). Participation had increased slightly since 1997 (van den Broek, 2010) and now included 48% of the population. In some areas such as in lectures and science cafes there was direct contact with publics, in other areas, publics consumed the research indirectly through either using resources made available by universities, or as translated and rendered in other media.

## 8.4 System pressures and potential future evolutionary pathways

### 8.4.1 *Perceived future directions and pressures for humanities*

The final section concerns the ways in which universities and scholars were preparing themselves for the future environment for humanities research in the Netherlands. There was clearly a fewer within the humanities scholars and representatives interviewed that they were out of step with government thinking, and in particular were continually asking for funding without demonstrating value. Demonstrating value was not necessarily something that was to be resisted, but there seemed to be a feeling amongst interviewees that the government were not interested in the kinds of proof that the humanities could offer of their utility. This forced the humanities to make second-order arguments relating to a better organisation of the field, rather than to make a clearer high-level narrative of their contribution. There was an understanding within government of the value of humanities in a civilised country and the Netherlands place in the world, but at the same time there was a difficulty in identifying a broader sense of contribution of the kind clearly enjoyed by technical and medical sciences.

The first issue is that humanities research is still perceived as being important for the Netherlands in terms of the prestige of the system and its positioning in international systems. At the same time, that is potentially under threat because of the different kinds of international involvements of Dutch humanities scholars, and it is anticipated that this will have to change. The issue here is that humanities research is seen to contribute less to the position of Dutch universities and Dutch science in international ranking measures. There has been a definite internationalisation of the language base of humanities, in particular an increased orientation towards English, which helps to establish the citation performance of humanities disciplines. One interviewee noted that there is a great difference between Dutch literature which is almost absent from Web of Science, and Philosophy of Science and Technology which has a very good level of coverage, and hence performs well in these measures.

The capacity of the humanities to demonstrate that prestige is regarded as being important for their future. The absence of humanities coverage for the Nobel prize has meant that only one award went to Dutch humanities, to Tobias Asser, for his involvement in the establishment of the International Court of Arbitration in the Hague, echoed in continuing Dutch research strengths in international law. The Spinoza prize (awarded annually since 1992 to up to 4 leading researchers) has been won nine times by humanities researchers and these Spinoza laureates are important to humanities disciplines in being able to claim that their research is as excellent and useful as in technical, medical and social science disciplines. At the time of writing, although after the fieldwork, *NRC Handelsblad* reported that some members of KNAW had resisted the election of Professor Hans Clevers as president on the grounds that in his (unopposed) hustings speech he had shown insufficient attention for the humanities, with reportedly over 200 academicians spoiling their papers in an unopposed election<sup>23</sup>.

The system is currently undergoing two changes that are anticipated to impact on humanities research in universities. The first is the introduction of performance contracts by government with around 2% of all funding to universities to be allocated on the basis their

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/03/27/onrust-bij-knaw-na-benoeming-beta-man-hans-clevers/>

attempts to adapt to the new environment for teaching, research and valorisation. The way that the Government accepts definitions of valorisation, whether a narrow (commercialisation) or broad (social contribution) will affect the capacity of humanities research to contribute to universities' targets, and will inevitably affect key university decision-makers perceptions of which kinds of university research activities can be fitted into a university. KNAW and universities have been working together as a humanities group to try to develop better impact indicators – both scientific and social – for the humanities – to inform these Performance Contract discussions. At the time of writing the outcomes, the Committee overseeing contract negotiations with universities has postponed the introduction of a formal requirement for valorisation indicators until 2015, the reporting date of another Committee developing valorisation indicators<sup>24</sup>.

The second change of concern is that there has already been announced to an elimination of special research funding from the Dutch hydrocarbon fund, the *aardgasbaten*. The requirements of the fund is that it is spent on infrastructure investments rather than current expenditure (following the problems of Dutch disease, *cf.* 5.1) and currently 40% of resources are allocated to the FES (*Fonds Economische Versterking* or 'funds for economic reinforcement'). These are allocated to science, innovation, education and research activities, and have funded *inter alia* the academic fellowship programme *Veni, vidi, vici* and a number of advanced technology programmes. From 2015, this funding stream is being abolished with the result that universities are anticipated to lose important sources of second and third stream funding. Although the humanities are not particularly big recipients for this, humanities scholars articulated a worry that they would have to bear cuts to generate savings to protect the less-funded infrastructure in the technical sciences.

One interviewee raised the more speculative point that the current system for research evaluation was probably regarded as being more stable than it in reality was, and that there might be big changes after the current framework expires. Changes are expected both in terms of greater formalisation of indicators and targets for both scientific and social impact, as well as an increasing compulsory use of it: currently *Colleges van Bestuur* are free to use the evaluation reports as they see fit in taking their strategic decisions. Some of the interviewees speculated that this might lead to a situation where there is more comparison between disciplines and the potential for humanities to underperform in research ratings – for example because of imperfect coverage by metrics – might see that a reform of the research evaluation system might also work systematically to disadvantage humanities (see Chapter 9 for a greater overview of this).

#### 8.4.2 *The future evolution of the strategic place of humanities in Dutch universities*

Those interviewees who were involved in strategic management of universities were also asked to reflect on the effect that these changes might have on the strategic place of humanities within universities. Although there was a general feeling that the place of humanities was in the universities, and that universities needed humanities, within the humanities there was a persistent fear that this position was systematically weakening, as seen in the reports in early March 2012 of cuts to humanities courses in universities. The national press coverage that this achieved – in the NRC Handelsblad as well as NOS Teletekst indicated the extent of the perceived threat, implicit in the newsworthiness of a story about changes to humanities courses in the Netherlands.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Werkwijze en Beoordelingskader, Reviewcommissie Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek, 5 maart 2012

<sup>25</sup> The text can be translated as: Tens of humanities courses disappearing. At humanities faculties, 30 humanities courses are disappearing in coming years. NRC reported this on the basis of a survey of universities. The studies are being scrapped or fused into larger, general courses. Language and cultural studies are coping with budget cuts and falling student numbers. The special money for the small humanities has disappeared, leaving little funding for



Figure 7 The persistent newsworthiness of humanities in Dutch public media



This image appears courtesy of NOS Teletext, ©2012, all rights reserved.

One interviewee noted that there was an issue that the humanities ran the risks of falling between government desires for a number of contradictory goals, of an efficient Dutch research landscape with a high quality, limited overlap and a strong contribution to the national economy.

Within this context, interviewees identified a range of problems that the humanities faced in terms of their institutional positioning within universities. The dominant one was that of falling student numbers, and the need to create new, attractive courses that supported graduate employability. A second issue was the relatively limited funding for humanities research, and the attendant low success rates which meant that research activities, and in particular highly specialised professorships, were dependent on their capacity to attract large student numbers to relatively generalised courses. Humanities lacked the capacity to really specialise effectively and create critical mass in identified areas of strength because of the independence of scholars even in areas where there appeared to be real overlaps in research activities and programmes.

The effect manifested itself as a co-ordination problem in that the humanities units themselves were not mobilising positively to deal with these changes, but found themselves fighting against the negative consequences. One interviewee contrasted the response of law, a separate category outside the humanities in the Netherlands, in which a changing world had led to the emergence of departments and courses specialising in European law. The lack of co-ordination within research groups meant that there were fewer similarly innovative courses emerging that would create a positive response to the problem. This in turn created a slight dependence relationship for the humanities faculties on their *Colleges van Bestuur* in covering the budgetary shortfalls, and that there needed to be a systematic solution to that problem.

The *Colleges van Bestuur* were aware of this problem, and in particular the fact that humanities' position was vulnerable and their costs a problem, but they were worth saving. One interviewee cited the 2006 Canada agreement in which the Ministry and universities through the VSNU had agreed to provide structural funding for humanities and other areas

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humanities in general. Almost all universities are scrapping courses: Portuguese and Romanian will disappear entirely".

that suffered from an over-dependency on student numbers. The problem with that agreement was of a change in government then bringing further funding changes that disrupted some of the solutions developed in the Canada agreement. Likewise, the Cohen commission reported just before the emergence of the economic crisis, and therefore the resources it was allocated, €10m per year, were far less had been anticipated or hoped for. Thus, in both these cases, although an agreement was reached between governments and universities that the structural funding problems of humanities in universities needed solving, circumstances prevented the full implementation of the solution.

The response of the universities to the challenges in part can be seen through their response to the Cohen Commission, in which there is what one interviewee referred to as a 'sector plan' for the humanities. The government responded by creating an advisory group to oversee the ten humanities faculties to prepare strategic plans to address the problems identified in the Cohen report. The ten universities all responded by developing plans for how they would place humanities on a sustainable footing within their universities, in particular by addressing fragmentation and creating more streamlining and co-ordination in their faculties. One interviewee cited the example of one smaller, specialised which used the funding to introduce a compulsory humanities element to all of its courses, and thereby to ensure the sustainability of humanities.

## 9 POLICY DEBATES CONCERNING THE VALORISATION OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH POST-2007

This chapter considers the policy debates around the value of humanities research in the Netherlands, and in particular addresses the question of whether there has been a public value failure. The chapter starts by presenting some of the background towards the policy context, including attempts to stimulate valorisation, the importance of evidence in policy decisions, and the use of new institutions as tools to achieve change in the system. The chapter then maps the highly complex humanities research policy system in the Netherlands, and traces both government and non-governmental actors in achieving policy outcomes. The chapter then explores four recent attempts to define or at least frame the public value of humanities in the Netherlands. Finally the chapter explores which interests are embedded within the outcomes, offers a stylised model for the operation of the science system, and suggests a prima facie case of public value failure for humanities policy in the Netherlands, dealt with at more length in chapter 10.

### 9.1 The background to contemporary policy debates

#### *9.1.1 Valorisation as a serious government industrial policy*

One of the concerns noted by many of the interviewees in the course of the fieldwork was the increasing importance of the so-called Top Sectors policy, in Dutch Innovation policy (*TOP-sectoren*). The idea behind that policy is that in a small country it makes sense for government policy to work on stimulating Dutch sectors with possibilities for global success, and so all industrial policy is to be aligned behind these world-class sectors, and in particular, in promoting innovation in these sectors. Nine sectors have been identified, each with their own lead Ministry, and 17 sources of financing for this policy have also been identified, including a contribution from NWO and KNAW of €350m to create a total funding of €1.5bn. One of these sectors is the creative industries sector, overseen by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). The heart of the concern expressed by interviewees was that this change diverts core scientific resources available to the humanities as a whole, to a single part of humanities that is neither vocal nor central.

The selection of these TOP-sectors was a profoundly political choice: one interview pointed to the fact that one of these sectors, the Chemicals industry had reduced from 20% to 5% of the Dutch economy in recent years, and therefore it was difficult to make an argument that it was a concentration of excellence. The selection is slightly arbitrary, a mix of traditional Dutch strengths as seen in the 1980 White Paper, (agriculture/ horticulture energy, water management chemicals), high-technology promising sectors, (high-technology materials and life sciences), big sectors (logistics) and trendy sectors (creative industries). The interviewees expressed a concern that all the work that was being done elsewhere around setting out the valorisation policies for humanities was being undermined by Government policy. At the same time, there was a recognition of the reality that the commitment of the government and with it the resources of NWO meant that it had to be engaged with.

The genesis to this policy lay in the response in policy developments in the Netherlands in the last decade to the Lisbon Agenda for a smart successful Europe. The first substantive response was produced by an interdepartmental policy research group on Technology Policy. This document affirmed that the best approach for government to take was to provide fiscal incentives to business to take up and exploit publicly-created knowledge, and to increase the total volume of private R&D<sup>26</sup>. The report was couched in the highly technocratic and neo-liberal language of the then-Cabinet (Kok-II, Labour/ Liberal) and held back from naming particular sectors to support, but argued for more generic instruments to create a

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<sup>26</sup> “Interdepartementaal Beleidsontwerp: Technologiebeleid”, KST 63622, Tweede Kamer, 2002-03, Dossier 28626 nr. 1.

stimulating policy environment for innovation. Although the expectation had been that there would be a continuation of this coalition in some form, the murder of populist politician Pim Fortuyn in the week before the May 2002 election led to a highly unstable first coalition of Christian Democrats, Right Liberals and the Pim Fortuyn grouping. The Cabinet lasted for just three months, and in May 2003, following early elections, in which the populist party was hugely reduced in size, the negotiations were completed for a Christian Democratic-Liberal Coalition (including two partners from the previous failed Coalition).

This Cabinet signalled its intention to place innovation at the heart of the governing accord, along with public sector reform and an emphasis on restoring norms and values to public life <sup>27</sup>. The leitmotif of that Government's approach to innovation was of co-determination, of providing additional resources for innovation actors in response for collective agreements about the nature of the problems and the relevant solutions. Typical of this approach was the creation of the Innovation Platform, inspired by the Finnish government's success in stimulating an advanced ICT industry through its research and innovation councils (Zomer & Benneworth, 2011). The Innovation Platform brought together a select group of industrialists, university representatives and tripartite institutions such as the Socio-Economic Council but failed to transform the way the government approached its innovation problem (Nauta, 2008).

The Innovation Platform was one part of a more comprehensive effort to transform research institutions to be more active in innovation, and in parallel with that the Dutch government launched the Commission for the Dynamisation of Research. The rationale behind this Commission was a feeling in government that there was social pressure to demonstrate that investments in research were producing social value. The Commission reported at the time that the Government once more prematurely fell in the summer of 2006. Thus, the Commission's demands for an additional €1bn to improve valorisation outcomes were simply shelved, but they illustrated a recurrent trend for a stand-off between demands from government to universities to improve valorisation outcomes and the counterclaim from universities for additional resources to improve their social value.

The elections of early 2007 led to a change of political balance in the government, with the liberal parties replaced by the Labour Party and the Christian Union as a smaller coalition partner. This led to a reshuffling of the political balance in the various Ministries responsible for research, with the former (Christian Democrat) Minister for Education moving to be Minister for Economic Affairs, and a former (Labour) university professor becoming Minister for Education. Plasterk immediately signalled a number of changes in his field, shifting €100m of university core funding to the Research Council, and in 2009 announcing a Commission of Inquiry towards developing an increasingly differentiated higher education system in the Netherlands. Economic Affairs' interest in research continued to focus on innovation, and involved an expansion of the resources being made available for research programmes of national significance gauged in terms of their potential to contribute to valorisation.

The problem from the perspective of arts & humanities research was that valorisation was framed in a very pragmatic, and rather economic, way. In linking priority areas to lead sectors of the economy, there was an apparent privileging of those areas where the Netherlands had a strong and well-organised existing economic base able to influence these discussions. KNAW had attempted to deal with this by encouraging a change in terminology from the rather mechanistic "knowledge exploitation" to the more neutral valorisation. However, despite valorisation as a concept apparently offering the potential for creating different kinds of value, the policy debate remained squarely focused on the creation of

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<sup>27</sup> Meedoen, meer werk, minder regels, hoofdlijnenakkoord voor het kabinet CDA, VVD, D66, 16th May 2003, [http://www.rijksbegroting.nl/rijksbegrotingsarchief/regeerakkoorden/regeerakkoord\\_2003.pdf](http://www.rijksbegroting.nl/rijksbegrotingsarchief/regeerakkoorden/regeerakkoord_2003.pdf) (accessed 6 March 2012).

economic value, something which marginalised arts & humanities research voices in this process, and led to the inclusion in 2012 of the Creative Industries as one of the targeted TOP-sectoren following the latest change in government.

### *9.1.2 The rise of science system assessment and impact assessment*

The second change in the last decade which was to influence the environment more generally for valorisation was the increasing importance of science system assessment and impact assessment in the Netherlands. Section 5.1 highlighted the decisions taken from the mid 1960s to plan science more seriously, including:

- The establishment in 1966 of the RAWB to advise the Minister of Science on questions of science policy in the interests of the overall balance of the system,
- The 1975 Science White Paper which introduced the idea of programmatisation and management of university research effort for national interests
- The 1980 Innovation White Paper, which proposed the establishment of a proper infrastructure to ensure the systematisation of university-business links

These various elements represented a shift towards a systematisation in the idea of science, against an underlying philosophy that the role of the government was to shepherd and steer that system to ensure that it best delivered for the Dutch society. Around 1968<sup>28</sup>, an interest emerged in science dynamics within one Dutch science councils, the FOM (natural sciences) and later in the STW (engineering). The pace of technological advance at the time made FOM interested in measures to chart the rise of new disciplinary areas as a means of ensuring that their funds were helping to support promising new fields. RAWB were interested in evaluation techniques as part of the mission to understand the Dutch national science system. The Ministry of Education and Science (OCW) were interested from 1975 in evaluation as a means of creating strategic competences and focus within the Dutch science base.

These three partners came together, and following an RAWB Inquiry, decided to create research capacity within the Dutch science system on 'science dynamics' by endowing a chair at a Dutch university as a focus for emerging scientific interest in the field. Science dynamics was at the time a new idea, but has emerged as a field seeking to understand the structures and evolution of science through techniques such as bibliometrics and scientometrics (*cf.* Scharnhorst *et al.*, 2012). A competition was held for this chair, and all universities submitted outline proposals: the best four were given one year's funding to develop a full proposal, and in the end, the chair was awarded to the UvA. A side effect of the competition was to mobilise a field of interest in Dutch universities in science studies and science policy studies, which remains evident at the time of writing in Dutch prominence in the field<sup>29</sup>.

The department of science dynamics at the UvA became the centre of a community of science studies and science policy studies in the Netherlands, along with the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at Leiden University (which had also submitted a competitive bid for the Science Dynamics chair). The rise of the Conditional Finance (VFO) arrangements in the 1983 and then the Standard Evaluations (*qv*) from 1993 raised the question of whether these Evaluations were adequate to recognise the evolving dynamics of Dutch science. Van der Meulen *et al.* (1991) published an overarching evaluation of the first round of these Visitations, indicating a rising interest in using emerging thinking in science

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<sup>28</sup> The date of the arrival of Kees le Pair to be chief executive of FM. *Cf.* Rozendaal, S. (2008) 'Nederland verbommelt': Kees Le Pair, lange tijd een machtige wetenschapsbestuurder, windt zich op over de afnemende waardering voor slimheid in Nederland, *Elsevier* 64, pp. 72-4, 8th February 2008, via <http://www.clepair.net/recent/elsevier.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> *Cf.* Interview DYNAMICS2

systems analysis as part of the government's approach to evaluation, and demonstrating a commitment to accountability. There was clear interest in the Standard Evaluation in having some way to understand the system dynamics as a whole, and include the evaluated units' performance within that system as an element of the overall Evaluation approach.

There was a clear and rising interest in these Evaluations – under VFO and the SEP – of trying to understand the social as well as the scientific impact of research. A consultancy business (Sci-Quest<sup>30</sup>) formed from the Department of Science Dynamics at UvA developed a method for use by the Visitation Commissions developed a tool for the Comprehensive Evaluation of research and its contribution, the so-called REEP method, Research Embeddement (sic) and Performance Profile (Warmelink & Spaapen, 1999). This looked at the broader contribution of a unit (e.g. department) to potential users, including scientific peers, students through education, public policy, professional users, and to profile/ visibility (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 2012).

The methodology that this consultancy (Sci-Quest) used was relatively complex and involved a substantial number of dimensions and questions, and although the idea was promising of being able to measure the wider consequence of research, it was not something that could immediately and uncontroversially be implemented. This methodology caught the attention of the Ministry of Education, who were attracted by the idea and funded the authors to develop the material into a book, which became *Evaluating Research in Context*, published in 1999, supported by the Dutch Agricultural Research Council. The second edition was published in 2007, directly funded by the Ministry of Education through their Co-ordinating Council of Research Councils, and provided the basis for the ERIC (*Evaluating Research in Context*) programme (*qv*), which featured in policy debates concerning the valorisation of arts & humanities research.

The important feature of this interest in science dynamics was it evolved as a highly numerical subject because of its origins in attempts to chart the rise of new disciplines using bibliometric and scientometric techniques. Embedded within these approaches was an apparent belief that it was possible to identify sectoral dynamics on the basis of finding suitable measures. This was something that was appealing both to administrators who wanted certainty that they were taking the correct decisions in shaping the evolution of the Dutch science base, as well as to the researchers involved in developing the methodology. Support for the approaches within the academy was mixed (*cf.* chapter 8) but there was sufficient consensus that some kind of indicator-led approach was appropriate for that consensus to become embedded within the policy discourses and from 2007 onwards to be largely unchallenged if not necessarily unchallengeable.

