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# Enacting the University: Danish University Reform in an Ethnographic Perspective

# Higher Education Dynamics

Volume 53

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Enacting the University:  
Danish University  
Reform in an Ethnographic  
Perspective

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This book is the only publication that brings together the work and ideas of the five authors. Each of the authors has of course been active in publishing their work during the course of the project. Nielsen conducted her research as a PhD project, and her thesis has been revised and published as *Figuration Work: Student Participation, Democracy and University Reform in a Global Knowledge Economy* (Berghahn, 2015). The discussion of 'figures' and 'figuration' and some of the material in Chapters 10 and 11 synthesise an argument developed at greater length in the introduction and Chapters 3 and 6 of that book. A briefer version of the argument developed in Chapter 2 is published in Wright and Ørberg's 'Universities in the Competition State: Lessons from Denmark' in Cris Shore and Susan Wright's (editors) *Death of the Public University? Uncertain Futures for Higher Education in the Knowledge Economy* (Berghahn). In Chapter 3, Wright and Ørberg draw on a more detailed analysis published in 2011 as 'The Double Shuffle of University Reform: The OECD/Denmark Policy Interface' in pages 269–293 of Atle Nyhagen and Tor Halvorsen's (editors) *Academic Identities – Academic Challenges? American and European Experience of the Transformation of Higher Education and Research* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Press). Finally, our thanks go to Yoka Janssen and colleagues at Springer for their patience and persistence in waiting for this book to reach fruition.

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**Part I**  
**Introduction and Approach**

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: An Ethnography of University Reform



Susan Wright 

### 1.1 University Reform

Over the last two decades, there have been momentous efforts to reform universities worldwide. International organisations, national governments and university managements have all engaged in these reforms and promoted them with an aura of inevitability. Agencies such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), the European Union and the World Bank projected a future ‘global knowledge economy’ and enjoined governments, if they wanted their country to be successful, to make their universities the drivers of this economy. They proposed that university research should be directed towards the needs of ‘knowledge industries’ with faster ways to turn ideas into innovative products and to bring returns to the national economy. Equally, they proposed university education programmes should be continually adjusted to attract international, fee-paying students and to produce graduates with the competences needed in this high-skills economy. To be effective and efficient in fulfilling these purportedly crucial roles for the future prosperity of their country, universities should be more business-like, strategically-led and market-orientated. In short, the reforms have aimed to change substantially the purpose and organisation of the university.

This book explores how these reforms have managed to transform a system of institutions that are reputedly change-resistant and that present themselves as proud bastions of independent research and teaching. Given that universities have been described as consisting of units in ‘loosely coupled systems’ rather than centrally steered organisations (Weick 1976), and given that managing academics is popularly likened to herding cats (Deem 2010), how have universities been transformed so profoundly and so quickly? The role and location of universities within the state

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has been a recurrently debated issue, but this version of the university as driver of a nation's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy emerged quite suddenly in the 1990s. How did a comparatively small network of people, who did not speak for a pre-existing social mobilisation, create this narrative vision of universities acting in a new world? How is the university constructed as an acting (and coherent) subject in this narrative? What instruments and forms of power have policy makers used to spread this vision across countries with vastly different university systems and to bring it into effect? How have students, academics and managers engaged with policy makers' ideas of the future, exposed dilemmas as they experienced the changes, and used opportunities to promote and act upon their own visions of the university?<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2 Denmark as an Optic

Why Denmark, when university reforms have been so widespread around the world? In Denmark, a previous University Law in 1993 was meant to be the reform to end all reforms and was followed by a long period of relative calm, whilst reforms were gathering pace in other countries. Once the Danish government decided to bring about change, it became very active in the international organisations and forums that were developing reform agendas, and Denmark became known for adopting these ideas in their most thoroughgoing forms. This meant that extensive changes were concentrated into a very short time-span. It was also possible for the new University Law of 2003 to apply a new logic consistently to the whole sector, as there were relatively few universities and they were all brought under the same legal and financial framework. As a result of the speed, extensiveness and extreme versions of sector-wide reforms in Denmark, this is an excellent optic through which to

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<sup>1</sup>The project on which this book is based was entitled 'New Management, New Identities? Danish University Reform in an International Perspective'. The researchers were Professor Susan Wright, Professor with Special Responsibilities John B. Krejsler and (then PhD Student, now Associate Professor) Gritt B. Nielsen from the Danish University of Education (later merged with Århus University) and Associate Professor Stephen Carney of Roskilde University. A number of research assistants were also employed: Peter Brink Andersen and Camilla Gregersen worked on specific issues for short periods; Nathalia Bricchet (2009) studied the ways universities prepared for the new law and did participant observation at meetings of the new governing boards; and Jakob Williams Ørberg worked with Susan Wright for over 2 years on historical and contemporary debates about public sector reform and on university reform in Denmark and in international agencies and co-authored their analysis in subsequent years. The project was funded by the Danish Research Council for Society and Economy, for 3.2 million kroner between 2004 and 2008, project number 09-058690. A visiting fellowship at CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities) at Cambridge University in spring 2010, and secondments to Auckland University through the EU Marie Curie project 'University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation' in autumn 2012 and spring 2013 gave Wright the opportunity to write her chapters for this book. She is grateful for new intellectual stimulation and very helpful feedback from many colleagues and especially Marilyn Strathern, Anna Tsing and Cris Shore.

view the multiple effects of high potency doses of the international cocktail of university reforms.

Contemporary waves of university reforms started in the 1980s in the UK, New Zealand and Australia where universities had been established historically as independent public corporations.<sup>2</sup> They adopted new forms of managerialism, cost cutting and market competition purportedly copied from industrial corporations. In the 1990s, a shift from treating education as a public good to a private investment opened the way, notably in the U.S., Australia and the UK, for funding public universities through student fees and loans. Further waves of reform started in Europe where universities were historically state institutions and where they have largely sustained free or very low fees for public education. The Bologna Process started to 'harmonise' education cycles, qualifications and quality assurance, with the aim of making Europe one of the most attractive and competitive regions for higher education in the world – even though the 48 countries currently engaged in this process stretch well beyond Europe and in to Asia. The Bologna Process had wider implications for reforms of university autonomy, governance and management, seen for example in Sweden's decentralisation reform in 1993, Norway's quality reform in 2002, Austria's University Act in 2002, and last but not least Denmark's University Law of 2003. Countries that are far afield have tried to borrow what they imagine to be European reforms. For example, British ideas of arms-length governing of autonomous universities were transposed to Japan with quite different effects (Goldfinch 2006). Versions of the UK-Australasian and UK-European reforms have reached the very differently organised university sector in the U.S.; at the same time, dislocated and bowdlerised images of the top tier of U.S. universities (notably Harvard, Stanford, MIT) have been held up as models for complete higher education sectors in Europe. Not even emerging or poor economies have been immune. For example, since 1994 South Africa has participated in widespread reforms of the education, organisation and autonomy of universities (Oxlund 2010). On the basis of recommendations from a high profile National Knowledge Commission, India has massively expanded its centrally funded higher education system through the establishment of new Central Universities, Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management (Government of India 2009:18). In 2010, China published a ten-year plan, the National Outline for Medium and Long Term Educational Reform and Development, and launched projects to improve the quality of universities, while Project 211 in 1995, Project 985 in 1998, and the Double First Class University Plan in 2015 aimed to develop elite institutions and propel them up the international rankings (Guo-hua Wang 2010; Peters and Besley 2018).

From our location in Denmark, we critiqued the way policies seem to travel globally, with apparently similar reforms taking place in widely divergent countries. A central difficulty in the vast literature on policy travel, borrowing, lending and learning is the tendency to treat policy as itself an actor. Rizvi addresses this issue when he argues that, undeniably, there is a global convergence of educational

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<sup>2</sup> See for example, Wright 2004; Shore 2007; Marginson and Considine 2000.

restructuring, but this is not the work of a ‘universalistic logic’ or reified ‘global forces’ but of human actors who, through discursive and material practices, create regularised patterns and institutional systems that both enable and constrain them (Rizvi 2004: 28). He proposes that

particular forms and impact [of globalisation] need to be understood historically through a perspective that connects the macro-economic global processes to the actual networks of social action that people create, move in, and act upon in their daily lives. Globalization thus needs to be located within specific sites (Rizvi 2004: 29).

Rizvi’s useful theorising of the global convergence of educational restructuring leaves us with the challenge of working out how to do such research ethnographically. This book uses Denmark as a site to take up that challenge. Three specific macro-political features were soon identified as important in this ethnography, and these features contribute new dimensions to the literature on university reform and policy travel. First, Danish politicians and civil servants were deeply involved in the international networks and agencies (notably the OECD, Bologna Process and EU) that were envisaging reformed universities as the driving force behind a future ‘global knowledge economy’. Some politicians, policy makers, university leaders and academics who were engaged in political debates over university reform invested both in networking and playing an active role in an international ‘epistemic community’ and in presenting themselves as national actors, appealing to, or summoning international agencies across the national boundary. This means that ‘Denmark’ does not act as a natural boundary for the study; rather, building on Robertson and Dale’s (2008) critique of ‘methodological nationalism’, this ethnographic study shows how such political activists were making policy travel through a strategic politics of choosing when to transcend and when to reinforce the national boundary.

This book argues that a second, important macro-political feature was that the Danish university reforms did not just concern the creation of a global knowledge economy; they were also part of a major reformation of the state and its steering mechanisms. Those Danish policy makers who were networked into international agencies, and especially the OECD, were an important source for the imaginary and the policy prescriptions that informed not just the reform of universities but of the whole of the public sector. Literature on public sector reform debates the shift from ‘rowing’ a bureaucratic state to ‘steering’ outsourced service provision, and questions whether this involves a ‘hollowing out’ or reconstitution of the power of the state (Osborne and Gaebler 1993; Rhodes 1994; Weller et al. 1997). Many of the aspects of Danish university reform had little to do with universities *per se* and had much more to do with the new methods of steering that were being applied to most state-funded and public institutions in Denmark. Yet the literature on public sector reform has not included universities as a site for studying how these widespread changes have been re-shaping the state and, simultaneously, one of its core institutions. On the other hand, although the higher education literature focuses on managerialism and the corporatisation of universities, it rarely locates these processes in wider reforms of the public sector and the nature of the state, which were very

prominent features of the Danish case. This ethnography called for analysing the conjunction between university reform and public sector reform.

A third important macro-political feature was the changing style of state politics within which the reforms were located. Denmark's tradition of coalition and consensus was markedly different from, for example, England's adversarial politics, with its focus on contest and dominance. But this research took place at a time when Danish politics were themselves becoming more adversarial: the 2001 coalition government between the Liberals and Conservatives, with the support of the populist and nationalistic Danish Folk Party made changes that sent shockwaves through the newspapers and universities. In his first 'New Year's Speech', the Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, denigrated academically trained staff working in NGOs and pressure groups on issues of ethnicity and immigration as 'arbiters of taste' (*smagsdommere*). These staff were used to researching issues and taking the results to the appropriate ministries, where they expected them to be discussed and taken seriously; now the government summarily withdrew funding, which closed or merged 150 of these organisations. Soon traditions of consultation and consensus between the political parties were also broken. During the whole of the 2001–2011 Liberal-Conservative coalition, the only issue on which there was agreement between the government and the Social Democrat opposition was university reform. These parties joined in passing the 2003 University Act and such political consensus left little space for dissenting voices. If they had not realised before, it came home to many people in the university sector that Danish politics had shifted away from dialogue and consensus when, in 2006, the Minister 'invited' universities to merge with each other and with government research institutions. At least two universities (Aarhus School of Business and the Danish University of Education) sought to exercise their new autonomy as 'self-owning institutions' and declined the Minister's invitation to merge. They were warned that in that case, they would lose in the distribution of significant new state funding for research.<sup>3</sup> These institutions decided they *had* to merge voluntarily. Examples are legion, where board members and academics expected to be able to express a view to the Minister and have it taken seriously in discussion, expecting a consensual politics. They were unsure how to operate when the government refused and adopted adversarial tactics. The fact that the reforms were introduced at this moment of a change in the way of doing national politics has a strong bearing on the ethnographic account.

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<sup>3</sup> Børge Obel, then rector of Aarhus School of Business, email 21 July 2016.



Fig. 1.1 Death notice for ‘The Free University (1479–2003)’. (Source: Øllgaard 2003)

### 1.3 Danish University Reforms

The University Act passed by the Danish Parliament in May 2003 (Danish Parliament 2003) was widely taken to herald a thoroughgoing change in Danish universities, to the extent that the academic unions’ magazine published a death notice on its front page (Fig. 1.1).

The main provisions of the 2003 University Law (Danish Parliament 2003) are presented in brief outline below. Bearing in mind Strathern’s (2006) critique that bullet points pile up issues without exploring linkages between them, we have purposefully chosen this format, rather than narrative, to imitate what is being described: the provisions are presented as disparate issues without, at this stage, presuming they make up a coherent package.

- The **purpose** of universities: previous laws had stated the purpose of universities to be research, education and dissemination of knowledge (*formidling*). Now, in addition, universities were enjoined to collaborate with the ‘surrounding society’ and exchange knowledge with a wide circle of stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> Education, still

<sup>4</sup>The University Law states ‘The University shall collaborate with the surrounding society and... contribute to promoting growth, welfare and development in the society’ (‘Universitetet skal samarbejde med det omgivende samfund og ...bidrage til at fremme vækst, velfærd og udvikling i samfundet’). The Memorandum to the University Law 2003 § 2 Stk. 3 states ‘The University, as an integral part of its work, exchanges knowledge and competences on a mutual basis with a big circle of actors, organisations, authorities, public and private enterprises and so on’ (‘Universitetet udveksler som en integreret del af dets virke viden og kompetencer på gensidig basis med en stor kreds af aktører, organisationer, myndigheder, offentlige og private virksomheder m.v.’) (Danish Parliament 2003: §2 Stk 3).



under considerable Ministerial control, was also reformed to fit the degree structure of the Bologna Process,<sup>5</sup> with quality evaluations and ‘competence profiles’ directed to specific jobs in the labour market.

