

Are Academics Driven by Managerialism? Governance and the Changing Role of Academics on the Way Towards a Knowledge Society

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Abstract. Changes in the governance system have been viewed as one of the key issues of higher education since about the 1990s. In many countries, the “managerial university” emerged accompanied by a controversial discourse about its strengths and about dangers implied. As academics are key actors performing key functions in higher education and as governance reforms increased the power of university management to steer academics, the academics’ perception of and response to the “managerial university” is crucial for its successes and failures. International comparative surveys of academics undertaken in the early 1990s and during the years 2007–2010 indicate that the modes of governance and the responses to these modes by academics vary more substantially across countries than the convergent international discourse suggests. Altogether, scholars’ views and behavior seem to have changed to a lesser extent than expected. The third comparative survey of that kind addresses similar issues, but additionally raises the question of whether strong footprints can be observed of the move toward a “knowledge society” with regard to the governance of higher education and academics’ views and activities.

Keywords: governance in higher education, university management, academic profession, knowledge society.

Ar profesūra pasižymi vadybiškumu? Universitetų valdymas ir besikeičiantis mokslininkų bei dėstytojų vaidmuo kelyje į žinių visuomenę

Santrauka. Maždaug nuo 1990 metų vienas iš pagrindinių klausimų aukštajame moksle tapo valdymo sistemos pokyčiai. Daugelyje šalių atsirado „vadybiniai universitetai“, o su jais ir prieštaringas diskursas apie tokių universitetų stiprybes ir numanomus pavojus. Kadangi mokslininkai ir dėstytojai atlieka pagrindines aukštojo mokslo funkcijas, o valdymo reformos padidino universiteto vadybos galią paveikti šią bendruomenę, jos narių „vadybinio universiteto“ vizija ir atsakas į ją labai svarbūs tokio universiteto sėkmei arba nesėkmei. Praėjusio šimtmečio dešimtojo dešimtmečio pradžioje ir 2007–2010 metais atliktos tarptautinės lyginamosios mokslininkų ir dėstytojų apklausos atskleidė, kad universitetų valdymo būdai ir jų darbuotojų atsakas į šiuos būdus tam tikroje šalyse skiriasi labiau, nei rodo daug sąlyčio taškų randantis tarptautinis diskursas. Bendra išvada ta, kad mokslininkų požiūris ir elgesys pasikeitė mažiau nei tikėtasi. Trečioje tokio pobūdžio lyginamojoje apklausoje gilinamasi į panašius klausimus, tačiau papildomai keliamas klausimas, ar aukštojo mokslo valdymas ir mokslininkų bei dėstytojų požiūris ir veikla rodo virsmo į „žinių visuomenę“ poveikį.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: aukštojo mokslo valdymas, universiteto vadyba, akademinė profesija, žinių visuomenė.

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Governance – a Current Key Issue of Higher Education

During the first two decades of the 21st century, and to some extent already during the 1980s and 1990s, higher education was expected to reconsider its traditions, to reflect and counteract visible weaknesses and to strive for “reform”, “innovation”, transformation” or “modernization” – whatever term might be considered suitable. Such calls for change are not new: after the WWII, widespread activities could be observed to consolidate higher education again, and this was combined in some countries with substantial reforms in many respects. In the 1960s and 1970s, many traditions were provoked by the rapid expansion of higher education and by the increasing popularity of social reform concepts touching upon higher education. Thus, the current debates about salient issues of higher education and the efforts to change many features of higher education can be viewed as a third wave of transformation.

There are four thematic areas that are most frequently addressed, most intensively debated and most often appear to be the focus of reform initiatives in this third wave not only in economically advanced countries, but also in many other countries.

