



# ***The institutional dynamics of the (European) University***

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this essay is to contribute to an improved comprehension of the university's dynamics of change, as part of a larger transformation of the relationships between society's key institutions. A distinction is made between seeing the University as an institution and as an instrument and four visions of university organization are outlined. These are: the University as a community of scholars, an instrument for national purposes, a representative democracy, and a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets – four stylized models based on respectively constitutive rules, command and hierarchy, bargaining and majority votes, and market prices and competitive selection.

The essay then attends to one important type of environmental change: the emergence of European-level debates and policy making processes that take University dynamics beyond the frame of single universities and nation states. Do these environmental actors and forces generate imperatives for universities or do they point universities in different directions? Next, the significance of University actors, structures, legacies and dynamics are considered. How much discretion is there, what are the dilemmas facing the University, and does the ideal of the University as a fiduciary arrangement dedicated to academic excellence and freedom have a future? The last part suggests that an improved comprehension of University dynamics may depend on a better understanding of how institutional success, confusion and crisis can be related.

- What kind of University for what kind of society?
- The University as an institution and instrument.
- Visions of the University.
- European-level debates and policies.
- The search for an institutional identity.
- Institutional success, confusion and crisis.

## *What kind of University for what kind of society?*

The University is currently involved in dynamics of change that has a potential for transforming its institutional identity. At stake are the University's purpose, work processes, organization, system of governance and financial basis, as well as its role in the political system, the economy and society at large.

The rethinking, reorganizing and refunding of the University are part of processes of change in the larger configuration of institutions in which the University is embedded. These processes link change in the University to change in the role of democratic government, in public-private relations, and in the relationship between the local, national, European and international level.

The current dynamics raise questions about the University's long-term pact with society: What kind of University for what kind of society? What do the University and society expect from each other? How is the University assumed to fit into a democratic polity and society? To what extent and how, are the University, government and society supposed to influence each other? What is the extent and direction of change?<sup>1</sup>

Observed or predicted transformations suggest that the time of the self-governing Republic of Science have passed. A revolution is underway (Marginson and Considine (2000: 3).<sup>2</sup> There is a reshaping of its institutional purposes and the University jeopardizes its legitimacy by losing sight of its identity and constitutive logic, its distinctive features, functions and achievements as an academic institution. Prevailing trends include fundamental change in the autonomy of the University and in the academic freedom of individual faculty members, in the University's collegial and disciplinary organization, the unity of research and teaching, who controls specific bodies of knowledge and who defines criteria of excellence and social needs, the structure of departments, degree programs and courses, the relations between those who do research and teach and academic and administrative leaders, and in governments' commitment to funding universities.<sup>3</sup> Science is increasingly de-nationalized and less constrained by national borders (Crawford, Shinn and Sörlin 1993) and European and international

developments make the continued existence or current roles of the University and the nation state less certain (Wittrock 1993: 361).

As often before, a period with a potential for radical change also invites speculations about what kind of organized system the University is and how it works, how the University ought to be organized and governed, what consequences different arrangements are likely to have, and how external demands for radical reform may depend on the University's capacity for self-governance and adaptation. There are different accounts. The University has been described as obsolete and mediocre. It has also been described as "a phenomenal success" (Veysey 1970: ix).

The aim of the essay is to contribute to an improved understanding of the institutional dynamics of the University. Instead of starting with a definition of what a University is in terms of its purposes and functions or its organizational characteristics, *first*, a distinction is made between seeing the University as an institution and an instrument. *Second*, four visions, or stylized models, of university organization are outlined and it is asked to what degree these abstract visions are of any help in understanding universities as practices. *Third*, since University dynamics usually are seen as externally driven, we attend to one important environmental change: the emergence of European-level debates and policy making processes that take University dynamics beyond the frame of single universities and nation states. How coercive are environmental actors and forces? Do they generate imperatives or clear behavioral guidance for Universities; or, is there a multitude of environmental expectations, demands and success-criteria pointing universities in different directions? *Fourth*, we attend to the significance of University actors, structures, legacies and dynamics - the ways in which the University responds to and act upon the environment, how it protects its institutional identity and integrity, and how it explains and justifies itself to society at large. How much discretion is there, what are the dilemmas facing the University, and does the ideal of the University as a fiduciary arrangement dedicated to academic excellence have a future? *Fifth*, it is suggested that an improved comprehension of University dynamics may depend on a better understanding of how institutional success, confusion and crisis can be related.

## *The University as an institution and instrument*

The University can be seen as an organizational instrument for achieving predetermined preferences and interests. Then the issue is how the University can be organized and governed in order to achieve tasks and objectives in the most efficient way. In an instrumental perspective, the University is involved in a set of contracts. Support, economic and otherwise, depends on contributions. Change reflects a continuous calculation of relative performance and costs, and the University, or some of its parts, will be disposed of if there are more efficient ways to achieve shifting objectives. Key questions are, for whom and for what is the University an instrument? For whom and for what ought the University to be an instrument?

The University can also be seen as an institution. An institution is a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances. Constitutive rules and practices prescribe appropriate behavior for specific actors in specific situations – for example, codes a scientist/scholar or student cannot violate without ceasing to be a scientist/scholar or student. Structures of meaning, embedded in identities and belongings explain, justify and legitimate behavioral codes; they provide common purposes and give direction and meaning to behavior. Structures of resources create capabilities for acting; they empower and constrain actors differently and make them more or less capable of acting according to prescriptive rules (March and Olsen 1989, 1995, 2006).

The degree and form of institutionalization impact both *motivation* and *capacity* to follow institutionalized rules and codes of behavior. In contrast to an instrumental perspective, an institutional perspective assumes that rules and practices have a value in themselves and that their immediate substantive effects can be uncertain or imprecise. For example, the benefits of the University are not easily planned or predicted. To a large extent the University is a set of activities whose benefits have to be enjoyed after they are

accomplished – in Maddox’s words, as ripe fruit can be picket from a tree (Maddox 1964: 159). In contrast to an instrumental perspective, an institutional perspective also assumes that well-entrenched institutions reflect the historical experience of a community, that they take time to root and that they are difficult to change rapidly and radically, except under special circumstances such as widely agreed-upon performance crises.

As an institution the University is involved in a pact based on long-term cultural commitments. The University is a fiduciary system. Those belonging to the University are supposed to be the guardians of its constitutive purposes, principles and processes. They are supposed to defend its institutional identity and integrity whether the threat comes from outside or inside. Third parties are also supposed to enforce rules and sanction non-compliance of institutionalized codes. In an institutional perspective, key questions are, to what degree is the University a strong institution, well-entrenched in contemporary society? What kind of institution, based on what kind of principles, is the University? Do reformers try to enforce existing characteristics or do they try to impose alternative values and principles on the University? Are there attempts to change structures of meaning and causal and normative beliefs, organization and systems of governance, or to reallocate resources?

Historically, the development of the University as a specialized institution dedicated to specific purposes and principles was part of the large-scale transformation from pre-modern to modern societies in Europe. Institutional differentiation created interdependent but partly autonomous institutional spheres of thought and action based on different logics, norms and values, principles of organization and governance, resources, and dynamics, such as democratic politics, market economy, religion, science, art, and civil society (Weber 1978). In periods institutional spheres are in balance, but historical dynamics can be understood in terms of tensions between them. In different time periods the economy, politics, organized religion, science etc. can all lead or be lead and one can not be completely reduced to another. At transformative points in history institutions can also come in direct competition (Weber 1970: 335).

In constitutional democracies the University is functionally dependent on, but partially autonomous from other institutions. Contemporary political-administrative orders, nevertheless, routinely face institutional imbalances. Collisions between key institutions are an important source of change and radical transformation of one institution is usually linked to changes in other institutions (Orren and Skowronek 2004). As a consequence, there is a need to clarify the conditions under which institutional reform is a fairly autonomous (internal) process, and the conditions under which internal processes are overwhelmed by wider political processes and societal mobilization. We need to distinguish between incremental change and reforms within fairly stable organizational and normative frames and change and reforms where the legitimacy of an institution's mission, organization, functioning, moral foundation, ways of thought and resources are thrown into doubt and challenged (Olsen 2004, 2005).