- The **status** of universities: universities became ‘self-owning’ (*selvejende*) institutions, which meant they could be declared bankrupt and it gave them the status of a person in law. As a legal person, they could enter into contracts and they were expected to use this tool to engage with stakeholders in the ‘surrounding society’. Indeed, the law required them to enter a periodic ‘development contract’ with the government. This status also meant that universities were required to protect their own research freedom and ethics, and no longer look to the government to shelter their independence.
- **University governance and strategic leadership:** The structure of the university, faculties and departments remained unchanged. However, the elected decision-making organs at each level of the structure – the Senate (*Konsistorium*), Faculty Board and Department Board – were abolished. Only the elected Study Boards remained. A Governing Board became the ultimate decision making body, responsible for the university’s strategy and for ensuring that its priorities were reflected in the rector’s budget. The majority of the governing board’s members and its chair were appointed from organisations outside the university world. Whereas leaders (Rector, Dean of Faculty, and Head of Department) had previously been elected by the academics, students and support staff, now the Governing Board appointed the Rector, who in turn appointed the Deans of Faculty, who appointed the Heads of Department. Each leader was only accountable to the leader above and no longer responsible to those they managed.
- **Contracts:** The Governing Board must enter into a ‘development contract’ with the Ministry, signed personally by the Chair and the Minister, setting out the ways the university will meet the government’s aims for the sector. Most universities have created a further chain of contracts between the Rector and each Dean of Faculty, and between the Dean of Faculty and each Head of Department. These contracts turn the Minister’s aims for the sector into targets and performance criteria that are devolved down through the university structure and that tie the leaders into a chain of upward accountability.
- **Financial management:** Government funding was to be gradually changed from a lump sum to output payments. The universities must adopt the capital accounting systems of the business world, and be audited by commercial auditing firms on their efficient use of funding, and by the State’s Auditor General on whether they were meeting the obligations in their Development Contracts.
- **Inspection:** The state auditors checked the universities’ performance against the commitments and targets in their Development Contracts each year. The Ministry retained powers to scrutinise universities if it received complaints and to check

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<sup>5</sup>The degree cycle is 3 year BA worth 180 ECTS points, 2 year MA (candidatus) worth 120 ECTS points, 3 year PhD worth 180 ECTS points.

they were obeying regulations and using resources appropriately to carry out their purposes and further the politicians' objectives (Ministry for Science, Technology and Development 2008).

Observers had different views on the ways these extensive changes would affect universities. The then-director of the Danish Evaluation Institute, EVA, went as far as to say he did not expect the 2003 law to have any great impact; it was designed to address a problem that had already been solved by improvements in the leadership of universities in recent years and universities were already moving in the 'right direction'. When the interviewer doubted that the effects of the law would be so benign, the director of EVA offered to meet in a year to see whether there had been changes and who should buy the drinks. A visitor from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) thought the reforms would enable universities to become a 'power force' in society, able to create developments beyond those imagined by the Ministry. This was in direct contrast to a senior civil servant we interviewed in the Ministry who conceived of the reforms as turning universities into efficient organisations that would deliver goals on topics defined by government.

With such major and thoroughgoing changes, there was a general expectation that the passage of the law would be followed by a period of calm, for everyone to adjust and find out how to operate this new system. This view was widely held by university leaders that we interviewed at the time. But the reforms continued with unrelenting pace. The year 2004 saw two OECD reviews, commissioned by the government, on Danish higher education and Danish educational research and development, which proposed further changes to universities, including mergers with government research institutes (OECD 2004a, b). In the same year, there was a report on university governing boards (Committee on University Boards in Denmark 2003). The government, which had promoted the Bologna Follow-up Group's work on 'Qualifications Frameworks', also required universities revise all their education programmes to include 'competences' and 'qualifications keys' (*kvalifikationsnøgler*) and re-register them with the Ministry (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and BFUG 2005). In 2005–2006, the Prime Minister's Globalisation Council gave higher education and university research central responsibility for driving Denmark's capacity to compete in the global knowledge economy so as to retain its position as 'one of the richest countries in the world' (Danish Government 2006a). In 2006, with the aim of linking Danish universities and businesses into international knowledge environments, the Danish Ministries of Science, Technology and Innovation and of Foreign Affairs set up innovation centres in Silicon Valley (USA), Shanghai (China) and Munich (Germany), later expanded to include New Delhi, São Paulo, Seoul, Boston and Tel Aviv. Strategies for knowledge-based collaboration were agreed, for example, with China (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2008a) and Science and Technology Attachés were posted at each centre to link the Danish and the host country's higher education, research and innovation environments, attract investment and bring the best international students and faculty to Denmark (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2008b).

Meanwhile, reforms to the steering and management of universities continued. In 2006, four smaller, specialist universities and eight government research institutes merged with the multi-disciplinary universities (Danish Government 2006b). In 2007, a further law established an agency, at arms-length from the Ministry, to accredit all new or revised degree programmes, with a focus on their quality and relevance to the employment market (Danish Government 2007). In the same year a Ministry draft report (later largely shelved) proposed a very comprehensive and intrusive annual cycle of university inspections (Danish University and Property Agency 2007). From 2007 to 2009 there was a major exercise, and heated public debate, over the method for counting and grading research outputs, as a basis for competitive allocation of university funding (involving 360 academics in 68 disciplinary committees ranking all the journals in their field) (Emmeche 2009; Wright 2014). In 2008, the Ministry commissioned three reports on university equity and liquidity, the steering of self-owning institutions and the financing and organising of universities and government research institutes (Finance Ministry 2009; McKinsey 2009; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2009). In that same year, the government commissioned a major, international evaluation of the 2003 University Law (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009). This criticised, *inter alia*, the new leadership for not involving colleagues in making important decisions. A law reform in 2011 obliged the university board ‘to ensure the codetermination (*medbestemmelse*) and involvement (*medinddragelse*) of staff (*medarbejdere*) and students in material (*væsentlige*) decisions’ (Danish Government 2011: §10(6)). The very language conveys the uncertainty of a moment of transition: are *medarbejdere* (initially meaning colleagues, but increasingly meaning employees) to be full participants in decision-making structures or do leaders just have to include them occasionally on an ad hoc basis? A report in 2014 showed the majority of staff and students felt neither happened in practice (EPINION 2014).

‘Reform’ was therefore not just one law, but a continuous stream of changes emanating from the Ministry. Each document contained ways of imagining the future university, its managers, academics and students in a projected global knowledge economy and sought ways to entice or coerce people to act in terms of those images and make them come about. But policy makers and university leaders were not the only actors initiating change: university academics, students, stakeholders and the media were also actively engaged in imagining and enacting versions of the university. Whether and how these top-down efforts at ‘reform’ resulted in students, academics and managers acting in new ways and ‘transforming’ the university was a moot point to be explored ethnographically.

## 1.4 University Reform as a Process of Transformation

Our aim, to study how policy makers, managers, academics and students participated in shaping the university, posed a number of methodological problems. We were aware that some policy makers and managers still tended to expect that when

those in authority passed a law or published a directive its concepts would be translated into provisions and ‘trickle down’ through organisations to be implemented as changed practices ‘on the ground’ – a view called ‘authoritative instrumentalism’ (Shore and Wright 2011: 21). Some evaluation studies endorse this view, by using the goals of policy makers as a normative baseline against which to read off the changes made to organisations and the ‘reactions’ of employees and clients. Our aim was not to evaluate the university law; rather, by taking a ‘democratic concept of policy’ (ibid.) we treated the top-down actions of policy makers and managers as just one part of the ethnography and we gave equal importance to how students and academics navigated the various reforms, took their own initiatives and sought to create their university.<sup>6</sup>

Central to our analysis was the concept of enactment, as the university was being enacted in a double sense. First, the university was being reformed through the enactment or passing of laws to try and bring about ‘top-down’ changes; and second, managers, academics and students were enacting their institutions ‘bottom-up’ through their daily activities. The tension between the dual meanings of enacting a law and acting in everyday life was at the core of the study. However, that raised a number of other issues that informed the ethnography. What were the relations between imagining and enacting the university? The relation between speaking and doing is a long-standing question in anthropology (e.g. Beattie 1964) and there is an extensive literature in linguistics and philosophy on how certain speech acts are performative (Austin 1962), while Butler (1990) has demonstrated the integration of imagining and performing gender. We engaged with this literature and treated the relation between imagining and enacting as a zone of ethnographic exploration. How were the student, the academic, the manager and the university itself reimagined in policy texts? How did managers, academics and students negotiate the different ideas they encountered as discourses, expectations and demands? In processes of interaction and contestation, what imagined futures prevailed, and with what material effects? We saw universities as politically contested spaces, continually re-enacted by a range of actors, with no single vision emerging intact. Although students, academics, managers and policy makers did not have equal power to shape the institution, each was actively contributing to the re-imagining and enacting of the university.

This approach posed a problem about how to delineate the field in which the enactment and transformation of the university was taking place. As DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 65) explain, the structure of an organisational field cannot be determined *a priori*, but must be studied empirically. Whereas their ‘field’ is quite a static structure, our focus on a process of university reform meant that we had to be continually alert for new people and agencies entering the field or the role of others

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<sup>6</sup>This approach echoes a parallel move away from ‘technological determinism’ in science studies and towards accounts of how technology is ‘co-produced’ by multiple actors. Jasanoff (2004: 16), for example, showed how, as people explored the technologies of the internet, they not only changed its architecture but the sum of their interactions changed commerce and capital and transformed notions of national-belonging, ownership, privacy, security and governance.

diminishing. We plotted the actors and institutions that could possibly participate in the transformation of the idea and operation of Danish universities in the context of the emergence of a global knowledge economy and 'post-bureaucratic' governance. This included international agencies, notably the OECD, but also the Bologna Process, the European Union and UNESCO, and to a lesser extent, the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, the negotiations of GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) at the World Trade Organisation or later trade agreements between world regions. It encompassed a range of private sector companies that operate internationally and look to turn university research into innovative products, gain consulting or auditing contracts, or participate in the international trade in students. Nationally the field covered not only the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Technology, with primary responsibility for universities, and its arms-length agencies for accreditation and evaluation, but also the Ministry of Education and, importantly, the Ministry of Finance, which has driven the reform of the Danish public sector. The field also included the 'issue network'<sup>7</sup> that honey potted around Ministries and engaged actively in promoting or contesting policy narratives. In this network were Danish Industry and other organisations lobbying for the private business sector, professional associations, the Royal Danish Academy of Science and Letters, Danish Universities (the organisation of University Rectors and chairs of governing boards), academic and other trade unions and student organisations. Beyond this, the field included university managers, students and academics, and the professional, disciplinary and international networks to which they belonged.

As a policy field is obviously too enormous to study ethnographically in its entirety, a number of sites had to be carefully selected through which to study how particular actors contested and enacted emerging aspects of the university, and which would open windows onto an overall process of transformation (Wright 2011). Often the people and institutions involved in the policy field did not know each other or share a moral universe. The challenge then was to find a vantage point from which to follow the process of contestation and grasp the interactions and disjunctions between people in their different organisational environments and everyday lives. Gusterson (2005) suggested doing this by 'tilting the field' so as to study a system from the perspective of a particular site in great detail and identify the connections to and implications for the wider field. Reinhold (1998, Wright and Reinhold 2011) elaborated a methodology for tracking a process of contestation and transformation that she called 'studying through'. She traced the unfolding of conflicts and events *through* time and *through* space, as they moved back and forth between different locations and institutions in the policy field. This enabled her to show how, *through* a process of contestation, key organising concepts in society, with long historical trajectories, were transformed and their new meanings were

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<sup>7</sup>Rhodes and Marsh (1992: 187) define an 'issue network' as participants involved in policy consultation, rather than decision making, and who do not share the same understanding of an issue either with each other or with the bureaucracy. Their contacts and access fluctuate; they compete and conflict with each other, and are in unequal power relationships.

made authoritative in law texts and incorporated into institutional rules and procedures.

As an example of ‘tilting the field’ and ‘studying through’, soon after the appointment of the Danish universities’ new governing boards, one word and its associated practices encapsulated the debate about the nature of the emergent university. The law text committed universities to conduct their business in ‘greatest possible openness’,<sup>8</sup> but the newly formed governing boards excluded the university and wider public from their meetings by making many agenda points ‘closed’ and the brief minutes of the meetings gave away minimal information afterwards. This was in stark contrast to the open meetings of the now disbanded senates. By tilting the field to focus on the issue of ‘greatest possible openness’, this put a spotlight on all the actors and relationships concerned with shaping the future university: the minister who was keen to build up sympathetic relations with the boards; the boards and rectors keen to assert themselves as strategically in control of the organisation; the academic and student unions that sought to sustain their participation in decision making and maintain a sense of ownership over the university; and industrial interests that stated bluntly that an organisation with commercial interests had to be steered behind closed doors. By following the way this issue was contested in the media, by elected academic and student board members in different universities, and between unions and national associations and the ministry, we were able to trace how the meaning of ‘greatest possible openness’ was attenuated and eventually redefined by the minister as ‘where possible openness’. With this authoritative statement about the flipped meaning of ‘openness’, governing boards were able to make unquestionable their practices of closing most of their meetings to the university, and this became a firmly planted ‘a stake in the ground’ around which other aspects of the university revolved.

By taking a longitudinal approach and following what happened through time and across sites, we could see how policy makers, managers, academics and students contested, accepted, engaged with or ignored the reforms, used them to their own advantage, or initiated their own changes, based on other visions of the university. We traced moments of friction or processes of conflict as they unfolded through time, with moments of suspense, not knowing what will happen next, and surprise, when people responded to situations in ways unimagined and not predicted by more powerful others. Students, academics, managers and policy makers were all working within the constraints of the law and its steering technologies, but imagining and enacting them, their own roles, and the university in multiple ways. The analysis moves beyond description when a certain moment of contestation or friction results in particular way of imagining the university being translated into a practice that is dominant and unshakeable, at least for a while. Such practices act like ‘stakes in the ground’ around which the university is enacted, and as more stakes become implanted, so the university begins to be organised along new tracks and normative

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<sup>8</sup> *‘Der skal i størst muligt omfang være åbenhed om bestyrelsens arbejde’* (Danish Parliament 2003: Chapter 3, §10 stk 2).

assumptions. Such an ethnographic approach shows how transformation comes about: changes occur through small moves that are incremental and contingent, but they gradually shape the university as a new subject in a new context. This approach to university reform enabled the researchers to work from detailed descriptions of activities and incidents to an analysis of how major shifts in the institutions were occurring and how they contributed to the ways new normative frameworks and relations of power were becoming instituted in universities and hegemonic in society.

## 1.5 The Study

The research started in 2004, in the hiatus after the passing of the 2003 University Law and before its provisions came legally into effect. Whilst mapping the field (as described above) a preliminary familiarisation with the Danish university sector also involved visits to eight of the (then) 12 universities in Denmark. A ‘vertical slice’ of interviews was conducted in each case: with students (often in a group interview), at least two academics and heads of department from two contrasting departments, and the rector or a pro-rector. The choice of departments was based not just on the divide between sciences and humanities, which was accentuated by the government’s focus on the ‘relevance’ of certain science subjects for the economy, but also on the contrast between departments with a large amount of externally commissioned research, and those dependent mainly on the government’s basic grant – a distinction that cuts across the science-humanities divide. In these preliminary visits, we focused on the history of the university; an outline of trends and changes in its organisation, research and teaching; interviewees’ understandings of, and attitudes towards, the university reform; and individual and collective strategies within the university to prepare for the expected changes. Documents were collected regarding debates about, or plans for, implementing the University Law, along with supplementary information on the size, budgets, and organisation of the universities. This preliminary study resulted in reports and a two-day team meeting to select the sites for detailed ethnographic studies.