- The first area might be called functional. Higher education has been expected to act more efficiently and in a more targeted way, as well as to take changes in societal expectations more seriously. Gradually gaining popularity since the 1990s, the term “knowledge society” is employed both to call for ways to ensure and enhance the quality of research and of teaching and learning, as well as to point at growing expectations of relevance – often interpreted together with terms such as “knowledge economy” and “employability” – as expectations that higher education should aim at becoming more visibly useful.
- The second area is structural. The assumption, which had been shared widely in the preceding wave of reforms that expansion of higher education had to lead to diversification, was revitalized in recent years with a specific accent: many countries opt for a steeper vertical stratification of the higher education system and thereby for increasing privileges of top universities in order to be successful in the race for top positions in “rankings” of “world-class universities”, while ideas that the varied sectors of the higher education system should take over substantially distinct tasks seem to have lost momentum.
- The third area, in which substantial changes are on the agenda, is spatial. The term “internationalization” is primarily employed to characterize trends towards increasing cross-border mobility of students and academics, and to encourage higher education institutions to develop strategies for promoting and supporting international activities in many respects.
- The fourth thematic area of discourse and actual changes is organizational. Changes in governance are sought or actually implemented with the aim to strengthen the power of select actors and steering-targeted mechanisms. In many countries, substantial steps have been taken towards a “managerial university” – a university in which the institutional and possibly also the departmental leaders, supported

by highly qualified administrative staff, have ample opportunities for shaping the conditions of research and scholarship as well as of teaching and learning.

The fourth thematic area deserves special attention here, because intended or actual changes of governance are closely related to changes in the other aforementioned areas. For example, increasing managerial power is expected to set functional priorities and to care for appropriate balances of varied functional imperatives. University management is also challenged to develop targeted internationalization strategies and thus to contribute towards a more impressive internationality of the individual university.

Finally, the moves towards the “managerial university” have to be analyzed here, because every major change of governance has considerable effects on the role of academics: what they are expected to do, how much their views and activities are geared by the managerial power of other actors, what their own power is in the overall settings of decision-making, and what remains of what has been traditionally called “academic freedom”.

Prior Settings of Governance

Although international discourse on higher education suggests that many features should be discussed and actually handled in a similar way all over the world, we actually note enormous differences across countries. For instance, different major thrusts of governance already existed when a “modern” university emerged (see Perkin, 2006; Ben-David 1977). Ideas formulated in Germany about the concept of the modern university – notably, the Humboldtian idea of the “unity of research and teaching” – spread to other countries, but the organizational context of a strong supervisory role of government, relatively weak university leadership and a strong position of individual professors underscores a highly regarded principle of “academic freedom”: prevailing in Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries, it obviously has not been internationally viewed as indispensably linked to the conceptual thrust of higher education. Rather, varied modes of governance persisted or emerged anew.

For example, French universities moved towards an even stronger system-coordination role of governance and weaker power of university management, but a notably stronger influence of the departments on professors’ teaching activities than in Germany. British universities were often described as the incarnation of a collegial model. Academics with disciplinary and departmental settings strived for collective decisions. Governments were the principal funder, but historically the “autonomy” of higher education institutions was more strongly respected than in many other countries. Higher education in the U.S. absorbed many concepts of research and teaching from the above named countries, but was already historically characterized by a strong role of university leadership supported by a large and powerful administration. There were concerns about efforts to steer teaching and research too much from above, but university leaders in the U.S. as a rule seem to have been viewed by academics as supportive for a typical academic culture (Birnbaum 1988).

Many traditional concepts and practices were challenged in the 1960s and 1970s in the wake of the rapid expansion of higher education, of critique voiced by protesting students and of the emergence of a general political climate in favor of societal reforms (Lockwood 2011; Rüegg and Sadalk 2011). In many countries, functional reconsiderations were accompanied by debates about needs for the reform of governance – both in respect of the role governments and other external actors play and of the internal processes of coordination. Although the search for new solutions seemed to have varied substantially, we might argue that steering in higher education in many economically advanced countries underwent changes in similar directions (Teichler 2019): activities of governments increased in various countries as regards mid-term planning and also as regards detailed operations in the daily life of higher education institutions. Some steps were taken to strengthen the influence of university management. Various countries introduced participatory models of decision-making with a stronger involvement of junior academics, possibly other staff and students. The power of the professors declined to a greater or smaller extent in many countries.