Institutional imperialism, with intrusions and attempts to achieve ideological hegemony and control over other institutional spheres, may threaten to destroy what is distinct about other institutional spheres. There is, however, also institutional defense against invasion of alien norms. Typically, an institution under serious attack reexamines its pact with society and its rationale, identity and foundations, its ethos, codes of behavior and primary allegiances and loyalties (Merton 1937, 1942). Likewise, there may be public debates about what different institutions are supposed to accomplish for society, how each is to be justified and made accountable, what is to be core institutions and auxiliary institutions, and what kind of relationship government is supposed to have to different types of institutions. A possible outcome is the fall and rise of institutional structures and their associated systems of normative and causal beliefs and resources. Arguably, the University now faces this kind of situation.

### *Visions of the University*

What kind of organized system is then the University? Students of formal organizations provide a set of theoretical ideas about how we might view the University as an organization (Hayes and March 1970, Cohen and March 1974, Olsen 1988); and inspired by these efforts four stylized visions, based on different assumptions about what the

University is for and the circumstances under which it will work well, are presented. These are: the University as a community of scholars, an instrument for national purposes, a representative democracy, and a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets. The organizing principles are respectively constitutive rules, command and hierarchy, bargaining and majority votes, and market prices and competitive selection.

**The University is a meritocratic community of scholars.** This vision portrays the University as an institution with a *raison d'être* and constitutive normative and organizational principles of its own. The University is a Republic of Science and *die Gelehrten*. There is *Lern- und Lehrfreiheit* and the University's corporate identity and integrating self-understanding is founded on a shared commitment to scholarship and learning, basic research and search for the truth, irrespective of immediate utility and applicability, political convenience or economic benefit. The advancement, validation and dissemination of knowledge are founded on cognitive categories such as free inquiry and intellectual freedom, rationality, intelligence, learning, academic competence and expertise, fidelity to data and knowledge, theoretical simplicity, explanatory power, conceptual elegance and logical coherence. These are universal criteria, independent of the particularities of a specific geographical, national, cultural or religious context or sacred text. The University is committed to serve society as a whole and not specific "stakeholders" or those able and willing to pay, and education is to be open and accessible to all formally qualified.<sup>4</sup>

The holistic nature of knowledge and the unity of research, humanistic scholarship as well as natural science, are emphasized. Science does not only provide technologies but also codes of conduct and concepts, ideas and beliefs by which humans understand themselves, others and society. The University has a key role in shaping individuals with character and integrity and in developing and transmitting a culture distinguished by humanistic *Bildung*, rationality and "disenchantment of the world", enlightenment and emancipation.

<p><i>Autonomy:</i></p>	<p>University operations and dynamics are governed by internal factors</p>	<p>University operations and dynamics are governed by environmental factors</p>
<p><i>Conflict:</i></p>	<p><i>The University is a self-governing community of scholars</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Free inquiry, truth finding, rationality and expertise.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Scientific quality.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Constitutive principle of the University as an institution: authority to the best qualified.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Driven by the internal dynamics of science. Slow reinterpretation of institutional identity. Rapid and radical change only with performance crises.</p>	<p><i>The University is an instrument for national political agendas</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Administrative: Implementing predetermined political objectives.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Effective and efficient achievement of national purposes.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Delegated and based on relative efficiency.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Political decisions, priorities, designs as a function of elections, coalition formation and breakdowns and changing political leadership.</p>
<p>Actors have <i>shared</i> norms and objectives</p>	<p><i>The University is a representative democracy</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Interest representation, elections, bargaining and majority decisions.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Who gets what: Accommodating internal interests.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Mixed (work-place democracy, functional competence, <i>realpolitik</i>).</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Depends on bargaining and conflict resolution and changes in power, interests, and alliances.</p>	<p><i>The University is a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Community service. Part of a system of market exchange and price systems.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Meeting community demands. Economy, efficiency, flexibility, survival.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Responsiveness to “stakeholders” and external exigencies, survival.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Competitive selection or rational learning. Entrepreneurship and adapting to changing circumstances and sovereign customers.</p>

The organization and governance of the University reflect its institutional identity and its special role and responsibilities in society. There is individual autonomy – Einsamkeit und Freiheit, yet the shared vision of the University provides integration and keeps together functionally specialized sub-systems (Schelsky 1971, Habermas 1987). The only legitimate authority is based on neutral competence. There is collegial organization, elected leaders and disciplinary organization. All activities and results are assessed by the internal norm of scholarship (peer review) and truth is an end in itself. The basic mechanisms of change are found in the internal dynamics of science in general and in specific disciplines. The system evolves through more or less internal, organic processes rather than by external design.

Protection and funding from the state, together with autonomy from government and powerful economic and social groups, is justified by the assumptions that society values objective knowledge, that knowledge is most likely to be advanced through free inquiry, and that “claims of knowledge can only be validated as knowledge – as opposed to dogma and speculation - by being subjected to the tests of free inquiry” (Searle 1972: 171). Free inquiry is also a key feature of an open society and science can aspire to be culture-shaping and provide models for problem solving, conflict resolution and social integration for a democratic society and civilization, based on communicative rationality and the power of the better argument (Habermas 1987, Kalleberg 2000).

**The University is an instrument for national political agendas.** Within this perspective, the University is a rational tool for implementing the purposes and policies of democratically elected leaders. It is an instrument for achieving national priorities, as defined by the government of the day. The University cannot base its activity on a long-term pact and a commitment to cultural development. Instead research and education is a factor of production and a source of wealth and welfare. The University’s purposes and direction of growth depend on political support and funds more than scholarly purposes. A key issue is the applicability and utility of research for practical problem-solving, such as defense, industrial-technological competition, health and education. The University is

a multiversity, and “the multiversity serves society almost slavishly” (Kerr 1966: 19); or, in other words, the University is “for hire” (Wolff 1969: 40).

Expansion and fragmentation come together. Serving national objectives makes the University richer, at the price of reduced internal unity and coherence. The assumption that the University could explore independently the unity of knowledge is replaced with the need to specialize in order to maintain excellence (Parsons and Platt 1973, Perkins 1966). Due to the changing nature of science, some types of research require large-scale facilities and huge budgets. Individual research is replaced by team-work and the disciplinary organization of knowledge is supplemented with or replaced by cross-disciplinary, application-oriented research and institutes. The University is a series of communities and activities held together by a common name, governing board, and related purposes (Kerr 1966). Leaders are appointed, not elected. The administration, with its hierarchies, rules and performance statistics, becomes the core of the University. Autonomy is delegated and support and funding depend on how the University is assessed on the basis of its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving political purposes, relative to other available instruments. Change in the University is closely linked to political decisions and change.

**The University is a representative democracy.** This vision sees the University as an instrument for internal, not external groups. The University is an interest group democracy allowing representation on governing boards and councils to all categories of employees as well as students.<sup>5</sup> The unions of employees and students are also significant participants in University governance. Focus is upon formal arrangements of organization and governance, more than on the special characteristics of work processes in the University. Decision making is organized around elections, bargaining, voting and coalition-building among the organized groups with the aim of accommodating their interests. The groups’ relative success in building and maintaining support decides how the University works and develops.

Democratization of the University is linked to enhancing democracy in society at large (Habermas 1967, Boer, Maassen and Weert 1999) but internal democracy and external autonomy are justified by reference to a mix of principles and concerns. Workplace democracy and co-decision is seen as an improvement compared to antiquated formal hierarchies. Giving more power to younger faculty and reducing the sovereignty of senior professors is assumed to improve the scholarly competence of the University. Giving power to administrative and technical staff is justified by their contributions to the performance of the University. Student power is related both to the significant impact Universities have on their lives and to realpolitik, the students' ability to cause difficulties for the operation of universities and societies. The basic mechanism of University change is internal bargaining and shifting coalitions.

**The University is a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets.** Within this perspective the University is an economic enterprise or a service station operating in regional or global markets (Marginson and Considine 2000). Research and higher education are commodities, bundles of goods to be sold in a free market. Competition and achieving profit and other individual gains are key processes. Students, faculty, donors and communities select from alternative universities in terms of how well they meet individual preferences. Information and knowledge are strategic resources for competitiveness and survival, not a public good. The University provides any research and teaching that can be sold for profit, and quantity, quality and price are determined in competitive markets (Hayes and March 1970, Cohen and March 1974).