In the second stage of the project, the five researchers focused on:

- the policy history of university reform and the emergence of the state’s new systems for steering universities
- the formation of new governing boards and appointed university leaders
- the strategic space of academics
- the participation of students in their own education, university governance, and the shaping of society.

Most of the intensive fieldwork on these topics took place in 2005–2006, catching the moments when people were engaging with major changes. However the duration of the project was extended to cater for the fact that the government’s slow decision-making delayed its own programme for implementing a number of the

provisions by over a year, and some universities decided not to rush into implementing the law either. Research on academics' strategic space was extended by Krejsler and Wright's subsequent study of how academics conceptualised their conditions of work in the light of new governance and management technologies.<sup>9</sup> Wright and Ørberg have continued to follow policy debates and changes to the University Law up to the time of writing. This longitudinal and multi-sited study gives us particular insights into the process of reforming and transforming universities in Denmark.

For all these studies, it was decided that the researchers would select their field sites according to three common criteria. First, each would select sites in the three main types of universities in Denmark.<sup>10</sup> These are large, old, multi-faculty universities; single faculty, specialised universities; and universities established in the light of European debates about 'reform' pedagogy in the 1970s (Hansen 2006). The second criterion was that the choice of sites would encompass universities at the forefront of implementing the governance and management changes of the new law; universities that were implementing them slowly and reluctantly; and universities that were actively exploring strategies for mitigating what were expected to be their 'worst' effects. The third criterion was, as in the preliminary study, a selection of disciplinary areas that the government deemed relevant/not relevant for the economy and whose economies differed between being based on externally commissioned research or dependence on the government's basic grant. In choosing these sites, care was taken not to treat 'the university' as an entity given in advance, or to treat it as the unit of study. While participants may have a primary location in an academic department or an administrative office or organisation, their activities were not contained within one site. They varied in the range of organisations they were active in and the forms of their engagement across the policy field. Some academics and students took part in national forums, others in debates in their own university, and many encountered aspects of these policy narratives in their daily work and studies. In many cases, we focused on 'telling events' or in Tsing's (2005) terms 'moments of friction' where people contested their different views of the

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<sup>9</sup>The project 'New forms of management, intervention and stress' (in universities, schools, local authorities and hospitals) was funded by the Danish Fund for Research on Work Environments, 2007–2009. The results are published in Kirsten Marie Bovbjerg (2011), Wright (2014) and Krejsler (2013).

<sup>10</sup>The three types of universities at that time were:

1. Multi-faculty universities included Copenhagen University, founded in 1479 and strongly influenced by German reforms in the nineteenth century, in what they call the Humboldt tradition (Jensen 2001); Aarhus University, founded in 1928 and mainly funded and shaped by the city council and local businesses until incorporated into the state sector in 1970; and University of Southern Denmark formed in 1998 from the merger of [Odense University](#) (founded in 1966) with schools of [business](#), [engineering](#), public health and education based on seven campuses across southern Denmark.
2. The single faculty universities at that time specialised in pharmacy, education, agriculture, technical subjects, IT, and two business schools.
3. The 'reform' universities were Roskilde University Centre (RUC founded 1972) and Aalborg University (founded as Aalborg University Centre in 1974).



university. These frictions sometimes occurred within a department, sometimes involved many parts of the university, and sometimes were on a national or international scale. As particular issues rose to prominence in contemporary debates, we ‘tilted the field’ to focus on these as particular ‘sites’, collecting documents, recording the flow of events, attending conferences and public meetings, and interviewing the actors concerned. Our focus was on the process of change and we chose contrasting sites *in* universities for ethnographic studies of this process of change, rather than making an ethnography *of* departments or universities.

## 1.6 Organisation of the Book

The tension between the dual meanings of ‘enacting the university’, as top-down decision making and as the shaping of insitutions through everyday working life runs through the chapters of this co-authored book. The ethnographic approach enables the authors to both describe in detail what was going on from different perspectives and to set these developments within wider processes of the transformation of the state and the global knowledge economy. The five authors come from different strands of anthropology and educational studies and each of the researchers has used their own disciplinary and theoretical approaches to develop a research design appropriate for their part of the overall study.<sup>11</sup> In Chap. 2 *Enactment of the University: Issues and Concepts* we identify the shared elements of the conceptual framework for the research, principally the concept of enactment, and a number of subsidiary or supportive concepts – policy, governance, organisation, subject, contestation and power. In a ‘shared diversity’, these concepts are then developed in slightly different ways by each of the authors in subsequent chapters, as suited to their material and their interests.

Chapter 3 *University Reform: International Policy Making through a Danish Prism* sets the scene. Wright and Ørberg plotted the key people and organisations within the university ‘policy field’ and explored linkages between Danish policy makers and influential international agencies. They identified discourses and discussions about the future university in the documents and policies of international agencies and studied the ways these were taken up in Danish national political debates. The OECD was a key influence – not only for its work on the reform of higher education, but, just as importantly, in its agendas for the general modernisation of the public sector. The chapter studies the ways the discourses have been developed through time in a sequence of OECD documents and how, as a political

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<sup>11</sup> We relied for project coordination on team meetings, culminating in two presentations of our findings to international visitors: members of the Ford Foundation funded network ‘The Trans-Atlantic Forum on the Future of Universities’ co-ordinated by Professor Davydd Greenwood, Cornell University, whose capstone conference was hosted by the project at DPU, 28–29 June 2006; and Professor Cris Shore who was conducting a similar project at Auckland University, New Zealand. We thank these ‘sparring partners’ for their generous insights and comments.

strategy, the OECD assembles an ‘epistemic community’ of like-minded people who participate in OECD networks and are influentially positioned to be ‘activists’ implementing these ideas in policy and practice in their own country. The particularity of the way Danish politicians used international discourses and agendas was highlighted by Wright’s comparative studies of the history of university reforms in the U.S., U.K., New Zealand, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Austria.<sup>12</sup> This revealed that although many reforms focused on the same terms – university freedom or autonomy, and accountability – they meant very different things in practice in each country. The chapter tracks the methods of ‘soft power’ by which a small network of Danish activists was able to work within and between national and international contexts and push their agendas for higher education and public sector reform.

Chapter 4 *Contested Narratives of University Reform* explores the different arguments about university reform since the 1970s in Denmark and traces how a particular agenda became dominant in 2003 and the basis of law. Wright and Ørberg created a corpus of the documents, reports, conference proceedings, newspaper debates and more recent electronic blogs that reflected the ways Danish activists and organisations in the policy field had participated at different moments in the creation of narratives about university reform. Documentary analysis was complemented by interviews in 2005–2007 with 16 national politicians and senior civil servants involved in university policy over this period. The chapter traced through the 1980s and 1990s, the changing narrative about ‘the problem’ with universities and hence ‘the solution’ as it played out in public debate, the media, statements in parliament, and the policy papers of ministries and interest groups. This revealed two sets of arguments, one specific to university reform and another that involved universities in a general reform of the whole of the public sector. Both discourses changed the purpose of the university and an image of the university as a coherent organisation subject to centralised government steering and internal management structures emerged. Central to changing ways of conceptualising the university were contests over the meanings of key words such as freedom, trust, autonomy, accountability, efficiency and democracy. The 2003 law is seen as a brief hiatus in this long-term political contest, when a majority in parliament formed around one vision of a new kind of university, which they tried to realise through the implementation of a new legal framework and a range of political technologies.

Chapter 5 *Steering Change: Negotiations of Autonomy and Accountability in the Self-owning University* describes the assemblage of technologies used in public sector reform, and which policy makers applied to universities with the intent of transforming an internally accountable truth-machine into an externally accountable innovation-engine. The result was a steering model that set up universities as free agents. Most Danish policy makers saw this model as tightly binding the university to government’s political agendas and policies through their financing and auditing

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<sup>12</sup> Studies of existing literature were complemented with country visits (often associated with invitations to give papers) and in most cases, interviews taking a ‘vertical slice’ through the sector, from the Ministry, to 1–2 universities and including members of the rectorate, middle management, academics and students.

systems, even though an OECD reviewer pointed out the university could potentially become a new and more independent ‘power force’ in society. Ørberg and Wright traced the history of each of the components of the new government steering mechanisms (development contracts, performance measurements, output payments, competitive funding, accountability regimes) and showed that some elements of this steering system were new but most were existing measures and technologies, each with its own historical trajectory and connections to other rationalities of governance. Wright and Ørberg’s 16 interviews with senior politicians and civil servants helped them understand the often quite radical transformations in the purpose and functioning of these steering mechanisms, and the complexity of accumulated meanings that they brought to the current steering assemblage. They show how different policy makers each had their own interpretation of the steering model in the 2003 University Law. Each focused on some of the constituent political technologies more than others; each drew on aspects of the previous history of those elements to give them particular meanings; and each stretched and shaped the assemblage to try and turn their own image of the university into effect. Each interviewee projected their partial view as an image of the whole university that they were trying to bring into effect. Wright and Ørberg took care to avoid the pitfall of assuming that there is one steering model that can be read off the law’s political or legal intent and the following chapters explore how managers, academics and students engaged with steering technologies as just one element among many in the way they each imagined, contested and enacted ‘the university’ as a whole.

The next chapters in the book are in pairs, each tracing the genealogy of key figures (university leaders, academics and students) so as to analyse how they are re-imagined by the reforms. The chapters then explore particular instances, events or cases where these figures, and the university they are imagined to be part of, have been enacted in a new way.

Chapters 6 and 7 *Governing and Leading the Post-bureaucratic University* ask how university governance – a dimension of higher education in Denmark that has historically enjoyed high levels of institutional autonomy – has responded to a policy agenda that desires greater economic relevance, efficiency and enhanced public accountability. These chapters explore how three very different universities envisaged the Government’s policy agenda and developed systems and procedures to adhere to it. Their approaches to this challenge were extremely varied, with university boards and their senior leadership reflecting a range of strategies for working with Government: one welcomed the changes with little dissent; another tried to engage academics in defining its ‘fundamental values’ in order to present these to the new governing board as the basis for a future values-based management; and the third used well-established communication and internal consultation systems to identify, polish up and try to preserve ‘the family silver’ – its consultative decision-making and its participatory pedagogy. Carney (with Wright) interviewed 33 members of the universities’ new governing boards and management focusing on what the person brought to their new role, including their vision for the university. The ways these new actors instituted new leadership, management and decision-making processes was studied through detailed observation and note taking at meetings of

the governing boards and academic council at the three universities over a one-year period, supplemented by close reading of associated documents. This fieldwork shed light on the changing nature of the university as an organisation but also on the diverse interests and capacities of such actors, and thus the potential for change, adjustment and resistance of different types. As this foundation was being laid, the study then identified a number of particular policy issues that were emerging across the sector and that were being understood and enacted in each institutional context. One of these concerned the meanings of ‘openness’ in board decisions (as mentioned above). Another considered the question of ‘university freedom’. Yet another focused on methods for financial management. A particularly intense example centred upon the Government’s demand that all universities identify research priorities (*kernefelter*) that would then be used to focus central funding and facilitate national-level research planning efforts. These were key issues for understanding contemporary developments in and contests over the ideas of the university and for what this meant to actors and interest groups across the sector.

For Chaps. 8 and 9 *Reconfiguring conditions for being an academic subject – academic subjectivities at stake*, Krejsler conducted 20 interviews with academics and institute leaders as well as observations in two departments in three universities. This served to explore how individuals and contexts responded to changes in university discourses and political technologies. Academic subjects in local discursive university settings were analysed within the larger discursive configurations they were both part of and helped to enact. A process could be mapped in the form of a ‘democratic-Humboldtian discourse’ being dislodged by an emerging and increasingly dominant ‘knowledge economy discourse’. This process took different speeds and trajectories at different departments and universities. In order to contextualise the interviews and observations Krejsler gathered documents, scrutinised websites and collected additional material at relevant department, faculty and university levels. To understand what happened at these local levels within the overarching frame of national debates among academic subjects he made systematic searches of *FORSKERforum* and *Magisterbladet*, the union journals for researchers and academic employees at universities and university colleges. Employing a Foucauldian theoretical approach, he charted the strategic spaces for manoeuvre that were available to academic subjects within a changing university regime of power-knowledge. He showed how each faculty, department, and in some instances, research group, had its own dominant discursive spaces (culture, tradition, formal and informal power networks), which made it highly unpredictable how the centralized introduction of a given signifier or political technology would affect local practices. Within these strategic spaces for manoeuvre, he analysed how different people operated to reproduce their identities and construct themselves as legitimate academics. Among other results, he found that academics in the government’s priority research areas and in some humanities disciplines that have been operating with external funding for decades expressed little fear of changes and apparently had strategies for long-term survival, whereas others were worried their fields would not fit into the market thinking.

In Chaps. 10 and 11 *Shifting forms of student participation: as a revolutionary figure and as a co-owner, consumer or investor*, Nielsen used historical analyses, policy studies and ethnographic fieldwork to explore how three different dimensions of student participation – students’ participation in their own studies, in the running of the university and in the shaping of society – have been put into play in different ways at different times and at different sites. Her historical study showed how the students’ quest for participation since the nineteenth century gradually provided them with decision-making power in governing bodies and in their own teaching and learning. Eight months’ participant observation in natural science programmes in three universities and semi-structured interviews with 22 students enrolled on those programmes explored how students participated in their education. Further semi-structured interviews with 13 student politicians in Student Councils and The National Union of Students, 16 teachers and university leaders, and 6 administrative staff and student advisors traced the ways particular reform initiatives (e.g. the introduction of fees for certain foreign students and the introduction of a new block and module structures in some courses) promoted an idea of participation as freedom of choice over modules and projects, and the reasons why very few students were interested in participating in the democratic governing bodies. A further phase of interviews with The National Union of Students and participation in their events explored the growing professionalization of the Union and how their ‘strategic’ approach to negotiating with government over the 2003 University Law was accompanied by ‘pragmatic’, single-issue, media and campaign-oriented ways of putting pressure on university leadership and politicians. Throughout, Nielsen paid attention to situations of friction and contestation (e.g. demonstrations, complaint cases from students and debates in the media) where conflicting ‘figures’ of the student were produced and formerly prevalent notions of the student as a ‘co-owner’ of the university or as ‘participant’ in a community of knowledge were increasingly supplemented or marginalised by notions of the student as an ‘investor’ in his/her own intellectual capital or as a freely choosing ‘customer’ in the university’s education shop.