### *9.1.3 New kinds of institutional solutions – digital humanities and LMIs.*

The third change in the landscape for arts & humanities research valorisation in the period around the Gerritsen Commission (2002) was a number of interesting institutional experiments. Although at least one interviewee argued that this was because institutional experiments – through their peripherality – were preferable to the universities to a more fundamental upheaval, there were various attempts in the Netherlands to create new kinds of activities with a greater focus on valorisation of arts & humanities research both within and without the universities. These reflect a desire for co-ordination in policy actors, and of the sector to avail itself of new resources comparable with those flowing in elsewhere at the time, related to the opportunities of valorisation.

The Leading Social Research Institutes were created in 2005 by the Ministry of Education as directly funded research institutions. The model was taken from four Leading Technology Institutions created by the same Ministry in 1999, which brought together leading university and corporate research interests around common research agendas. The four

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<sup>30</sup> <http://jbspaa.home.xs4all.nl/> (Accessed 6th March 2012)

were active in technical fields, including materials, energy and telematics, and were very positively reviewed by the OECD in a public report in 2003. The Minister therefore chose to create three new institutions with limited life funding, in the fields of aging and pensions, urban innovation and international law (Benneworth and Jongbloed, 2009). The research institute for International Law was based in the Hague (HiiL), in part because of the location of the presence of the International Courts of Justice in the Hague. The creation of HiiL reflected a reality that Dutch law schools had actively engaged with the ICJ in developing education and research around the topics of International Law.

HiiL was created as a network between jurists and academics, seeking to co-ordinate activity and to intermediate between potential clients and the field, whether that be research councils or private users. Part of the remit of HiiL – as for all the various Leading Technical and Social Research Institutes – included promoting valorisation, and HiiL attempted both to create its own service base as well as to use its networks to mobilise solutions for potential clients. Although according to the Dutch system Law is not regarded as a humanities field, the creation of HiiL did demonstrate a willingness of actors in the field – both policy and academic – to embrace new institutional forms and ideas of valorisation as part of the pursuit and validation of additional resources in the context of longer term financial pressures.

A second area where there was in this period the emergence of institutional solutions was in the rise of digital humanities in the Netherlands. Digital humanities was emerging organically as the rise of ubiquitous computing power created a huge new class of research questions that could be asked by making a huge range of new techniques feasible, as well as enabling new kinds of data gathering, analysis, combination, synthesis, archiving, retrieval and processing. But at the same time, the experience of early leaders in the field, notably the United Kingdom, was that because humanities researchers did not have a strong research project culture, attempts to invest in and stimulate digital humanities were having perverse effects. Researchers on the digital side of the collaboration (ICT researchers) were much more used to the routines of research management and administration and therefore colonised both the programmes but also the way that the field became constructed and defined, and indeed the space that was free for humanities research. There was a feeling in some quarters that digital humanities was about a shift in research paradigms from the intensive to the extensive, the ideographic to the comparative, and the unique to the general, values that were sometimes regarded as anathema to humanities values.

## 9.2 The field of policy actors

### *9.2.1 Who are the key government actors in research policy as it affects arts & humanities research?*

Arts & humanities research in the Netherlands falls under the remit of two departments, and within one of those Ministries, two separate departments. Traditionally, humanities research has been the exclusive concern of the Education Ministry (OCW), between two departments, Higher Education and Research & Science Policy respectively. In recent years, the rise of the innovation agenda previously noted has seen an increasing interest from the Ministry of Economic Affairs (EZ, since 2010 ELI) in research inasmuch as it affects innovation, for example through the TOP-sectoren policy. Finally, the finance Ministry has an interest in humanities research because of the focus of increasing efficiency and value for money in higher education/ research more generally, and around the *Kleine Letteren*, but also with issues like drop-out rates and graduate quality.

The traditional governmental sponsor of Dutch humanities research has always been and remains the higher education division of the Ministry of Education. The fact that humanities raised questions through the TVC and SKG budget cuts in the 1980s, and the emergence of the issue of the *Kleine Letteren* at the end of this period, have meant that the higher education division have a strong sense of awareness of humanities. Part of this is

that interviewees even today were aware of the fact that because they are the primary supporter of humanities, and there are some very vulnerable research groups, they have a general duty of care to support good research where it exists. At the same time, the interviewees also generally spoke of the long-term problems in administering the humanities, and in particular the difficulties in managing humanities as a special case at a time when the Ministry was under cost pressures.

The other department in OCW with a responsibility for humanities research is the division Research and Science Policy. This division is newer and concerned with managing the research and science system of the Netherlands. This department is also a strong supporter of science and technology studies and science systems assessments, and is involved with the science studies community located around Rathenau, CWTS at Leiden, Maastricht, and the University of Twente. This department is primarily involved with research capacity rather than educational capacity aspects, but interviewees reported that there had been an increasing interest in RSP in supporting and encouraging innovation activities, the universities' third mission. One example of this cited was the recent Entrepreneurship in Higher Education programme, which encouraged universities to attempt to valorize their research more systematically.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs (after 2010 the Ministry for Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation) has become increasingly interested in research policy through its interest in knowledge exchange and valorisation. ELI and OCW were working together in some areas to develop joint activities which seek to influence the innovation landscape, such as the recently launched National Valorisation Commission<sup>31</sup>. The issue for the involvement of ELI is that their interest and experience lies in having sponsored technical valorisation projects in the 1990s and 2000s, in high-technology areas. They have become increasingly concerned with the business-exploitation rather than the university-creation elements of the innovation process. This has made it relatively hard for them to have a meaningful policy response to these other elements. One interviewee reported that ELI were on record as saying that additional concentration in innovation resources was not harmful for those outside the TOP-sectoren because OCW could assume responsibility for their survival.

A key driver underpinning many of the changes to Dutch higher education has been since the 1960s the need to reduce costs and increase efficiency, and the Ministry of Finance has played an important role in these discussions. One can therefore observe in the constant pressure on education and research in the Netherlands to be more efficient pressure from the Ministry of Finance to ensure its goals of efficiency and directedness of resources are effectively met, given that some €5.8bn was spent in 2010 on higher education (including universities of applied science) in the Netherlands. The Ministry of Finance have very broad goals for the investment of public money, which in turn have tightly framed the space within which the two functional ministries have been able to negotiate and achieve their goals, although the approach of the Ministry does of course also vary with the political colour of the government of the day (Inspectie der Rijksfinancien, 2010).

### 9.2.2 *What are their key interests in an abstract, political and practical level?*

*“The humanities write history, but the technical sciences make history”, Ronald Plasterk (then-)Minister for Education, 2010<sup>32</sup>.*

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<sup>31</sup> <http://maxius.nl/instellingsbesluit-landelijke-commissie-valorisatie>

<sup>32</sup> ‘Alfa’s schrijven de geschiedenis, maar bèta’s máken de geschiedenis,’ liet minister Plasterk zich eens ontvallen. Deze uitspraak illustreert hoe onzichtbaar doorbraken in de alfawetenschappen zijn.  
[http://uitgeverijprometheus.nl/index.php?option=com\\_pac&view=boek\\_detail&isbn=9789035134850](http://uitgeverijprometheus.nl/index.php?option=com_pac&view=boek_detail&isbn=9789035134850)



The above quotation makes the point that in the Netherlands, there is a sense within government that has persisted from the last thirty years or so to the present day that somehow the humanities are an addendum in knowledge terms to the technical sciences, although humanities scholars notably Bod, 2002 have taken issue with this technocentric view of progress. As one interviewee put it, there is a basic need and a right to exist for humanities, especially for the large subjects, but there needs to be a rationale for their existence beyond their intrinsic value, and making the discussion of which subjects, how many students and how much funding a fair question for government to ask. At the same time, the principle is very strongly entrenched, and many interviewees chose to really emphasise the point, that government does not seek to allocate funds to particular research groups: its *modus operandi* is in rewarding areas that can demonstrate that they are organising themselves as disciplines or universities to improve and sustain their quality.

A key issue about these positions is that they are relatively deeply entrenched and that the problems seem to operate on a cycle. One interviewee within the Hague's policy network said that there were a list of problems that were never solved but periodically resurfaced on Ministerial agendas. One of those problems is the issue of differentiation within the Netherlands, in which there is no ranking of universities: there is a political will for a hierarchy of universities within the 14 scientific universities, and this has clear ramifications for humanities because different kinds of hierarchy will imbue humanities with different kinds of either strong or weak positions. The intractability of these problems – and politicians' realisation of their intractability – created what some interviewees suggested was a further problem for the policy field. Politicians had to do things that were visibly interventionist and for which they could claim a victory, rather than making one small change that over time and together with past changes added to solve the problem.

Beyond the general interests of government in humanities funding, the interests of OCW can be understood in three ways. At their most abstract, OCW have three targets for research, value-for-money, a streamlined international quality research base and research which contributes to the Dutch national economy, the last arguably becoming more important in the last 15 years. One interviewee argued that although value-for-money was important, it was the research quality which was most important, because this provided the numerator in the efficiency equation, and was a precondition of good value: another interviewee argued that high quality (the SEP (*qv*) system allowed the Ministry to justify leaving taking substantive research decisions to the field itself. OCW framed their policy approach as creating conditions for effective research systems which functioned efficiently and with a high quality, which had as an effect assuming a model of research in which big teams were co-operating on large capital infrastructure, something which is not necessarily applicable to humanities.

The political drivers which OCW currently face at the moment are not entirely related to research base, and yet will clearly affect humanities research through the performance contracts being negotiated with each university. The performance contracts agenda is being driven politically by a dual feeling that universities of applied science are not of sufficient quality and a desire to increase efficiency by reducing study durations. Although the performance contracts which are currently being negotiated include 2% of the 7% to be allocated on the basis of valorisation and other goals besides teaching and research, those other areas remain relatively weakly elucidated. The performance contracts may ultimately unintentionally benefit or penalise humanities through their differential effects on different disciplines.

One interviewee noted a clear desire within profiling to separate out teaching and research activities within university, and to profile differently in each area, something which clearly has ramifications for the humanities given their dependence on teaching positions as the basis for research strengths. This is a problem for the humanities because the balance between the dependence on teaching and research income to support research groups is very different to other disciplinary areas (where there are more and easier opportunities to earn

research funding). Changes to teaching funding therefore disproportionately impact on the humanities, whereas other disciplines have the opportunity to smooth that impact out with research funding. Another interviewee suggested that there is a view in OCW that some of the resistance to profiling is coming from weaker research and teaching groups, and there is would be a value in humanities as a whole coming together to try to shape at least as far as humanities is concerned what can positively be achieved by profiling for humanities.

The OCW has long held the view that the key to research success is in co-ordination of the Dutch research base at the level of the discipline, based on co-operation and efficiency, and the Cohen Commission and its implementing arm the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen* are the latest attempt by the department to encourage greater co-operation. There is still the feeling that the *Kleine Letteren* require better streamlining to improve their efficiency. At the same time, OCW are mindful of the fact that they are the only government department with a material interest in the humanities. Interviewees reported a desire to use the autonomous (e.g. VSNU, QANU, KNAW members) and maintained bodies (KNAW institutes, NWO) to ensure conservation of a diverse research base.

The contemporary interests of the Ministry of Finance under both the latest and previous government were strongly shaped by the global economic crisis, which has dramatically reduced the flexibility in government budgets, particularly around the margins. The Ministry of Finance has an interest in attempting to reduce spending and maintain the financial stability of the Netherlands, and this has involved shaving core expenditure and slashing project- and incidental expenditure. This had profound ramifications for the humanities, because two agreements reached between universities and the government immediately before the crisis, additional funding for social sciences and humanities (the Canada agreement), and special funding for threatened humanities (which led to Cohen) would not be fully honoured because of the financial crisis. At the same time, pressure from the Ministry for efficiency was identified by some interviewees as one of the reasons for opening a discussion about the balance between basic and applied research, again potentially very threatening to the limited resources available for humanities research.

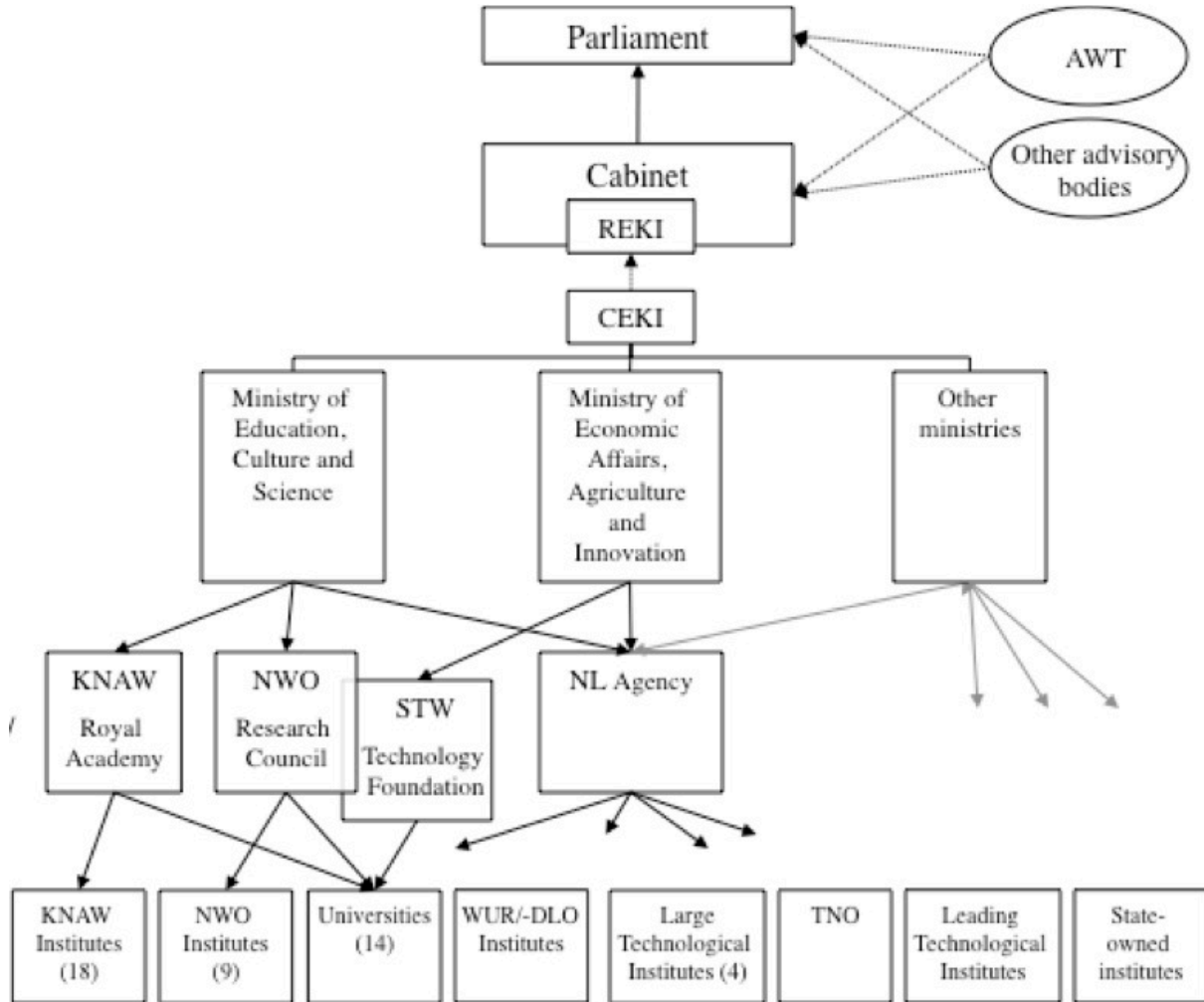
The final Ministry with an interest in humanities research is Economic Affairs, now part of ELI. The Innovation and Knowledge Directorate (part of the Business and Innovation Directorate General) were argued by some interviewees to have a more instrumental and short-term perspective on innovation than OCW. That led to a split between departmental perspectives, with ELI being more interested in applied research connected to business and growth, rather than long-term basic research creating future opportunities for radical innovation. The influence of ELI was seen by some to be evident in the way that the performance contracts which were being negotiated with individual universities included the possibility for innovation outcome indicators being included. However, ELI were at least aware of the dangers of excessive short-termism, and had asked KNAW to undertake an Inquiry into where the focus of innovation funding on the TOP-sectoren was risking leading the development of 'blank spots' ('Witte vlekken') in the Dutch research landscape.

### *9.2.3 Who are the non-governmental actors that are involved in shaping arts & humanities research policy, and what are their interests*

A key issue highlighted in 5.4 was the fact that the policy network around science policy in the Netherlands was incredibly complex and complicated with the presence of a large number of bodies with a mix of statutory responsibilities, rights for consultation, 'expert witnesses' and voluntary lobbying interests. These interests and actors meet in a range of areas, often with different terms of reference, from having a Parliamentary Mandate, and with actors having different opportunities to represent their interests. Single bodies may have multiple interests in a process, in particular those with statutory responsibilities have to moderate their potential criticism of government in order to sustain those responsibilities. The following diagram provides a sense of the complexity of this field of scientific policy-

making, divided by the kinds of roles that the different parties outwith the government play in this rather complex process.

Figure 8 The complexity of the science policy network in the Netherlands.



Source:

[http://erawatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/erawatch/opencms/information/country\\_pages/nl/country?section=Overview&subsection=StrResearchSystem](http://erawatch.jrc.ec.europa.eu/erawatch/opencms/information/country_pages/nl/country?section=Overview&subsection=StrResearchSystem)

### 9.2.3.1 Statutory responsibilities.

The responsibility for research evaluation exercise (SEP) was passed to QANU (Quality Association of Dutch Universities): their interest is primarily in administering the process fairly and effectively on the basis of the protocol agreed for a six year period between the Tripartite organisations. VSNU's statutory responsibility is limited to agreeing the Collective Labour Agreement with universities. There is the Advisory Council for Science and Technology Policy (AWT, cf. 6.2) whose 12 independent members decide on subjects into which their officers organise an inquiry – in 2007, AWT produced a report on valorisation on social sciences and the humanities, which ultimately fell between governments and produced little lasting response from government. WRR

The NWO as Dutch Science council are concerned with demonstrating accountability to government and in particular the efficiency and quality of the research they fund. The current director of NWO went on record criticising the idea of a wider view of valorisation in

a newspaper debate in 2009<sup>33</sup>, but NWO are actively involved in delivering the TOP-sectoren concept of diverting research funding towards economically valuable sectors. NWO is organised on the basis of Directorates, and there is a Directorate for Humanities (GW) who are concerned in both maximising the resources available to be invested in humanities research, and then demonstrating to NWO and government that that research has been spent as usefully as possible. GW have organised a number of humanities research projects, and at the time of the research were reportedly considering evaluating the scientific and social impact of their Religion programme, to explore whether post hoc evaluations would produce useful information and data.

### 9.2.3.2 Statutory consultees

The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (HBO-Raad) also has an interest in research policy because UASs have been developing their research profiles in recent years, and have a strong interest in ensuring that any research evaluation framework (the SEP, *qv*) is adequate for acknowledging and recognising the applied research and development work undertaken by *Hogescholen*. There is a tri-partite consultative mechanism involving OCW, NWO, KNAW and VSNU who discuss research evaluation and sign up collectively to the SEP, although with the conclusion of the agreement until 2015, there is currently a lull in the work of this group. The Netherlands Academy for Arts and Sciences (KNAW) has a consultative role where government bodies may ask it to provide a considered opinion on areas of interest, and the Council for the Humanities (*Raad voor Geesteswetenschappen*) discharges this responsibility in the field of humanities. KNAW has a primary interest lies in representing the views of its members to government, but also there is a secondary interest in sustaining its position as a trusted consultee for government.

### 9.2.3.3 'Expert witnesses'

The Dutch government (via OCW) specifically funds one institute of the KNAW, the Rathenau Institute (*qv*)<sup>34</sup>, to inform and promote public and political opinion and debate regarding the influence of technology in society, and is responsible as part of that for mapping the science system landscape; from 2007-2010 the Rathenau Institute provided the secretariat for the Evaluating Research in Context programme. There are a range of government bodies which undertaken research which potentially influences government attitudes to humanities research, most notably being the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), which undertakes research on public involvement in arts and culture, as well as public attitudes to what are society's most pressing problems, which shape politicians' interest and agendas. Another research centre active in the field is the University of Leiden's CWTS, (*cf.* 9.1.2), although they are university research centre and therefore focused on the scientific questions raised by research evaluations and scientometrics rather than on providing policy answers (although they do produce the renowned Leiden research rankings<sup>35</sup>).