Market competition requires rapid adaptation to changing opportunities and constraints, which again requires strong, unitary and professional internal leadership with a responsibility for the University as a whole. The University has more freedom from the state and political authorities. Government involvement is at arm's length and there is regulation and incentives rather than governmental dictates. Simultaneously, the University is more dependent on "stakeholders", donors, buyers, competitors and society at large and University leaders are market entrepreneurs.

Autonomy from government is turned into a management tool for changing universities and the New Public Management ideas and techniques from private enterprises are celebrated (Marginson and Considine 2000, Amaral, Meek and Larsen 2003, Felt 2004). Collegial, disciplinary and democratic organization and individual autonomy are viewed as hindrances to timely decisions and good performance, to be replaced by strong management and inter-disciplinary organization. There are appointed academic leaders and external representation on the governing boards of the University. There are also external accreditation and mechanisms to oversee and evaluate the quality and quantity of university performance (Brennan and Shah 2000). As part of improving fiscal balances, there is appropriation of intellectual property rights (a principle alien to science) and pressure towards “patent or perish” rather than “publish or perish” (Amaral, Fulton and Larsen 2003: 291). In the market-vision, change is governed by competitive selection and the survival of the fittest, that is, those best able and willing to adapt to environmental imperatives and incentives.

**Abstractions and practices.** The four stylized visions are based on assumptions which make it unlikely that any of them alone can capture current university practices. As less than perfect approximations to the abstract visions, universities as practices show “a shocking diversity” (Neave 2003:151) and the relations between universities, public authorities and society are characterized by a great variety of forms of interaction, intervention and control (Hood et al. 2004: Part III). While the historic development of science and universities in Europe have distinct characteristics compared to developments in other civilizations (Huff 1993), talking about “the European university”, characteristics that apply to more or less all European universities and institutions of higher education, and only to European ones, refers at best to a normative vision and not an achievement. Do, then, the four visions give a rough approximation to stages in the European historical development, or is each vision an aspect of university organization and governance?

The University is an old institution. Bologna University, regarded as the oldest in Europe, was established more than 900 years ago and thus long before Italy was founded as a nation-state. The University also shows traces of medieval and ecclesiastical ways of

thought, organization and governance, as well as sediments from historical encounters with governments and powerful groups (Huff 1993, Wittrock 2004).<sup>6</sup> Still, the modern research university and the conduct of scientific research in large-scale formal organizations is relatively new – a phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. In this period, two university systems of special importance have been the German in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, dethroned by the American research university in the twentieth century (Wittrock 1993: 328-9).

The vision of the University as a self-governing community of scholars is usually linked to the legacy of “The Humboldt University” (1810), an arrangement where institutional autonomy and individual freedom are protected by the Constitution and sponsored by the state in order to prevent the University from being corrupted by powerful actors and forces in politics, the economy, or religion. Nevertheless, self-governance took place within constraints. Universities were part of the state apparatus and professors were civil servants (Beamten). The state kept the right to appoint professors and academic autonomy was linked to abstention from politics. While the University was a cultural core institution of modernity, Humboldt was well aware of science as a significant productive force. He used economic and utilitarian arguments and saw the university and science as important in nation- and state-building processes (Habermas 1987, Nybom 2003).

The successful American research university, the multiversity, was in many ways a new type of institution (Kerr 1966) and increasingly it became dependent on federal support and its contributions to defense, industrial-technological competition and other national purposes (Reagan 1969). World War II experiences of the applicability of research for practical problem-solving, together with the Sputnik chock strengthened the link between basic research and national goals in many countries. In 1963 Congress, for example, asked the National Academy of Sciences what level of federal support was “needed to maintain for the United States a position of leadership through basic research in the advancement of science and technology and their economic, cultural, and military applications” (The National Academy of Sciences 1965: 1)? Humboldt’s philosophical-humanistic vocabulary and the idea of unity of purpose and homogeneity of constitution

were gradually replaced with functionalism as the justification for the diversity of the American educational institutions (Parsons and Platt 1973, Wittrock 1993).

The idea that science can, and ought to be, planned at the service of national objectives and social needs spread throughout the OECD area during the 1960s (OECD 1963, 1965, 1968). Still, the ideas were not completely new. They had roots in Marxist thinking (Bernal 1939, Gustavsson 1971: 81-132) and arguably the myth of the Ivory Tower tends to conceal that combining basic and applied research, and being both a Republic of Science and a national instrument for coping with economic and social needs, have a long history (Roll-Hansen 1985).

During the 1960s and 1970s the vision of the University as a representative democracy was boosted by student revolts and their criticism of overcrowded universities with very limited access to professors and the repressive authority of universities and government, the younger faculty's struggle against senior professor dominance, and democratic developments in society at large, emphasizing work-place democracy and co-determination. Students and faculty organizing to protect intellectual and material self-interests were, however, key elements when the University of Bologna was founded, with the students as the key "entrepreneurs" (Lay 2004). The modern implementation of the vision has also been complicated because the key ideas were never fully reconciled with the commitment to intellectual excellence: that the distribution of authority in the University should be in rough conformity with demonstrated competence and expertise, and that science was the affair of "an intellectual aristocracy" (Weber 1970: 134, Wolff 1969: 132, Searle 1972: 203). Neither were the ideas easily reconciled with the observation that faculty historically has shown little enthusiasm for using their participatory rights. Non-participation has often reflected a choice rather than exclusion (Olsen 1976) and this tendency is also observed after the democratic reforms of the 1960s and 1970s (Boer, Denters and Goedegebuure 1998).

Finally, the main trend during the last decades has been that the dominant legitimating idea of the University has changed towards the vision of a service enterprise embedded in

competitive markets.<sup>7</sup> While the reforms during the 1960s and 1970s were inspired by models of political democracy, the normative climate, the reform rhetoric and the standards of assessment have more recently been dominated by the ideologies of neo-liberal economics and business, in higher education as well as in the public sector in general.<sup>8</sup> The conception of the University as a competitive enterprise, open towards society and protected against the state is newer and more contested on the European continent and in the Scandinavian countries than in Anglo-American countries, even if the criticism of the enterprise-ideology has long roots also in the United States (Veysey 1970, Currie et al. 2003, Neave 2003).<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the historic stages-perspective gets modest support. There are trends but also variation and countertendencies that make it more plausible to treat the four visions as enduring aspects of university organization and governance. The mix of visions varies over time and across political and cultural systems and invites questions about the scope conditions of each vision. Under what conditions are professors, other university employees, students and governments likely to be fully committed to the vision of a self-governing community devoted to academic freedom and excellence? Under what conditions are governments able and willing to provide well defined and fairly stable objectives for the University and forecast what it takes to reach these objectives? Under what conditions will there be an identifiable electorate in the University, representing well-organized interests and well-informed “citizens”, as well as political and societal acceptance of University autonomy based on internal, representative arrangements? Under what conditions are markets perfect enough (few frictions, perfect knowledge, easy entry etc.), and oriented towards academic quality rather than low prices, so that competition rewards excellent research and teaching and eliminate low quality?

Arguably, the area in which the critical assumptions underlying each vision are realistic is considerably smaller than the area where they are assumed to be applicable by their proponents. While there has been some convergence in rhetoric, few are likely to be completely committed to a single vision under all conditions. Often various models will supplement each other and the task is to understand how different systems balance

different concerns, and how they develop power-sharing arrangements rather than allocate all power to faculty, students, administrators, public authorities, or business.

In a democratic society there are probably long-term adaptive processes that make internal and external conceptions of the University's autonomy and social responsibilities converge to some degree. If so, an existing balance is most likely to be challenged in periods of radical regime change. Not unexpectedly, for example, the South African government wanted a break with the past by restructuring higher education and changing government-institutional relations as part of moving away from apartheid (Muller, Maassen and Cloete 2005). One may hypothesize that implementing national priorities may be more legitimate in periods of war and crises than in normal times, that some government objectives are more legitimate than others and that it is more legitimate to intervene in some activities (e.g. capacity-issues) than in others (e.g. the content of research and education). Universities, disciplines and individuals with strong academic credentials and high status are less likely to have their autonomy challenged than others. Disciplines that are highly dependent on outside funds (many natural sciences) are probably more positive to outside influence than those who are not (many of the humanities), and they are in particular so where there are attractive alternatives to the University. Systems with strong trade union traditions and general acceptance of workplace democracy, such as the Scandinavian countries, are also likely to be most willing to accept representative schemes in the University.