The final chapter, *The Changing Role and Meaning of Universities*, with the interests of academics and policy makers in mind, acts as a summary statement of the overall construction of the university that arises from our analysis. What emerges is an account of university reform, which is markedly different from that anticipated in the policy documents. What we have shown is that reform did not ‘trickle down’, nor did it stand still, even among the policy makers, and that changes were being initiated in many locations. Over time, certain ways of thinking about the university and certain administrative practices became normative, but our studies of specific formative events involving students and academics as much as university leaders and policy makers show that they all had room for manoeuvre in a continual process of negotiating, contesting and creating the university of the future. Drawing on the material presented in the previous chapters, this concluding chapter puts forward a notion of the university as a contested whole, continuously re-enacted by a vast array of people who are differently positioned in the policy field. The message of the book is that all actors must seek out their specific reflexive space and room for

manoeuvre to create the university of the future. While students, academics, managers and policy makers did not have equal ability to shape these institutions, we show ethnographically how all contributed to the enactment of different visions of the university. In this process of contestation and co-production, no single image of the university triumphed.

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# Chapter 2

## Enactment of the University – Issues and Concepts



Susan Wright 

### 2.1 Introduction

Our ethnography treats reform as a process of continually reshaping the university, which has taken place over more than a decade. In this process, concepts, even of the university itself, are contestable and changeable, and systems of governance and management, which sometimes take on an appearance of fixity, are in flux. The point of an ethnographic approach is to analyse how and why changes come about and to theorise these in terms of the emergence of new forms of sociality and power. Ethnography is always open to surprise (Willis and Trondman 2002) about how people will behave, and in suspense over whose ideas will dominate, and how events will unfold. For this reason, change cannot be modelled, predicted or theorised in advance. Instead, ethnography starts by asking what is going on. It proceeds by noticing puzzles, ambiguities, paradoxes and tensions in what people are saying and doing in the field and it teases these out in relation to available theoretical explanations in academic literature. In our case, a key issue became the tension between two uses of the concept of enactment in the field and in the literature.

One way of ‘enacting’ reforms is by passing a law. That is, policy makers, working within international and state institutions, strive to make a particular discourse on an issue authoritative and they set out provisions that they expect will be turned into changes in organisational processes and in the lives and conduct of people. People are conceived of as passive and compliant, or sanctions are expected to make them come into alignment. This expectation by policy makers, that they can use powers of parliament and processes of public administration to ‘enact’ reforms of the university from the top-down, is a very important part of the ethnography. But it is far from the whole story.

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In a second meaning of ‘enactment’, which comes from discourse theory and feminist analyses, everyone enacts their life day-to-day. All people are conceived of as active agents in creative, participatory processes of change, albeit in unequal relations of power. Sometimes reflective and critical people knowingly seek to make changes to their working lives and their institutions, but even when people do apparently the same thing every day, they ‘enact’ it differently each time. In Shore and Wright’s (2011: 21) terms, this second meaning of enactment offers a ‘democratic’ idea of reform where change is always happening, often in unpredictable and creative ways. This ‘democratic’ idea is quite different from the ‘authoritative instrumentalism’ of the first, top-down ideas of policy enactment and managed reform. The aim of this book is to keep both concepts of enactment in play: both the ‘top-down’ enactment based on laws and institutional power, and ‘bottom-up’ enactment derived from multiple actors imagining and shaping their institution. We aim to hold these two kinds of enactment in tension, so as to conceive of the university as ‘enacted’ in both ways at once and to explore ethnographically how and why the university comes to be imagined and instantiated in new ways. This chapter investigates the analytical purchase of the concept of ‘enactment’ in more detail, and to do so, it delves into a number of subsidiary concepts. Together, these provide an analytical vocabulary and framework for exploring the process of enacting the university, which the co-authors develop further, and in their own ways, in the rest of the book.

## 2.2 Policy Field

The first challenge posed by this project was how to conceive of the space in which reforms were being enacted as encompassing both those involved in devising and implementing laws in a ‘top-down’, authoritative fashion, and the contributions of a range of other actors who reshaped the university from the ‘bottom up’. The task of conceptualising this space involved positioning the project in relation to established approaches to policy. While political scientists have moved away from their traditional institutional focus and have sought to study how policy making operates across different levels of government, concepts such as ‘policy community’ and the wider ‘issue networks’ still focus on what Rhodes and Marsh (1992) call the netherworld of committees, civil servants, professions, and interest groups. Such approaches make an implicit distinction between the governing and the governed, whereas the aim of this study was to include academics, students and all who we thought could potentially be part of reshaping the university in a single field of ethnographic research and analysis. Like many political scientists, this book conceptualises policy as a messy process and rejects as empirically inaccurate the neat ‘stages heuristic’, which sees policy as a linear process or cycle of agenda setting, decision-making, implementation and evaluation (Cairney 2015: 493). Sabatier’s (1988) Advocacy Coalitions Framework views policy processes as contested over a decade or more, but he frames this as rivalry between two or more fairly stable coalitions of

actors (still mainly limited to governmental and lobbying organisations) who focus on influencing government decisions and who are held together by the ‘fundamental glue’ of agreement over core beliefs (Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994: 195). This move in American pluralism from rivalry between interests to rivalry between core beliefs still conceives of power, qua influence over government decisions, as a continuous bargaining process between competing groups. In contrast, this study was more akin to interpretive policy analysis, which focuses on contestation over the meaning of policy in the process of forming alliances that are rarely stable (Yanow 1997, 2011). As set out below, the study also drew inspiration from Foucault’s productive notion of power and processes of transformation, along with Gramscian-inspired cultural studies of historical and shifting alliances in processes of contestation over the meaning of keywords.

Methodologically, the study drew on a repertoire of anthropological concepts. Framing university reform as a ‘policy field’ extended the ambit of the study beyond the ‘policy community’, ‘interest network’ or ‘advocacy coalition’ to include both the governing and the governed as active participants in the transformation of the university. However, when working on such a broad and complex canvas, this still posed a problem, identified by Strathern (1992), about how to derive the ‘figure’ from the ‘ground’ and then reintegrate it again. Whereas earlier community studies often conflated figure and ground and treated the field of research and the site of study as coterminous, anthropological studies of policy have shown the methodological advantage of separating the concepts of a field and site: the sites being carefully selected locations through which to study processes of transformation in the wider policy field (Shore and Wright 1997; Wright 2011). Of course, as social science researchers, we ‘participate in, reflect upon and enact’ (Law and Urry 2004: 392) the field of university reform ourselves. If research is always performative, it is also always tinged, even implicitly, with the social world we wish to create. We turn a reflexive gaze on our own position within the research and the field in the book’s conclusion.

A policy field, as a construction continually under review, is a ‘fragile conjunction between knowledge-making and the world’ (Tsing 2015: 231); it is a map of potentials and it changes as events unfold. At the start of the Danish reforms, our construction of the field consisted of what had hitherto been called the university sector: politicians, ministry officials, university leaders, administrators, support staff, academics and students, the rectors’ association, the academic unions, professional associations and students’ unions. It also included the international agencies with which Danish officials and politicians interacted. Initially, these were the OECD, EU and UNESCO. Later we noticed that the World Bank and IMF, World Economic Forum and World Trade Organisation had also become sites for envisaging the university in the knowledge economy and making policy proposals. Within Denmark, from the start, the policy field also included a number of organisations that had lobbied over many years for universities to be reformed to meet the interests of their members, notably Danish Industry (the association for large businesses), ATV (a pressure group for engineering and technical business interests) and Dansk Metal (an important trades union). Certain newspapers and media outlets had

also played a big part in debating different visions for the university. As the study progressed, some of the above organisations and people began to assume a much greater role in policy debates and unanticipated new sites appeared, while others shrank in importance or ceased to feature at all as events unfolded over time. For example, during the detailed debates over the law text, the students' union was present at the negotiation table in the ministry, it mobilised support among politicians, and had tangible influence over the outcomes, whereas the academic unions were absent. Shocked by their marginalisation, the academic unions gradually organised themselves and in subsequent law reforms they formulated positions, were treated more as a dialogue partner by the ministry, and tried much harder to be heard. New actors also appeared on the national and international scene, notably commercial companies that rank universities (Times Higher Education, and QS) and that advise ministries and individual universities on how to improve their management and global status (the auditing firms PwC and Deloitte, the consultancy McKinsey). International associations of unions also played an increasing role (Education International for academic unions, and the European Students' Union). Some companies involved in research-based innovation grew ever bolder in seeking to collaborate with universities or harvest their research capacities and knowledge, and new international companies emerged, especially so-called 'pathway providers' developing the international trade in students.<sup>1</sup>

If the policy field involves all these *potential* actors in a process of university reform, the next question is, how to conceptualise their interactions within this policy field in order to analyse, ethnographically, how and why certain changes came about? This demands a 'double take' on the part of researchers. First, taking a 'democratic' approach to policy (Shore and Wright 2011) means conceptualising all participants in the policy field as active players, all with their own ideas, taking their own initiatives, and finding their own ways to respond to the initiatives of others. From this perspective, those actors who advocate an 'authoritative' view of policy making and who take top-down initiatives and expect others to react and comply, become part of the ethnography. In a democratic view, all other actors in the policy field are also involved in a process of change by, for example, accepting the 'top-down' vision, contesting it, deflecting it into another form, or initiating their own alternative developments.

The second 'take' on this field is that, even if all participants are actively contributing to re-imagining and re-shaping the university, it is not a free-for-all. In a Foucaultian approach, power is enacted within dominant discourses as institutions become part of a disciplinary dispositif (Foucault 1979; Callewaert 2017). Yet as Krejsler (Chaps. 8 and 9, this volume) makes clear, people's 'room for manoeuvre' in institutions, although constrained, rarely if ever has fixed dimensions in stable

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<sup>1</sup>The 'field' is even wider in other countries which encouraged privatisation of higher education, and saw the growth of for-profit universities and publishing companies whose new business models took them into developing materials for on-line teaching and even owning colleges (e.g. Pearson's) or into producing citation indexes, impact factors and rankings (e.g. Thomson and Times Higher Education) as well as vastly expanded journal production (Wright 2015).

structures. With a more Gramsci-inspired approach, Wright and Ørberg (this volume) explore how such dominant discourses emerge and are made authoritative through processes of contestation between identifiable people, organisations and interests. Our ‘democratic’ approach to policy explores enactment between these two poles: these are not opposed positions but do reflect differences between authors on the nature of social action and politics.<sup>2</sup> Power, in either pole, is not evenly distributed and some people have access to institutional resources that are not available to others. Rather, it is an ethnographic question, how do people act, somewhat reflexively, whether they are contesting, resisting or empowered in the process? Who has the ability to convey images and discourses of the university and how do they gain support for their ideas, and contest or defeat others? How do they mobilise institutional powers and resources to make their ideas not only dominant but authoritative, generalised, even hegemonic? With what institutional and material effects? In a context of reform, it becomes very clear that people’s participation in processes of contestation is itself part and parcel of continual processes of organising the university and its emerging forms of power.

This double take – between mapping the presence of multiple people and organisations, and exploring their unequal ability to shape what happens – means that the researcher treats the policy field as a space of political contestation where *analytically* any actors, including the researchers themselves, have the potential to become important players, but *ethnographically* people are engaging in processes and systems of power (Shore and Wright 1997; Shore et al. 2011; Fairclough 1995). The question is, who manages to define the university, for whom, with what material and institutional effects - including new forms of power? Such an ethnographic approach generates suspense, as all that ethnographers of reform processes can know in advance is that the people they study will engage with uncertain and changing situations in unpredictable ways and some with astonishingly clever political acumen. It also presents a challenge for the ethnographic analysis: how to avoid either treating the university as the result of ‘top down’ enactment of a single and coherent vision, or as consisting of a vast variety of multifarious ideas and actions with no emergent shape? This is parallel to issues facing the analysis of contemporary capitalism: how to avoid treating it either as an elite plot, or so distributed that no systematic relations can be identified?

### 2.3 Governance

It is not just researchers but also policy makers who have become concerned about the space between top-down intentions and bottom-up reactions. In Denmark in the 1980s, as elsewhere in Europe, U.S. and Australasia, policy makers became

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<sup>2</sup>And, consequently, the role of ethnographic research in describing, resisting or consolidating dominant understandings of and interests within the ‘field’.

increasingly aware that the hierarchical model of a bureaucratic government did not function in the joined up way once imagined. Instead, they developed a vision of ‘governance’ in which policy makers created the legal and financial framework, steering technologies and incentives for institutions, along with their employees and citizens to imagine themselves in a particular way. If successful, organisations and individuals would respond positively to the subject positions they were offered and adopt them as their own. Whereas ‘government’ involved ministers ‘rowing’ the machinery of a centralized bureaucracy to manage the economy and society and act on (passive) clients, ‘governance’ entailed ministers ‘steering’ institutions and individuals, who would use their own agency and capacities to act ‘freely’ in such a way that they contributed to the government’s political aims and vision of social order (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Rose 1999). If the top-down policy makers’ vision of a society, its organisations and individuals are brought into alignment with people’s own ‘bottom-up’ aspirations then their multifarious actions would be given coherence and direction. However, a flaw in this apparently neat resolution of the tension between the two kinds of authoritative and democratic enactment is exposed when ‘governance’ is applied to universities.

‘Governance’ was an early modern term for how a country, a landed estate or an institution was kept in good order and how an individual conducted business by maintaining ‘wise self-command’ (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1989 VI: 710). It fell out of usage when ‘governing’ became the specialised role of ‘government’ and a bureaucratic state – except in the context of universities. Throughout this history, ‘governance’ has consistently been the term for the way the university orders its own affairs by managing its relations with the state, maintaining its own internal organization, and instilling certain values and expectations of individual conduct. When, in the 1990s, governance burst back into widespread use, its new meaning echoed the old in that it spanned the three scales of the self-management of individuals, the running of institutions, and the ordering of a country – now in a space of global competition.