But, altogether, the overall character of governance did not move substantially towards a convergent model during the second wave of reforms. This was pointed out by higher education researchers in the early 1990s, i.e. at the time when a new debate about the need for reforms in this domain already got momentum. For example, Harman (1992) observed four different models of higher education governance that were persisting: (a) the collegial model emphasizing non-hierarchical cooperative decision-making and a substantial degree of institutional self-determination by academic staff; (b) the bureaucratic model stressing legal-rational authority and formal hierarchies; (c) the professional model, in which the authority of experts is influential within various kinds of loosely structured organizational settings; (d) the political model, which conceptualizes governance in terms of conflicting areas with varied interest groups characterized by competing views and values. He stated that individual countries obviously opted for different mixes of these models. Another example is Maassen and van Vught (1992) who argued that individual national higher education systems made clearly different choices in terms of power allocated to the level of actors (government and society, institutions and departments, and finally individuals) and the type of actors (politicians, managers, administrators, academics, etc.).

Moves Towards the “Managerial University”

A shift in governance of higher education towards what might be called the “managerial university” could be seen in a few countries in the 1980s (see Neave and van Vught 1991), in many countries in the 1990s (see Braun and Merrien 1999; Amaral et al. 2003), and in a few late-coming countries in the early years of the 21st century (Amano and Poole 2005; Wolter 2007). The followings features could be observed in many countries:

- Governments reduced detailed bureaucratic supervision and instead moved towards putting their stamp on higher education through select policy directives as well as incentive-based or reward-based funding.

- The direct influence of society was expected to be strengthened through increased external stakeholder participation in decision-making mechanisms.
- Most importantly, substantially more formal power was allocated to executive actors within higher education institutions, i.e. to university leaders and often to the leaders of institutional sub-units as well.
- University leaders aimed at strengthening their strategic and supervisory potential through a substantial increase in highly qualified administrative staff with no consistent definition (“middle level managers”, “higher education professionals”, “third space professionals”, etc.; see Meek et al. 2010; Schneijderberg and Mercator 2013; Whitchurch 2008), expected to understand the character of academic work.
- Systems of evaluation, i.e. the assessment of the processes and outcomes of teaching, learning and research, were newly built up or substantially enlarged with a view to serving as an information base both for the reflection and improvement of academics and for the distribution of rewards and sanctions (see Kells 1999; Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004; Cavalli 2007).
- In addition, there was a spread of the modes of assessment considering the individual institution of higher education as the unit of action and success, which is most visible in university “rankings” (see Hazelkorn 2011; Shin et al. 2011).
- Governments increasingly employed mechanisms of incentives and sanctions vis-à-vis institutions of higher education and institutional management, and similarly vis-à-vis individual academics. The latter, for example, refers to the duration of employment contracts, promotion, remuneration, and resource allocations as modes of steering, thereby contributing to increases in competition among institutions of higher education and among scholars.
- A shift of actors’ views and attitudes towards more strategic reasoning, towards a more competitive mind and towards more attention being paid to visible “performance”, “output” and “outcomes”.
- A further weakening of the power of academics in the decision-making system around and within higher education.

Most analyses of the policies aimed at moving higher education towards the logic of the “managerial university” agree in underscoring that many similar conceptual and operational elements emerged across countries (see Krücken and Meier 2006; Ferlie et al. 2008; Paradise et al. 2009; Huisman 2009; Bleiklie et al. 2017) and that the national systems of governance in higher education are less varied during this third wave of reforms than they were a few decades ago. However, differences between current governance systems by country and differences between management approaches by institution are by no means marginal. It is not the aim of this article to discuss the extent of similarities and varieties as far as they are disclosed in the expert literature. Rather, information provided below is to show how similarly or how differently academics of different countries perceive and assess the settings of governance which they experience.