If support is conditional and a question of degree and the four visions are both competing and supplementing each other, there will in some periods and contexts be a balance between the different visions. In other periods and contexts one vision may generate reform efforts, while others constrain what are legitimate and viable solutions. Ongoing European-level debates and reforms aimed at developing a European Area of Higher Education and a European Area of Research provide a setting for studying such issues. Which, if any, effects is European integration – including ambitions of European research and university policy coordination, research cooperation, and the development of support

structures such as a European Research Council – likely to have upon the development of European universities, their identity, organization and financing?

### ***European-level debates and policies***

The European case illustrates that debates and reforms concerning the future of the University can evoke several, competing visions of the University and that they can be driven by a confluence of processes taking place in different organized settings, and not by a single dominant process taking place in a single setting.

**The confluence of reform processes.** September 18 1988 The Magna Charta Universitatum was signed in Bologna by more than 400 Rectors of European Universities and later endorsed by many others from different parts of the world. The occasion was the 900 Anniversary of the University of Bologna. The initiative had been taken by the University of Bologna in 1986 in a proposal to the oldest European universities. At a meeting in Bologna in June 1987 delegates from 80 universities elected an eight members board to prepare the Charter and the proposal was drafted by a group of academic leaders in Barcelona in January 1988. An Observatory has also been established to monitor future developments.<sup>10</sup>

The charter laid out the principles seen to define “the university”. It celebrated the humanitarian values of university traditions and aimed at strengthening the bonds among European universities. The Rectors pledged loyalty to ideals such as the University’s moral and intellectual autonomy from all political authority and economic power; teaching and research in universities as inseparable, and cooperation across political and cultural borders. The spirit was one of confidence. The University had proven its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and it was assumed that it will be able to do so also in the future. An appeal was made to European governments to follow up the principles formulated in the Charter in their policy making.<sup>11</sup>

Humboldtian ideals were not seen as a hindrance for an active role for universities in the search for a new European political order and a European identity. The universal values

and the European roots of the University were not seen to conflict. On the one hand, the University transcends geographical and political frontiers and universities from other regions of the world were invited to join the Charter. On the other hand, Europe was asked to unite around the University as a vehicle of unity and a trustee of the continent's intellectual and normative legacy. Reaching back to the early years of European university history, the Charter supported the mutual exchange of information, joint projects, improved mobility among teachers and students, and a policy of equivalent statuses, titles, examinations and award of scholarship.

These were also core themes in the Bologna Declaration on the creation of a European Area of Higher Education by 2010, but this time the initiative came from a different source. While the Charter was initiated by the academic community, the Bologna Declaration was a pledge taken in 1999 by the ministers of education from 30 countries.<sup>12</sup> The expressed aim was to reform national systems of higher education in order to promote mobility, employability, and European dimensions in higher education. The aspiration was to insure compatibility and equivalence, not to develop a common European policy of higher education or streamlining national systems. Focus was on structures rather than content - the development of a system of readable and comparable degrees, a system with two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate), a quality assurance system and a credit transfer system. European cooperation was linked to a cultural, and not only an economic dimension and a "Europe of knowledge" was seen as a means to consolidate and enrich European citizenship. Rather than being forced by the imperatives of global competition, ministers did what was politically possible at that time (Allègre 2002: 18).

To some degree the Bologna-process has changed the terms of the debate and provided elements of a common understanding. Some have also seen the process as a turning point in the development of higher education in Europe.<sup>13</sup> 40 countries are now members. Themes have been added, such as life-long learning, the participation of institutions of higher education and students in the process, making European universities more attractive for non-European students, doctoral studies, creating a synergy between the

European Area of Higher Education and the European Area of Research, and balancing the social dimension and social cohesion against the efforts to improve economic competitiveness.<sup>14</sup>

The Bologna process has primarily been an intergovernmental process. Ministers of education have been the key participants and national control over policy making has been emphasized. The removal of barriers to mobility is, however, consistent with aspirations of European integration and making European higher education more competitive in global markets. There has also been a gradual shift in the meaning of “diversity” – from diversity among national systems of higher education to a European-wide diversification in institutions and programs with different profiles (Hackl 2001: 114). The EU Commission has, furthermore, become a full member and has played an increasingly important role. The academic community is involved and several institutions and organizations are consultative members.<sup>15</sup> To some degree the process has also become institutionalized. Working structures and a series of meetings with time-tables attached have been set up.

Compared to the ambitious but delimited aspirations of the Bologna process, the Commission wants a general debate on the role of European universities with the aim to develop a vision for university-based research and innovation for the next 15-20 years (European Commission 2003, 2004b). The occasion is the emerging knowledge economy and doubts that the universities will be able to play a constructive role in these transformations. As often before in EU documents, there is no lack of big words: “A new age is about to dawn”. We are in the Century of science and technology and the world is more variable and unpredictable as one society gives birth to the next (European Commission 1995: 73, 2000, 2003).

The Commission claims both necessities and consensus. A permanently changing economy and technology compel the system of research and higher education to change. Increased demands for higher education, the internationalization of education and research, the need to develop effective and close co-operation between universities and

industry, competition following from the proliferation of places where knowledge is produced, the interdisciplinary reorganization of knowledge, and the emergence of new expectations, make European universities face an imperative need to adapt and adjust (European Commission 2003: 6-9). The Commission also claims that the time of “heated debates” over university organization have come to an end (European Commission 1995: 42), thereby framing reforms as technical questions of finding efficient organizational forms consistent with necessities and shared goals.

The situation is assessed as worrying. While Europe aspires to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”, there is a lack of university adaptation and innovation that contributes to a loss of economic growth and competitiveness, as well as brain-drain. European universities are not globally competitive. They have not learnt to compete in world markets and handle structural change and most of them lack the competitive mindset. The picture is not exactly flattering:

“After remaining a comparatively isolated universe for a very long period, both in relation to society and to the rest of the world, with funding guaranteed and a status protected by respect for their autonomy, European universities have gone through the second half of the 20th century without really calling into question the role or nature of what they should be contributing to society. The changes they are undergoing today and which have intensified over the past ten years prompt the fundamental question: can the European universities, as they are and are organized now, hope in the future to retain their place in society and in the world” (European Commission 2003: 22)?

A sustainable level of competitiveness is seen to require many different and not easily reconcilable things: concerted action, better investment in knowledge, adequate and sustainable incomes, ensured autonomy, professionalism in academic and administrative affairs, priority to excellence, contributions to local and regional needs and strategies, closer co-operation between universities and economic enterprises, and the fostering of a coherent, compatible and competitive European Area of Higher Education and a European Area of Research (European Commission 2000, 2003: 2-3).

The Commission observes a trend away from the Humboldt model and towards greater differentiation and specialized institutions concentrating on core specific competences (European Commission 2003: 6). In Europe there are some 3800 higher education institutions and some 300 of these have a significant research capacity (Commission 3004b).<sup>16</sup> The Commission accepts that the link between research and teaching continues to define the ethos of the university, but the link has not to be identical in all universities, for all programs or for all levels (European Commission 2003: 18). Managing a modern university is also a complex business and universities should be open to professionals from outside the purely academic tradition, provided that confidence in the university's management remains strong (European Commission 2003: 17).

The Commission, finally, sees itself as surrounded by ignorance and a lack of commitment. The creation of a European Research Area, attempts to create an "internal market" in research, better coordination between members states and development of a European research policy, have been hampered by insufficient participation by the member states (European Commission 2002). Public opinion perceives scientific ventures and technological progress as a threat – an "irrational climate" and a fear "which has some parallels in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance" (European Commission 1995: 25).<sup>17</sup>

**The co-existence of competing visions.** The Commission invites a general debate on the universities but remains within an instrumental economic-technological framework. Consistent with the neo-liberal reform ethos, the University is an enterprise in competitive markets. This vision is also seen to coincide with the vision of the University as an implementer of market-oriented economic policies, even if some emphasize the value of competition in general, while others view universities as an instrument for supporting European industry in the global competition. The Commission's approach can partly be understood on the basis of its limited legal competence in research and higher education. Competition and vocational training are accentuated because these are areas where the Commission's competence is strongest. Still, it is surprising that the Commission seems ignorant about the university-debates during the 1960s and 1970s;

that the Magna Charta process is not mentioned when “The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge” is on the agenda; that the actual support of the Humboldtian model is overlooked and that the cultural dimension of the Bologna process is largely ignored.<sup>18</sup>

Among commentators, there were voices in support of the Commission’s focus on economics and markets and the need to promote competitive European research universities.<sup>19</sup> In order to compete globally, universities had to be granted more autonomy from government within stable financial and legal frameworks, and the “management deficit” required stronger leadership and improved strategic capacity. Unsurprisingly the Commission’s assumptions, analyses and conclusions also created criticism and confrontations with the academic community. The Commission was attacked for vulgarizing the debate. It presented higher education solely as an instrument of economic policy and gave a too narrow interpretation of the university’s basic mission. The overall negative description of European universities was rejected, and so were the TINA-perspective (There Is No Alternative) and the consensus assumption. One comment was that “far too many questions in the Commission’s Communication asks “how” instead of “why” or “should we”.<sup>20</sup> Where the Commission assumed consensus, respondents saw a number of dilemmas, tensions and paradoxes of a nature that cannot easily be solved.