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<sup>33</sup> Koelewijn, J. & van der Heijden, M., Een lesje lobbyen voor wetenschappers; Wetenschap Voormannen van bouw en onderzoek spreken over hoe ze hun nut aan de samenleving uitleggen, NRC Handelsblad July 15, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Besluit van de Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap van 3 juli 2009, nr. OWB/FO/130825, houdende de herziening van het Besluit van de Staatssecretaris van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen van 19 april 1994, nr. OWB/FO-93070908, aangaande de instelling van het Rathenau Instituut (Instellingsbesluit Rathenau Instituut) [http://www.rathenau.nl/uploads/tx\\_tferathenau/Instellingsbeschikking-tekst\\_staatscourant-stcrt-2009-11024.pdf](http://www.rathenau.nl/uploads/tx_tferathenau/Instellingsbeschikking-tekst_staatscourant-stcrt-2009-11024.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.leidenranking.com/default.aspx>

#### **9.2.3.4 Public representation.**

In December 2011, the National Valorisation Commission (Landelijke Commissie Valorisatie) was formed under the aegis of OCW to promote the Valorisation Agenda, an agreement which came out of the Innovation Platform (*cf.* 9.1) to help improve the application of knowledge to the Dutch economy. This group includes representatives of KNAW, STW, NWO, ELI, OCW, Wageningen University, VSNU, the LTIs and LSRI's, TNO, the HBO-Raad, and the two leading business representative organisations, SME Netherlands, and VNO-NCW. Although this does not specifically influence humanities research, because of the link through the ELI and OCW, the group could – as the Innovation Platform have – have a system steering effect that differentially impacts upon humanities.

VSNU maintain regular contacts with government and have a public affairs committee as well as an agreed list of pressing collective interests for universities as a whole, and respond reactively to political issues such as new regulatory or funding proposals. They have an ongoing interest in the development of the SEP and also the plans for the NWO and how changes to funding arrangements will affect the universities in practice.

One organisation that is involved in humanities research policy and certainly shapes it at some level is the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen (qv)*, which was a body created to co-ordinate the funding coming out of the Cohen report; the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen* functions by soliciting plans from universities on how they will streamline and co-ordinate their humanities activities, and presenting them as a coherent whole to the OCW Ministry. Whilst the Cohen Commission involved a range of actors, the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen* is organised within the sector; it acts as a co-ordinating body between Deans of Humanities and *Colleges van Bestuur* of the universities, and the Ministry. Its interest is in the plans being positively regarded by the Ministry, and ensuring that the one-off three year grant becomes a recurrent stream of funding for humanities in the universities, replacing the lost Staal funding.

### **9.3 The historical process of interest negotiation**

#### *9.3.1 What were the defining events in the process of policy intervention?*

The start of the period can be regarded as a time when politicians and ministries had attempted to steer science in general towards a series of goals, and there had been a general resistance by universities towards that steering. The period can be regarded as a set of efforts to intensify that steering by Ministries of 'their' universities, not least in part to ensure the sustainability of Dutch academic research. There were several key elements of that steering process – which were applied at the level of systemic interventions then interpreted by universities, faculties and research groups. The main ones included an increasing programming of research activities (steered by funding research), increased co-ordination (sector plans) and co-operation (including an emphasis on multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary research), a concentration on research excellence and an emphasis on generating social impact ('valorisation').

Because of the shift from 2008 with the financial crisis towards serious budget cuts and economising, the influential activities tended to be those that affected marginal or non-recurrent activities. In 2009, OCW announced that €100m was being shifted within the research budget from core university funds to the research council, to more directly reward excellent research. One big criticism of this was that it reduced funds the universities had to match European research and ERDF funding and therefore reduced the net resource ceiling for universities whilst notionally incentivising more excellent research. But the more general point was that NWO became a more influential actor, and those criteria for marginal funding became increasingly important to universities seeking to secure their financial viability. This was seen in 2010 with a shift of a further 7% element of the education budget

to the Performance Contract approach, in which university core funds were made contingent upon hitting performance measures centrally agreed with the centre.

The case of programming in humanities research can be seen very clearly via the research council in the research plans of GW, through the increasing definition of research lines of activity, and also the introduction of formal programmes. Both of those sought to steer individual researchers towards particular themes identified by GW which were scientifically interesting, but also helped GW to justify within NWO, and NWO to the Ministry, that research funding was being spent in ways that supported policy goals. At the time of the research project, the strategic plan 2007-10 for NWO as a whole had 5 of 16 strategic themes which had a humanities focus. Likewise the plan for 2011-14 plan the affirmed commitment of KNAW, VSNU and NWO to increased scale of activity, a performance based culture and rewarding curiosity, as well as having a clearly humanities-centred strategic research theme for NWO, *viz.* "Society under Stress"<sup>36</sup>.

In terms of co-ordination, and the failure of the Vonhoff and Gerritsen Commissions to produce an effective Sector Plan for the Humanities, the creation of the Cohen Commission was clearly invested with a great deal of importance as a means of creating co-ordination. It was suggested by at least one interviewee that the Minister's intention with Cohen had been to create a solution for the *Kleine Letteren*, and the proposals were made for humanities as a whole. The Inquiry reported in 2008 and made a set of recommendations for the key actors in the humanities research policy network, the OCW, NWO, KNAW (*Raad voor Geesteswetenschappen*), and then universities at three levels, the *Colleges van Bestuur*, the Deans of Humanities and the humanities researchers themselves. The installation of the *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen (qv)* was in effect an attempt to produce a cut-price sector plan for the humanities and provide the desired co-ordination across the field as a whole

A final key policy evolution in this period were a number of developments around performance measures for humanities research. The Standard Evaluation Protocol in sway at the start of this period (2003-09) included relevance to scientific and social users as one of its four criteria, and in the 2009-15 SEP this had become relevance to social users, scientific relevance being subsumed under quality<sup>37</sup>. IN 2007, the Evaluating Research In Context (ERIC) programme launched to attempt to identify more effective research evaluation measures, and it developed a comprehensive protocol for measuring the impacts of research: although ERIC involved some of the SEP partners, the two activities were not formally linked. In 2009, arising from Cohen, the KNAW *Raad voor Geesteswetenschappen* was tasked to produce a set of recommendation on Measures for Sustainable Humanities, and this led to an Inquiry chaired by Professor Algra, and a publication of a report that was greeted enthusiastically by the academy in a meeting in Wassenaar in November 2011<sup>38</sup>.

### 9.3.2 *How did government perceive the arts & humanities research sector in the Netherlands?*

An important influence for government was pressure from politicians (MPs) who were able to exert pressure on government and demand an answer, which in turn triggered responses

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOA\\_6PXJ9W/\\$file/wetenschap\\_gewaarderd\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOA_6PXJ9W/$file/wetenschap_gewaarderd_lowres.pdf);  
[http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOP\\_86NHXX/\\$file/strategie%202011-2014%20low%20res.pdf](http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOP_86NHXX/$file/strategie%202011-2014%20low%20res.pdf)

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[http://home.tudelft.nl/fileadmin/UD/MenC/Support/Internet/TU\\_Website/TU\\_Delft\\_portal/Onderzoek/Kwaliteitszorg/Protocollen/doc/sep2003-2009.pdf](http://home.tudelft.nl/fileadmin/UD/MenC/Support/Internet/TU_Website/TU_Delft_portal/Onderzoek/Kwaliteitszorg/Protocollen/doc/sep2003-2009.pdf);  
[http://www.knaw.nl/content/Internet\\_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20091052.pdf](http://www.knaw.nl/content/Internet_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20091052.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Pers.comm.

from the machinery of government<sup>39</sup>. There was a consensus from a range of quarters that politicians were not active in pressurising government around university research: one interviewee estimated that more than half of the parliamentary parties had a basically benign attitude to research, with the two right-liberal parties wanting to ensure that the humanities added value to the Dutch economy, and that they did not work against a strong and traditional set of national identity, respectively.

Interviewees argued that there were few political experts in higher education, although all had attended university, and therefore had a very broad oversight of the sector. At the same time politicians were primarily concerned with three issues at the time of the research, rising health costs, multi-culturalism/ immigration and public safety, a point of view corroborated by an authoritative NISR report (SCP, 2011). There is an issue that views on social issues vary strongly by education level, as the table below taken from that research shows, with a statistically significant difference between adults with a low and high education level in whether education, innovation, arts and culture was a significant problem worthy of political attention.

*Table 5 The most important social problems according to the adult population 2008-11 (top 5 plus research), and by highest level of education, 2011.*

	All, 2008	All, 2011	Low	Middle	High
Society, norms and values	20	20	17*	19	24*
Crime and safety	11	12	14*	12	8*
Work and Economy	14	12	12	12	10
Politics and Government	13	11	9*	11	13*
Immigration and immigration	10	11	11	11	10
<i>Education, innovation, art, culture</i>	2	2	1*	4	6*

Source: SCP 2011.

In the absence of any pressing political imperative guiding government policy towards the humanities, humanities research as a policy question appeared to be left as a very technical concern with little wider traction or interest from outside the most directly connected actors in the policy network. It must of course be noted that as we have seen it is an incredibly wide network, the point being one of network closure to the outside and its resultant technocratic focus, rather than the numbers of participants. ELI's views of humanities appeared to be relatively minimal except insofar as they were able to participate in university technology transfer activities and create 'hard valorisation' outputs in schemes under the Valorisation agenda.

The government perception at the scale of the directorates in this period of humanities in the Netherlands has been in terms of university based research as a problem requiring sorting out, and in terms of its exploitation, the importance of the creative sector as a Top-sector. Despite earlier efforts and government interventions to rationalise humanities, even in 2007 there was a sense that humanities in the Netherlands was in problems because of its fragmentation and lack of co-ordination. One interviewee referred to the idea of a 'shadow effect' from the failure of Vonhoff and Gerritsen Commissions, in giving the sense that humanities was unreformable. Nevertheless, interviewees were clear in saying that OCW saw that the solution to the problem was of reform rather than more radical solutions. The Directorate General for Higher Education was able to get a clause in the 2007 Coalition Agreement for funds for a reform action, that became the *Regieorgaan*

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<sup>39</sup> Despite a number of efforts, it was not possible to speak to any past Ministers of education to get an insight into the political prioritisation process within Ministries, so interviews within Ministries in this section refer exclusively to interviews with administrators.

*Geesteswetenschappen*, suggesting that government (OCW-HO) regarded the humanities as a problem needing solving, but also a solvable problem.

Where there was an awareness of humanities in public discourse was around a series of 'crises' which emerged and which politicians and government felt forced to respond to. There was an issue around the limited involvement of universities in school curricula, and the absence of a school-level popularisation movement in the humanities. A response at the start of the 2000s had been to create a Canon of Dutch History as a publication to spread to schools using the latest historical research to bring the texture of academic research into the classroom. There were also concerns about the quality of graduates emerging from degree programmes as part of a wider worry about university quality with the introduction of the Bologna reforms in the Netherlands, and the shift from a five year *doctorandus* to a Bachelor/ Masters structure.

One issue that a number of interviewees pointed to was the absence of authoritative voices of humanities in public discussions at this time. A number of interviewees specifically cited the case of Staal's letter to Elsevier in 1987 (although often in rather vague terms) as in some way compelling the government to create a Commission of Inquiry. One interview referred to the emergence of the Cohen commission as being in contrast rather 'shadowy', out of sight of the public and out of a dialogue between a number of key stakeholders. Several interviewees also noted that the public role of academics had changed in policy discourse, with academics becoming one voice and claim amongst many self-proclaimed experts (see chapter 10). There were examples of the 'humanities problematic' featuring in the media, including a report in NRC that universities were closing 20 humanities courses in 2011, as well as short pieces in *Trouw* and *AD* in 2010 when the Department of Frisian Language and Culture at RUG attracted zero first-year students<sup>40</sup>.

A final issue was that it was possible to detect an undercurrent of irritation in the way that government regarded humanities, particularly around the development of indicators. There were a number of technical attempts around creating indicators for the humanities, such as the Algra Commission, but all of these explicitly stated at the outset that indicators were unavoidable, and it was a question of finding the right indicators. A number of interviewees suggested that this happened because humanities researchers had been so resistant, and so any reasonable arguments against indicators were only heard within OCW as resistance and obstructionism. Therefore, humanities researchers had to go along with ideas such as a single list of journals to measure research excellence and hope that those ideas would fail in the face of resistance in other disciplines with a higher degree of prestige, despite a recognition (and evidence) that there were disciplines for whom a single journal list made no sense.

### *9.3.3 What were the reasons that government chose to intervene in terms of the logics for intervention?*

"What chimneys are made to smoke by humanities research?" HERAVALUE interviewee, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

One of the curious situations around reforms to the humanities in the Netherlands is that there is a disconnect between the sense of problem and the situation on the 'ground'. The reality is that Dutch humanities are performing very highly when measured in a number of ways. In international league tables, for example, the Times Higher Education ranking for arts & humanities universities included three Dutch institutions in its top 50, UvA (30<sup>th</sup>), Leiden (35<sup>th</sup>) and Utrecht (45<sup>th</sup>). Likewise, the first round of the HERA European Programme under which this research is funded had a disproportionate number of Dutch researchers (although the UK was more over-represented than the Netherlands).

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<sup>40</sup> `De Trouw, 5 september 2010, Groningen krijgt niet één, maar nul eerstejaars Fries;



Policy-makers therefore find themselves of trying to make a change that wins credit without undermining the base, and that has in the case of humanities research led to a rather incoherent and reactive series of interventions. The clear split between core and margin funds in the systems means that policy-makers find themselves trying to make mid-level changes by affecting either high- or low-level interventions. This means that policy-makers have difficulties in trying to steer evolutionary change – as happened very effectively for example in materials science, where consistent investments from the Hydrocarbon Funds in micro-materials and nano-materials since the early 2000s encouraged many research groups to orient themselves towards the field.

The small size of the humanities field has meant that information is at a premium in ensuring that there are not disastrous outcomes from relatively small scale changes with unintended consequences. Thus, there have been a number of interventions where policy-makers have sought to change the humanities research system and its societal usefulness, but it is hard to discover a common theme; some have been in response to government pressure for usefulness, some have been driven by perceived crises, and all have been relatively small scale. OCW have clearly felt the pressure to demonstrate the excellence of their research base, and this has led to their interventions around the shape of the SEP. As social relevance and use became an issue, the evaluation system needed to evolve to be able to provide evidence for the Ministry of excellence in social relevance, in order that the Ministry could stake its claim for research resources.

This explains in part why there is such enthusiasm within government for indicators, what one interviewee described as the “Search for the Golden Egg”. There was enthusiasm for the Sci-Quest method, leading firstly to the ERIC book and then the ERIC project. However, one interviewee argued that there was a situation with policy-makers developing indicators for utilisation in the humanities had great *ex ante* enthusiasm but *ex post* indifference. This can be perhaps ascribed to a dissatisfaction with the eventual results of the various different efforts, and the fact that it was not possible to produce an agreement on the low-level constructs that would make measuring excellence possible, such as agreeing a single quality list of publications. The sudden importance from 2007 onwards of indicators for valorisation to be included in the latest SEP also led some to see ERIC as a potential means of developing the necessary consensus for the inclusion of such measures in a future revised protocol. Likewise, the Review Commission for Performance Contracts in 2012 noted:

“Projects such as Evaluating Research in Context (ERiC, NWO) are working to develop indicators, and the VKO Commission provides a means to pay attention to indicators for professional education”<sup>41</sup>.

The reason that the problem of fragmentation was a concern for OCW related to the introduction of the Bologna (bachelor/ master) arrangement in the Netherlands around 2006. Vonhoff and Gerritsen had already identified the fragmentation of the humanities research landscape as a big problem for streamlining doctoral training. There were concerns in the Ministry that with the introduction of new courses and structures, there would be a return to duplication and proliferation of very many very small courses with low student numbers which required cross-subsidy from within the humanities faculties. The desire to solve the problem of the humanities in this period was as much driven by a desire to ensure efficiency in the teaching landscape as in research, and yet, because it became influential in allocating marginal funding, had an influence on the key structures by which Dutch research was prosecuted.

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<sup>41</sup> Via projecten als Evaluating Research in Context (ERiC, NWO6) is aan de ontwikkeling van indicatoren gewerkt en ook in het kader van de Validatiecommissie Kwaliteitszorg Onderzoek (VKO) krijgen specifieke indicatoren voor prestaties en impact van praktijkgericht onderzoek aandacht.

The issue of the Frisian department at the University of Groningen was evoked by one interviewee as emblematic of the issues facing the wider public debate. The problem emerged because study financing was removed for second degrees, and most students entering Frisian Studies already had a first degree. But the situation came to a head in 2010 when no students were recruited to the course. The interviewee made the point that there was a serious debate in public about the potential to move that activity to Germany, and the potential negative consequences of such a move. The small scale of humanities research means that direct interventions can very quickly lead to the loss of unique knowledge, rather than for fields where larger groups exist, to a more nuanced evolutionary specialisation process

The simple explanation for why did the Cohen Commission emerge is that it was seen as desirable by the tripartite group, NWO, KNAW and VSNU, and the unity in that group allowed OCW to have attempt to achieve its own goal of better managing humanities. However, that is not to say that is the reason that each of those three partners was keen for a Commission on the Humanities. A stylised reading of the three parties interest would be that NWO was interested in ensuring that the humanities benefited from a bonus income by agreeing a sector plan, whilst VSNU was keen to ensure that funding for research in the humanities became more sustainable. KNAW had a dual interest in Cohen, on the one hand in process terms, in legitimating itself as a social partner by answering a government problem, but also in serving the interests of the Academicians, and particularly on the Humanities side, where there was reportedly a sense of pessimism concerning the long-term evolution of humanities in the universities.

#### 9.3.4 *What were the mechanisms that defined the process, what were they trying to achieve?*

We highlight that there were four main mechanisms which in which there was a public debate – or at least a debate within a policy network – over the value of humanities research in this period. Although these mechanisms emerged with particular desires and intentions from those that launched them, the way that they played out within the complex and multi-centric Dutch research policy network meant that what they actually achieved was not always the same as that *ex ante* intention.

The *ex ante* desire with ERIC in this period was to create a set of pilots that demonstrated the usefulness and potentiality of a multi-dimensional approach to evaluating research impacts, that would help government and universities to better demonstrate and understand the value of the research they were funding. The key issue with ERIC was that there was a fairly significant disconnect between the promise of the idea at the start, for a relatively routine and uncontentious system for measuring the outputs and what actually emerged. Several interviewees reported statements that pointed to ERIC being ‘sociologically messy’, that is to say that all kinds of compromises and particularities were necessary to deliver the particular pilots, that in turn undermined its claims to be a general mechanism (if not approach) to measuring research value. One interviewee reported that the longer the project went on, the less interested were policy-makers in its potential outcomes. By the end of the process in this period, four pilots were successfully produced, as well as the so-called Guidebook (*handreiking*<sup>42</sup>), which was reportedly considered for taking forward by NWO as a means of *ex post* evaluation of its research investments.

The desire at the start of Cohen was clear, at least insofar as there was a desire for the creation of a sector plan for the humanities in which the fragmentation problems were solved in return for additional funding. Where Cohen encountered a problematic was in the gulf between the relatively ‘small’ problem of the *Kleine Letteren*, and the much larger supposed problem of fragmented humanities in the Netherlands. This in turn reflected an incoherence in the idea of humanities as something with a collective interest requiring collective solutions; there was clearly a collective interest in the *Kleine Letteren* in ensuring

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.knaw.nl/Content/Internet\\_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20101024.pdf](http://www.knaw.nl/Content/Internet_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20101024.pdf)

that they collectively survived in some form in the face of dwindling student numbers, whilst this was not more generally true. Cohen made a clear choice, perhaps reflecting a sense that humanities in the Netherlands as a whole felt itself to be under threat, and chose to try to create a sector plan for the humanities as a whole. However, sensibly dealing with that fragmentation led to a demand for resources that were never realistically going to be available.