Analyses present an enormous wealth of factors which might have contributed to the moves towards the “managerial university”. The following list might be illustrative of the range of factors assumed, but does not aim at being exhaustive:

- Loss of trust in the self-regulatory potential of the academic profession;
- Loss of trust in the efficiency and effectiveness of governmental planning and supervision;
- General spread of the popularity of economic reasoning and, notably, of neo-liberal concepts as policy rationales;
- Spread of “New Public Management” concepts;
- Increasing reliance on “indicators” and other “performance” or “output” measures as an information base for “evidence-based” policies and strategies;
- Increasing reliance on market mechanisms, also in non-commercial sectors of society;
- Growing belief that leaders can excel in problem-solving.

Proponents of the “managerial university” are obviously convinced that a strong managerial power in universities and a strong position of university leaders within the overall system of governance of higher education as a whole have led to a leap forward in the enhancement of quality and efficiency of higher education and that this will be true as well in the foreseeable future: university managers will be highly informed, strategy-minded, target-devoted, power-conscious, rational, realistic, balance-supporting and conflict-solving actors.

However, frequent critical voices (see Birnbaum 2000; Deem and Brehony 2005; Hyde et al. 2013; Leisyste 2015; de Corte et al. 2018) suggest that models of governance, which are characterized by a strong managerial power, are biased from the outset and have lopsided consequences as a rule. “Managerialism” is considered inappropriate for higher education notably for the following reasons:

- The strong emphasis on targeted strategic reasoning and action does not fit an “indeterminate” university, i.e. an institution where academics need “academic freedom” in order to search for unforeseeable new knowledge and to strive for unpredictable success.
- Strong managerial power is inappropriate for a professional organization where employees – in this case academics – know the character of the aims, operations and acceptable results of the organization far better than those leading it.
- The prevailing managerial approaches imply “over-competition” and “over-instrumentalization”. They are likely to promote “extrinsic motivation” among academics and a superficial search for visible results which endanger open search for creative operations and results.
- Managers who are expected to be strong, targeted and visibly successful tend to “mold” the higher education institution as a whole in tune with the common overarching thrusts and thus contradict the basic logic of a university, which is shaped by heterogeneity due to a different character of disciplines as well as due to the individuality of academics.

- To sum up the strategic activities pursued at the mezzo-level of the higher education system, i.e. university and departmental leaders, the prevailing efforts are to make universities at stake more similar to other, more highly-reputed, universities. This race for adapting to the top universities reinforces a vertical stratification of the whole system of higher education with little variety of substantive profiles among individual universities.

Both the praise and the critique of the “managerial university” make clear that its success is to a substantial extent dependent on the responses of the academic profession: how academics perceive and assess managerial approaches and practices, whether they see themselves as losers or believe to have opportunities for action, whether they employ their talents to undermine rules and prescriptions smartly (even forming a coalition of resistance) or are cooperative, whether they consider academic individuality, openness of academic work and possible creativity to be endemically endangered or reinforced by managerial thrusts, whether they believe that strong power to shape higher education institutions leaves room for concurrent professional influence or is destructive in this respect, and whether managerial power is seen as de-motivating for the academics or as leaving room for professional satisfaction.

Governance and Its Impact as a Theme in Surveys of the Academic Profession

As the direction of changes in governance intended or actually implemented in higher education seems to be somewhat similar across countries, but obviously not leading to worldwide uniformity, any analysis of the ways how academics perceive the changes of governance, how much they are affected and respond, and finally how they view their professional role altogether under the existing conditions, would be beneficial if undertaken with a comparative perspective. Therefore, the three major comparative surveys of the academic profession are a valuable information base for the analysis of the functioning and impact of the widely spread moves towards the “managerial university”.