As distinct from the Commission’s view, the Humboldtian model was seen as still valid. The pledge to the University as a universal, united and autonomous institution, whose identity and integrity should be protected against external groups, was strong. Research and teaching should be linked and individual freedom defended. Support was given to a public service model and it was argued against making higher education solely market driven, because the market logic does not apply easily to education. The commission was also attacked for giving too little attention to education as a cultural good with a contribution to social cohesion.

One conclusion was that today there is no ready-made model likely to address all current challenges. The Humboldtian model needs rethinking and adaptation to new circumstances and a possible renaissance for the European University requires that

Europe finds its way forward on the basis of its own strengths. Europe should learn from, but not copy the United States. The solution is to be found in a diversity of models, reflecting the diversity of European cultures and perspectives. Diversity is an asset and imposing a single model will threaten the diversity. There are also several roles for universities. The Commission had not considered what should happen to the losers - whether full systems, individual universities or individual academics; yet competition creates losers, as well as winners, and it would be a serious mistake to focus on the brilliant few and forget the rest. One should not aspire for a hierarchy of excellence but a system of excellence in diversity, and there is a need for a massive effort to raise the level of universities' missions in training and research across Europe.

Support for Humboldtian ideas was (again) seen as reconcilable with instrumental concerns, as long as utility was not assessed solely in terms of economic competitiveness and growth. The European University Association, for example, portrayed the University as an autonomous institution with a distinct European mission and underlined “the fundamental role of the university in building Europe, and in further defining and developing the European social model” (European University Association 2003). Others claimed that there is a need to strike a balance between diverse university missions, including regional development and an equitable geographical distribution.

Absent in the comments was strong support for the representative democracy-vision. This was so even if current reform efforts involve a reversal of many of the accomplishments of the 1960s. For example, new hierarchical elements have been introduced, egalitarianism has been played down and the anti-capitalist rhetoric against a University that produces “cogs in industrial wheels and brained-washed middle-class consumers” (Parsons and Platt 1973: 348) has been replaced by market rhetoric. Voices of the 1960s may be absent due to the institutions and individuals invited to respond to the Commissions Communication. The silence may also reflect that faculty and students have become less concerned with participation and representation, as illustrated by the Dutch case. At the end of the 1960s a management-inspired reform bent on coordination, effectiveness and efficiency was swept aside by demands for more democracy. Arguably,

the 1970 Act on university governance passed by the legislature took the Netherlands closer to a democratic model than what was the case in any other country. In comparison, the new Act on modernizing the organization and governance of the University, put in effect in 1997, represented a “counterrevolution” with its emphasis on strong and unitary executive leadership. There were some protests, but neither students nor faculty took to the streets (Boer, Denters and Goedegebuur 1998, Boer, Maassen and Weert 1999). A query then is whether the market and management ideology will also turn out to be a fad, or whether it will establish itself within the University (Amaral, Fulton and Larsen 2003: 293).

The European case displays that a new level of university debate and reform has been added. Different visions and legacies, partly located in different institutional settings and carried by different types of actors, are evoked simultaneously at the European level. Universities are not solely seen as national institutions (Hackl 2001). For example, the Commission wants Universities to be enterprise-like tools involved in global economic competition and Rectors reach back to a past where geographical and political borders were of lesser significance. The EU’s funds, Framework Programs and network-building have already had consequences for academic contacts, cooperation and co-authorship, making Europe a more significant entity (Smeby and Gornitzka 2005). A European Research Council, possibly modeled on the National Science Foundation in the United States may strengthen these developments, depending on their agenda, budgets and autonomy (Caswill 2003) and so may joint degrees and accreditation. A development from national block-grants to European competitive funding has also increased the time and energy spent on applications, reports, monitoring and control, and the trade-off between academic excellence and European “added value” is problematic.

In several respects the European situation is unsettled. There is a multitude of partly inconsistent criteria of “success” and competing understandings of what forms of organization and governance will contribute to good performance. There is also a confluence of processes, and the European case illustrates the difficulties of disentangling the effects of global, European, national and local processes and thus comprehending

university reform and change. The tensions and collisions between competing visions and legacies may have a potential for renewing the European University, but the TINA-interpretation of an inevitable transformation from a scholar-governed mode of research and governance to research governed by political and commercial actors and organizational forms (Gibbons et al. 1994), have to be scrutinized. It is important to distinguish between an observed trend, its inevitability, and its normative validity (Gustavsson 1997). It is also important to make efforts to disentangle the explanatory power of environmental dictates, deliberate reforms and institutional structures, processes and actors (March and Olsen 1989, 2006).

### *The search for an institutional identity*

The claim that universities must reorganize and deal more imaginatively with problems ahead is well known from history. So are warnings against meeting criticism and reforms with romanticizing an alleged ideal model and demonize others. The University needs to avoid the pitfalls of “platitudes and nostalgic glances backward” (Kerr 1966: vi) and being “fogged by noble sentiments and high rhetoric” (Searle 1972: 169). Just like the turn of the nineteenth century, there is a need to carefully rethink the current and future role of universities on the basis of scholarly, institutional and political realities, such as increasing specialization and fragmentation of modern university life, “deep-seated tensions in the very conception and operation of the University” and a gulf between acknowledged models and university practices (Wittrock 1993: 331).

It is beyond this essay to discuss in detail how the heterogeneous group of organized activities called “universities” and “institutions of higher education” in everyday language will develop, the processes through which change will take place, and the factors that are likely to favor or hamper change. The future of the University will be affected by many factors and some are obviously outside the control of the University. Still, universities, and different parts of each university, have responded differently to changing circumstances and attention is here primarily focused upon what discretion universities have and the possible impacts of the University’s own actions and institutional characteristics.<sup>21</sup>

**Institutions and environments.** A key distinction in the literature on formally organized institutions is the extent to which a perspective views institutions as epiphenomena that mirror environmental circumstances or deliberate willful reorganization, and the extent to which a perspective pictures institutions as partly autonomous and reproduced with some reliability, independent of environmental stability or change and deliberate reform interventions (March and Olsen 1989, 2006). The institutional perspective used here views processes such as competitive selection and rational structural choice and adaptation as less than perfect. They also interact in complicated ways (March 1981). To understand institutional dynamics then means understanding environmental effectiveness in eliminating sub-optimal institutions, the latitude of purposeful institutional reform, and institutional abilities to adapt spontaneously to changing circumstances (Olsen 2001: 196).

The idea of influential, or deterministic, environments gets support from the fact that the University has never fully controlled the direction, substance or speed of its development. Large-scale processes such as the industrial, democratic and scientific revolutions and the development of the nation-state have fundamentally affected universities. Nevertheless, developments have not merely reflected functional responses to macro-forces and national styles, educational ideals and cultures, or differentiation within science itself. The University has been influenced, but not determined, by their environments and we have to consider to what degree reformers promoting specific programs and visions of higher education have had an impact.<sup>22</sup>

The idea that university organization and governance can be designed and reformed through deliberate intervention is a key assumption behind the recent promotion of strong university leadership, the formulation of clear, consistent and stable goals, and the development of long-term-strategies for managing change. In contrast, students of university organization and governance have called attention to the limits of understanding and control and the complications of rational intervention where there is no agreed upon and stable meaning of “improvement”. Causal chains between formal

structures and university practices and performance are usually indirect, long and complex; formal and informal structures can only to a limited degree be deliberately manipulated; and successful universities tend partly to be loosely coupled “organized anarchies” (March and Cohen 1974, March and Olsen 1976, Kogan et al. 2000). Furthermore, what looks like revolutionary change in the formal organization of University governance, may turn out to be a codification of practice, with uncertain effects upon actual behavior and academic performance (Boer, Denters and Goedegebuure 1998).