The *Regieorgaan Geesteswetenschappen* therefore found itself in the invidious position of trying to stimulate steering across the humanities with an extremely limited budget, a task to which it clearly applied itself wholeheartedly. The problem was then that the results produced were – at least at the level of content – small and project-led, particularly in terms of the valorisation of humanities research, in working more with schools to bring ‘humanities’ into the compulsory school curriculum more effectively. The results have been internally valuable, but what they were not able to do by the time of writing was to create a more concrete sense of what the value of humanities research that was so palpably felt by The issue of valorisation was effectively postponed in Cohen by recommending the establishment of a working group to develop indicators for quality in humanities, and to use this to reflect the distinctive nature of quality in the humanities in terms of both scientific excellence and societal relevance.

The issue of the SEP began as an administrative attempt by Tripartite partners to ensure that in the forthcoming period (2009-15<sup>43</sup>) that the evaluation protocol measured what ‘users’ found to be important, and in particular, captured the then-government’s interest in valorisation. In this SEP, one of the four evaluation criteria is societal relevance, listed in the protocol as “Societal quality; Societal impact; Valorisation” (KNAW, 2009, p.11). The SEP concedes that different disciplines will require different kinds of measure in order to be effective as a measure of value, and explicitly names humanities as one of those disciplines. Although the protocol is deliberately ambiguous concerning potential definitions, indicators and measures of value the SEP refers through to ERIC (including the Guidebook) and to the Algra report (*qv*). Reading the Handbook, it is perhaps surprising that there is little more offered than a framework for defining the process of what is important; the concrete example offered is from architecture, and includes such variables as third-stream income and number of spin-off companies (ERIC, 2010). Likewise, although at the time of writing the report Quality Indicators in the Humanities had been published in draft form, the final report had yet to be finalised.

The issue here for understanding the progress of the SEP was that it effectively deferred making difficult choices about what constituted quality in disciplines to the disciplines chosen for evaluation. This meant that the SEP was not able to have an unambiguous and simple measure of quality and impact in Dutch research. Although the Tripartite partners interviewed expressed a degree of happiness with its relevance and also its stability, in interviewing policy representatives one was struck by their need for relatively simple measures because of the lack of resources within the Ministries to sift and synthesise evaluations and convert them into messages which satisfied their own stakeholders. There was also some concern amongst academics that there was also an ‘ordering’ effect in this process, that some disciplines, predominantly on the hard side, were regarded as being more useful than others. Certainly, when the TOP-sectoren policy was introduced, information from the SEPs was not used to determine which research fields were the most ‘useful’ but instead measures of the size and importance of industry sectors were used.

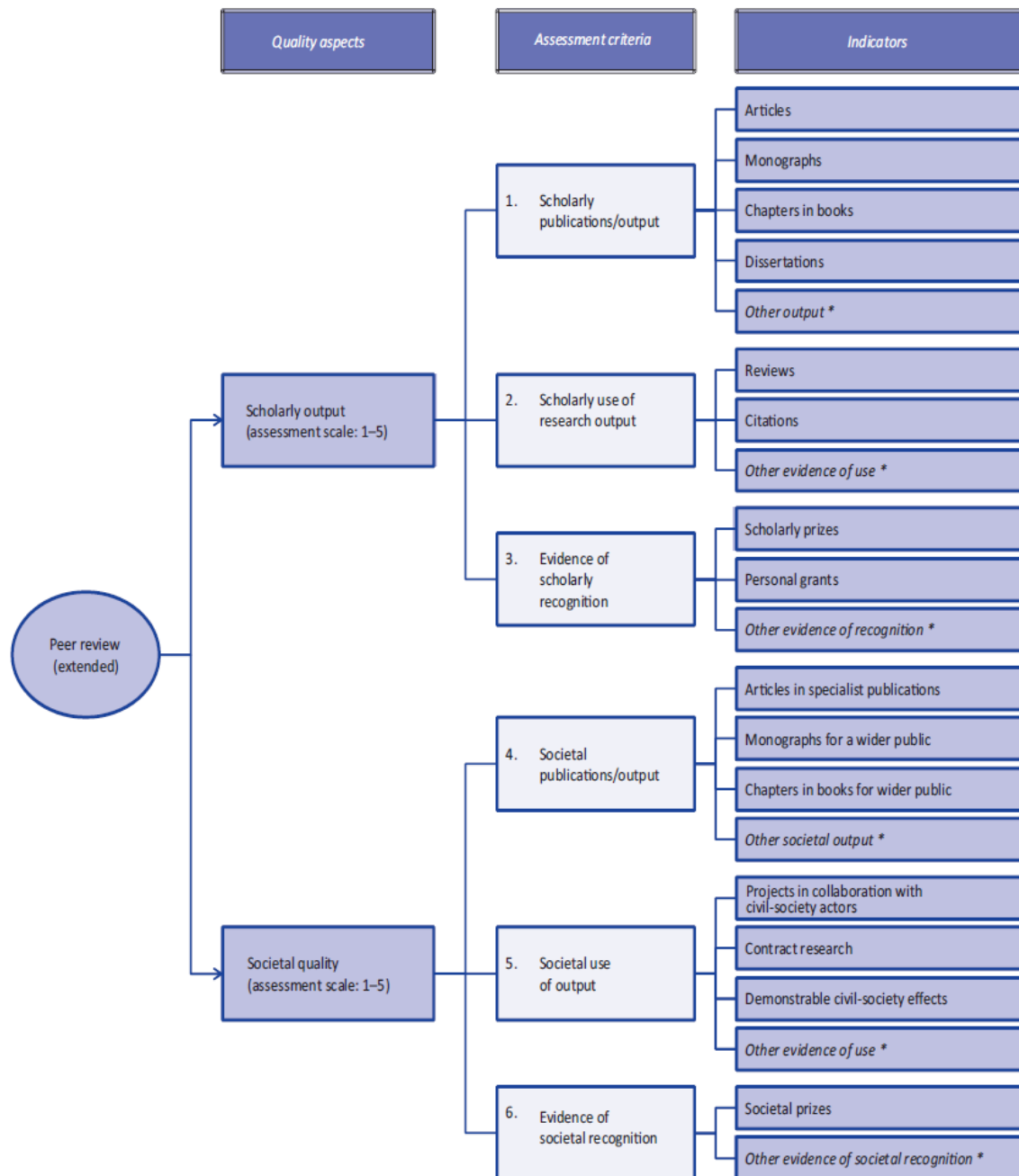
The final area where there was some debate about value and its inclusion in the system came through the process around the Quality Indicators for the Humanities, the Algra Commission. This Commission was set up as a result of the Cohen recommendation, and produced on the basis of a further set of pilots a report and framework for quality measures for the humanities. This report appreciated the need for consistency in the approach, both

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<sup>43</sup> [http://www.know.nl/Content/Internet\\_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20091052.pdf](http://www.know.nl/Content/Internet_KNAW/publicaties/pdf/20091052.pdf)

internally (between scientific and social quality measures) and also externally (with respect to humanities and other disciplines). The report therefore began with the logic that ultimately what indicated research quality was the opinions of the research users, and therefore any valorisation quality measures needed to be equivalent to those for research quality, with peer review central to determining that quality. The scheme proposed in the Algra report is reproduced below.

Figure 9 A sketch of a system of quality indicators for Dutch humanities



Source: KNAW (2011).

However, having been able to square the circle of generalisation and particularity, the report had much greater difficulty in articulating a set of useful indicators. The Commission had used a series of pilots to try and identify what scholars might be willing to accept in humanities, and immediately this produced a logical clash within the report. On the one hand, there were a series of principles and interests that humanities scholars had concerning humanities, in what it was reasonable for humanities scholars to do and the impacts of

particular choices on the relative positioning of humanities vis-à-vis other disciplines. On the other hand were a set of more pragmatic concerns which applied should some schema have to be applied, relating to the legitimacy of a scheme in the eyes of the field, the choice of measures and the practicalities of implementing it. The indicators from this report relevant to valorisation in the humanities are reproduced in the table below.

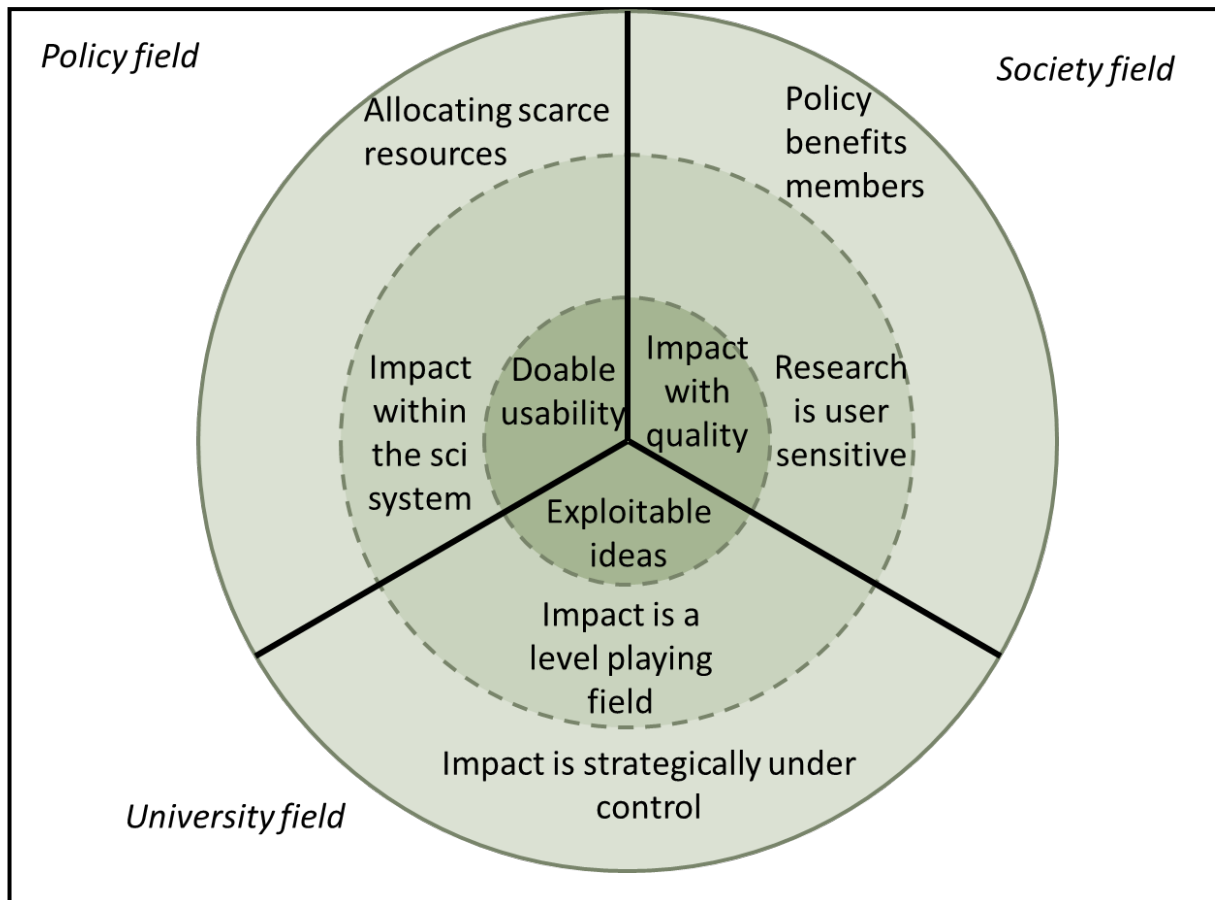
*Table 6 Potential indicators for valorisation in KNAW (2011)*

<b>4. Civil-society publications</b>	Articles in specialist publications (not being primarily scientific/scholarly journals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List</li> <li>• Selection of key publications</li> </ul>
	Monographs for non-scientists/scholars and interested individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List</li> <li>• Selection of key publications</li> </ul>
	Chapters in books for non-scientists/scholars and interested individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List</li> <li>• Selection of key publications</li> </ul>
	<i>Other civil-society output, for example collections for non-scientists/scholars and interested individuals, editorships of specialist publications, handbooks, dictionaries, editions of texts, databases, software, exhibitions, catalogues, translations, advisory reports on policy</i>	Quantitative and/or qualitative information to be requested as determined according to the context
<b>5. Civil-society use of research output</b>	Projects carried out in collaboration with civil-society actors	Simple statement with dates (years)
	Contract research	Simple statement with dates (years)
	Demonstrable civil-society effects of research	Simple statement with dates (years)
	<i>Other types of civil-society use, for example reviews, citations in policy reports, use of publications, media attention, books sold/loaned</i>	Quantitative and/or qualitative information to be requested as determined according to the context
<b>6. Evidence of civil society recognition</b>	Civil-society prizes	Simple statement with dates (years)
	<i>Other evidence of civil-society recognition, for example civil-society appointments, invitations to give lectures, invitations for media appearances, advisory positions/membership of advisory committees</i>	Quantitative and/or qualitative information to be requested as determined according to the context

One key issue that appears to have emerged is the ‘slipperiness’ of the system as a whole, which can be regarded as being a consequence of the complexity and breadth of the system, but also the very different kinds of demands and interests of the policy networks. There have been a series of attempts to bring cohesion and consistency in this system, but the various elements have been relatively small fragments, and at the same time have opened up more questions than they have been able to resolve. Thus, taken in their own terms, Cohen could be regarded as offering a reasonable sector plan, Algra a sensible schematic for humanities quality indicators, ERIC a detailed methodology and rationale for using valorisation quality indicators in practice and the SEP for co-ordinating a review of research quality in the Netherlands. But the ‘travel process’ of these various instruments and activities between the various communities and sub-groups within the policy network have undermined their stability and the sense of consensus that could potentially build up by exposing them to the interests and demands of new kinds of users of those instruments. This

is illustrated in the diagram below, which shows the complexity of the different logics in different parts of the system.

Figure 10 The conflicting logics of the public value system for humanities research



Thus although evaluation committees may choose to use the ERIC or Algra indicators in the course of their own SEP, that is a choice that they have to make. But interviewees suggested that that choice by the SEP panels did not flow the same rationality as that of ERIC or Algra, which was to create an implementable and internally consistent measurement framework. Interviewees reported that the SEP panels had a great deal of internal autonomy to choose how to implement evaluation. Cases were named of where choices had been made, for example to evaluate a single institutional unit or a group of units across institutions, to produce the best set of scores in those evaluations. There are two logical splits here: ERIC and Algra are both neutral in that they both want to give all institutions the chance to make the best case for themselves, as well as wanting to give a possibility for comparison between units. The SEP review panels arguably have a logic that emphasises presenting themselves the best, whilst recipients of the SEP reports want to be able to make a comparison between institutions and disciplines.

Thus, there is no clear dissonance at play here, rather there is a 'double dissonance' in that these technologies and technologies are regarded in very different – and almost incompatible ways – between stakeholders. And yet at the same time, each stakeholder has a logical affiliation with the particular technique that masks that dissonance. The techniques therefore become a battleground for these conflicting logics, and as we have seen thus far, in the context of a highly complex policy network, conflict is moved around the system, deferred, finessed and postponed rather than directly addressed. The reason for this was argued of a need for the system to work effectively on some level and not grind to a halt because of particular conflicts. Although there has been a great deal of activity, is it

arguable that there was at the end of the period no greater consensus on the measurement of humanities research societal impacts than there was at the start of the period.

## 9.4 Towards a stylised model of the Process

### 9.4.1 *What are the determining interests in debates concerning arts & humanities research value?*

In order to make sense of the very complex science policy system in the Netherlands, it is possible to make a set of distinctions that allow a more stylised model to emerge of how these debates function. What follows in this section is an attempt to describe and stylise the process on the basis of the various mechanisms outlined in the previous section. One key variable alluded to by multiple interviewees was the sense of remove around actors: some are very powerful in shaping the field such as the Ministry of Finance and Parliament, but at the same time have a high degree of remove from the detail of the particular debates that are taking place. Perhaps pleasingly for a democratic society, one sees Parliament as the most powerful actor in the process. Parliament's influence can be seen at three levels:

- Setting the terms of debate for politics as a whole and what are (in-)valid claims in accountability arrangements,
- Exercising accountability through scrutinising government proposals in committees and debates, and
- Reshaping departmental agendas by creating and mobilising crises around particular perceived problems in the system.

At the same time, interviewees were clear in that their experience of this is that Parliament does not have a great deal of interest in either research in general or humanities research in particular. Therefore what achieves salience to Parliament are things that are able to claim a resonance to other things that are more generally important to the Parliament of the day. Because of this light-touch oversight, certain issues acquire a short-hand and hence legitimacy to shape debates more generally. The TOP-sectoren policy was able to gain the necessary support within Parliament because it was both generally and particularly appealing to the current Parliament, representing support for high-technology industry (general to the Netherlands), and subsidies going to private rather than public bodies (particular to the right-liberal coalition).

At the next level of the policy system, the Ministry of Education is clearly the peak actor in the science policy system, seeking to develop plans which serve its own interests in an excellent Dutch research landscape, but at the same time addressing problems and allowing claims of good stewardship to be made particular to those choices. In effect, the Ministry of Education makes relatively **short-term interventions**, but at the same time rationalises them in terms of extensive evaluation and consultation to justify that **long-term benefit**. This duality is important for understanding the nature of the policy network if considering the types of power that actors may exert within a policy-network. Making a distinction between finance, knowledge and legitimacy (following Andersen, 1990), the one area where non-governmental public sector actors in the science policy network are able to exert influence relates to the flow of knowledge about the sector, used to justify particular sets of intervention.

In the case of humanities, it is a field or set of fields that is greatly under pressure in terms of its perceived utility and value to the Dutch economy and its fragmentation and wastefulness. However, the one point of strength that it does have is the fact that it exists in ways that are suggestive of a long-term utility: one interviewee cited a prominent politician, speaking at the *Night of Science and Society* event as saying that there was a fundamentality likeability of the humanities that meant they did not need to justify themselves. Thus, there is a duality that exists around the public value of humanities research that allows a diffusion

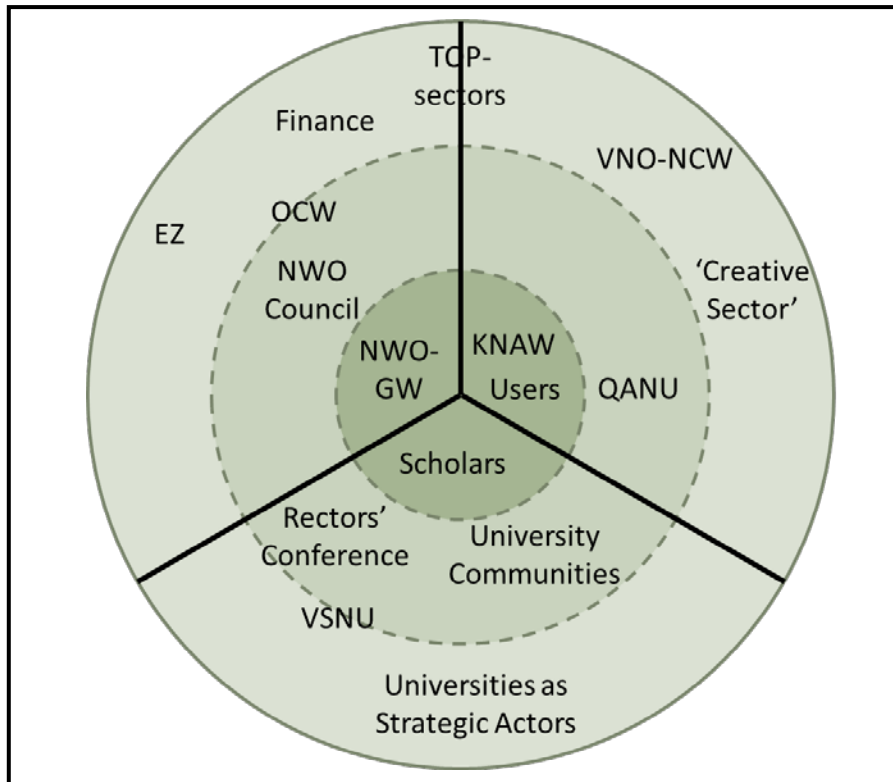
of pressures on the humanities to be more useful. Rather producing a conflict which undermines the integrity of the research system, attempts to impose change, and their resultant pressures, are diffused through a series of channels, via Commissions, formal Inquiries, reports and administrative structures.