Despite the apparent similarity between the old and the new meanings of governance a crucial shift had taken place in who had the power to define ‘good governance’. It was no longer up to people or institutions to maintain their own ‘wise self-command’ in a bottom-up fashion. Now it was government that defined the contribution of universities to the competitive state, the ways that the institution should be organized and managed, and the appropriate behaviour for ‘responsible’ academics and students to adopt. However, in higher education literature these two meanings of the state steering and the internal ordering of universities have often been conflated. For example, Marginson and Considine (2000: 20) describe the function of governance as the ‘unification’ of a ‘double structuring’ between the university’s internal configuration of power and its external relations with government, business and other outside interests. Whereas such conflation is a government aspiration, Marginson and Considine treat it as an empirical fact. For government, ‘good governance’ is achieved when its ‘top-down’ vision is adopted by the university as its own identity, and when the incentives and strictures it uses to elicit this performance ‘stimulate[s] the academic heartland’ in Burton Clark’s words (Clark

1998: 11) such that not just managers, but also academics and students come to identify with the government's vision for themselves and their university. Far from assuming that this 'unification' happens, this book treats it as an open question and an issue of ethnographic suspense. In what ways does the original meaning of governance get overlain by the resurgent meaning? Are universities not just *reformed* top-down by government enacting a law, but are they *transformed* by their staff and students adopting the government's aspirations for their institution as their own?

Foucault's detailed studies of how a range of institutions (hospitals, prisons, city planning, mental health, sexuality – but unfortunately, not universities) emerged in modern forms of power provide a repertoire of concepts that are useful for analysing current processes of political transformation. First, French and European reforms from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries downplayed 'sovereign power' in favour of 'government' and then heralded a shift to 'governance'. Foucault showed that at such moments of change, new discourses emerged that re-envisioned the role of the state and the space it was governing. The emergence of 'modern' power was marked by the shift from a ruler controlling 'territory' to a government optimising the productive capacity of a 'population'. In the contemporary case, the role of government was to generate a highly skilled workforce and optimise its capacity for research-based innovation so that the country and its world region would succeed in the new space of the global knowledge economy. Second, Foucault shows how new discourses of governance were a sign of the emergence of new professions with 'knowledge' about how to manage the population (notably in the 'modern' era, through the development of population statistics, the designation of sub-categories like children, ill, criminal, and the classification of norms and deviance). Third, new professions have deployed this specialised knowledge to redesign the purpose and architecture of public institutions and the use of space and time in their daily governing of these segments of the population. In the contemporary period, the emergence of a new professional knowledge has been witnessed by the burgeoning of think tanks that reframe the nature and purpose of the university, consultants advising on reforms to organisational structure and financial management, IT companies offering designs for computerised management systems and on-line teaching delivery, and educational developers advising on massified and distanced learning. Such knowledge is translated into the architecture of universities (hence the proliferation of glassy structures around the world) and their use of space, aimed to break down old departmental structures and foster interdisciplinary research (Jiménez et al. 2014) as well provide an environment suited to the teaching and learning of the imagined 'model student'.

The fourth of Foucault's major insights into contemporary forms of governance was to show how political aims are embedded in apparently politically neutral tools for steering an institution and innocuous, rational and routine administrative procedures for ordering its population. Foucault argues that such 'political technologies' achieve profound effects as instruments of modern power because they conceal their own operation and mask the political under a cloak of neutrality (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 196). Such instruments are plentiful in the 2003 University Law (Danish Parliament 2003): a development contract between the ministry and the

university's governing board, measurable performance targets, compliance auditing, output payments for teaching, and increasingly competitive allocation of funding. Such political technologies convey to the reformed institutions and their inmates a clear depiction of the subject position and the 'technologies of the self' they should adopt in order to succeed or survive (Shore and Wright 2000, 2015b). The greatest art of this form of governance is to find one instrument that will operate across scales and will bring the ordering of the sector as a whole, individual institutions, and academic staff into alignment (Wright 2014b). A good example is the bibliometric points system, devised following the 2003 University Law to measure and value each academic's publications, to allocate university funding on a competitive basis, and to differentiate the sector so the three biggest universities could improve their international ranking (Wright 2014b). The points system made clear to newly appointed strategic leaders what priorities to set for their organization and academics quickly learned what was expected of them to maximize 'what counts'. A fifth insight from Foucault is that, based on the new professional knowledge, academics and students have also been offered redemptive therapies (ranging from guidance on annual performance expectations to employability training, stress management, time management, 'managing your leader', and successful grant writing) to enable them to become the kind of calculative, accountable and responsible subjects expected by this regime (Hoskin and Macve 1988; Miller 2001). The aim of these modern forms of power is to work through the capacity of organisations and individuals as 'self-actualising' agents and to achieve political objectives by 'conducting their conduct' through 'action at a distance' (Miller and Rose 1990: 1; Foucault 1991).

While it is clear that these technologies and knowledge practices are *intended* to work in these ways, what *actually* happens in practice? Some of the governmental literature has assumed too much coherence and neatness, as if organisations and people simply take on the subject positions they are offered. Instead, Rabinow (1984: 11) argues that this is a dual process of subjection and subjectification. That is, through their professional classifications, concepts, procedures and political technologies, institutions convey the new subject positions they expect people to adopt, with new norms of behaviour and sanctions for non-compliance. But people do not necessarily accept these subject positions. It is only if individuals take on these subject positions as their own identity, that is, engage in subjectification, often with the reforming guidance of pastoral or redemptive professions, that they actively and voluntarily conduct themselves in terms of the norms through which they are governed (Foucault 1983; Rose 1989).

Our study has explored ethnographically a range of ways that managers, academics and students have engaged with these technologies of the self. The 'strategic leader' is arguably the new profession that is central to the shift from government to governance – and is certainly one of the most prominent features of the new university landscape. Carney (Chaps. 6 and 7) explores the range of ways that the new Governing Boards and their appointed strategic leaders have envisioned and enacted their new roles, caught as they are between being 'agents' of government policy and protectors of 'self-owning' institutions. Krejsler (Chaps. 8 and 9) explores what he



calls ‘the room for manoeuvre’ that academics (and also students, managers and policy makers) can find to pursue their visions of the university within the conditioned subject positions of these changing institutions. Room for manoeuvre in institutions rarely if ever has fixed dimensions in stable structures, but in a context of reform it is even clearer that people’s participation in relations of power is part and parcel of shaping those same emergent forms of university governance and management. Nielsen (Chaps. 10 and 11) has identified the different ‘figures’ of the student available not just in policy discourses and managerial technologies, but derived from historical discourses about the role of the student in society and contemporary media representations. She shows how people draw on this repertoire creatively, moving between a wide range of often inconsistent ways of figuring the student in conversations, teaching situations and political actions. She also shows that as people draw on a particular figure of the student, they simultaneously conjure up a particular ‘world’ that it inhabits: ‘figures’ and ‘worlds’ are inseparable. These studies propose new ways of thinking about how people are positioned within, and engage with, this new system of governance. If the policy documents present particular visions of the future university and its managers, academics and students, the studies in the following chapters explore ethnographically how people have engaged with this vision, and what other images and ideas they bring to bear, in enacting the university in practice.

While a steering system and technologies of governance are clearly designed to create new self-governing subjects, it does not mean that a university will actually become the particular kind of ‘organisation’ that is envisaged. Even if academics and students read the subject positions they are meant to adopt, do they slip into them, or resist alignment? The next sections consider these questions further through the concepts of ‘organisation’, contestation and enactment as a basis for later chapters to explore ethnographically, what happens to the concept and formation of the university when authoritative and democratic enactments of governance meet.

## 2.4 Organisation

One of the images embedded in the ‘top down’ authoritative view of Danish university reform is that a university is, or can become, an ‘organisation’ – a unified entity with a capacity to act in a concerted fashion. This is an imaginary derived from the private sector, where successive management techniques have been used to try and project a company as a coherent entity with a leader in control (Krause-Jensen and Wright 2015). These have ranged from trying to narrate the organisation through apocryphal stories about the heroic doings of the founder or apical ancestor and inventing rituals of tradition and community (Czarniawska 1997; Deal and Kennedy 1982; Pondy et al. 1983); to trying to project a unified organisational culture (Peters and Waterman 1982; Schein 1992); or, later, discern ‘company values’ and use these for ‘values-based management’ (Krause-Jensen 2010). However, as Kunda’s (1992) company ethnography shows, the more managers tried to propagate a corporate

culture, the more the employees dissociated themselves, responded with cynicism and ridicule, and revealed that different work groups had diverse ways of thinking and acting within the company. As Hernes (2014) points out, the philosopher A. N. Whitehead argued long ago that organisations are not *a priori* entities: they are in a continual process of organising. That process is essentially political and ‘coherence’ is an ideological claim by managers as they try to assert the power to define the organisation (Wright 1994: 24).

With the failure of such imaginaries of a company as a unified organisation, another way of organising, with a history stretching back beyond Fordism to ways of organising military education and institutions, has become dominant (Shore and Wright 2015a). This envisages a company as a balance sheet, and uses accountancy methods to assess the productivity of each unit and their contribution to the bottom line. Performance targets are set for each unit and individual and these are monitored regularly, with star performers praised and underperformers named, shamed, and ultimately got rid of. In this view, humans are turned into units of account and, as Hoskin and Macve (1988) have shown, the system only works if employees accept a subject position as ‘accountable selves’ who act as if the calculating eyes of the company are continually upon them. Most recently, attempts have been made to soften the de-humanising aspect of this financialised view of the organisation by combining individualised ‘score cards’ of productivity and performance measures with ‘caring management’ that uses techniques such as appraisals and coaching to identify workers’ untapped resources and potentials and bring them into profitable use. This brands a company as a caring space that facilitates the ‘proactive worker’ in their quest to achieve personal fulfilment through work (Bovbjerg 2011). Marked by unconscionable levels of stress, workers who accept the subject position of ‘auditable selves’ engage in an unending project of expanding their personal abilities, increasing their capacities to take on new tasks, and extending their working life beyond boundaries of family, sociality, or exhaustion. Both imaginaries, of a concerted actor and a balance sheet, project an organisation as a unified entity managed by a figurehead who stands for and acts as the organisation.

Ørberg (2007) studied the law texts from 1970 to 2003 to trace Danish governments’ successive attempts to make the university into an organisation, that is, an increasingly coherent and identifiable subject, organised around common objectives, with a figure the government could negotiate with, and a voice that could speak *for* or *as* the university. The starting point in policy narratives was the 1970s when two university laws enacted a contrary vision of the so-called democratic university. In 1970, marking the end of the ‘rule of the professors’, the rector was elected by a wider academic community including all researchers and teachers and student representatives, and was responsible to an elected senate, which was designated the highest authority of the university. In 1973, the electorate for the rector was changed to all elected representatives on the senate and faculty committees, which included administrators as well as academics and students. The 1992 law introduced direct democracy, with all students, academics and administrators electing the rector for a 4-year period. The rector became accountable to an inclusive ‘university community’, a mandate that was hard to define, but one that made it

possible to speak and act for the institution. But the senate, not the rector remained the university's executive authority. The rector had to act in accordance with the wishes of the senate, of which he was chair, but which could still hold him in check. This vision of the university was contested as soon as the law was passed. Struggles continued through to 1993 when a new university law shifted some executive powers to the rector and away from the senate, so that the latter came to resemble a governing board more than an executive committee (Ørberg 2007: 11). The 1993 law was meant to resolve the issue once and for all (Rasmussen 1995, 1998), but, as we trace in Chap. 4, the debates continued. As explained to us at a meeting with Dansk Industri, the story since the 1970s was of a contest over the leader's right to lead, which was ultimately won, in their view, when the 2003 University Law made the university into a unified organisation with a clear figurehead. In fact that law split the unified voice of the university between the externally appointed chair of the governing board, the university's ultimate authority, and the rector, the university's CEO, who surmounts a chain of appointed leaders, each responsible to the leader above, and ultimately to the governing board, with hardly any accountability to students and staff. Although the governing board includes one or two elected academics and two elected students, there is an increasing split between the university leadership and staff and students. The leadership speaks as if it *is* the university, and acts as a negotiating partner with the Ministry. The Ministry treats the leaders as if they are speaking for the whole body of the university. But the students, academics and support staff, who at one point were 'the university', find they are spoken *for* or *to* when the university speaks (Ørberg 2007). There are numerous examples of politicians not understanding that the voices of students and staff are no longer included in the voice of the university, and that when leaders speak *as* the university they are no longer speaking *for* the university as a whole.

Projection of the leader *as* the organisation is found elsewhere. Shore (2007: 13) records how a university management in New Zealand also described itself as *being* the university – to the extent that staff and students are listed among the university's 20 stakeholders, along with business interests, governments and research foundations. In Ryle's philosophical terms, it is a 'category mistake' to think of a university as an 'organisation'. Rather, a university is a community of scholars (academics and students) who self-manage as individuals without the need for leaders to turn them into 'proactive selves', and who organise themselves in groups (often disciplinary departments) in what Weick (1976) famously called 'loosely coupled systems'. Dwight Eisenhower made this category mistake in 1948 when, as the story goes,<sup>3</sup> in his first speech to faculty as President of Columbia University, he expressed his pleasure at meeting the employees of the university. He was promptly interrupted by a famous physics professor, I. I. Rabi, who corrected him, saying, 'Sir, the faculty are not the employees of the university, the faculty *is* the University'. Academics in 'old' U.K. universities were traditionally appointees of the university,

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<sup>3</sup>This story is recounted by John Rothfork at <http://cust.educ.ubc.ca/workplace/issue6p2/rothfork.html>, accessed on 11 May 2010.

not employees, and the university's function was not to manage or control them, but to facilitate their work based on their own academic judgement and professional 'wise counsel'. Academics have a long history of pointing out the category mistake of equating a university with a company with leaders and a managed workforce – although even advocates of the university as a community of scholars critique the way it has worked in practice, with problems of cronyism, bullying, and marginalisation of women and minorities.

Ryle's original example of a 'category mistake' was to look for a physical and visible manifestation of 'organisation' at Oxbridge:

A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asks 'But where is the university'? I have seen where the members of the Colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.' It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized (Ryle 1949: 16).

The visitor's category mistake was to presume that a University is a physical unity with a tangible presence, rather than a far more abstract institution whose existence can only be discerned in the interstices of buildings, people, positions, procedures and histories. Half a century later, Strathern argued that the UK government's arms-length inspection regime was making a similar category mistake when it reported:

The protean nature of the [Cambridge] University's academic structures and system of governance is difficult to capture concisely in managerial language, or by reference to a straightforward organisational model (1996/7: 7)

Unlike Ryle's innocuous visitor, these inspectors had the authority to try and make the university match their imaginary. As Strathern goes on to say, 'In short: the auditors could not see how Cambridge University worked' (1996/7: 9). But they were not interested in an ethnographic account of how the university *actually* worked; they had pre-set criteria for determining if an institution performed adequately according to their idea of an organisation, and if the university's workings could not be described in these terms, 'then somehow the university is not there' (ibid.). In what she calls a 'tyranny of transparency' such audit systems demand institutions come to think of themselves first and foremost as 'organisations' that are in a constant state of activation, making administrative improvements and reporting on objectified performances (Strathern 2000: 312, 314). She sees a danger that such second-order accounts could fold into the real workings of the institution – the cultural values, social relationships and forms of organising that are not captured in the reporting models. Then, rather than creating a reporting fiction for the benefit of inspectors, the university would actually begin to look and feel like the organisation of government imaginary. Power (1997) argues similarly that auditing systems' definitions of performance are far from objective; they reshape in their own image the organisations they monitor (Shore and Wright 2015a).