- The first international comparative study – often called “Carnegie Study”, because it was initiated and coordinated by the U. S.-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching – was prepared in 1990-1991, i.e. before concepts of the “managerial university” were already spread worldwide. But the survey undertaken in 1992 in more than a dozen countries already addressed some issues of governance (see Altbach 1996). At that time, the view was widely shared that the academic profession is a “profession under pressure”, for example, expected “to do with less”. Therefore, the questions were raised how much academics perceive themselves as being driven or consider themselves as relatively independent actors and how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with their overall professional situation.
- The second comparative study – “The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)” – was initiated and prepared by higher education researchers from almost 20 countries during the years 2004-2006, i.e. at the time when the idea of the “managerial

university” was already spread across countries and when it was clearly one of the key themes of public discourses about the present state and the future of higher education. Actually, “governance” was chosen as one of the three key areas of major change in higher education to be addressed in the questionnaire along with “internationalization” and “relevance”. The surveys were actually undertaken in 2007-2008 (see Teichler et al. 2013). In 2010, scholars of various countries used an almost identical questionnaire in the project “The Academic Profession in Europe (EUROAC)” (see Teichler and Höhle 2013); therefore, many analyses drew from the findings of both projects. It should be added that similar surveys were undertaken in subsequent years in Slovenia and Russia as well as, collaboratively, in some East and Southeast Asian countries.

- During the years 2015-2017, higher education researchers from more than 20 countries prepared the third comparative study: “The Academic Profession in the Knowledge Society (APIKS)”. They were convinced that changes linked to the knowledge society paradigm deserve special attention in the survey, e.g. an increasing social relevance of higher education as a whole, increasing pressures to deliver clearly useful results, growing expectations to care for the transfer of knowledge into society, etc. But they considered the key issues addressed in the previous survey as still highly important for academics’ views and activities. Therefore, many questions posed were similar to those in the second comparative survey. Actually, surveying began in some countries in 2018, but has not yet been completed in other countries by 2020. Some scholars have already examined national data or included some comparative data into their first analyses (see Special issue for APIKS 2020), but the major work of collaborative comparative analysis has yet to be undertaken.

The following thematic areas of governance or closely linked to it were addressed in the CAP questionnaire: (a) Management style of the institution of higher education; (b) strategic targets set by the institution of higher education; (c) expectations and targets set with respect to academics; (d) evaluation of academic activities; (e) primary influence of different actors on various areas of decisions; (f) academics’ (respondents’) influence on shaping their policies on the level of the department or the higher education institution as a whole. Other themes addressed in the questionnaire provided the opportunity to examine how views and activities in the domain of governance are linked, for example, to the academics’ discipline, institutional setting, status and employment situation, their preferences for research vs. teaching, their academic productivity, sense of affiliation to the discipline, the department and the institution, and their overall job satisfaction (see, for example, Kwiek 2019).

The major findings of the CAP survey have been presented in one overview book (Teichler et al. 2013), five thematic books predominantly composed by chapters on individual countries, and a large number of additional publications (see the bibliography in Höhle and Teichler 2016). The findings of the thematic book on governance (Locke et al. 2011) might be summarized as follows:

- Altogether, university management has not moved across countries consistently to very powerful, “top-down” and strongly directive modes. We do not observe a clear dominance of a managerial miracle hoped for by its proponents and feared in “managerialism” critique.
- Differences by country as regards the managerial style, the expectations conveyed to academics and their influence within their institution of higher education have remained substantial.
- The editors of the book came to the conclusion that modes of “shared governance” between institutional managers and academics have turned out to be the most promising approach.

Some findings of the CAP and EUROAC projects will be presented here to illustrate and specify these summative statements (see Teichler 2019). Actually, the data presented here refer not to all respondents, but rather to senior academics at institutions of higher education in economically advanced countries with a strong emphasis placed both on teaching and research (“universities” in European countries and select research universities in countries where the term “university” also might comprise institutions with a dominant teaching and learning emphasis).