This view is also found in interpretations of the historical development of the successful American research university. Veysey, studying late nineteenth century institutions in the United States, observed that there was a lack of self-consciousness over the emerging new organization, rather than manifest intentions. Much was taken for granted and Veysey (1970: 267-8) warned against interpreting good results as the outcome of intentions and foresight. Kerr (1966: 9, 49, 102) argued that no one created the multiversity, or even visualized it. Developments were unplanned and governed by circumstances more than shaped by plan and conscious design. Jencks and Riesman (1969: xiv-xv) claimed that American educators “have seldom been able to give coherent explanation for what they were doing. Even when they had a consistent theory, the theory often had little or no relationship to the actual result of their actions”. The general responsiveness of American universities to society has also been seen to stem not from explicit policy, but from “the habits of flexibility and adaptability that have well served American universities throughout the first century of their history” (Geiger 1991: 215).

Shaping the University’s internal organization, performance and role in society through long-term plans and strategies is today further complicated because debates and policy making impacting the future of the University take place in a multi-level and multi-centered setting, involving a myriad of actors, institutions and processes. For decades the single university setting and the nation state setting have been supplemented by premises from international organizations such as the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank. More recently, European-level processes have increased in importance. The GATS negotiations

(General Agreement on Trade in Services) within the framework of the World Trade Organization may turn out to have huge consequences (Oosterlinck 2002) and it is not unlikely that security policies in the wake of 911 will have more important consequences for faculty and student mobility across national borders than policies based on educational concerns.

Such processes can be more or less loosely coupled. Sometimes they operate separately and in parallel. At other times they flow together and participants, problems, solutions, and choices are connected through timing and simultaneity more than through intention and plan, and seemingly accidental outcomes appear. The consequences of such processes depend on whether they take place in more or less institutionalized settings, more or less constraining the confluence of processes, actors and concerns (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972, Cohen and March 1974, March and Olsen 1976, 1989).

Change, then, is affected by how strong is the University as an institution. Does the University have an integrating self-understanding and shared sense of purpose, an organization and resources that make it motivated and able to impact the multitude of processes potentially affecting its future?<sup>23</sup> Is it likely to be able to counteract institutional imperialism and invasion of alien premises and reexamine its identity and pact with society?

One possibility is that the University gets involved in confrontations and a power struggle over its future. Then the questions are: How united, resourceful and attractive is the University? How relevant is it for other significant actors – what can it offer to others - and how relevant can it be made? Who are likely to come to the rescue of the University and what coalitions and alliances are possible? What opportunities are there for playing different opponents against each other - public and private and local, national, European and international actors?

Another possibility is a public, free and critical debate about the institutional identity and autonomy of the University - its foundational principles, the appropriate forms of

organization and governance, and what a legitimate role is for the University in a democratic society. Then, the University involves itself in processes inspired, not by a predetermined vision of a specific organizational form and system of governance or a shared normative ideal, but by the processes that define the character of the University: communicative rationality, reason-giving, deliberation and learning (Habermas 1987). While the prospects are hampered by the lack of a shared “public sphere” in the University (Kalleberg 2000), such processes may under favorable conditions have a potential to unite highly differentiated and specialized sub-cultures around a shared conception of what a successful university can be and what it means to be a faculty-member, an administrative and technical employee, or a student.

**Dilemmas to be faced.** If it is assumed that the future of the University (at least partly) depends on how convincing the University argues for its institutional identity and autonomy, a first step may be to call attention to four dilemmas facing the University. They are, how to balance: (a) the search for unity of purpose and the proliferation of identities and accounts, (b) the desire for unity of action and for protecting individual freedom, (c) the need to secure adequate resources without being seduced or being abandoned, and (d) the desire to embrace self-renewal as well as continuity.

*Unity of purpose and the proliferation of identities and accounts.* The University is a specialized institution with limited legitimate purposes. “Institution” implies some degree of internal coherence. Yet there are tensions and conflicts in all institutions. Insuring that a shared sense of purpose does not disintegrate is a constant challenge and it has to be inquired to what degree the University constitutes a community with a strong identity and a shared sense of institutional purpose.

There are competing loyalties, logics and accounts. Some are committed to the University as an institution - “cosmopolitans”, others to a specific university - “locals” (Gouldner 1957), or a department, discipline or profession. Massive growth and differentiation are claimed to turn the University into an accidental agglomerate of co-habituating fields and individuals at the price of reduced community-feeling (Kaplan 1964) and to create a

danger of make-believe-universities (Gardner 1962: 79). “The Humboldt University” has become a myth and a life-lie as its ideals have been incapable of coping with the theoretical and institutional expansion of the natural sciences.<sup>24</sup> Appeals to a unitary, self-governing academic community and the scientific ethos are used for justification rather than for governing the University (Gornitzka 2003).

In this perspective it is important to ask whether faculty, other university employees, and students are able to define what their common, institutional identity is. Do they know, and agree upon, what are the constitutive principles, values, structures and rules by which they want to be organized and governed, what they wish to share as an academic community and how they want to be different? To what degree do they, for example, embrace the principles of academic excellence and freedom, the unity of knowledge, the linking of research and teaching, the tenure-principle, and the principle of free education? To what degree are such principles related to the University’s institutional identity and not solely to individual or group self-interests?

Academic communities, like democratic communities, have problems combining excellence and equality. There are many defenses against competition and against rewarding individual performance and superior individuals. Excessive competition can tear a University or a country in pieces. Excessive egalitarianism can make a university or country out-competed by other universities or countries (Gardner 1962: 24-5, 112).

Historically, universities have not always given priority to high quality and been willing to differentiate between more and less competent professors and more or less motivated and skilled students. Weber, for example, found a predominance of mediocrities in the German university (Weber 1970: 132). In the United States it was observed that “most university presidents and many professors at the end of the nineteenth century were downright hostile towards eccentric geniuses” (Veysey 1970: 428). It has also been argued that many faculty-members failed to effectively defend high academic standards during the 1960s campus turmoil because they had no overall vision of the University or philosophy of higher education (Searle 1972: 204). During the 1960s, educators were less

sure than they were before that their tradition and values were worth defending. Many students were alienated from the University; “they had no sense of identification with the institution, no stake in improving it, and no reason for wanting a voice in its operation” (Jencks and Riesman 1969: x).

An implication is that the University’s ability to impact its own future and its ability to defend the position as a fiduciary institution dedicated to academic freedom and excellence will depend upon factors such as: How strong is the academic community today? What is its content – what foundational values and principles are it likely to give priority to? How well does the University itself understand the processes and conditions that facilitate an academic community that honor academic quality and how are these principles explained to an audience largely ignorant of the nature of academic work and scholarly identity? How widespread is the belief that university employees and students can achieve influence by engaging in genuine discourse, argumentation and non-strategic and non-coercive behavior?

*Unity of action and individual freedom.* The current enthusiasm for strengthening academic and administrative leadership and introducing more hierarchical elements as a condition for institutional autonomy is also based on a perceived threat to the coherence of the University. The suspicion that the University is unable to manage its own affairs in a coordinated and unitary way is not new, but as unity of purpose disintegrated, a uniformity of standardized practices came into being in the American university around the end of the 19th century. There was fragmentation and centralization and bureaucratic administration made possible a new epoch of institutional empire-building without recourse to shared values (Veysey 1970: 311). The different developments of French and German science during the nineteenth century have been attributed to changes in the German way of organizing and governing the University (Clark 1995) and Weber (1970) observed that the German loss of academic leadership to American universities at least in part was caused by the latter’s organizational and technical advantages. The same type of argument was evoked during the 1960s. The institute directorship was labeled “the last strong-hold of feudalism” in Europe (Consolazio 1965: 326). The decentralized, live-and-

let-live system and the oligarchy of senior professors and academic guilds were seen to contribute to the stifling and decline of basic science in much of Europe and cause a loss of talent to the United States (Kaplan 1964: 111).