How can we conceptualise a university, if we seek to hold up to scrutiny the government imaginary of a university as a coherent organisation and treat it as part of the ethnography? An alternative would be to see the university, in Lesser's terms, an institution with 'a career in time' (Lesser 1933 quoted in Fox 2002). His analysis of Pawnee hand games<sup>4</sup> shows that an institution can persist in the form of core relationships and activities, but its meaning and significance for society changes as it becomes part of new social complexes. Brichet and Nielsen's (2004) analysis of the history of changes to the University of Copenhagen's constitution shows substantial shifts in the university's 'purpose' and raises the question, in what sense does 'Copenhagen University' have any continuity of meaning as an institution? Chapter 5 records how the minister claimed to be creating an entirely new institution, with a complete break from the past; a view that was echoed by academics who published the death notice of the university (reproduced in Chap. 1, Fig. 1.1). New institutionalists, however, provide another image of organisations, as palimpsests – a new ideology gets manifested in new structures and processes, which overlay but do not obliterate other forms of organising which came from previous ideologies (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Newman 2001). There can be several layers. Meanwhile people give new meaning to old features of the organisation, often in the name of preserving ancient values.

Such concepts and approaches open up questions for our study: how does the government's imaginary of a university as an organisation with a coherent purpose implemented by a heroic leader get overlain on the institution; does it obliterate the past, or do palimpsests of other forms of organising show through? Does senior management go unchallenged when they claim to be the university, as if it is an entity they can encompass; or are counter claims advanced, that the university is a community, and that it is in a continual process of organising? If academics do not heed Strathern's warning, do they fall in with the demands of audit procedures, and allow them to reshape the organisation in their own image? To address these questions ethnographically we do not treat the university *a priori* as a coherent unit, monolithic entity or self-contained organisation. Rather, we study that as an ideological claim and marketing ploy. We treat the university as a space populated by managers, academics, and students, all of whom can be knowingly initiating changes or less consciously enacting small shifts in their day-to-day activities. All are involved in a continuous process of organising and trying to routinise, challenge or reform the university's purposes and processes. Managers, academics, and students, along with policy makers, other interest groups and the media are all involved in trying to imagine, define and enact the university.

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<sup>4</sup>Pawnee handgames were a recreation in the 1890s; but then white rulers stripped Pawnees of their institutions and economy and the handgames fell into desuetude; the games then became central to the revivalist Ghost Dance religion, and transformed from gambling into a ritual and then into a public game again; but by the 1930s, when US domesticity influenced Pawnee life, handgames were played as parlour games.

## 2.5 Contestation

One way to see how the shape of the university emerges from multiple ways of imagining, defining and enacting the institution is to focus on how the university becomes a ‘policy problem’, how that problem is defined and contested, and whose voice prevails. Politicians and civil servants often construct a policy narrative that represents the past in such a way as to claim there is a particular problem in the present and to project only one possible course of action for the future. Whereas policy makers try to control the process of argumentation and the power to define the problem and its solution, our approach is to bring into view multiple other actors, all trying to contest the problem and create the meaning of the university.<sup>5</sup> In Chap. 4 we trace how such a narrative about university reform in Denmark developed through the 1980s and 1990s, how the ‘problem’ of the university came to be defined, who argued for it, how it was contested, and how the problem was serially redefined, quite radically several times.<sup>6</sup> Far from following a purportedly linear decision-making process of identifying a problem, assessing a range of options and deciding on a course of action, each time political agendas changed, new ‘solutions’ were layered on top of previous ones until the moment when an alliance of political forces made one definition of the problem sufficiently dominant. Then policy makers could institute ‘solutions’, such as a law to change university governance in 1993, the introduction of output-based payment for teaching in 1994, and development contracts in 1999. Old ‘solutions’ are also recast in new contexts: the 2003 law text centres on the concept of ‘self-ownership’, which was originally a solution to the liberal political problem of the 1980s, but, as shown in Chap. 5, in 2003 ‘self-ownership’ became incorporated in a much more *de rigiste* model of govern-

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<sup>5</sup>That is, we have moved away from the rational approach to policy, which economists and systems analysts brought to dominance in the 1960s and which finds its latest manifestation in the craze for ‘evidence-based policy making’. That approach starts from the premise that problems are self-evidently existing ‘out there’, and just need to be identified in order for policy makers to follow a hierarchical and linear process of identifying a problem, devising a course of action, and implementing a solution (Jansson in Midgley et al. 2008: 41–3). In contrast, we question how problems come to be created: it could be that the desire to act creates the problem (Jöhncke et al. 2004).

<sup>6</sup>First, in the 1980s, universities were included in arguments for a wholesale reform to improve the economy and efficiency of the Danish public sector. The solution was to turn public institutions into self-owning institutions (at that point, to include ownership and independent control of their own assets) with a new contractual and financial relation to the state. Second, in the late 1990s, the problem was the structure of the Danish economy: although the small number of large industries had excellent working relations with relevant university departments, the much larger number of small and medium sized enterprises lacked contacts and interest in knowledge transfer. Quickly this problem was blamed on universities: ‘society’ could not trust universities because they were unable to focus their research efforts on areas needed by the economy or transfer their knowledge speedily and effectively. Third, in 2006, the problem was how to protect the country’s position as one of the richest in the world, and the solution was for universities to become ‘competitive’ and ‘world class’ so that government could invest in them to drive Denmark’s efforts to forge the kind of economic activity and high-skilled employees that were needed to meet, or create, the inevitable future of a global knowledge economy.

ment steering. Soon after each of these measures was agreed, their meaning became contested and other definitions of the problem were reasserted. In this view, the passing of the 2003 University Law was but one ‘moment’ in a continuing and contested process of narrative making, stretching from the expansion of universities in the 1960s and continuing into the present.

If students, academics, managers, policy makers and other interest groups are continually engaged in creating and contesting a policy narrative for university reform, either by directly contesting the definition of the ‘problem’ or by initiating their own alternatives, this raises ethnographic questions about the power to define. What different meanings are being advanced by whom? How do some reconceptualisations of the university ‘stick’ (Thompson 1984)? What political alliances (or in Gramscian terms, what historic blocs) are created to support a particular idea of the university and through what strategies do they make their meaning dominant and render other ideas about the university ridiculous, unsayable and even unthinkable? What resources of institutional and state power can they access to make their meaning not just dominant but authoritative and routinised in the university’s practices? Even if a strong political alliance manages to make its meaning of the university hegemonic and generalised, so that it is widely held in society for a time, there is always the possibility that others will find ways to unsettle established meanings and project a different vision of society and its institutions (Wright 1998).

Such processes of contestation often focus on the meaning of one or more ‘keywords’, so called because their different meanings are at the core of different ways of conceptualising society and its major institutions. For example, we explored the evolution of the concept of ‘self-ownership’ (Chap. 5), and followed debates over the ‘openness’ of meetings of the new governing boards (Chap. 6) and over different ideas of ‘participation’ (Chaps. 10 and 11, Nielsen 2011). Whereas conceptual historians trace political transformations through shifts in the meanings of keywords over long periods (Ball et al. 1989), ethnographers can track contestations in recent events and as they actually happen, to produce a ‘history of the present’. This focus on change-in-the-making needs a methodology that recognises that any event is what Moore (1987: 735) calls a starburst, with effects radiating in all directions, across sites and scales. This unpredictability and contingency has to be the dominant perspective, knowing that every moment has several potential meanings, which point to different possible futures. But at the same time, the aim is to catch the contours of new ideological formations and emerging systems of power and governance. As Moore (1987: 727) puts it, the core questions are not just ‘how was the present produced?’ but ‘what is the present producing?’ Our ethnography is replete with such ‘starburst’ events, when different views of the university were contested and it was unpredictable whose political acumen would prevail.

In analysing the politics of such events, a keyword often acts like a ‘boundary object, that is, ‘an object which lives in multiple social worlds and which has different identities in each’ (Star and Griesemer 1989: 409). But there is an important point of difference: in studies of boundary objects, people from different social worlds are aware that the object has a different meaning for each of them, and yet it is ‘imbued with enough shared meaning to facilitate its translation across those

worlds' (McSherry 2001: 69 quoted in Strathern 2004: 45). For example, in McSherry's study of 'scientific authorship', people invoked the same 'boundary object', knowledge, but located it in different market and gift economies, the one advocating commercial exploitation and the other considering the commodification of scholarship to be immoral. In contrast, in our ethnography, whereas a keyword can be at the boundary between two different and contested discourses, there are instances where some of the people involved do not realise this. They think their opponents have the same meaning and vision as they do, they become co-opted into the discourse of their opponents and the effectiveness of their opposition is undermined. Then the result is not translation but domination (Wright 2005).

This was seen, for example, in arguments between the Minister and academics in Denmark over the keyword 'freedom', which came to a head when they met at the Danish Royal Academy of Science and Letters. The Royal Academy propounded the view of many academics, that the government's reforms were incompatible with academic freedom (Kærgård et al. 2007), whereas the Minister claimed that it was 'setting universities free'. At stake here were two different meanings of freedom. In the academic discourse, there were four aspects of freedom. First, the university should have institutional autonomy, that is, although the university always has to negotiate a relationship with the state, it should be a realm protected from undue interference from political and economic interests. Second, the members of the university – academics, support staff and students – should have the democratic right to elect the decision-making bodies and the leaders at all levels of the university, as had been the case from 1973 until 2003 and should have the right to discuss and criticise their institution in public. Third, freedom of research meant each academic should have the legal and institutional conditions to be able to choose their own research topic and method, and to decide on how to disseminate their results and engage in public debate. Fourth, each individual academic had responsibility for their own professional judgement and ethics and, as the essence of academic training is to develop these capacities, their exercise implies a degree of freedom from management.

In contrast, the Minister claimed that he had set universities free by making them 'self-owning institutions', which in government documents written in English, is translated as 'university autonomy'. This means, first, that the university is no longer under state protection but is open to demands from 'surrounding society' (industry, government, NGOs, etc.). Self-ownership gives the university the status of a person in law, able to enter into contracts, and, in negotiating these with 'surrounding society', the university is responsible for protecting its own freedom and research ethics. However, the university is obliged to enter into a service-delivery contract with the government as a 'free' agent of the state (Pollitt et al. 2001). Second, the law gave the new, appointed leaders 'freedom to manage', that is the powers to make strategies and focus resources on economic priorities and to use whatever methods they chose to meet their contracted performance targets. Third, as one senior civil servant told us, strategic leaders freed universities from the 'hours and hours' of discussion and internal dispute associated with the previously democratic system; now the universities' 'huge power' would be released for education



and research. Fourth, for the minister, academic freedom, qua peer review, was still important as an instrument of quality control for funders. Finally, the Minister promised further ‘degrees of freedom’ when government could trust that universities had acquired the capacity to act as freely contracting beings. This is reminiscent of Yeatman’s (1997) analysis of ‘new contractualism’ where individuals and bodies previously under patrimonial governance had to learn how to behave as freely contracting selves.<sup>7</sup>

As this example shows, the potency of keywords such as freedom lies, first, in their characteristic as ‘essentially contested concepts’: that is, they never achieve a closed or final meaning (Gallie 1956). There is no ultimate definition of keywords such as ‘freedom’, rather, though a history of contestation, they accumulate a vast store of different meanings. Even when one meaning becomes dominant, previous meanings are rarely lost. A process of contestation, such as that above, involves drawing on or reshaping old meanings, shifting, stretching, or inverting existing meanings, or proposing new ones (Williams 1976). Second, as in this case, keywords rarely work alone: a particular meaning for a keyword is often clarified by its association with other words in a ‘semantic cluster’ (Wright 1995, 1998). In the above example, the academic discourse associated freedom with institutional autonomy, democracy, research freedom, professional ethics and personal responsibility, whereas the government’s semantic cluster linked freedom to leadership responsibility, contracts, performance, accountability, enterprise, strategy and trust. In each case, freedom gains its meaning through the company it keeps, and the two semantic clusters convey very different images of the university and the state: the academics’ idea was of free inquiry as professionals exercising independent judgement within a welfare state (what Krejsler calls the democratic-Humboldtian discourse in Chap. 8); the minister’s vision was of universities in what Carney (Chap. 6) calls a post-bureaucratic context, using allocated degrees of freedom to choose how best to meet the demands of a competition state in a knowledge-based global economy.

Both sides at the meeting of the Royal Academy used the same word ‘freedom’, but academics did so without exposing and challenging the minister’s concept. During the passage of the 2003 University Law not only academics but also rectors failed to challenge what policy makers meant by freedom. In the debate at the Royal Academy and in an associated head-to-head with the minister on television, academics ‘misrecognised’ the Minister’s new meaning of ‘university freedom’ by assuming it was the ‘academic freedom’ they held dear (Wright 2005). They puzzled aloud how the minister could claim he was setting universities free when he could surely see that his governance and steering of universities was undermining their (academic) freedom. Academics’ misrecognition stymied their attempts to claim the right to define this keyword and use it to project an opposing vision of society and its institutions. The minister’s new meaning of freedom and its associated

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<sup>7</sup>But as Yeatman also makes clear, whereas under classic liberalism, men (not women) who had come of age could freely choose whether and with whom to enter into and end contracts, under ‘new contractualism’ individuals and institutions do not have such freedom – for example, the 2003 University Law makes it compulsory for the university to enter into a contract with the state.

semantic cluster only became clear much later, when it had already been translated into systems of state steering and tighter controls (Wright 2014a).