Managerial power: 53% of university professors, on average, in the countries surveyed noted a top-down management style at their university. This was observed by about three quarters of the respondents in the United Kingdom and Australia, but only by about one quarter in Norway. Similarly, 55% believed that the existing expectations to increase the utility of their research activities and results pose a threat to academic quality. These statements varied to a lesser extent by county : between 45% and 62% percent.

Academics’ influence: 38% of university professors, on average, across these countries believed that they had a real influence on academic decisions on departmental level; this ranged from 63% in Germany, 50% in the U.S. to less than 30% in Norway and the United Kingdom. As regards the university level, only 17% of the respondents believed to have a substantial influence on academic matters; this was again clearly above the average in Germany (27%) and in the U.S. (25%), but relatively low in the United Kingdom (12%). One has to add here, however, that academic junior staff in Germany noted influences of that kind to a lesser extent than the average reported by their colleagues in other countries. As these questions were also raised in the 1992 survey, change over time could be observed. As one might expect, the university professors’ influence dropped to a certain extent, but only moderately in most countries; in contrast, respondents in the U.S. and Germany noted an increase in the influence both on departmental and university levels. Altogether, 39% of professors, on average, across the countries surveyed in 2007-2008, considered the lack of the academics’ participation in shaping their university to be a serious problem.

Academics’ attitudes: 57% of university professors, on average, across countries surveyed in 2007-2008, reported that they felt closely affiliated to their university. This was lower than the affiliation to their academic discipline (89%) and their department (62%), but still can be viewed as quite high. However, respondents from Australia and

the United Kingdom noted a close affiliation to their university clearly less frequently than their colleagues surveyed in 1992; in contrast, the affiliation to the university during this period increased on the part of German university professors. Finally, it is worth noting that overall job satisfaction of university professors in economically advanced countries increased during this period of move towards the “managerial university”. In 2007-2008, 68% of university professors, on average across countries, described themselves as satisfied with their job – more than the average in Japan, about the average in Germany, somewhat fewer in the U.S. and markedly fewer in the United Kingdom (49%). As compared to 1992, professors’ job satisfaction increased in Japan and Germany, remained on a similar level in the United States and slightly decreased in the United Kingdom. In sum, “managerialism” seems to have most clearly manifested in the United Kingdom and has been met most frequently there with negative responses on the part of academics. In most other countries, the majority of professors adapted to stronger managerial power in one way or another.

The author of this article has summarized responses to various questions addressing institutional cultures. Four types of institutional characteristics were developed which were called “academic university”, “managerial university”, “collegial university” and “supportive university” (Teichler 2011). The respective analysis of CAP and EUROAC data shows substantial differences by country. This might be illustrated with some examples:

- The majority of university professors in the United Kingdom characterized their university as managerial and as not academic and not collegial.
- Senior academics in Australia and Finland also considered their university as managerial, but were not as negative with regard to other dimensions.
- Professors in the United States appreciated their university as being managerial and concurrently as academic and supportive.
- Japanese respondents viewed their university as supportive, but as not academic.
- Those in Norway considered their university to be collegial, but not managerial and not academic.
- Finally, university professors in Germany described their university as academic and as not managerial.

It is difficult to draw overarching conclusions from the results of the surveys about the consequences of the move towards the “managerial university” in recent decades. We note clear signs of increasing “academic productivity”, notably in terms of growing numbers of publications, and internationality of higher education seems to have spread in many respects, even though often not as impressive as frequently argued. Also, the issue of how to reconcile growing expectations for quality and relevance of academic work is being paid more attention than in the past. Yet, it is difficult to establish how much of the changes in academics’ views and activities can be attributed to the academics themselves, to the overarching social climate or to the push on the part of governance.