Strengthening internal University leadership and external representation and weakening collegial and discipline-oriented organization, is likely to impact individual freedom and creativity. On the one hand, it is a paradox that individuals and small groups in universities account for a considerable amount of innovation, while the University as a corporation has been seen as “unconscious” (T. Olsen 1966) and even a “stronghold of reaction” (Kerr 1966: 98). There is also little hard evidence showing that New Public Management reforms have successfully contributed to academic success (Amaral, Fulton and Larsen 2003: 292-3). On the other hand, academic success is reconcilable with a variety of funding schemes (Liefner 2003) and it is a paradox for many European universities that reforms perceived as threatening, such as externally recruited boards of trustees and appointed presidents, deans and chairs are integrated and legitimate parts of some of the best American research universities.

Traditionally, scholars have wanted to be left alone, but today it is difficult to imagine a well-working university that does not have a well-functioning administration. As argued decades ago, it is important to get beyond the old pitting of faculty against administration, simply because it reflects an outmoded idea of the university (Perkins 1966: 88). It is then important to understand how different organizational arrangements and forms of governance are likely to function in different historical and cultural contexts. Under what conditions is it, for example, likely that university administrators come to think of their activity in generic leadership-terms (currently dominated by the ideology of the market-oriented private firm), or come to see university management as special, requiring principles and rules of its own? The ability to reconcile academic and administrative values and skills will also depend on what kinds of leaders, including external representatives, are recruited; what role-conceptions they develop; and how they are they made accountable. These are questions where few well-documented answers are available.

In principle, one way around the management-dilemma is to restrict the scope of the University. An old theme is to rescue basic research and learning by driving out undergraduate teaching and professional schools, by differentiating between professors who are competent to do high-quality research and those who are not, and leaving the writing of a dissertation to the relatively few students who are able to do original work (Veblen 1957, Wolff 1969). In practice, these proposals will produce tension and conflict and it is likely to be difficult for Universities to make such decisions. The proposal that there should be built a limited number of European elite universities (Nybom 2003), together with the already existing stratification between universities and the development of relatively autonomous research institutes, laboratories and centers within universities, nevertheless indicate that universities have to face a difficult question. Where on the continuum, the Research Academy (generating new knowledge and seeing all knowledge as hypothetical and imperfect) and the School (transmitting established knowledge) do universities aspire to place themselves? The answers given are likely to have consequences for how unity of action and individual freedom are balanced in the future.

*Resources: Being seduced or being abandoned.* The prospect of a loss of institutional purpose, direction and integrity has a resource aspect. The fear of seduction linked to the University's inability to say "no" to funds was typically voiced in the American context during the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Facing a plurality of sources of support and a perceived problem of uncontrolled growth, it was asked whether the University should accept the goals and values of whoever could pay. It was also asked to what degree it would be possible to reconcile being an instrument for national purpose or community groups with free inquiry and critique (Perkins 1966, Wolff 1969).

In contrast, the primarily state-financed European universities now tend to define their problem as financial more than a question of identity. They are concerned about being abandoned by public authorities - that national governments abdicate their traditional role as the universities' guardian angel and that public funds dwindle so that the University becomes dependent on private sponsors, alumni support and student tuition (Veld, Füssel and Neave 1996, Nybom 2003). Future generous support is certainly not guaranteed. The

University's days of almost unquestioned pre-eminence as an instrument for coping with society's problems have gone (Wittrock 1993: 344). Excellence has been developed in other institutional settings and the University is not necessarily the preferred site even for basic research. The distrust of public sector professionals has to some degree also spread to university employees and generated demands for external quality assurance and cost efficiency controls (Kogan et al. 2000) and massification has made it impossible for the University to guarantee upward social mobility for all students.

Slack resources buffer conflicts and make it easier for an institution to live with conflicting goals and principles (Cyert and March 1963). In periods of austerity, budgetary struggles over cut-backs create more visible winners and losers and easily strain feelings of community. Adaptation of specific parts of the University to their task environments, sponsors and customers is also likely to make University-wide coordination difficult and weaken the sense of internal community and shared purpose and identity. Pay-per-unit financial systems can give incentives for growth, independent of internal consistency, academic quality and labor market opportunities for candidates.

A challenge for the University is to balance between the Scylla of being seduced and the Charibdis of being abandoned and at the same time defend its identity and integrity. Potential contributors of funds, and the population at large, have to be convinced that it is worthwhile to support the University in the future. It has to be clarified to what extent and under what circumstances there is a contradiction between academic excellence and self-governance and various social and economic objectives, and a line has to be drawn between what are legitimate and illegitimate demands and arrangements. This balancing act is not a one-time-affair. It is a continuous challenge linked to the ability to combine self-renewal and continuity.

*Self-renewal and continuity.* The belief in the self-regulatory capabilities of markets stands in contrast to the wide-spread belief that the University is unwilling or unable to change and that its structures are too rigid in an era of rapid scientific and societal change. The University has not changed itself; it has been changed (Kerr 1966: 102,

Nybohm 2003: 150). The European University in particular has had few if any self-correcting mechanisms (Kaplan 1965: 358) and governments in Europe have leaned over backward in their effort not to interfere with university autonomy (Consolazio 1965: 329).

The perceived rigidity of the University is curious, given that universities are strongly overrepresented among the longest-living formal organizations in the world and that they therefore have documented their ability to survive under very shifting circumstances. The rigidity-claim is also surprising given the unprecedented growth and change that has taken place in universities over the last half century.

On the one hand, change in itself is not a valid normative standard. Any change is not necessarily better than status quo and there are few good reasons for generally embracing the current enthusiasm for rapid adaptation, for example by establishing research centers that can be easily established and dissolved (Clark 1998). On the other hand, protecting the identity and integrity of the University cannot simply mean a defense of status quo and in particular not a defense of a specific form of organization or system of governance. It is highly unlikely that a single arrangement can guarantee good performance indefinitely, under all circumstances, and for all parts of the University. Furthermore, concepts such as “university”, “institutional autonomy” and “academic freedom” are not completely static. They have changed slowly over time and developed somewhat differently in different political and cultural contexts. Their content, and what are seen as reasonable reciprocal expectations, cannot be determined by universities or any other single group alone. They evolve in the interfaces between the academic community, public authorities and society at large, including the power relations typical for those interfaces.

In democracies the confidence of citizens and elected representatives is in the last instance decisive for how far institutional autonomy will reach and what will be an institution’s legitimate role in the social order. The University therefore must balance change and continuity in a way that is acceptable both internally and to the outside world.

Overly strong identification with a specific institution can threaten the coherence of the larger system and there are legitimate reasons for guarding democracy against non-accountable experts and functional elites. Universities have to be accountable for the research and education they provide and there are no moral or democratic arguments for accepting mismanagement and eventually the collapse of universities with reference to the principle of institutional autonomy (Pandor 2004). The issue is the balance between autonomy and the degree and nature of democratic intervention and one way to generate support for the University is to convince the public that a well-functioning democracy requires a (partly) autonomous university and that both universities and democracies are constituted by processes of free discussion, opinion building and sharing of information (Gustavsson 1997).

Historically, there is ample evidence that the University's identity and integrity can be threatened from outside. But conflicts are not necessarily between the University and the rest of society. More likely there are disagreements within the University, among political actors and societal groups. Neither is it obvious how different universities will cope with the dilemmas they face and that they will always give priority to academic excellence and freedom. Actors within the University can also threaten its identity and integrity, for example through purely self-interested rather than principled behavior, or by rejecting academic ideals such as truth and objectivity as unrealistic or outdated. It is an empirical question under what conditions external or internal threats are most likely and most dangerous for the University.

The future of the University then depends on how its autonomy is used in practice. The self-reforming capacity of the University affects both the likelihood of external interventions and the prospect of being abandoned. The challenge is to protect the University's foundational purpose, identity and integrity and simultaneously develop and maintain flexibility and adaptation, including possible long-term change in established conceptions of what a good University is all about. Universities need to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate demands for reforms. They also need to distinguish between legitimate defense of constitutive values and principles and defense of

privileges, self-interests and ordinary laziness. In brief, both reform proposals and resistance to change have to be justified within a valid theory of the University as an institution (Searle 1972: 211).

### *Institutional success, confusion and crisis*

Institutional change is often seen as driven by perceived failure – the institution fail to meet expected functional performance or there is an erosion of its normative basis and legitimacy. The essay, however, suggests that institutional success may also carry the seeds of institutional confusion, crisis and change.