The meanings of keywords have material effects, which can also be contested. When a dominant discourse is translated into steering mechanisms and procedures, they appear to be ‘purely’ administrative. However, in Foucault’s terms, these are political technologies that position organisations and subjects within a new order, and they too can potentially be contested. The 2003 University Law text sets out a number of steering mechanisms or political technologies – performance targets, development contracts, output payments, competitive funding, heightened audit and inspection. In the literature, such an array is often referred to as an assemblage and it is often assumed that they fit together in a coherent and unified steering system or model that will spread the ideology or ‘logic’ of the new form of governance ‘on the ground’. For example, Sassen analyses how the mode of government and the institutions of the nation state were transformed through a repurposing of their capabilities to function in a new ‘organising logic’ of globalisation (Sassen 2006). Similarly, Collier’s ethnographic study of neo-liberal reforms in Russia shows that the previous Soviet budgeting system was dismantled and some of its elements were re-used in conjunction with globally mobile technologies to create an assemblage that conveyed a ‘logic of commensurate calculation’ (Collier 2005: 374). It sounds like a logic informs a coherent steering system, which works in practice as intended. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) allow more room for doubt and happenstance. They use the idea of an ‘arrangement’ (*agencement* usually also translated as assemblage)<sup>8</sup> to suggest connections between concepts in an arrangement that produces, not a rigid and encompassing ‘logic’, but a ‘sense’ that emerges in creative and unpredictable ways (Phillips 2006). This ‘sense’ is a very vague concept and still too unitary and coherent, but it captures some of our ethnographic curiosity about how the steering techniques would work together in practice in different settings.

Chapter 5 uses concepts of contingency and articulation to analyse the ways elements of the new steering assemblage were brought together and acquired meaning in specific locations. Each of the steering technologies in the 2003 University Law had its own historical trajectory. Each of the technologies originated as part of a different political ideology at a specific historical moment, and, at other moments, each has been adapted and combined with other technologies to suit other political and ideological purposes (Wright and Ørberg 2009). For example, development contracts between the Minister and the University Board started under the Social Democrats as a voluntary, pedagogical tool for rectors to learn to take university-wide, strategic initiatives (Andersen 2003, 2006), but under the 2003 University Law, as part of the Liberal-Conservatives’ ‘agentification’ of the public sector, contracts became a compulsory tool to make universities accountable to the Minister. In a similar way to a keyword, each technology has its own historical trajectory and

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<sup>8</sup>Phillips explains that whereas *agencement* refers to an arrangement or fitting together of parts, *assemblage* in French means a blending of grape varieties or of ingredients in a recipe. In this case, *agencement* is more accurate to describe the elements of the steering model, as we are arguing they are never blended and never lose their distinctiveness and separate histories (Phillips 2006).

accumulation of meanings. Each technology is still moving; they are not stable and do not have final meanings. As in ‘semantic clusters’, those meanings have been adapted and refined through association with other technologies in different ‘steering clusters’ or arrangements at different moments. This approach makes the government’s steering model seem more mobile, contingent and unpredictable than either a focus on the model in the law text or a search for the organising logic in an assemblage might suggest.

Chapter 5 draws on Hall’s concept (in Grossberg 1996) of ‘articulation’, as both a way of expressing a vision or ideology, and as a particular way of joining together elements from an assemblage, to highlight further space for contingency and contestability. Our research shows that different policy makers and university leaders articulated their visions of the role of the university in the competitive state and the knowledge economy in different ways, so that each emphasised different elements in the steering assemblage and operated them in different ways. Even though in the 2003 University Law text the steering technologies seem to form a very coherent and unified system, by using the concepts of assemblage, contingency and articulation in combination, we are able to explore ethnographically what happens in practice. Will the different steering techniques be snapped together in a configuration that generates a new force on the sector? Or, do ministry officials and university managers use the different elements in such diverse ways that they have contrary and unpredicted effects?

## 2.6 Imagining and Enacting

Processes of contestation depend on people sensing shifts in the meanings of keywords and technologies and imagining alternatives. Williams (1976) depicts this vividly when, on returning to Cambridge after the Second World War, he sensed that the word ‘culture’ was moving. Culture no longer just meant high art and ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’ (Arnold 1869), or knowing the proper way to behave in a Cambridge teashop. Gradually the idea was gaining currency that everyone and all classes had ‘culture’ in the sense of an everyday way of life. However, Williams only discovered this emerging meaning by following his own feelings of discomfort when the word he thought he knew seemed to be used in ways hard to grasp. Williams described a widespread and inchoate process of change among the population, in which the imagination of a new idea of culture and society and the shifts in the meaning of those words struggled to emerge together. His is an extreme example of a popular and fairly unfettered process of ‘bottom up’ transformation. Even when society is not undergoing such intense change, the literature on performativity suggests that everyday activities cannot be repeated without change – at each iteration, they happen differently. Butler’s (1993) work on gender is usually taken as the model for this: although everyone is taught what gender is and how to perform it, nobody ever does so perfectly and they enact it slightly differently each time. Similarly, in performing the work of an academic,

even if one tries to teach the same way to successive groups of students, each iteration is different. Butler is not arguing that the subject is autonomous or that there are not constraints but she is arguing that there is always a looseness, which gives room for manoeuvre.

In Williams' inchoate process and Butler's repetitive performance, imagining and enacting are tightly interwoven in every-day activities that form hard-to-notice, incremental changes. If they are at one end of a spectrum, at the other end is an act of imagining that tries to make a strategic impact on others' actions. Such acts offer potentially more room for manoeuvre between imagining and enacting. For example, a rector who made a speech to rouse the university into leaping up the global league tables (Wright and Ørberg 2011) had a strategic and performative effect by enunciating his vision for the university. But for academics who maybe did not sympathise with the rector's vision, there was a question whether he would be able to follow through and instantiate this vision in the university? In this suspense between enunciation and instantiation, academics did not know what would happen: this was a space for them to judge how to make a political intervention and whether it would make a difference; whether to contest or turn away. Not all strategic statements of imagining have the same enactment status, and how ethnographically can we distinguish their forcefulness?

Gramsci (1992, see also Hall 1986), like Butler, argued that no system is ever a complete and closed, and there is always room for manoeuvre. This raises the ethnographic question, whether people actually found such looseness in the performance of university governance? If so, how knowingly did they use that space to explore different meanings of key concepts and ways of being an academic, student or manager? Were their ways of imagining and acting the university interwoven, and did they emerge in a widespread and inchoate fashion, although in a less unfettered context than in Williams' example? Or did academics, students or managers, like some Danish policy makers, consciously develop different ways of imagining the university and try to implement them strategically? In short, what was the relation between imagining and enacting as differently positioned people engaged in the performance of university reform?

The literature on how university managers, students and academics imagine and creatively 'enact' the university in their everyday working lives is very sparse. There is an excellent ethnography of how a group of university teachers used a process of reflecting on their positioning in order to make changes in their teaching, but it does not consider their interactions with students' and managers' ways of imagining and enacting the university (Walker 2001). Ball et al. (2011, 2012) likewise focus on school teachers to develop a typology of roles and positions through which they enact policy. One exception is Cobb-Moore et al. (2005) whose study of a school explored how young children 'enacted governance' in their classroom. The children had a concept of governance: that they should conduct themselves in a way that was fair and orderly. This concept was made up from multiple sources – from what their parents and teachers said, school rules, conduct seen on television, and their own senses of order and justice. They acted experimentally to explore this concept with

each other in play and in everyday incidents with the school authorities, and in the process they became active participants in the creation of the school.

Weick (2001) has tried to develop a systematic approach to what he calls the ‘enactment’ of organisations. Like Cobb et al., he conceives of people as not passively on the receiving end of management. Rather, they are active organisational members who not only respond to their social and material surroundings, but make or create their environment. Weick calls this ‘sensemaking’ a dynamic and chaotic process, which he tries to turn into an ‘enactment cycle’. Members of an organisation track sequences of events in ‘causal maps’ to make sense of their actions and experiences and inform further responses to their environment. They engage in a cyclical sequencing of imagining a different future, generating concepts for description and analysis, and then turning them into action.

In a more complex and social setting, a collective based at the University of Massachusetts provides an example of how people engaged in a conscious exploration of the room for ‘imagining and enacting’ alternative futures (Collective 2001). The researchers were in search of noncapitalist futures for people in their region. In an interview survey they heard about people’s existing non-capitalised and non-monetarised coping strategies, elaborate exchange relationships and how they valued a spirit of generosity. From their interviewees, they learnt how to see ‘the economy’ differently and searched for appropriate concepts to discuss and envision an economy based on principles of generosity. They explored how those principles implied acting and feeling differently, and deploying their energy in new ways. Ultimately, in order to shape their own economy, they had to challenge and change the local authorities’ ‘development’ policy, as that dominant way of imagining the region’s future was based on destroying the fundamentals of their ‘generous’ economy. In this example, there was an entangled and iterative process of imagining and enacting: learning to see and to act differently fed into each other and both contributed to a very conscious strategy to challenge orthodoxies and develop practical alternatives.

As this example shows, academics clearly have the research skills to find room for manoeuvre, develop alternative imaginaries around key words and develop effective political strategies to put them into practice; but do they apply this same reflexive acumen to analyse and act upon their own institution? Even if academics and students are finding looseness in the steering models, are they knowingly identifying the principles and practices that would make their university a ‘generous economy’, and can they negotiate this with managers and policy makers, or find other ways to enact this politically?

In the ethnographic chapters, the authors all address these questions about the enactment of the university in different ways. Chapters 3 and 4 trace the emergence of a discourse to reposition universities as drivers of the knowledge economy and show how this discourse became dominant in Danish policy making. Chapter 5, however, finds room for manoeuvre even within this discourse: there is a tension between government’s articulation of steering mechanisms to more tightly direct universities’ contribution to the knowledge economy, and the potential for universities to use their new strategizing capacities to exceed or surpass the government’s

ideas and become a new ‘power force’ in society, leading a visionary research policy for Denmark. The chapter explores how civil servants and university leaders, who broadly endorsed the government’s reforms, each imagined a ‘university-whole’ from their own a positioned stance, and used their institutional powers to try and bring it into effect. Chapters 6 and 7 similarly explore empirically how the reform processes both enabled and constrained the room for manoeuvre for certain subject positions. Through a series of moments of friction or contestation over keywords and technologies, Carney traces how the potential for different ways of enacting the university came to be closed down. Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the spaces available to academics as the emergent ‘knowledge economy discourse’ gradually dislodged a ‘democratic Humboldtian discourse’. Krejsler maps how each university, faculty and departmental context made up its own particular discursive configuration according to their own genealogies of discursive struggles. The different ‘room for manoeuvre’ for academics that emerged from these enactments were, consequently, in no way deterministic. On the contrary, he traces how the external discursive forces, the university context and its academic subjects all emerge through co-constitutive enactments. Chapters 10 and 11 consider not just the emergent discourse of the knowledge economy but a historical accumulation of other discourses about the university, which envisaged the student participating in different ways in their own education, their university and the wider society. Nielsen shows how in their day-to-day activities and in their activism, students draw on this repertoire of different ‘figures’ and, in doing so, they simultaneously conjure up different ‘worlds’ that, while imaginary, ideal or emblematic, are also real and tangible. This approach emphasises a continuous and tightly entwined process of imagining and becoming, but Nielsen also extends the focus of the book on keywords and mobilising metaphors to examine moments of friction through which she can identify how ‘key figures’ emerge and gain some solidity or closure by mobilising particular figures and eclipsing others.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the analytical concepts and framework, which the authors have each developed in their own ways in subsequent chapters. Our common approach is that universities are a site of considerable contestation around the world as they are re-imagined as drivers of a global knowledge economy and that this has taken a particular form in Denmark. We argue for an ethnographic approach, which holds two ideas of enactment in tension – an instrumental view of policy as enacted in law, and a democratic view of policy as a site where many diverse actors and organisations can potentially be actively involved in contested processes of change. We develop a repertoire of concepts and, in discussing them, raise a number of questions to be explored ethnographically. In subsequent chapters we trace how certain dominant discourses and ways of imagining the university emerge and how policies, their keywords and steering technologies are enacted through contestation

between many, diverse actors. Sometimes relations between a policy text and academics or students are remote – but still negotiated. Sometimes, as with policy makers and university leaders, relations are close. Our research strategy is not to take features of the policy field for granted, but to pay close attention to how relations are made, how keywords and discourses are contested, and how what happens can always be surprising.

In the final chapter of the book we return to a discussion of our concepts and approach, to reflect on how we straddle the tension between treating reform, on the one hand, as an elite, top-down process and, on the other, as a thoroughly distributed array of myriad activities. We show how, by seeing universities as politically contested spaces, continually re-enacted by multiple actors, we can trace the emergence of new discourses, forms of organisation and subjectivities – and how, in this process of contestation, no single image of the university triumphs. We reflect on how we as researchers have also participated in that process. If social research is always performative, through our construction of the field, our ‘democratic’ approach to policy, our ethnographic methods and not least, the writing of this book, we are also contributing a partial picture of the university. It is partial in that it is not a God’s-eye view of the university – it is no longer an aspiration of any social science to conjure up a holistic image of a so-called objective reality. Rather, our account is partial (and implicitly political) because we are positioned within it ourselves, and because, however much we listened to and took seriously the views of our interlocutors, the book is imbued with the authors’ various hopes and ideals for the university. Indeed, if there is a message from this book, it is that we encourage all actors to imagine their institution as a space of contestation and seek out their reflexive space and room for manoeuvre to create the university of the future.

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**Part II**  
**Imagining and Enacting a Reformed**  
**University**

# Chapter 3

## University Reform: International Policy Making Through a Danish Prism



Susan Wright 

### 3.1 Introduction

At the ministerial meeting of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Education Committee in Athens in 2006, Denmark's then Minister of Education, Bertel Haarder, a member of Denmark's Liberal Party, caused a commotion. He went out on a limb as the only one of the assembled ministers to vote for total marketisation of university research and teaching as not only the most likely but also the most desirable future scenario. In reaction, participants at the meeting were said to be whispering about the 'Danish disease', meaning that the Danish government predictably opts for the most extreme university reforms (Stage 2006). But the minister also caused shock waves in Denmark. By casting his vote in favour of the OECD's free trade image of the future, with pure market competition and tuition fees, the minister had gone far beyond his own government's position. This Minister had a long history of pushing for the reform of universities, along with other parts of the education sector. Since the 1980s, in books and pamphlets he had consistently advocated that government should reduce its detailed bureaucratic management of institutions, pay them by results instead of through a grant, put them in control of their own finances, activities and strategic priorities, and establish so-called strong leadership in order for them to do so (Haarder et al. 1982; Haarder 1990a, b). As the minister of education, he had reformed the vocational and technical education sector along these lines. He had also proposed similar legislation for universities and further education in the early 1990s, but it came to nothing (Ministry of Education 1991). By 2003 a Liberal-Conservative coalition government had the support of most other parties, including the major opposition party, the Social Democrats, to pass such a university reform. At the Athens

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Ministerial meeting he was continuing to push both the international and the national agendas, now in the direction of marketisation.