Higher education nowadays is more strongly shaped by the “managerial university” thrust than it was two or three decades ago. It has spread to more countries, and more

experience could be gained within the countries which already shifted to this direction some time ago. But it is difficult to assess these changes comprehensively. Does higher education move increasingly towards managerialism? Does “shared governance” spread? Does management become more strategic, more targeted and more efficient? Does the managerial university consolidate, or does it seem to be a temporary fad, most likely to be substituted after a while by other thrusts of governance? The only observation which might be called undisputable is that the “managerial university” remained much more diverse across countries and across individual institutions of higher education than its proponents had thought.

Expected Changes of Governance and the Academic Profession on the Way Towards a Knowledge Society

As already pointed out, the APIKS survey, which is currently underway, addresses inter alia issues that have played a role for some time now. This helps to establish, for example, how academics’ views and activities have changed with respect to the internationality of higher education and the increasing expectations to care for the relevance of teaching and research. Of course, APIKS also provides information about general features of the academic profession: how career patterns have changed, how the working conditions are assessed, to what extent academics are satisfied with their professional situation. In those respects, all three major comparative surveys of the academic profession provide information for measuring changes over almost three decades.

A genuinely new question posed in the APIKS project, however, is in the context of the themes addressed in this article, i.e. whether, to what extent and how we note footprints of knowledge-society issues on governance in higher education and through governance on the role of academics. For example, are the same issues of the “managerial university” similarly at stake as before? Or does knowledge society push governance into specific directions?

The three comparative surveys of the academic profession have been carefully prepared by the scholars involved. For example, the discourse about governance was thoroughly reviewed at the beginning of the CAP and EUROAC projects in order to identify its most salient implications for the academic profession to be analyzed (see Kogan 2007; Hyde et al. 2013). In the preparatory stages of the APIKS project, concepts of knowledge society were examined in advance in order to identify explicitly discussed and implicitly assumed interfaces between the move towards the knowledge society and changes in the academic profession (see Aarrevaara et al. 2021).

Similarly, when looking at public discourses of the character of the emerging knowledge society and its impact on governance in higher education and its eventual consequences for the academic profession, we can ask, for example, the following questions in analyzing the results of the third comparative study on the academic profession:

- Do governments and university managers interpret the knowledge society paradigm as calling for a preferential treatment of the science and engineering disciplines at the expense of the humanities and social sciences?

- Do academics note rising expectations in the name of the knowledge society to put a stronger emphasis on research at the expense of teaching?
- How do academics interpret the university managers' concepts of the knowledge society: Are they seen, for example, as pushing towards an "elite knowledge society", towards diverse profiles of higher education as a whole, or towards the "wisdom of the many"?
- Are academics more strongly expected than before to shape their research activities in ways which lead most likely to visibly useful results?
- How active are academics in the direct transfer of knowledge to society?
- Do academics perceive academics' rising expectations linked to the knowledge society paradigm as calls for being engaged in socio-political activities? What chances do they see for more science-based decisions in society and what risks do they fear with regard to politicization of the academic profession?
- Do university managers - in the view of academics - strive for an acceptable balance in terms of quality, relevance and efficiency of academic work, or do they set lopsided priorities?
- What changes in their professional role do academics see as linked to the knowledge society paradigm?

When some decades ago the expansion of higher education was increasingly viewed as a major driver for change in higher education, this development could be interpreted as a sign of growing societal importance of higher education. But a substantial proportion of academics considered themselves as losers, e.g. as being required to "do more for less" and as experiencing a loss of power in decision-making processes, while others adapted themselves to changing conditions. The moves towards the "managerial university" witnessed a few decades could be interpreted later as efforts to prepare higher education for its growing societal relevance: again, academics' notions of this change remained ambivalent. In recent years, discourse about the role higher education plays in the knowledge society can be interpreted as a sign that the societal importance of higher education is bound to increase even further. And it will be interesting again to see what opportunities and threats of this development academics see for themselves.

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