The research suggests that the failure to agree clearly a set of measures for humanities research in the Netherlands as a response to a pressure for potential conflict within the system. The system functions by promising to make a series of incremental improvements. Those issues which are too dangerous to deal with immediately, potentially in terms of producing excessive conflict, can then be postponed whilst other more urgent issues. At the same time, it is important to note that this is a primarily internal strategy, whilst other bigger changes take place with potentially much more significant ramifications for the humanities. Nevertheless, the issue of measures of humanities' research value can be regarded as a way in which a series of tensions and contradictions which are not immediately solvable are placed and diffused through a complex policy network, which at the same time obscures the fact that they are not being solved. What eventually emerges is a series of small incremental steps that offer potential promise for the future solution of the issue, suggesting a kind of dynamic equilibrium in the system, and not any kind of agreement about how the value of humanities research in the Netherlands could be measured.

Using the same kind of logic as represented above, this situation can be understood as being a highly compartmentalised system where it was possible to produce solutions to actors with a reasonable degree of proximity, either horizontally or vertically. Thus, within the university system, universities were able to come to a degree of consensus about what mattered for valorisation; likewise, the tripartite partners were able to agree a methodology for measuring that value. But what was not possible was to achieve stability across the system as a whole; in particular, once particular techniques travelled beyond their original policy network space, then they were exposed to challenges and contradictions that undermined their value. At the same time, in this process of travelling, policy debates moved on and it was possible to diffuse those tensions by arguing that there was promise in particular solutions for a long-term stable answer, without ever getting close to a point of static equilibrium, that is to say agreement across the system as a whole of what the value of humanities research was, that carried legitimacy with government, university and public sectors.



Figure 11 The segmented policy network (horizontal/ vertical) of humanities research value in the Netherlands.



Source: authors' own design.

This instability of the idea of valorisation was also arguably evident in one of the discussions taking place during the research. This has deliberately not been analysed because of its early stage<sup>44</sup>, but the Performance Contracts which are currently being developed between universities and the Ministry sought to include hard valorisation targets. However, interviewees suggested that because it would be much harder to agree high-level valorisation indicators as simple as student completion rates, the plan included only an aspiration to develop hard targets by the end of the period. This suggests once more that the conflicting logics involved in the development of indicators for valorisation for any institution as complex as universities, and particularly given universities diversity in terms of subject and disciplinary groups, the dynamic equilibrium in these policy networks presents definitive agreement being reached on valorisation indicators.

#### 9.4.2 How are 'publics' defined in this process, who represents the public interest?

Returning to the overall question of whether there is a public value failure in this policy process, it is first necessary to understand how the public interest can be understood within this policy intermediation system. What emerges strongly in the following chapter is that there is by various measures a very strong public interest in the findings from *particular* humanities research. This is demonstrated in a variety of ways: TV audiences are strong both for shows reporting humanities research findings as for discussing the crisis in the humanities<sup>45</sup>. Likewise, book sales of history volumes created best-sellers which have been

<sup>44</sup> And indeed the question of whether they would be completed, given the fall of the Cabinet on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2012, or whether the entire policy would be declared politically inflected and deferred pending elections.

<sup>45</sup> For example during the course of the research, 326,000 people tuned in to watch a TV "Labyrinth" on linguists and language, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2012, and 416,000 watched the Sunday

researched using NWO research grants. Broadsheet newspapers increased their coverage of science in general, and in particular, one newspaper set the tone by emphasising humanities research within its science coverage as well as in media. Finally, there are particular research organisations which have a strong emotional value – one interviewee pointed out a real public affection for the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD, originally the National Institute for War Documentation), which expanded its scope from Dutch occupation in WWII to more recent examples of genocide, including the Balkans. NIOD played an important and visible public role concerning the Inquiry into potential war crimes in Srebrenica, something which continues to have salience to the Dutch public to this day, because of the disputed role of Dutch peacekeepers.

What it was hard to identify in the interviews was articulations of that value, particularly in the policy debates, about how publics valued arts & humanities research. In a number of cases, publics were taken as synonymous with Parliament, and Parliamentary interest was elided with a very reductionist version of value-for-money. In a sense, that reflected the very particular manner with which Parliament became involved with the debate, through particular crises, where value-for-money arguments were legitimate ways to mobilise criticisms of a very complex system. At the same time, interviewees in all spheres (notably government and university) noted that what the public wanted was value and accountability, without necessarily saying if that was a strong consideration in the decisions and discussions which took place.

Part of the issue here can be regarded as a public aggregation problem, as identified in the next chapter, and the issue of who speaks for humanities in the public domain. Despite the various ways in which publics meaningfully expressed interest – and presumably value – in humanities research, those expressions did not become meaningful representations of value. The next chapter identifies a number of reasons why this situation emerges, and it is worth reprising some of those issues here:

- **Interlocutors:** humanities research reaches the public through intermediation channels, and this blurs the link between the agency of the accountable unit – the academic, department or institution, and creating the particular output – such as a TV programme or newspaper report – which is the responsibility and product of a separate organisation.
- **Variability:** there is a common accepted norm that research has to be published to be useful, and that academics should be publishing scientifically. But the reality is that there is such huge difference in scope between what particular people can achieve - that there are strong risks of concentrating only on the superstars and ignoring the many smaller communications that ensure that universities make a broad social contribution.
- **Value hierarchy:** there is a desire for equivalence made by many partners – to allow comparability – in which monetary value becomes a proxy for the real outcome. But for value produced by transactions which researchers are not necessarily in control of – such as for newspaper articles – the assumptions necessary to infer value mean that they always seem less valuable than things which result in a ‘sale’ transaction.

This seems to point to a *prima facie* case of a public value failure within the humanities debates in the Netherlands. The case to answer would seem to be that despite a very broad sense by publics that there are very many kinds of humanities research that are valued in many different kinds of way, the fact that publics do not see research as a pressing political problem, and instead experience research as a positive form of cultural enhancement, has led to a misrepresentation of the ‘public interest’ in humanities research in the policy networks. The relation of the policy process to the idea of problems – and humanities as a problem requiring correction – has framed humanities in a way that omits the possibility to value the contribution they make to public experiences such as culture.

Of course, in the interviews it was clear that part of the policy process involved a recognition of the paradox, and the fact that the publics did consume humanities through cultural experience. Part of the reason for the dynamic equilibrium position of humanities' public value was a recognition of the problem that was raised by the resultant public value failure which would arise from narrowly measuring humanities' public value. This public value failure was something that policy-makers were wrestling strongly with, and their various ongoing efforts to produce solutions, and the continual postponement of hard decisions that would produce that public value failure can be understood as in part driven by a recognition of that failure. To gain a better understanding of that public value failure in the humanities, it makes sense to look more closely at the various publics with interests in the valorisation of humanities research – its public value – and consider this public value failure in more detail.

## 10 SOCIETAL STAKEHOLDERS AND THE USE OF HUMANITIES RESEARCH

### 10.1 HOW DOES SOCIETY VIEW THE EFFECTS FROM HUMANITIES RESEARCH?

#### 10.1.1 How does humanities research affect society?

The research looked at the ways in which ‘users’ interacted with humanities researchers in the course of their research, and how that research flows into society. There are two ways of representing the flow of that knowledge into Dutch society that were found in the research, namely the pipeline and ecology metaphor. Each of those two metaphors is useful in understanding the relationship between the researchers, the research topics and various kinds of societal actors. Each of those also have implications for the valuation of that research, identifying the characteristics of the research that is ‘most valued’ by societal users and society more generally. In understanding how particular research projects affect society – a concern of many debating the public value of humanities research in the Netherlands, it makes sense to consider how particular research projects change behaviour.

The first of those is a linear pipeline, that is to say that a research project is undertaken, and that it creates findings which then find a natural user. One good example of this where there are clear pathways of that knowledge from a research project into society might be the case of research into ‘ideophones’, which are words which carry a natural association with some kind of contextual information. A Ph.D. project on the subject of ideophones in one particular African language, undertaken at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics at Nijmegen was published, in the field of anthropolinguistics, clearly falling within the field of humanities. This Ph.D. was completed and was awarded the *cum lauda* distinction, pointing to the underlying excellence of the research that was undertaken. In the course of the research and following its completion, the research appeared in a number of media outlets, including a national radio programme, within the NRC’s Saturday science supplement, and also within a TV programme. At the time of the research:

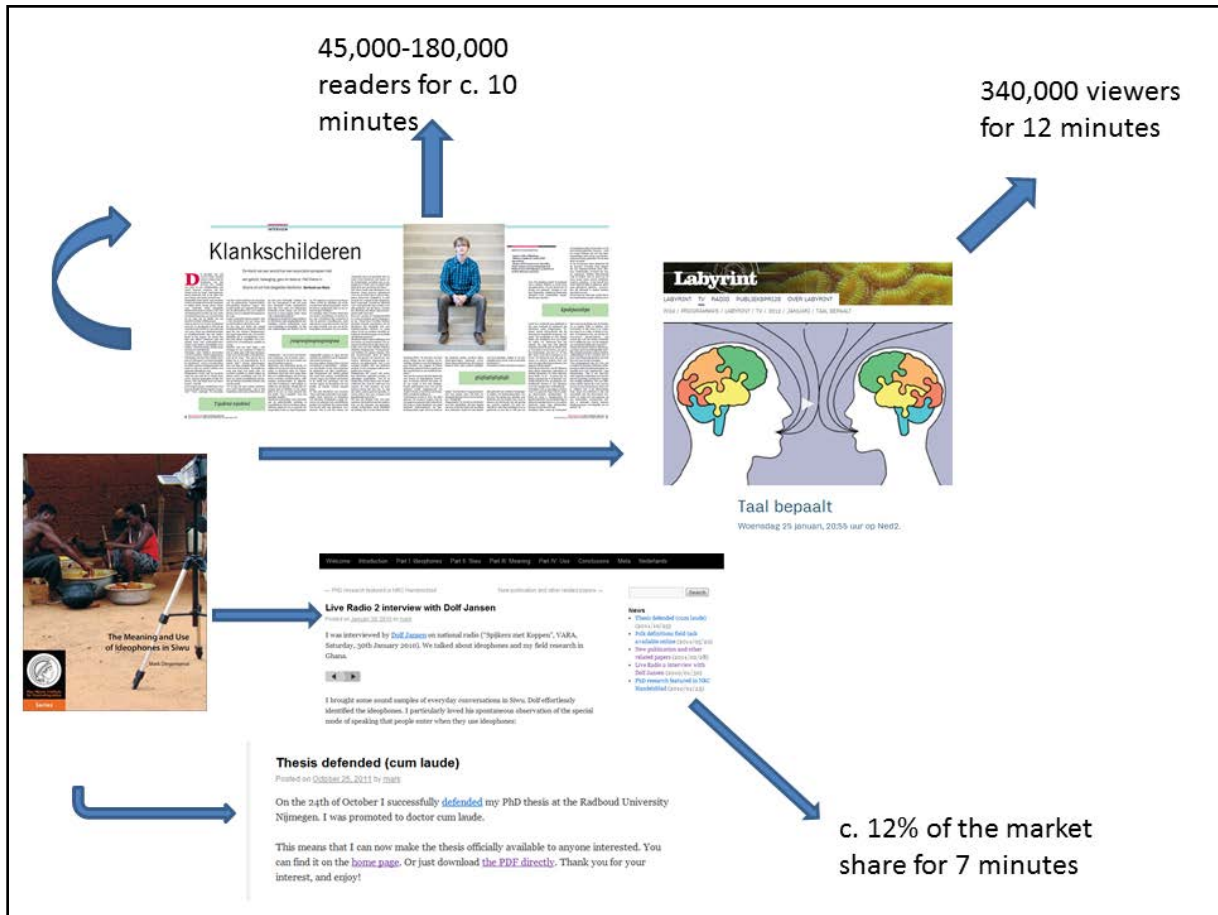
- The average daily paid circulation of *NRC Handelsblad* was 190,247 (HOI, 2012).
- The TV programme *Labyrinth* attracted 340,000 viewers, and the segment concerning the research at MPI lasted 12 minutes (Kijkcijfers, 2012).
- The typical market share for Radio 2 was 10.6% in the period closest to the broadcast of the show (Jan-Feb 2011) <sup>46</sup>.

What this shows is that there was a definite audience who devoted some of their time, and signalled an interest in some way, in this research. It is of course not possible to show how this then affected their behaviour, but clearly, the public attached some value to this research. This tallies with the research reported from the Dutch Institute for Social Research in Chapter 8, that there is interest from the Dutch public in humanities research around culture as a leisure good, and that gives it a value to society. The diagram below indicates the ‘impact’ or at least contribution of this research both in the field (graduating *cum lauda*) but also to society, in terms of being consumed by users.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.luistercijfers.nl/luistercijfers-nederland/451-luistercijfers-januari-februari-2010-marktaandeel>

Figure 12 How Dutch humanities research flows into society.



Source: derived from <http://ideophone.org/>

However, in making the above analysis of a single example that emerged in the research what becomes evident – and this was also found in other examples of ‘value chains’ linking research to users - was that this is not a direct value chain. IT is not just that the user absorbs in this case the research and behaves differently, but at the same time, there are intermediaries involved in the process. In these cases, the intermediaries have their own ‘rules’ about what matters. In the case of a newspaper article, for example, there was both a science journalist who wrote the article, an editor of the ‘Science Supplement’ which the piece appeared in, and an owner of the newspaper title, all of which had different views on what mattered. Thus, the scientific quality is less important to them than the way that the research can be converted into a story and presented to their readership. On the basis of interviews with various science media, it is possible to say that:

- The journalist is interested in a story that is new, timely and thought-provoking, that raises larger questions for the readership.
- The supplement editor is concerned as well with balance across the supplement between themes and difficulty level of the stories across the supplement
- The owner is concerned with maintaining and growing sales levels by maintaining NRC’s position as the authoritative paper of ‘intellectual Holland’.

Thus, the issue of the use of the humanities research is influenced by two external factors, firstly the nature of the intermediation, and then secondly by the nature of the response of the publics to the channels by which they receive that research. The traditional way of dealing with this by governments and researchers has been to try to ascribe a value to the

particular consumption activity, for example by putting a price on leisure time, and then costing the value of the time of that consumption. However, what is clear from other research, for example reported in AWT (2007), is that that is not the only expected response from the transfer of that knowledge into society. Therefore, to better understand the 'value' placed in humanities research in the Netherlands, it is necessary to understand more systematically the different kinds of pathways by which that research creates responses, and the different kinds of publics that potentially benefit from Dutch humanities research.

### *10.1.2 What is the role of Dutch humanities research in society?*

On the basis of all the interviews – activities reported by academics as well as by the users – it was possible to develop the following schematic for how humanities research creates impact. What is notable in this schematic is that there are various kinds of publics that use research, depending on the different ways by which it reaches them: the expected reaction from those publics, and the potential of research to create a reaction and hence attributable impact, varies depending on those pathways. On the basis of the interviews, it was possible to see that 'publics' and users were involved and influenced/ affected in quite distinct ways in the humanities research process<sup>47</sup>. What follows is an attempt to develop a typology from what emerged in the research:

- **Research subjects:** in several fields of humanities, publics are subjects for research, including philosophy, gender studies, area studies, museum studies, as well as providing materials, artefacts and evidence for research projects (e.g. photo archives).
- **Cultural experiencer:** publics experience humanities research through 'high' cultural consumption, such as museums or galleries, intending that the experience changes the way that the visitor understands the world, and thereby produces user satisfaction.
- **Media consumer:** publics consume humanities research through its incorporation into media content which generates consumptive satisfaction for the user through acquisition of that knowledge not otherwise easily or readily accessible.
- **Habermasian democrat:** publics are involved with humanities research through debates shaping its construction and execution, for example in applied public philosophy, where public consultation and dialogue can be an important reflective methodology, but also when publics interact with humanities research for example with web 2.0 tools.
- **Direct user:** public audiences may directly engage with humanities researchers, through correspondence, consultancy relationships (extremely rare), research ambassadors into schools and other public engagement events.
- **Citizen service user:** publics may experience humanities research which has affected the development or framing of public services, or in which humanities research has – for example through applied philosophy, influenced wider policy debates.

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<sup>47</sup> In line with the rest of the report, and for the sake of simplicity, the set of relationships that humanities have with society through teaching by research active staff are not discussed here. This was dealt with in *inter alia* the Cohen report, and is clearly important: its omission here .



were also indirect effects, with newspapers increasing their coverage of humanities within their science coverage in response to a feeling within their readership of a value in so doing.



The third point was the relative indirectness and invisibility of the relationship between researcher and publics. We were able to identify only one example of a kind of knowledge transfer activity in which scientists were directly exchanging with publics, without an intermediary being present, in the format of the Science Café. The Science Café format involves a scientist giving a presentation to a public audience in the format of a theatre show with the possibility for publics to ask questions later. These are by no means restricted to the physical and technical sciences; the Deventer Science Café, in the east of the Netherlands, regularly attracts an audience of 2010, and in 2008, the renowned historian Professor Maarten van Rossem (cf. 7.3) presented on the topic of the American elections.

The complexity of the relationships is further

demonstrated by the fact that Veen BV

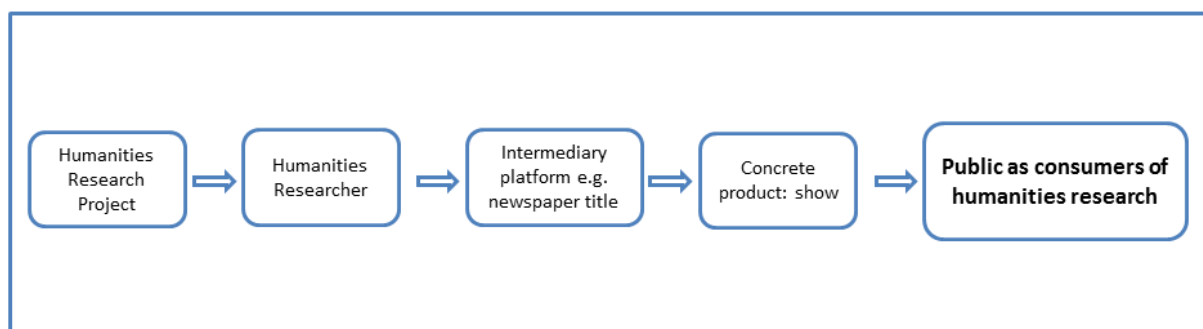
publishers established a magazine, *Maarten*, with a circulation of 24,000<sup>48</sup>, which has the specific aim of stimulating a public dialogue about politics reflecting the eponymous researcher's own perspective on social relations. In the case of Professor van Rossem, his media profile and the success of the magazine mean that his personal involvement in the impact generation is high. However, the reality for the majority of other contributors is that the end-users eventually 'consuming' the museum display, the reformed public service, the popular magazine or media content are unaware of the role of research in producing what it is about the product that they value. Indeed, as reported in Chapter 8, academics sometimes feel they are asked to contribute to outputs on the basis of their general knowledge of a subject area rather than any particular expertise that they have as the result of from particular identified research projects. It is therefore possible to see that humanities research is 'filtered' and kept at a distance from its eventual users, in comparison with a piece of technology transfer between a laboratory and a firm, in several ways:-



<sup>48</sup> <http://www.veenmagazines.nl/nl/content/788/lezersprofiel-maarten.html>



Figure 14 The filters applied to humanities research projects in reaching users.



Source: authors' own design on the basis of interviews






















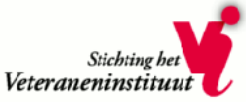
One phenomenon pointed to by a number of interviewees was the vibrancy of the market for scientific journalism in the Netherlands, both in general sciences but also in the humanities. One interviewee noted that whenever there were reduced opportunities for employment in particular fields, then there was a tendency for graduates to become journalists, and in history and linguistics, there had been particular sticky moments in the labour market that had led to substantial numbers of graduates training as scientific journalists reporting on their scientific speciality area. In the case of history, a group of history graduates established a journal in the 1980s which evolved into the *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, a magazine about Dutch history with a circulation of 23,000 primarily oriented towards highly educated individuals (Hartmans, 2011). Although the relationship between various popular humanities magazines, broadsheet humanities-as-science<sup>49</sup> reporting and academic research is somewhat distanced, and their agenda is not set by contemporary academic debates, Dutch researchers are an important source of information and opinion which creates and sustains a relatively high-value media activity.