The University has in many ways been a success. It has developed into a key institution that impact most aspects of democratic societies. The University has never before been asked to fulfill more roles, take on more tasks and solve more problems. It has never before attracted more students and resources and many organizations want to use the name in order to improve their status and attractiveness.

Yet, the success has also created problems. Success has made aspiration levels raise rapidly, creating what may turn out to be unrealistic expectations. A result has been work overload and institutional confusion. The vision of the University as an enterprise embedded in global economic competition has gained strength, but other visions also have their more or less resourceful spokespersons. There are many and inconsistent purposes, expectations and success criteria and it is unclear who has legitimacy to talk on behalf of “society” and define what social needs are. Governments are unable or unwilling to formulate clear priorities; societal groups have different expectations and demands and only few of them are likely to be accommodated through market competition and price systems. Universities are uncertain about their identity – what they are, what they want to become, and in what direction to go. Boundaries between institutions are blurred and it is difficult for universities to find their place in a larger order of research and higher education institutions and in the political system and society at large. Institutional confusion, in turn, generates disappointment, criticism and sometimes an atmosphere of crisis.

Historically, universities have survived by turning institutional confusion and crisis into reexamination, search, innovation and rejuvenation. There is no guarantee it will happen again. Developments will, as before, depend upon many factors the University can not control. What the University can do is to critically re-examine its self-understanding as an academic institution: its purposes, core values and principles, its organization and governance systems, its resources and friends, and its social obligations. A possible starting point is to focus upon the University's work processes (and not solely its processes of governance) and its participation in a global intellectual competition among ideas (and not solely its role in economic competition). A key question is: What are the organized settings that attract highly qualified people and encourage academic excellence and free inquiry and also make the University take seriously its social and cultural responsibilities in a democratic society? The answer is most likely found in a mix of visions and principles and improved analytical frameworks and better comparative data are likely to be of great help in such an endeavor.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Marginson and Considine refer to Australian universities, based on a three year study of 17 Australian higher education institutions, covering about half of the Australian system (Marginson and Considine 2000: 12).

<sup>3</sup> Gibbons et al. 1994, Gumport 2000, Kogan et al. 2000, Novotny et al. 2001, Amarald, Fulton and Larsen 2003, Currie et al. 2003, Neave 2003, Lay 2004, Bluckert, Neave and Nybom (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Merton 1937, Schelsky 1971, Searle 1972, Habermas 1987, Wittrock 1993, Nybom 2003.

<sup>5</sup> “Assembly of the academic estates” may be a more correct label since different organized groups are represented but not based on the principle of one-person-one-vote. Models of direct participation played a role at some universities in relatively brief periods during the 1960s and 1970s but are not attended to here.

<sup>6</sup> The historical struggle with the Church is, for example, revoked when Rector Linda Nielsen, Copenhagen University says that business is the new “Church” challenging the autonomy of the University (Nielsen 2002). The historical importance of the church is also visible when it is argued, “A university is only incidentally a market. It is more essentially a temple – a temple dedicated to knowledge and a human spirit of inquiry. It is a place where learning and scholarship are revered, not primarily for what they contribute to personal or social well-being but for the vision of humanity that they symbolize, sustain, and pass on” (March 1999: 378).

<sup>7</sup> Gumport 2000, Kogan et al. 2000, Marginson and Considine 2000, Amarald, Fulton and Larsen 2003, Currie et al. 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes the two are also directly related. For example, the Japanese government was eager to turn universities into agencies because they by doing so could nominally remove many employees of national universities from the total of state employees - an indicator of reform success (Suleiman 2003: 167).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Veysey observed that:

“Loosing a clear sense of purpose, spokesmen for the American university around the turn of the century ran the danger of casually, even unconsciously, accepting the dominant codes of action of their more numerous and influential peers, the leaders of business and industry” (Veysey 1970: 346).

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Contemporaries are said to regret that those who were supposed to stand for education and scholarship had become businessmen, that Harvard was run like a department store, and that the college president had become the tool of business (Veysey 1970: 346). Warnings against the intrusion of business ideals, aims and methods in higher learning and the pervasion of scholarly values by the ethics of the business community is also a well-known theme in Thorstein Veblen's writings (Veblen 1918).

<sup>10</sup> Observatory, Magna Charta Universitatum, <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna.html>. See for example, Observatory 2002, Felt 2004, Lay 2004 (<http://www.magna-charta.org/autonomy-public.html>).

<sup>11</sup> The Charter is more concerned about the autonomy of the University than the freedom of the individual professor. Peter Maassen has also called my attention to the fact that European Rectors as a collectivity usually supports Humboltian principles, yet as individuals many of them embrace the entrepreneurial style and are more positive to trade with educational services than are national politicians.

<sup>12</sup> A forerunner was the Sorbonne Declaration, signed by the ministers of higher education in Britain, France, Germany and Italy in 1998, at the occasion of the 800 anniversary of Sorbonne University.

<sup>13</sup> Haug 1999, Hackl 2001, Banchoff 2002, 2003, Neave 2003, Amaral and Magalhães 2004.

<sup>14</sup> The European Area of Research was decided by the European Council in Feira in 2000, at that time called European Area of Research and Innovation, as part of the attempt to pool scientific and technological resources to improve the economic and technological competitiveness of the member states.

<sup>15</sup> These are the Council of Europe, the European University Association, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, the European Centre for Higher Education and the National Union of Students in Europe. *The Council of Europe's* web-site provide much relevant information about the Bologna process: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural\\_Cooperation/education/Higher\\_education/Activities/Bologna\\_Process/default.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Cooperation/education/Higher_education/Activities/Bologna_Process/default.asp)  
*The European University Association* (EUA) have 759 members from 45 countries (January 2005, [www.eua.be/](http://www.eua.be/)). In comparison, the UNESCO-based world-wide association of Universities founded in 1950, The International Association of Universities, in November 2004 had 602 members, 43% from Europe (not all members carry the label "university" but they are degree-conferring higher education institutions).  
[http://www.unesco.org/iau/members\\_friends/index.html](http://www.unesco.org/iau/members_friends/index.html)  
*The European Association of Institutions in Higher Education* (EURASHE) organizes National Associations of Colleges and Polytechnics and individual institutions in 18 countries but do not have information about the exact number of institutional members (e-mail from EURASHE and [www.eurashe.be/](http://www.eurashe.be/)).

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<sup>16</sup> In comparison, Clark observed 3500 accredited institutions of higher education in the United States, 200 of them granting doctoral degrees (Clark 1995: 139-41). Of course, much depend on the criteria and classifications used. Here we are primarily interested in institutions of higher education with a significant research component.

<sup>17</sup> In contrast, Banchoff (2002) argues that European-level institutional legacies and not solely national interests (or popular ignorance) have undercut efforts to create a European Research Area.

<sup>18</sup> The “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe” says that “The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected” (Article II-73). The Treaty, however, does not mention the autonomy of the University. Universities are mentioned in Section 9 “Research and technological development and space” (Article III §§ 248-253) and the formulations are closer to those of the Commission than to the Rectors’ Magna Charta. (<http://www.eurotreaties.com/constitutiontext.html>).

<sup>19</sup> I rely here on documentation from “Stakeholders’ consultation” which involved 140 responses in September 2003 and all in all 150 responses (European Commission 2004a) and the proceedings from the follow-up Conference, attended by more than 1000 participants (European Commission 2004b).

<sup>20</sup> The response of the Learned Societies (Brussels 8 September 2003).

<sup>21</sup> H. Olsen 1998, Kogan et al. 2000, Marginson and Considine 2000, Amaral, Meek and Larsen 2003, Currie et al. 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Kerr 1966, Veysey 1970, Parsons and Platt 1973, Wittrock 1993, Boer, Maassen and Weert 1999.

<sup>23</sup> In a similar vain, Nybom is concerned whether the University has the moral, intellectual and organizational strength to defend and deserve *Lern- und Lehrfreiheit* (Nybom 1997: 225)?

<sup>24</sup> “The assertion of unbroken faithfulness to Humboldt is the life-lie of our universities. They no longer have a formative idea” (K. Reumann in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 24 March 1986, referred to in Habermas 1987: 4. Also Gumport 2000, Nybom 2003).

<sup>25</sup> During the 1960s a number of writers on university governance illustrated the dilemma with the following Limerick:

There was a young lady from Kent  
Who said that she knew what it meant  
When men took her to dine  
Gave her cocktails and wine  
She knew what it meant – but she went.