An important issue for the humanities in the Netherlands is that the research forms part of thematic activities in which the research activity might be entirely invisible to the user, despite the importance of research – often over decades – to shaping the way that that theme is understood. One example of this is the creation of the single portal website for the history of WWII in the Netherlands, ([www.tweedewereldoorlog.nl](http://www.tweedewereldoorlog.nl)). The ‘invisibility’ of research in this process can be seen in the partners page, which lists the various bodies active in creating the website (see figure below). There are three knowledge institutes listed, including NIOD (*qv*), the Dutch Institute for Military History and the COGIS institute. What this does not show is both the other five knowledge institutes that have been involved in creating the site, as well as all the research partners which work with these various lead partners in helping to create a single resource and support the development of a community of interest in WWII studies, and its contemporary implications, in the Netherlands. This paradox is repeated more generally across the impact of humanities – because humanities are ubiquitous in the production of knowledge about culture in the Netherlands, they often seem invisible in this process.

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Humanities-as-science’ is a shorthand adopted in this chapter to make a distinction between where humanities are reported as part of a research effort, and not where humanities appear either as cultural commentary or criticism-‘essayfication’ (*cf.* Pollman, 1999).

Figure 15 The limited visibility of Dutch humanities researchers in one high profile thematic humanities cultural activity in the Netherlands.

PARTNERS			
TWEEDEWERELDOORLOG.NL is tot stand gekomen uit een samenwerking van musea en instellingen in Nederland om iedereen die geïnteresseerd is in een aspect van de Tweede Wereldoorlog via internet snel aan betrouwbare informatie te kunnen helpen.			
			
NATIONAAL COMITE 4 EN 5 MEI ▶	MINISTERIE VAN VOLKSGEZONDHEID, WELZIJN EN SPORT ▶	AIRBORNE MUSEUM 'HARTENSTEIN' ▶	ANNE FRANK STICHTING ▶
			
COGIS ▶	HERINNERINGSCENTRUM KAMP WESTERBORK ▶	JOODS HISTORISCH MUSEUM ▶	NATIONAAL ARCHIEF ▶
			
NATIONAAL BEVRIJDINGSMUSEUM ▶	NATIONAAL MONUMENT KAMP AMERSFOORT ▶	NATIONAAL MONUMENT KAMP VUGHT ▶	NATIONAAL OORLOGS- EN VERZETSMUSEUM LIBERTY PARK ▶
			
NEDERLANDS FOTOMUSEUM ▶	NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR BEELD EN GELUID ▶	NIMH (NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR MILITAIRE HISTORIE) ▶	NIOD (NEDERLANDS INSTITUUT VOOR OORLOGSDOCUMENTATIE) ▶
			
OORLOGSGRAVEN STICHTING ▶	STICHTING ORANJEHOTEL ▶	VERZETSMUSEUM AMSTERDAM ▶	VERZETSMUSEUM FRIESLAND ▶
			
VERZETSMUSEUM ZUID-HOLLAND ▶	VETERANENINSTITUUT ▶		

### 10.1.3 How is public performance in A&HR perceived, long versus short term?

One way to gauge the public perceptions of performance of humanities research in the Netherlands is to look to the statements made in the Standard Evaluation Protocols of Dutch research, which have since 2003 included as one of their Evaluation elements public valorisation. Those reviewed under the 2003-09 protocol tended to regard relevance as a potential for relevance rather than demanding more concrete evidence of society valuing that evidence (cf. QANU, 2007). However, of the later humanities reviews using a more rigorous definition of relevance, of Philosophy and of the Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) (QANU, 2008). The review of Philosophy does not explicitly disentangle scientific from societal relevance. In the evaluation of ISIM, the main section on societal contribution makes the following argument:

“A core activity right from the beginning of the institute was ISIM’s flagship publication, the ISIM Review (8.000 copies), drawing praise from colleagues, students and non-academics from, all over the world and widely considered as one of the most important means of getting to know what sort of research is going on elsewhere. Faced with increasing demand for material in Dutch, the ISIM staff has published two books for a

general readership (Islam in een notendop, 2003 and *Nederlandse Moslims: Van migrant tot burger*, 2005). ISIM has also become partner in Kennislink.nl producing online dossiers on themes like 'Political Islam' and 'Muslim Popular Culture.' Other activities mentioned in the self-evaluation report concern public lectures and debates that bring prominent colleagues from elsewhere (Olivier Roy, Tariq Ramadan, the authors of the Arab Human Development report) to the Netherlands for occasions that attract broad, non-academic audiences. Other activities mentioned are the increasing co-operation with non-academic partners (for instance the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam) and applied research, for instance for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and more recently for the Ministry of Social Affairs."<sup>50</sup>

Given that there are not strong public voices evident in the research evaluations, it is therefore necessary to look to other more indirect indicators of how the public evaluate the performance of humanities research. If one looks to one of the lead science broadcasters, for example, the VPRO (which produces the show *Labyrint* mentioned above) had in 2009 362,000 paid-up members (for €12.50 pa), or 9.9% of all Dutch households which were members of a broadcasting organisation. Likewise, it is possible to point to the launch of a magazine like *Maarten*, and the success of magazines like *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, each with 25,000 members paying c. €50 pa for subscriptions, to point to the fact that there are substantial numbers of members of the public in the Netherlands that see that there is sufficient value in the knowledge-cultural infrastructure in the Netherlands for it to be worthwhile paying for, and that that figure is if anything increasing.

In parallel with that, the media mediate a public interest or positive evaluation in humanities research in general terms. On the one hand, the point is made elsewhere that there is expanding coverage of 'humanities-as-a-science' in broadsheet newspapers, and that this is a conscious editorial choice. The Dutch broadsheet newspapers target themselves at highly educated and affluent Dutch citizens, and the choice has been made to increase this expansion, of science and humanities as science, to reflect the expectations that these target readers have of 'newspapers of record'. On the other hand, these newspapers also do report – in very general terms – stories on the 'quality' of humanities research. The NRC, for example, carried a series of stories over the difficult birth of the Institute for Contemporary Islam Studies (what became ISIM). The hinge for the story was that the humanities were asking for a lot of money, and so the reporting covered the question of whether they were worth it. But at the same time, the nature of these stories, reporting political and university decisions, reflected the preoccupations and interests of these groups in their framing rather than necessarily reflecting a public evaluation of the quality or otherwise of Dutch humanities research.<sup>51</sup>

In part, this is a reflection of a more general point about the nature of the evaluation of humanities research in the Netherlands by publics, and that is beyond the direct sphere where publics are clients or engaged with research, there is not a well-informed relationship between these groups. What was striking in the course of the research was that the definition of what the public valued about humanities research in the Netherlands was colonised by interest groups that could not really make a reasonable claim to represent 'publics', but had some kind of public accountability in their role within particular policy- and decision-making networks.

But it is possible to point to a range of examples that show that publics do value humanities research and the problems that are created. One example cited in the course of the research was the NIOD project "*Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden digitaal*" (The Netherlands digital edition). The background to this was that this was a 30 volume book written by the historian Loe de Jong between 1969 and 1994, and which the interviewee claimed was to be found in

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.ganu.nl/comasy/uploadedfiles/Rapport%20ISIM.pdf>

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Van Delft, DF. (1997) De Soeharto-fanclub: Topzwaar islam-instituut mist aansluiting bij Nederlandse expertise, NRC Handelsblad, p. 32, Dec 13th 1997.

most well-to-do Dutch household during this time. The book was digitised as a collaboration between NIOD, UvA, DANS; when it was placed online in November 2011, it was so popular that the servers crashed<sup>52</sup>. Initial public interest turned to irritation because of the clumsiness of the digitisation approach taken<sup>53</sup>. Therefore, a follow-up project was also arranged, *Koninkrijk Verrijkt*, (Kingdom Enriched), involving the research partners as well as the KNAW Meertens institute as part of the digital humanities infrastructure programme CLARIN, to make it more accessible and usable in contemporary public contexts<sup>54</sup>.

The previous chapter makes the point that political representatives had a tendency to deal quite reductively with the idea of what mattered about humanities research, reducing it to a question of value for money, and criticism during particular crises. This in turn is used to make a series of claims that ‘the public’ in some sense are demanding reform and simplification of humanities structures to ensure quality and excellence as well as value-for-money. This extremely reductive narrative set obscures some of the complexities that emerge in the perception of the performance of the humanities research base by different kinds of publics.

Perhaps the most striking example of this was the statement by one interviewee that the NIOD institute was seen by publics as one of the most treasured Dutch institutions. The implications of this ‘status’ can be seen from the example of the Amsterdam Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. As part of a promised and highly popular set of cuts to cultural subsidies after 2010, in 2011 the government announced that the Orchestra’s annual subsidy would be cut. There was such an outcry that the government was forced into a U-turn, quite exceptional given the campaign that cultural interests had waged against those cuts more generally. One interviewee noted that although the public are enthusiastic about universities, they do not enjoy that level of support, another interviewing noting that NIOD had indeed managed to achieve that status in the Netherlands.

What it is possible to say is that the Dutch have a relatively high affinity with culture and art, and humanities research is an important part of the production complex of Dutch culture and art (SCP, 2011; *cf.* 8.2.3). The picture from SCP figures is of a general interest in and active participation in arts and culture, without necessarily finding that it is a politically important issue. Research based on opinion-polling published in 2010 further nuanced this picture of a general interest in culture and arts, with a number of potentially significant additions (Terbecke *et al.*, 2010):<sup>55</sup>

- 71% believe the government spends either enough or too little on art and culture
- 65% are very interested in history
- 64% believe that art and culture are as important as sport and education,
- There is an overwhelming majority of public support for public subsidies for culture and arts media (13% against) museums (6% against) and performance activities (11% against).<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless as the OCW report *Cultuur in Beeld* (2011) reports, at the same time comparative research into which areas must be cut by government show that Dutch citizens

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<sup>52</sup> <http://nos.nl/artikel/321341-standaardwerk-loe-de-jong-te-downloaden.html>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.edwinmijnsbergen.nl/2012/01/het-koninkrijk-der-nederlanden-in-de.html>

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[http://www.niod.knaw.nl/onderzoek/onderzoek\\_detail.asp?ID=119&from=ONDERZOEKEN&rub=84](http://www.niod.knaw.nl/onderzoek/onderzoek_detail.asp?ID=119&from=ONDERZOEKEN&rub=84)

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.cultuur-ondernemen.nl/documents/10156/c4b77d5a-4ed2-458b-b7f4-3ba234728c25>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.cultuur-ondernemen.nl/documents/10156/bae848c5-436f-4c9c-8706-613e78409c7d>

see only foreign aid and foreign military missions as greater targets for budget cuts. Closer consultation of the source of this reveals that this is a priority for votes of two right-liberal parties, whose other priorities include better integration of foreign minorities into the Netherlands, suggesting a possible elision between cultural subsidies and support for multiculturalism. As Terbecke *et al.* (2010) find, there is increasing interest in the Dutch public for art and culture, which could be used to infer a sense that the quality of that art and culture is improving, and from that could be offered a claim that this possibly suggests that there is a public valuation of the quality of the contribution made to that offer by knowledge institutions in the Netherlands.

## 10.2 Carriers for knowledge transfer

### *10.2.1 How does society express a demand for knowledge from humanities scholars?*

One of the main issues emerging in the previous section is the indirectness and intermediated nature of the linkages between wider society and humanities scholars. It is not really fair to assume that the policy system as it operates in the Netherlands is fairly reflecting the breadth of public interests in terms of the way that those demands are mediated in the science governance system. The previous chapter showed that there is both a reductionism in the articulation of public demands, as well as the formation of an elite, interest-centred policy network in which public interests are not necessarily visible. However, it is possible to see that within the complex ecology by which humanities research in the Netherlands flows into society, that there is not just a one-way flow of knowledge, for humanities scholars creating knowledge and then finding users. There are a number of pathways by which intermediates create demands on humanities researchers which also lubricate that flow of knowledge through the system.

The most obvious of those are the science journalists who are seeking to create content on their own platforms – newspapers, TV and radio shows, and blogs – based on interesting science. The demands of journalists relate to the newsworthiness of something, which means that there must be something currently happening for the report to be made, and that it is more ‘man bites dog’ than ‘dog bites man’. In practice, this means that ‘humanities-as-science’ journalists typically follow the events listings of universities looking for items that look both intrinsically interesting as well as there being an event that justifies the newsworthiness. Their demands are also for excellent work, because they are reliant on indicators such as highly ranked publications or prize awards to indicate where research is valued by the peer community, and worthy of reporting. At the same time, they are not guided in their presentation of the ‘story’ by the way the individual scientists frame their knowledge.

A second group of public intermediary groups are cultural institutions that participate in particular research projects. One interviewee noted that there was an independence between these cultural institutions, such as museums, and the researchers because it was these institutions that had artefacts such as archives – which were essential to effective research in particular areas. At the same time, these institutions had their own desires for what researchers should do, in terms of preserving their collections, increasing the visibility and openness of those collections, and generating more public support for those institutions. Thus, this led to the creation of collaborative activities in which the research contributed to these wider ‘public-facing goals’ – such as the case cited above of the Dutch WWII Portal site.

A third group of intermediaries who articulated and aggregated public interest in Dutch knowledge were publishers. A number of Dutch publishers owned imprints whose purposes were to public academic books (or at least books based on academic research) for ‘mass markets’. Some of these imprints had different requirements from their owners to the mass commercial imprints, and were allowed for example to produce lower rates of return and profit than more commercial activities. The commercial publishers justified this in the prestige that this brought them, as well as being a means of making a socially responsible contribution. Publishers were quite pro-active in this field, seeking particular authors for

identified projects, and returning to established successful authors. Unlike fully academic imprints, some of these publishers would not guarantee to publish the manuscript until they had seen it, and judged it against a criterion of its potential commercial success (rather than for peer review, as for fully academic imprints).

A fourth group of intermediaries for public interest were academics' own contacts, who would sometimes suggest to them that the findings from their research were interesting to publics and also potentially be able to direct them to useful outlets. The National Platform for Science Communications operated a national database of press releases from Dutch Universities in all fields, including humanities. Esmeijer (1999) explored the role of universities communications offices as intermediaries for the humanities; what appears substantially different since then is the degree to which science journalism has coalesced as a community, for example around the National Platform for Science Journalism, which includes both universities but also science journalists and other science research users. Thus those academics who have knowledge potentially of interest for external (media) users have institutional connections via their communications office to the journalists (often freelancers). In turn, those journalists who are responsible for pitching the ideas for stories to science editors, who in turn control access to these popular media platforms.

One example of a mechanism to better aggregate public interest and demands for humanities knowledge is offered by the NWO: the *Alfa Meerwaarde* (Added value in the Humanities) programme. This programme is an interesting example of a subsidy instrument to help identify direct societal demands for knowledge. The basis for the scheme is that humanities researchers are able to bid for relatively small sums to transfer their humanities knowledge to some kind of societal context, ideally in co-operation with an identified societal partner. The definition of relevance was interesting because it made the distinction emerging in AWT (2007) of cultural, social, democratic or economic relevance as the four dimensions of relevance. The June 2011 round of the competition led to awards for eight humanities projects, which give a sense of the extent to which users are involved in question setting for humanities research.

- Making research over sign language more accessible for the deaf community
- Making research of the languages of Bolivia more embedded in the Bolivian context
- Creating an smartphone-app that demonstrates the richness of Dutch dialects.
- Using contemporary classics research to refresh secondary school Latin and Greek syllabi
- Creating an on-line historical role-playing game based on research on financial markets in Golden Age Amsterdam,
- Reviving an archive of a 'lost' musician, creating a scholarly score edition and recording it.
- Improving young people's appreciation of archaeology by critical reflecting on tangible and intangible historical remains.
- Creating a single English-language knowledge portal for the Dutch and Frisian languages to increase the study of these languages by international scholars<sup>57</sup>.

#### 10.2.2 *What are the carriers of knowledge from A&HR to various societal contexts?*

Following on from the expression of social demands through intermediaries, the next stage in the process is that there is some form of knowledge exchange – or co-creation – between humanities research and users. The most obvious of these is in the form of direct exchanges

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOP\\_8HMF73](http://www.nwo.nl/nwohome.nsf/pages/NWOP_8HMF73)

between users and academics within some arranged interaction. There are many research projects in the Netherlands where users are involved in some kind of format. The example of the *Alfa Waardevol* scheme that immediately precedes this section is a specific example of schemes to encourage downstream interaction (i.e. post-research), but there are also examples of more upstream involvement in research projects. One example of this is the way in which public policy philosophy has oriented itself towards new kinds of questions around the roles of technology in society, thereby creating a new field. A typical research methodology for this project would involve working with some kind of public peer group to delineate the problem posed by particular technology interventions, and to orient the research to reflecting on the contours of that problem.

But user involvement in research projects is not the only form of knowledge exchange, and indeed, the preceding examples are a rather traditional form of user involvement and interaction. In the course of the research, we also encountered other examples of interaction and knowledge exchange. In 10.2.2, we highlighted the example as Science Cafes as one example by which publics came into direct contact with scientists and were able to interact with them, and get knowledge more directly related to their own questions and interests.

At a second stage of remove was one set of examples is where KNAW and NWO arranged some sessions for academic scholars in particular fields to work directly with civil servants from particular Ministries around questions of immediate public – or at least political – demand. One notable case mentioned in at least two of the interviews was a session involving jurisprudential discussions concerning the proposals from one right-wing party for a ban on burkas in public. As already noted, however, the intended beneficiaries of those kinds of knowledge transfer are the wider public, who supposedly benefit from more informed law-making – and that can happen without those publics necessarily being aware of the academic expertise that has been applied in taking those decisions.

The role of the media in the knowledge transfer process of humanities knowledge is harder to precisely identify. In particular, although the interviewed editors and journalists were able to articulate their rationales in covering humanities, what they were not able to do was to demonstrate more than anecdotally that their coverage led to knowledge transfer to publics. Indirectly, a number of editors argued that their success in terms of relative growth means that they had struck the correct balance in terms of their audiences' expectations, but it is much harder to argue that there was a knowledge transfer process in the media that led to changed behaviours. One journalist noted that often in speaking to readers – who were also friends – that what the readers had taken away from the story were often not the point of the article, nor really related to the scientific research.

On the other hand, another media interviewee noted that part of reporting a science story – including humanities – was to ensure there was sufficient information for interested readers to discover the 'science behind the story'. One interviewee argued that this made a contribution to democratic relevance of knowledge by allowing people who felt it might be relevant to their situation to have the opportunity to raise important questions with their political representatives and themselves to organise for political activity. It was clear through statements in interviews, but also through things like the webchats after the *Labyrinth* programmes, that media outlets were taking seriously the opportunity to create more direct interactions between scientists and publics.

A final form of knowledge transfer came in the form of embedded knowledge, where products would be created using the knowledge of the humanities scholars but embedded in a codified form. The issue expressed by a number of scholars was that the creation of products was outside their specific area of responsibility, and so there needed to be value to them from a research perspective in the process of creating the product.

An example cited by one Amsterdam-based interviewee was the project "Vincent Everywhere", which aimed to create a catalogue of how images associated with Vincent van Gogh had spread over the world. The project led to a book published by the University of

Amsterdam Press, and written in conjunction with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; the project was itself supported by a number of Dutch cultural funds, including “the Van Gogh Museum, the Mondrian Foundation, the Prins Bernard Cultuur Foundation, SNS Reaal, and Stichting Doen”<sup>58</sup>. The activity produced a very useful database of the diffusion of Canonical ‘Dutch’ artistic images beyond the Netherlands, and the relationship of this with the place of the Netherlands in the world, that formed the basis for later high-quality scientific articles. At the same time, the activity also contributed to the Museum and City Council’s attempts to sustain recognition and appreciation in their work in curating an important cultural artefact and maintaining its contemporary historical relevance.

### 10.2.3 *Who funds the knowledge transfer/ exchange activities?*

The example cited above – of Vincent Everywhere – highlights a question in the valorisation cycle for humanities research, given its highly complex and interdependent ecology – of who pays for that research. A spin-off company interviewed in the course of the research noted that it was extremely difficult to develop useful products for a commercial market (language technologies) even where commercial businesses were interested in demonstrator products created with subsidy schemes. This in turn meant that it was difficult to attract investment into the field to fund commercial research – as was common in pharmaceutical research – because unlike for those pharmaceutical companies, investors did not believe that spin-off companies were moving towards creating products that would at some point have a demonstrable commercial value.

Researchers interviewed, as well as their interest representatives noted this particularly in the context of the debate around the TOP-sectoren. There were relatively few other institutions able to fund humanities research – or even contribute to it – in the way that large firms were able to pay for technology transfer in the technical sciences. Consequently, the list of carriers and vectors for knowledge exchange between humanities and society in the preceding section certainly has to be recognised as also a list of those who for some reason are willing to fund knowledge exchange between humanities and publics. Alternatively, it can be considered as a set of conditions under which voluntary (i.e. non-contractual) knowledge exchange takes place (such as seen in Science Cafés). Thus, the question of who funds knowledge exchange in humanities provides a means to understand who sees there being value in that research in some form.

What is clear here is that because of the importance of the Government as a funder of humanities knowledge transfer activities (in the absence of other interested parties), that the government agenda (with all its framing around value-for-money and quantifiable impacts) is represented in the kinds of knowledge transfer activities that are funded. With increasing pressure from research funding bodies to promote valorisation as part of research, it is not surprising that there has been an encouragement of researchers to involve users in the construction of research projects. This appeared to be the most common means of funding knowledge exchange activities in the humanities, either constructing them within subsidised public research projects, or using them as a means of creating partnerships with users that could then form the basis for claims made in research funding bids about the usefulness and usability of their research.

The research funders interviewed clearly did not have an entirely reductive view of the public. But at the same time they all felt (in varying measure) pressured or constrained towards reductive readings in what they felt it was reasonable for them to include in their definitions of public interest in terms of humanities scholars’ public engagement and valorisation activities. At this point, it is worth reiterating the point in Chapter 8, that scholars felt that there was a split in research funding, in that valorisation was an *unfunded mandate* for them, and government expectations ran ahead of the resources which were provided for valorisation.

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<sup>58</sup> [http://www.margrietschavemaker.nl/html/vincent\\_everywhere.html](http://www.margrietschavemaker.nl/html/vincent_everywhere.html)



In a sense, the media are able to exercise a decisive, or at least important, role in framing what information about humanities research reaches publics, because they have established platforms and mechanisms, and critically, readerships. But at the same time, it has already been noted that their interests in research are not the same of the researchers, and their criteria for what is suitable for communication to their public are different to those of the researchers themselves. One science editor candidly admitted that their personal preference to increase coverage of humanities-as-science was entirely dependent on two facts: being able to create physical space for that coverage in their platforms by being more stringent in the 'silly' stories that got published, and audience response to those changes being positive.

As previously noted, publishers are also important in the Dutch valorisation landscape, at least in particular areas, in being willing to publish – if not fund – particular kinds of popular humanities research. In the course of the research, researchers in history, linguistics and applied philosophy all pointed to volumes that they had been written for popular science imprints and which had achieved reasonably high sales. Likewise, the Vincent Everywhere project was apparently relatively rare in a publisher (a University Press) being involved in the financing of the research as well as in the publishing of the resultant popular volume. As previously noted, some of these publishing houses have the opportunity to take commercial risks with popularisation, cross-subsidised by occasional best-sellers as well as with relationships to either fully commercial or fully academic imprints with correspondingly higher margins.

### 10.3 What is successful humanities research from a societal perspective?

#### *10.3.1 Does A&HR need to have economic effects for society?*

One of the striking issues in the policy debates around measuring the public value of humanities research in the Netherlands was the existence of the sense of belief in a 'gold standard' of impact that good research produced economic impact, and that research subsidies should be focused on research that produced economic impact. Our hypothesis was that there was a disconnect within the policy debate between desired outcomes and arguments deployed. On the basis of the evidence from publics, policy-makers seem more concerned with trying to change the behaviour of academics than to argue that publics were dissatisfied with scholars existing efforts. The distance of academics from their publics, and the role of the government as a major funder of that research, means that it is much harder to talk of a meaningful public demand for humanities research to be more economically engaged.

The prime example encountered of direct economic impact of research was in publishing; non-fiction books typically require a great amount of 'research' – not always academic – and academic research can serve to provide material for these books. At a second step of remove, there was a link in museums where research was used as the basis for new exhibitions and collections which then generated new visitors. There are various ways of estimating the direct economic impacts of visitor numbers to attractions (although they are heavily reliant on making assumptions about displacement effects within the leisure sector).

But as 10.1.2 suggests, in many other cases, the relationships between academics and users are mediated through long chains, with multiple intermediaries. These long chains mean that there can also be a distance between where the research is produced and where the profit is produced, and that had the effect of obscuring the link between the research cost and the economic profit. The most obvious example of this was in the case of spin-off companies who were trying to create value around particular computing applications using humanities research as an interesting example of large data sets. We have already noted the unwillingness of some investors to countenance investing in these spin-offs because of the distance of the companies from potential profitability. Where these companies were potentially profitable was in generating commercial applications of the technology, which in the cases explored had little relation to the humanities research: the humanities research was one interesting user domain, but only in terms of generating interesting problems and

also having resources which could be invested in creating demonstrators and proving the technologies, making it interchangeable with other domains in the public and private sectors.

The Dutch public broadcast companies and museums were two important groups of intermediaries who could aggregate ‘public demand’ and work with spin-offs and humanities research to create media archives which generated public interest. But at the same time, that activity featured as a cost in the ledger of these businesses – they were nice to do and served their mission but they were difficult to monetize and generate income from. The *Labyrinth* TV programme example cited in 10.1.1 is freely available to download and view and therefore generates an extremely limited amount of revenue for the company (through advertising).

To argue that publics were dissatisfied with humanities scholars’ efforts would suggest that at some level there would be a demand within publics for research to produce (more) economic impact in some way. As an anecdote, the publics interviewed were *far less* strident in their criticism of academics than we had encountered in previous research exploring firms working with university departments in the technical sciences. One technical spin-off from a Dutch university we had interviewed in 2004 then lambasted the university for failing – amongst others – to help him find research funding, find venture funding, to properly manage Ph.D. students he co-funded, to allow him to access research results he had co-funded, for speaking in their own inaccessible language and for spending government subsidies for technology transfer on research projects<sup>59</sup>.

What was notable in the course of the HERAVALUE research was that there was indeed criticism of some academics for the particular issue of obscurantism – the use of jargon (encountered in the course of this research from journalists). However, the journalists interviewed appeared to be far more phlegmatic in that criticism than the policy-makers who voiced similar criticisms but far more stridently, and normatively, arguing that academics *should* make more of an effort to connect with their publics. A more substantive criticism was that academics were very concerned with their own very tightly defined subject area, and therefore this hindered them making connections – and telling bigger narratives of interest to journalists. On the negative side, independently voiced by three journalists (in the field of linguists) was a concern about the influence of paradigmatic conflicts within academic fields, that this could adversely affect the public’s potential to get value from that research.

The specific cited example was the conflict between Chomskians and non-Chomskians, which had to frame the way that theoretical linguistics was reported. If the report was not placed on one side of the argument, and the point also made that there was a conflicting position, then the newspaper editor would receive many critical letters from the other side of the argument. The three journalists felt that this undermined their mission of trying to give science to the public, by allowing something of purely academic interest – a paradigm debate – to determine the course of reporting<sup>60</sup>. What is interesting was that the journalists appeared to take responsibility for determining what ‘knowledge’ was useful for themselves, and a desire not to be shaped by academics’ own interests (as indeed did publishers of popular works). There appeared to be relatively few examples encountered, nor reported by the academics interviewed, of other areas of relatively sophisticated users placing demands on them.

A final point is that there is the problem in trying to talk about public engagement in the humanities that the nature of the engagement is very different in the cases we followed than in the exact sciences. By and large, the nature of the engagement meant that the partners in projects were not so economically dependent on the researchers as in the case cited above, where a small company had invested a sizeable fraction of its turnover in a university

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<sup>59</sup> Interview dated 07/04/2004

<sup>60</sup> For the ongoing effects of this, see for example Maris, B. v. (2012) “U leest dit terwijl Kees koffie drinkt” NRC Handelsblad, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

research project that had gone wrong. In the humanities, there is regularly an inversion of those relationships – scholars are small and the users are large institutions like museums that can absorb the potential shock of a project not reaching fruition; likewise, the dependence is not economic. An unsuccessful collaborative research project for a museum need not greatly adversely affect sales where failure of a small technology company to develop a new product in which considerable investments had been made into university technology transfer could potentially lead to the failure of the company, and loss of considerable wealth by the private owner.

### *10.3.2 Public influences in defining academic research questions*

A second criterion for valuable humanities research would be research that was working on questions of wider interest to a public, or that public actors were involved in the field, and determining where the research effort should be focused. The most obvious ways that influence is exerted on researchers to influence their selection of research questions is through providing direct funding for research activities. There was a consensus in interviewees that the almost exclusive funder of humanities research was the public sector, although channelled through a range of different activities including the KNAW. Therefore, it is to be expected that the public influence in setting research questions in the field reflects the priorities of those public funders.

It was outwith the scope of this research to explore the role of different influences on the choice of research questions and topics by humanities researchers and then to be able to distinguish the roles of various publics in that complex governance process. Previous research has pointed to the fact that attempting to impose or influence choice of questions by funding agencies leads to at best symbolic compliance or to novel behavioural forms e.g. creating new research groupings rather than fundamentally changing research direction (*cf.* Kehm & Leiyte, 2010 for the case of medieval history). What was evident was the rise of a great deal of concentration in particular research areas and themes at a variety of scales, within research institutes and universities, the rise of programmatisation of funding made available by funding agencies, and the increasing importance of the KNAW Research Institutes. There was clearly a reorientation of research funding towards topics of social interest in the recent period by NWO, in line with its overall strategy and the choices of both NWO in general and the Humanities college (NWO-GW) in particular.

If one looks at the various research programmes in which the humanities college is participating, then it is possible to distinguish between four types of research programme (*cf.* NWO, 2010) along the open competition (unprogrammed research):

- Open Basic Research: Ph.D. positions for artists, *Language for Communications*, *Integrated approaches to cognition*.
- Collaborative research: encouraging Dutch researchers to work more closely with researchers in other countries (the UK, China and Flanders, as well as creating international networks),
- Valorisation: *Alfa Meerwaarde (qv)* and
- Urgent topics: conflict and security, New media for Museums, Memory and WWII, Socially Responsible Innovation, Democracy under pressure and Social Cohesion.

What is perhaps notable about the topics which we have categorised as ‘urgent’ is that there is a clear link between these programmes and public expressions of interest. Two of them relate to areas of great interest of Dutch publics, namely accessing cultural resources and WWII. The other four are all areas which SCP research (opinion polling, *cf.* 9.3.2) as the most important social problems facing the Netherlands. There is not a one-to-one correspondence between these issues and research programmes, but nevertheless what it is possible to say is that the thematic research programmes which are based on social urgency

rather than academic potential do in the majority correspond with pressing social problems, and by implication, important social questions to be answered.

Social problem	Research Programme
Society, norms and values	Democracy under pressure/ Social Cohesion
Politics and Government	Democracy under pressure/ Social Cohesion
Crime and safety	Conflict and security/ Social Cohesion
Work and Economy	Socially responsible innovation
Immigration and immigration	Conflict and security/ Social Cohesion

It is important to provide some caveats to potential interpretations of this. The most important of this is that the majority of the resources invested by NWO-GW (c. €49m pa) are invested in excellent research evaluated on purely scientific grounds<sup>61</sup> (the ‘open competition’). NWO (2011) makes it clear that this alignment with social problems is part of a deliberate strategy – as much about increasing the amount of resources available to the sector by persuading other Ministries and funding Foundations to see humanities research as more acceptable for funding by being more relevant for their aims. A final caveat, and that is echoed by Kehm & Leisyte (2010), is that there is a huge gap between research councils having research programmes and materially changing the content of what researchers actually do (*cf.* Gläser, 2012).

The role of NWO-GW in this process can be interpreted as acting as an aggregation mechanism. Analogous to the way that in the complex and intermediate process of humanities knowledge exchange that newspapers and media outlets aggregate their audiences to create demand, NWO-GW are aggregating researchers to create a ‘supply’. That supply is ultimately of useful knowledge, or knowledge that is valued by publics, with the apparent intentional of also aggregating the ‘publics’ as supportive of that value. That then provides the means for NWO to approach other funders and persuade them to fund humanities research because of the fact that it is valued – or at least potentially valuable to – humanities. However, as noted, that is not the same as then being able to definitively establish that that changes the nature of research that is done in the humanities<sup>62</sup>.

### 10.3.3 ‘Relevance’ as a criteria for value

One of the issues which recurred in all the interviews was the issue of relevance as being related to the idea of public value around research. Both university and policy interviewees repeatedly came back to the idea of relevance being important – and this was something that was clearly stressed in the SEPs. Of course, from this perspective, relevance is a potential for knowledge to be used by others – this was clearly seen in the humanities review of 2007 (QANU, 2007) in which relevance judgements were based on an assumed set of needs and gauging that relevance in terms of researcher behaviour. A not atypical comment in this evaluation report related to the Transnational and Multiculturalism research programme at the UvA:

“Multiculturalism and its imprint on cultural production at large has become a major topic of public debate. Members of this programme take part in this debate and have contributed a considerable number of professional publications in this area.” (QANU, 2007, p. 11)

<sup>61</sup> [http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOP\\_87AGZM/\\$file/Implementatie%20strategienota%20NWO%20G%202011-2014%20definitief.pdf](http://www.nwo.nl/files.nsf/pages/NWOP_87AGZM/$file/Implementatie%20strategienota%20NWO%20G%202011-2014%20definitief.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Although the rise of digital humanities around WWII does appear to be a clear-cut example of a new set of questions that have emerged out of societal interest and technological potential as well as the scientific excellence of the researchers undertaking the projects.

However, there is a different reading of relevance which is ‘how is this relevant to my own interests and needs?’ and against that it is much harder to definitely and directly be able to judge Dutch universities. It is of course possible to create an argument for relevance – so to say with the preceding example – that multiculturalism is clearly a social concern, and by participating in public debates, researchers are demonstrating their relevance. But that is not the same as in saying that research undertaken by university researchers would be found relevant by publics, and indeed valued. Indeed, there is evidence that publics in the Netherlands are now turning against multiculturalism and arguments can be made that some publics regard research in that area as being part of elite attempts to promote a particular cultural agenda, and hence ‘not relevant’.

One way to understand this given the diversity and extensiveness of the value chains is to consider what makes knowledge relevant to intermediating organisations and intermediary users. The immediate issue encountered is that very different users have very different versions of relevance, and indeed are not always in full understanding of what is relevance. In the media, for example, there were not a set of topics that were ‘relevant’, although Dutch audiences had a particular preference for WWII, language, neuroscience, and (auto)biographies of famous people<sup>63</sup>. ‘Relevance’ was an emergent characteristic, and depended on the ability of a piece of research to be framed in a way that connected to an issue in which people were already interested. But the nature of that connection, and the responsibility for taking that connection, was made by the journalist rather than the researcher (except in cases where scholars wrote opinion-pieces for newspapers).

This issue of the **agency of the intermediary** was regarded as important. There are many items that could be made into news stories, and there is a selection process that is actively made by journalists, and leads to the selection of pieces that are ‘relevant enough’ rather than the ‘most relevant’. One journalist said in the course of the interview:

“No-one really realises that what you see in the newspapers depends on chance, so it depends on whether the journalist has time that week, is interested in the subject, already has done something this week, and whether they can remember to chase the lead up. When I used to write all the reviews, I only chose to review those books I wanted to review. That was a realisation for me – whether a book in this field is reviewed in a newspaper or not depends on whether I wanted to review it, because I am the ‘specialist’ in the field.” (Interview 8th December 2011).

Thus, it is not possible to say on the basis of particular topics appearing in the newspaper that they are the most relevant for newspaper audiences: rather, they are the ones that humanities-as-science journalists are the most interested in, and they meet a basic threshold for being relevant to media outlets (in terms of newsworthiness as novelty and changing the way you think about something, *cf.* 10.2.1).

A further complicating factor is the issue that politics is a form of conflict, and contributing or being relevant to politics means the potential to take a side in that conflict, and therefore affecting the potential relevance to people who take alternative political positions. There was a general point in the Netherlands that academics are greatly involved in political debate, and it is hard in practice to distinguish two kinds of value that exist when humanities (and social science researchers) become involved in public debate. One is the value through a contribution to democratic debate by strengthening the range of voices that are heard, and challenging weaker arguments. The other is contributing to advancing a particular political interest or position or even policy.

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<sup>63</sup> The top ten non-fiction books in the Netherlands at the time of writing included three books about language use written by NRC journalists, three biographies of famous people (Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Steve Jobs, Bram Moszkowicz), two books on neuroscience, a book about Auschwitz, and a book on thinking skills. <http://www.cpb.nl/bs/index.asp?gnr=12>

Both are indicative of the relevance: irrelevant research cannot contribute to the debates. But that contribution is not enough, as universities find their research judged on the political effects of their contribution as well as the participation. Whilst the ideal of evidence-based policy making is that an independent research contributes to debates and leads to the best decisions being taken. However, where there is debate over what the preconditions of the best decisions are – for example whether you believe that more or less state spending is *a priori* better, then tensions can arise in practice, where one side in political debate ‘devalue’ research that works against their position, something one interviewee argued was much more prevalent in the US media landscape than in the Netherlands<sup>64</sup>.

## 10.4 Towards a model for the ‘public’ value of humanities research

### 10.4.1 How does society view knowledge interlinkages between universities and civic society?

The dominant characteristic of the linkages between universities and civil society is that they are extremely extensive, both in being many in number, but also extended and involving multiple channels and partners by the time that civic society (‘publics’) receive research in a way that creates a visible effect *cf.* figure 10.2). On this basis, it is able to create a model or heuristic of the way that civic society actors regard humanities research and its value in flowing into society. The key elements of the dynamic are:

- There is strong public interest/ value in consuming humanities research,
- Publics do not necessarily fully understand the nature of the scientific endeavour,
- Humanities research that is relevant may be both unpopular but a positive contribution,
- There are many points of transformation from research projects to publics,
- The system is extremely fragmented with little accountability or interdependence,
- Much of accountability and public steering falls to the Science Council, which is tiny.

The clear message emerging from the research and this chapter is that on an individual basis, at the moments of particular encounter and knowledge exchange, there is enormous positive valuation of that research on some level. The audience figures for humanities-as-science TV programmes, the increased newspaper coverage of humanities-as-science, the sales of popular humanities research-led books, SCP’s leisure surveys, and the enthusiasm for the NIOD 30 volume history all point to immense public appreciation of humanities research. That appreciation can often best be described as an interest. Framed in utilitarian terms, one looks could express an opportunity cost values or the shadow values of the final consumption associated with that interest.

The relative length of those knowledge exchange chains by which research reaches users makes it somewhat problematic to talk of public valuation of that ‘research’, but more as a function of the invisibility of that research rather than a lack of valuation of that research. There is an interesting question of why publics do value investment in hard sciences when

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<sup>64</sup> An example highlights the tensions within the issue of relevance as an indicator of the value of research by introducing ‘popularity’ as a variable. Research from Tilburg University Humanities faculty in 2009 (Moors et al., 2009) on various forms of radicalisation in the Netherlands analysed the phenomenon of (inter alia) right-radicalism in the Netherlands, and in particular, one new political party (the PVV) which was to win 24 of 150 seats in the election the following year. The way the characterisation of the PVV as radical-right spread through the media demonstrated that the research was influential, but at the same time, public opinions, at least as far as represented in the media were divided on the value of that research. The founder of that party attacked one of the Tilburg academics as a “Toilet Duck for the Minister” in a letter to the Volkskrant, or simply telling the Minister what she wanted to hear.

the linkages between basic research and final products are as tenuous. One interviewee with extensive experience in public engagement noted that there was a problem that humanities researchers are doing ‘mundane’ things, such as reading a book that anyone can read, in contrast to the specialness of having a laboratory.

But at the same time, it is important not to invoke an ‘awareness gap’ model of research, that if publics knew more about humanities research then they would value it more; publics might value research into – for example multiculturalism *less* for political reasons, if they knew about it. It is clear that one of the reasons that economic value models are successful is because they offer a simple calculus – more economic development is better, based on a relatively stable consensus within society of fundamental values. Conversely, in the case of humanities, research may pertain to issues around which there is no social consensus in the Netherlands, such as identity and (trans-) nationalism. The three forms of non-economic contribution – democratic, social and political – are all more contentious and have a dual form of things that are generally beneficial (such as democratic debate) and particularly beneficial (such as supporting one party’s position over another).

A second issue that the length of these transfer chains then raises is that there are many elements of transformation and transfer in the process from the ‘research project’ to ‘final consumption activity’. The first transformation comes when an academic makes a selection from all their knowledge base – which may draw on many research projects – and creates a knowledge set for a particular intermediate user. A second transformation comes when intermediate users with their own criteria for relevance select the kinds of knowledges they wish to use, and combine it with other inputs to create some kind of codified artefact. The third transformation is at the point of consumption, where the way the public encounters the knowledge in turn influences the knowledge that they acquire, and how they then use that to change, to behave or feel differently.

There is a clear issue of accountability and interdependence in these knowledge exchange chains. One of the features identified in the research is the relative substitutability of academic knowledge in the process, and the lack of dependence of users on academics for their knowledge. In such situations, one might expect few reasons for potential collaborators to invest heavily in knowledge exchange processes and to break off knowledge exchange relatively quickly when problems emerge. It could be speculated that this in turn could lead to a primacy of knowledge exchange activities that are either well-funded, where there is a strong material interdependence between partners, or situations where knowledge exchange is relatively ‘easy’ (i.e. unproblematic).

The one actor that is trying to provide some coherence in the system, at least as there being a degree of accountability from researchers to potential societal users, is the Research Council. At the same time, that research council has a number of different interests towards humanities, for which it is the largest research funder. The research council realises that it is responsible for the long-term sustainability of the sector, ensuring that there is diversity in the base, and that humanities remains important to NWO. At the same time it understands that humanities must be accountable to the government, as well as demonstrate reasonable efforts to create useful value for society. Although the research council is dominant in terms of its funding, it is far from omnipotent, as a relatively lean organisation, with 27 employees making it far smaller than many of the humanities departments in the Dutch sector.

#### *10.4.2 How can publics value for humanities research be understood?*

The preceding chapter makes the point that the public valuation of humanities research in the Netherlands is extremely complex, and can be conceptualised as taking place in a highly-interconnected ecology. In order to try to make sense of this concept of how the public value humanities research, a number of distinctions can be made about the different kinds of value that people are talking about. That in turn allows the articulation of a sense of where the public interest in humanities research lies, and to better understand the overarching

question in this report of whether there has been a public value failure in humanities research, and an emphasis on tangible economic benefits neglects a set of less-well articulated public interests in that research.

The most fundamental distinction in the humanities research is not – as is often claimed, between intrinsic and extrinsic value – but instead, between positive and normative value. There is clearly a ‘search’ underway in the Netherlands for the value of humanities research which assumes that impact is always positive. But at the same time, individual researchers find themselves facing the possibility that their research is – at least in the short-run – disapproved of in society (i.e. it has a negative normative value). One interviewee pointed to the problem that some historians involved with figures who are popular in the Netherlands (e.g. Churchill) can have in the eyes of the public if their research ‘tarnishes the image’ of those individuals.

Whilst it can be appealing to see research as contributing to an ever-growing stock of knowledge capital, many of the issues that humanities research can contribute to the public are contested, and yet, this has never been explicitly addressed by policy-makers, nor a settled societal consensus achieved. Processes which address this by looking at responses to research, and counting negative and positive responses as valuable run the risk of encouraging ‘controversialism’ in public engagement. This issue does have parallel in scientific impact, when at least two interviewees noted that it was possible to achieve high impact by publishing a controversial paper which would be cited by others seeking to demonstrate the vitality of the debate in the field. At the same time, different kinds of values can come into conflict within a single debate – in the evidence around radical extremism, the positive democratic value of contributing to an open debate was arguably cancelled out by the strong negative valuation of that research by a political party which three months later was to capture the support of every sixth Dutch voter.

A second distinction can be made between the extent of activity. It was clear that there were many cases where in the public passively ‘absorbing’ the research, there was no discernible behavioural change by the public actor. It is therefore very difficult to talk of the use value of that research, but at the same time, public actors can be ascribed discernible values for their pursuit of interest. This goes back to the much older distinction between *artes liberales* and *artes mechanicae*, the *artes mechanicae* being those skills necessary for survival and the *artes liberales* which were only available to those that had secured their own survival. *Artes liberales* were in Roman times what distinguished free citizens from slaves, and remain to this day an accoutrement of social class, and therefore the pursuit and absorption of humanities knowledge could be regarded as a subconsciously instrumental economic strategy by individuals to secure their strong positioning within society. What cannot be claimed is that the fact that absorption is for the sake of ‘interest’ that these are a societal luxury that can be economised on, for that economisation would have consequences in terms of access to those skills and the superior societal positions that they confer.

The diffuse nature of the knowledge transfer process, and the many intermediations, transformations and translations involved between research processes and public users raised a question over what brings the public benefits. In the example of the NIOD archives, both publics and researchers are interested in the archive: the public see the archive as the useful output, whilst for the researcher creating a new technology archive allows new kinds of research questions to be answered. Likewise, the academics interviewed noted that their research did not always directly answer social questions, but gave them insights and approaches to speak to particular questions of social interest. If the research process is decomposed into different elements, the production of new facts, creating new narratives, assembling new infrastructures and the development of new theories, then the public and academic researchers have quite different value hierarchies for these elements.

The diffuse nature of the knowledge exchange process, and the passivity of the ways in which publics absorbed that knowledge, also introduces an issue around interdependence and accountability within science systems. There are clear lines of accountability in individual,



direct knowledge exchange activities, such as when academics work with museums in creating new archives (user-producer interaction). There are also clear lines of accountability between research funders and scholars (scientific governance): as part of that, funders in the Netherlands have been encouraging scholars to work more closely with societal actors. But what is missing more generally is someone holding universities and researchers to account more generally for these looser relationships beyond demonstrating that they have attempted to make their research available. There is also a very limited public infrastructure for wider public accountability in research in the humanities, in contrast to the extensive public involvement and accountability measures in genetic and nano- technology programmes.

What was evident in the case of the Netherlands was that there were very different versions of the public, and the direct public were rarely visible to scholars, but what was far more common was a talk of ‘the public’ and what ‘they’ want. Analysis suggests that the idea of the ‘public’ when evoked in these debates was an attempt to begin to articulate some of these needs for accountability. In the absence of actual publics taking that responsibility. But at the same time, this prevented the concept of ‘public’ being stabilised around a clear view because it could always be undermined with a competing perspective more closely related to real behaviour. This was something that was glossed over, finessed and postponed in policy debates, or simply left hanging as a contradiction, with the result that the accountability issue – of publics holding humanities scholars to account – left unaddressed.

Viewed from this context, the oft-quoted failure of humanities to develop a Grand Narrative can be understood as part of a failure to deal with this disconnect by creating social agreement around the general beneficence of the research activity. One interviewee made the point that the allure of the possibility of curing cancer allows many biochemists who are not necessarily doing the world-leading research to “live off the importance of the disease”; of course, what that really means is that the social agreement that curing cancer is an urgent problem allows difficult questions about how particular parts of a research jigsaw lead to that solution to be glossed over with this Grand Narrative. Humanities in the Netherlands had tried to mobilise – since the time of the Staal report (*qv*) its own grand narratives around how it contributed to Dutch society, and the place of the Netherlands in the world. The narrative at which it arrived was that humanities contribution to the Netherlands in helping the Netherlands to place itself in the world, vital for a small, open country with a long tradition of internationalisation and a diverse range of economic, political, cultural and social foreign interests.

There appear to have been two problems with attempts to mobilise a ‘Grand Narrative’ for the public value of humanities to finesse these problems with the definition of ‘public value’. The first is a very particular one, regarding a crisis that the Netherlands has experienced regarding this place in the world, in particular in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (‘9/11’) and the 2004 murder by a religious extremist of Theo van Gogh. A number of interviewees noted that this period (2001-4) marked a crisis of self-belief in Dutch society’s capacity to sustain itself in the world. Therefore, positive messages about promoting Dutch tolerance were confronted with – and arguably overwhelmed by – a much more negative set of messages about the need for the Netherlands to protect itself from incomprehensible outside threats.

The second problem was a more general one, in that it was hard to make a claim for the specialness of humanities research in universities as distinct from a set of other activities, including literary criticism, essayism, opinion writing, popular humanities and leisure-culture consumption. What we have noted elsewhere has been a reification of the ‘special spaces of the knowledge economy’, the use of laboratories in biotech and nanotech as attractive glimpses into the high-technology future with a more general promise for a brighter future (e.g. Benneworth & Hospers, 2007; Benneworth *et al.*, 2011). Despite attempts to develop a physical infrastructure for the humanities, the sense of ‘specialness’ or allure is eroded by the invisibility of the infrastructure, and its consumption via the e-

economy where prices are well known for failing to reflect the costs of production, and consumer expectations are of free content.

## 11 DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

In this report, we have sought to explore the question of a public value failure in policies for humanities research, as a means of understanding the public value of that humanities research. This report forms one of a set of three national reports which will be synthesised in the next stage of the project to produce deeper and insights and refine the conceptual structures in answering that question. We have been particularly concerned in this project into not falling into what one referee of our project called ‘methodological nationalism’. We are therefore very keen to avoid coming up with definitive answers to these research questions on the basis of these national studies, and to allow a more open look at these national systems to allow a comparison of those national systems in the second, synthetic phase.

It is therefore not the place of this report to try to definitively answer how do public value systems function in creating a public value for arts & humanities research. However, on the basis of the evidence offered in this report, it is possible to offer some observations in answering the empirical questions posed at the start of this report (*cf.* 2.4.3). These five questions are reproduced below, and in this concluding section, some very brief and early reflections from the Dutch case are offered.

- Where have been the critical moments or crises which might be suggestive of a public value failure around humanities research?
- Where are the lacuna in the current state-of-the-art around the public value of arts & humanities research as framed in economic/ metric-based definitions?
- How do universities and scholars’ relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?
- How do civil society and cultural organisations’ relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?
- How do policy-makers and research funders’ relationships with their publics affect their requirements for a consensus position on the value of humanities research?

### 11.1 The concept of a public value failure in the Netherlands

The first two questions deal with the question of a public value failure in the policy process surrounding arts & humanities research policy. In looking at the functioning of the system by which public interests and values are mediated into forums and embedded in artefacts and structures, the empirical material reveals that the ‘system’ insofar as it can be said to exist in the Netherlands is extremely fragmented. At the same time, the system appears to work well in that it is able to accommodate both public engagement and academic freedom in a university system that performs well in international comparative rankings. This fragmentation might justify the claim for an existence of public value failure, in that it is clear that the way public interests are mediated into the debate is not representative of the diversity of public interests and valuations for humanities research. In particular, there are reductionist accounts of publics, that reduce to saying Dutch taxpayers want efficient government expenditure, or Dutch citizens care about culture, rather than reflecting the fact that the idea of public value is a complex and contested terrain.

What must be immediately conceded is that although the sys by which public values are represented is fragmented, a wide array of opinions are voiced in these public forums. NWO and OCW are both on record as stating that they are concerned with many interests – in pastoral care of the sector, in securing Dutch research excellence, in producing public value, and in giving administrative efficiency. The problem is that the system does not have the cohesion to reconcile these different perspectives, and therefore activities emerge which seemingly attempt to resolve tensions – for example between public value and administrative efficiency by defining something concrete, “indicators for public value”. That attempt fails in its stated aim, to develop indicators for value, but at the same time succeeds in allowing the

parallel representation of quite different versions of value in humanities, there being what might be thought of a kind of ‘existential dynamic stability’ in the system.

This raises the possibility that the failure to be able to clearly define valorisation in humanities is in fact a piece of constructive ambiguity necessitated by deep-seated philosophy contradictions between the different kinds of value for the humanities. In effect, the system is asked to choose between competing, contradictory and partial versions of ‘public value’ and chooses by refusing to choose, but instead devoting the pressure between the tensions into particular efforts to resolve those tensions.

The reasons that these attempts to define public value fail is that at the moment they are forced to choose a version of the public, they have to choose a singular version, and that empowers a *reductio ad absurdum* from the other positions. An example is attempts to render a strictly economic version of economic benefits – such an attempt immediately becomes ridiculous if insisting that every benefit must come through an economic transaction, and more intangible benefits can immediately be evoked in public discourse to neuter that attempt; the converse position – the intrinsic with argument is likewise undermined by saying that public funds require public accountability.

This would suggest that at least one boundary condition for effective measures for arts & humanities research is that they are capable of encompassing different logics of publics. At the same time, that does not fit with the logic of administrative simplicity and efficiency, which is a single indicator for a single problem. But the reality is that public value reflects a number of fundamentally incompatible versions of the public – and conflicting public interests. Measures need therefore to be grounded on a more eclectic philosophy – not just utilitarianism or idealism, but in some hybrid paradigm of public policy. The problem here is that such a hybrid public policy paradigm is not simply lying on a shelf waiting to be deployed.

## 11.2 The effects of lengthy valorisation chains on the discursive construction of value

The second three questions relate to the question of how is the discursive construction of value in arts & humanities research affected by the lengthy and diffuse chains by which knowledge production is separated from its exploitation. In biotechnology, although the chains are arguably just as lengthy, patents and contracts bind the various partners together to create a clear causal transaction chain ‘from the research to the pill’. What this does not show, of course, are the feedback loops and blind alleys followed in commercialisation activity, except where they leave an audit trail. One effect of that is to give the rather misleading sense that what humanities is unusual in terms of its lengthy valorisation relationships.

Nevertheless, these causal and contractual relationships create a governance and regulation system that is quite clear about public value. The clinical trials process is explicitly designed with an ethical framework, biotech researchers and pharmaceutical manufacturers are able to show that in developing a new drug. This means that there is a minimum net zero public benefit – that no one has been harmed in developing the drug. Even in technical sciences, consumer law and standards mean that products being developed have to have a reasonable potential of sales, and this means meeting both a consumer demand but also not being banned for public safety reasons. Again, this means that there is some kind of ethical background to technology transfer activities that take place – knowledge transfer only makes sense to companies if it can be used in ways that society deems to be responsible.

But these linkages of accountability and responsibility, and comparable underlying ethical framework are much less visible in the case of humanities, and are not regulated in the way they are with technical products subject to regulated markets (as almost all markets in Western European countries). But we have already seen that in some cases, the research can be used in ways that cannot be guaranteed to have a net positive public value, or at least

the positive public value is disputed, because of conscience-based reasons to disagree with the implications of that evidence. There is not a clear regulatory framework which sets out the conditions under which the implications of academics' research are socially acceptable. Public agreement is easy to achieve that that you must not have car braking systems that fail unexpectedly, and that can be embedded in law and enforced through the courses. It is much harder to agree the boundary conditions for what constitutes safe, truthful and positive use of humanities research in order to create a meaningful set of responsibilities between academics and their publics.

Thus, a second boundary condition for agreeing on the public value of humanities is in deciding the ethical boundaries of what is socially acceptable for research to achieve. The technical sciences have had such a debate around morally challenging areas such as gene technology and therapy, fertility treatments and research, and nanotechnology devices. There has not been a comparable public debate around humanities research – there have been discussions about particular themes – such as the development of a Canon of knowledge in history (in the case of the Netherlands). But there has not been a serious ethical debate about what society defines the ethics of technology transfer in the humanities, not the 'consumer safety standards' for the cultural production fields whereby humanities research interacts with society.

### 11.3 The key sticking points in adopting metrics for humanities research's value.

A final issue relating to the last two questions relates to adopting metrics for the public value of humanities research. It is clear that in the case of the Netherlands, there is the contours of an agreement about how that can be measured satisfactorily. That is that for each discipline, a wide range of indicators and impacts on appropriate publics are defined, and then evaluated on what is effectively a 'Likert' scale on how effective those activities are. But there is here a tension – policy-makers want similar indicators for different disciplines, whilst the disciplines themselves wish to use their own variables. Policy-makers' reasoning for this is to give transparency in the process, which is in turn driven by a sense of responsibility to publics, that they can explain how those scores have been arrived at.

That insistence by policy-makers on common indicators is a sticking point – effectively a contradiction between two versions of the 'public', the administrative and the intrinsic-cultural. The problem is that the figures exist between different disciplines are not legitimate in the eyes of the public as viewed by policy-makers, and yet, we know because of the fragmentation of the social value production system, that public interests are only weakly represented and mediated through policy-makers. In a refusal to allow diverse measures policy-makers are giving primacy to the 'administrative' version of the public, and thereby construct a *reductio ad absurdum* that will undermine those measures ever achieving legitimacy and hence consensus.

We return here to the point that the value system is extremely diffuse, and relationships are not closely linked through accountability; there is an aggregation problem that hinders the articulation and representation of the public interest. That problem clearly impacts on the legitimacy of the simple metric scores (1-5 for social relevance) because at no point has it been possible for the public to meaningfully assent to those scores. However, that is not to say that it is not possible to develop aggregation mechanisms that allow the publics as they have been revealed to be – in all their messiness and incoherence – to meaningfully assent to those measures. It is outwith the scope of this piece of research to propose particular mechanisms that would permit that aggregation. Yet, it seems to be self-evident that any measure of public value needs in some meaningful way to deal with this issue of public assent and thereby provide the validity and legitimacy that the constructively ambiguous, existentially dynamic public policy system, is itself unable to provide.

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## 14 GLOSSARY

<i>Dutch</i>	English/ explanation
<i>FOM (Stichting voor Fundamenteel Onderzoek der Materie)</i>	Physics Research Council (Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter)
Hoger Onderwijs en Onderzoek Plan (HOOP)	Higher Education and Research Plan (from 1986)
<i>Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie van Wetenschappen (KNAW)</i>	Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences
<i>Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap (OCW)</i>	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
<i>Nederlands Wetenschappelijke Organisatie, (NWO)</i>	the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
<i>Nota Hoger Onderwijs: Autonomie en Kwaliteit (HOAK)</i>	White Paper on Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality (1985)
<i>Nota Innovatie</i>	Innovation White paper (1980): first moves towards innovation system, university-society connections, and socially-useful knowledge.
<i>Nota Wetenschapsbeleid</i>	Science policy white paper
<i>profijtbeginself</i>	The principle in government that paying for public services makes beneficiaries more selective and demanding of producers.
<i>Selectieve Krimp en Groei, SKG,</i>	Selection Contraction and Expansion Operation, 1987-91
<i>Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (SCP)</i>	Netherlands Institute for Social Research, the research institute informing policy-makers and Parliament about cultural developments in the Netherlands.
<i>Taakverdeling en Concentratie, (TVC)</i>	Task Reallocation and Concentration operation, 1981, structurally managing the Dutch universities as a single system in disciplinary areas
<i>Technologiestichting STW (Stichting voor de Technische Wetenschappen)</i>	Technology Foundation STW (Foundation for Technical Sciences, Dutch Engineering Science Council).
<i>VFO (Voordwaardelijke Financiering van Onderzoek)</i>	Conditional Financing of Research (1983-1993) quality-based allocation model for first stream research funding.
<i>Vereniging van Universiteiten (Vereniging van Samenwerkende Nederlandse Universiteiten/ VSNU)</i>	Association of Universities in the Netherlands
<i>Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)</i>	The VU University, Amsterdam
<i>Wet Hoger Onderwijs</i>	Higher Education Law (1876): first Dutch law on higher education
<i>Wet op het Wetenschappelijke</i>	Scientific Education Act (1960): first Dutch

<i>Onderwijs</i>	modern law on higher education
<i>Wet Universitaire Bestuurshervorming</i>	University Administration Act (1970): shifted power from professors to executive authorities
HBO-Raad	Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences

Table A: The funding models used for public Dutch Higher Education

<b>Model and principle</b>	<b>Period</b>
<i>Declaratie</i> : direct repayment of costs incurred	1876-1960
<i>ATOOM</i> : lump sums (no vire permitted) of capital and recurrent costs	1960-1978
<i>ITT</i> : lump sum for staff costs, variable element on student numbers	1978-1983
PGM: separation of teaching and research budget heads; volume link	1983-1992
OBEK: Payment on mix of volume/ outputs in teaching, research, overhead	1993-1996
STABEK: Falling student numbers see funding dependency cut	1997-1999
PBM: Focus output +, activity -: student numbers → recruits, graduates	2000-2002
BAMA: PBM modified to account for Bachelor/ Masters model	2003- 2012
Contracts: 7% of total grant on basis of contract with Ministry, 93% outputs	2013-...

Source: Jongbloed & Salerno (2003).

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