Whilst taking the most extreme position at the meeting, he was not alone. A video of the meeting<sup>1</sup> showed him, along with one of the panellists, the former Minister of Education from the Netherlands who was now president of Maastricht University, and some others who propounded moves towards the marketisation of higher education supporting each other convivially in exchanges, signalling they were friends, and referring to previous events or OECD activities in which they had collaborated. They fed each other questions and supported each other's arguments. In his speech, the former Minister from the Netherlands argued energetically for a market in higher education which, he claimed, would improve quality. He favoured high student fees accompanied by means-tested grants to protect the participation of the poorest. He railed against the 'inertia' induced by university self-determination and his remedy was strong leadership. Looking towards the Danish Minister, he referred to his membership of an OECD committee that had conducted a review of the Danish university sector, and which, he claimed, had changed the law to incentivise leadership and let universities develop. In this way he dismissed the arguments of the South African panellist and several commentators from the audience who emphasised the social role of universities to improve social equality and provide opportunities for the previously excluded. In the discussions, they were either ignored or at least isolated, and not fed sympathetic questions from supporters.

This interchange provides a glimpse of the way that the OECD was being mobilised. The Danish and Dutch politicians dominated the scene and were clearly pushing the OECD's higher education agenda in an ever-more radical direction away from state controls and public management and towards free trade. At the same time, they were both well positioned to act on their views, as a minister and a rector in their own countries. One interviewee from a Danish academic trade union explained how this simultaneous political mobilisation in the OECD and in domestic politics works. He said that, as in any politically governed organisation, OECD's Secretariat will say that they do what ministers ask them to do. Although one of the strengths of the Secretariat's professional staff<sup>2</sup> is that they act as semi-independent from governments that fund them (Mahon and McBride 2008: 8), their job in such a ministerial meeting is to discern which ministers' directions to follow. The trade unionist's explanation was as follows:

When Bertel Haarder went to the Athens meeting and voted for the most outrageous liberal scenario of them all as the most desirable future, he gave a signal to the Secretariat that that's the direction they should work on. That means these politicians get the OECD to be a little bit more focused on liberal or trade strategies than there is actually a political majority for in the individual member states (Interview 9 January 2007).

The Danish minister was also pushing the OECD agenda in a more liberal direction than his own political hinterland would endorse. The head of Dansk Magisterforening,

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<sup>1</sup>The video was accessed on the OECD's website on 25 July 2007.

<sup>2</sup>In 2006 the OECD secretariat had 858 staff, which had risen to 2500 in 2019.

the largest Danish academic union, pointed this out in her review of the Danish minister's contribution to the meeting:

It was somewhat surprising to be witness to our minister as OECD's standard bearer for more extreme privatisation of higher education. But now the ground is laid for the government – when the right time comes – to make new proposals to commercialise higher education because 'the OECD recommends it' (Stage 2006).

The Danish politician was acting on an interface between the international organisation and the national government, helping to shape OECD policy, and then using that to shape Danish policy. He was pushing both OECD and domestic policy in a direction which he himself once called 'new liberal' (Haarder et al. 1982). As Greenwood (2012) points out, with its emphasis on marketisation, a numerical calculus of performance and authoritarian leadership, such an approach has little connection to classic liberalism, but in an interview for this project Haarder also distanced himself from Milton Friedman and the neo-liberal monetarists and free-marketeers 'who think the market solves all problems'. Although Haarder was not so influential over university policy by the 2000s, in promoting his 'new liberal' political agenda at the OECD meeting he helped set a tone for policy development to take place in these terms. His activism is the daily fare of such international meetings but this was a rare instance when it was made visible. As will be further elaborated below, such activists within the OECD are party to creating the very advice that the OECD hands to their government in the form of reports and recommendations, and which the government presents as neutral and authoritative advice from the OECD, which must be followed if their country is to maintain economic competitiveness.

The OECD features strongly in the Danish university reform because for a period, from the late 1990s to 2006, Danish policy makers found this agency most relevant for discussions of public sector organisation and governance. Danish politicians and civil servants were also active in a number of other international forums during this time. Notably, Knud Larsen, State Secretary for Research and Information Technology, participated actively in the European Council's Lisbon Strategy in 2000, which aimed to 'make EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010. Danish policy makers were also deeply involved in the Bologna Process and the 2003 Danish University Law included many 'Bologna' provisions. A Danish civil servant, Mogens Berg, was chair of the Bologna Follow-up Group and then chaired the working group that designed the Framework for Qualifications (QF) in the European Higher Education Area, adopted by ministers in 2005. This QF was the core feature of the Bologna Process as it provided a standardised description of higher education qualifications, workloads and transferable credits, and shifted the focus of higher education to learning outcomes, competences and employability. Work on coordinating the other arm of the Bologna Process, Quality Assurance (QA), was also led by a Dane, Christian Thune, who chaired the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*ENQA*). But in the run up to the Danish reforms of university

governance and management, Danish policy makers focused on the OECD. As detailed below, senior Danish civil servants played significant roles on the OECD's Education Committee and on the Governing Board of the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). They only turned their primary focus from the OECD to the EU again in the years running up to the 2008 meeting of the EU's Council of Ministers with its vision of developing a European Research Area by 2020, with free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology and the establishment of the European Research Council and the Framework Programmes for European research. In 2010 Denmark met its commitment to the Barcelona Goals (European Council 2002: section 47) by ensuring public sector spending on research and development amounted to 1% of GDP. They were fully involved in the 2010 strategy to establish a European Higher Education Area to consolidate the Bologna Process' objective of more comparable, compatible and coherent systems of higher education. These various regional strategies are referred to as 'a Europe of Knowledge' (Dale 2014). Initially the EU as well as the OECD lacked explicit competence to regulate these issues, and their strategies relied on instruments of 'soft governance' and the voluntary compliance of member state authorities and actors. In the Lisbon Strategy, agreed by the European Council in 2000, these instruments were codified as 'the Open Method of Coordination' (OMC) (European Council 2000: §37).

This chapter will first outline policy developments in several international organisations in which Danish civil servants and politicians played very active roles. The chapter then focuses in detail on their involvement in one, the OECD, which our interviewees in the ministry identified as central to the management reforms in the 2003 University Law. It will track how, over the last 30 years, the OECD moved towards what it calls a market model for universities and how it developed the Open Method of Coordination to engage policy makers in implementing policies for university reform. It will explore how the rhetorical strategies used in such policies drew support from more welfare-oriented parties, including the Danish Social Democrats, and academics who might otherwise espouse quite different values for the university, and it will uncover the tropes used to propel them urgently to enact the policy's vision of the future. It will look at how the agencies form an international 'epistemic community' of influential people from member countries who participate in shaping the OECD's vision. Some of them are 'activists' who, like the Danish minister, not only use 'soft power' to work across the interface between international forums and national policy making, but have a position in government (or in a university) through which they can turn this vision into action. In sum, the chapter will ask, how has this community of activists been mobilised and how have they managed to move international and national institutions to enact an OECD-inspired vision of 'marketised' universities?



## 3.2 World Trade or International Exchange?

In the late 1980s, various international agencies were putting forward different and often conflicting ideas about the university and how it should be reformed. At one extreme, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was the site of repeated attempts, led by the USA, Australia and New Zealand, to establish free trade in higher education (Kelsey 2007, 2009; Knight 2006; Lim 2005; Robertson et al. 2002; Vlk 2006). It remained uncertain how the GATS' rules and any internationally binding agreements, enforced through the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body, would apply to higher education. There were fears that governments would have to treat for-profit private universities and their students on an equal footing with public universities when it came to the allocation of public funding, and that national systems of quality control would be considered an 'impediment to free trade'. In 2008 negotiations over a global free-trade agreement eventually collapsed, but governments continued to pursue this agenda through bilateral and regional free trade agreements. These negotiations raised further concerns. Whereas the GATS worked on the basis that governments specified the services to be included, in the subsequent proposal for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the U.S. and EU, all services were to be 'liberalised' unless they were on a 'negative list' of exclusions. Only public services that were not in competition with any other providers (like tax collection or courts of law) were covered by a general exemption. If a country provided any part of a 'public' service commercially or on a for-fee basis (e.g. student fees) that service would be subject to free trade, unless the country made an exception by placing it on the 'negative list'. If an investor felt that a state's regulations or policies violated its rights to market access or affected its future profits, that investor would have the legal right to challenge the state through Investor-State Dispute Mechanisms (ISDS or the so-called 'corporate courts') presided over by corporate lawyers. For example, if a government had experimented with liberalising a sector like education, and a future government wished to exclude it, there was a risk they would be faced with claims for significant compensation from private providers for loss of future profits (ETUCE 2014). These measures encroached on a state's democratic decision making. Even though the TTIP was shelved in 2016, these are the typical arrangements for free trade agreements.<sup>3</sup>

The danger posed by free trade to higher education was perceived most strongly by UNESCO – the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation. It had long valued the international movement of students and staff not as a trade, but as an expansion of the traditional role of universities in exchanging ideas, sharing

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<sup>3</sup> By 2019, some countries in the global south (S. Africa, Bolivia, Ecuador, Indonesia and Tanzania) had terminated treaties that included ISDS and the EU was trying to negotiate an international ISDS-light system, a Multilateral Investment Court. However, the UK government aimed to work under WTO rules post-Brexit, with trade agreements including ISDS, and Britain has the third largest number of companies globally that are making claims against other governments under this system.

knowledge and fostering cultural understanding and peace (Altbach 2007). UNESCO had twice tried to establish an international convention for the recognition of qualifications to facilitate students' international movement, but so far this has only been achieved on a regional basis. In 1997, the 'Lisbon Convention' on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (curiously including Russia and the USA) was signed, and became crucial to the Bologna Process which started a year later (Hartmann 2015). Although concerned about the draining of intellectual capacities from the global South, UNESCO also saw increased internationalisation as offering new educational opportunities to students from low income countries, with the promise of greater development and more global equality. With the WTO's moves towards free trade in higher education, UNESCO considered students would only be able to benefit if they had the information, backed by national quality control systems, necessary to distinguish bone fide universities from rogue traders. UNESCO was worried that free trade agreements on higher education would make students, whose families often go into debt for their education, vulnerable to fraudulent providers without safeguards or means of gaining recompense (Mathisen 2007). An alliance of high-income countries, working through OECD, approached UNESCO with a view to establishing 'Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education' (UNESCO/OECD 2005). However, because the text benefitted educational service providers over students, UNESCO's General Conference refused to endorse it as an enforceable, 'standard-setting instrument' (Hartmann 2015). UNESCO continues in its attempts to create an international regime for the recognition of higher education qualifications with a more level playing field between low income and high income countries.

If GATS and UNESCO had two different visions for the internationalisation of higher education, the EU and OECD became interested in universities for yet another reason: their role in a projected 'global knowledge economy'. Whereas GATS and UNESCO diverged markedly in their conceptualisation of the future of universities – the former holding out a vision of universities in an international free trade regime and the latter valuing the intellectual and cultural opportunities offered by international exchange – the EU and OECD included both of these contradictory visions of the university in their policies. In tracing the development of policies to reform universities for their new role in the knowledge economy, the next section will signal how their policies espoused both the view that universities needed marketisation in order to be a source of future economic prosperity, and the contrary view that universities were a public good, whose research and teaching freedoms needed protecting. The question to be explored in the following section is not just how, but why these two contrary discourses and visions of the university coexisted in these international policies.

### 3.3 Global Knowledge Economy

From the late 1980s, both academics and international agencies had focused on what they perceived as world-wide changes in economy and society and looked to processes of innovation and strategies for competitive advantage to take them into the future. For example, Lundvall's (1992, 1997, 2001) and Lundvall and Archibugi (2001) ideas about national systems of innovation in learning societies were taken up by the OECD. Porter's (1985) focus on firms' strategies for competitive advantage was hugely influential, matched by Harvey's (1989) analysis of how companies were using sites around the world to maximise the speed and profitability of production. Reich (1991) who became President Clinton's secretary for labour, identified how firms were downsizing their headquarters and assembling short-term teams of experts whom he called 'symbolic analysts' from anywhere in the world to develop innovative products and methods of production. He made clear that the 'work of nations' *qua* governments was to ensure 50% of the population gained higher education so that they could be knowledge workers in this global quest for competitive advantage. By this time, the competition was not just between firms, but the world was conceptualised as made up of 'competition states' (Pedersen 2011) operating in what was variously called a 'learning society' (Lundvall 2001, 2003) or a 'knowledge economy' (Drucker 1969, 1993).

In this vision of the future, the ability of the richest countries in the world to maintain their competitive edge depended on the speed with which they generated new knowledge and technology and transferred them into innovative products with high value added. If the global north, with the most advanced scientific and technical knowledge, could maintain its position as the 'head' in this economic order, then dirty, dangerous manufacturing could be outsourced to the 'hands' in the global South. Other studies have revealed this argument to be fallacious: for Stewart (1997), companies were not interested in a widespread population of knowledge workers, but only those few whose innovation and intellectual capital could be turned into proprietary knowledge and market domination. In keeping with this, Brown et al. (2007, 2010) found major western companies outsourcing not just dirty and dangerous work to the global South but also increasingly sending 'knowledge work' to pools of good quality and cheaper graduates, especially in India and China. In 2002, the World Bank inverted the logic of the global north's policy by arguing that even poor countries should expand higher education and participate in the global knowledge economy as the latest way for them to leapfrog out of poverty and gain greater parity with the global north (World Bank 2002). Yet these critiques and policy inversions have not dislodged Western policy makers' belief in a future based on a high skills population sustaining their country's competitive advantage and wealth through creativity and innovation. At first the role of universities was seen as *supporting* this economy by producing the graduates, knowledge and technologies on which companies depended. But gradually universities were needed to *drive* this economy, and ultimately, they were seen as networked into the new organization of firms, consultancies, financiers, as an *integral part* of this economy.

How did policies develop in Europe over these 30 years to change the role of universities? When the Common Market was formed in 1986 with free movement of goods, persons, services and capital, university rectors responded enthusiastically by accepting the Erasmus programme for staff and student mobility in 1986–1987. They saw Erasmus as a way to enhance their universities' traditional activities of international and intellectual exchange. However they resisted universities' being marketised or subject to new forms of accountability to governments and in 1988 the rectors of 430 European universities signed the Magna Charta Universitatum. This welcomed the role of universities in a society without borders in Europe, but re-stated a vision of the university as an autonomous institution with a vocation to produce, appraise and preserve culture and knowledge for the world. To do this, students and academics must be free to enrich their minds, and their research and teaching 'must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power' (Rectors of European Universities 1988).

Ten years later, and after the European Union (EU) had been formed with enhanced means to forge 'ever closer union', the education ministers from Europe's four biggest countries met at the Sorbonne and recognised the need to enhance their universities' 'global attractiveness'. They were aware of forecasts for steep rises in the value of the international trade in higher education, and saw Australia and the USA reaping the benefits of concerted policies to attract students, whereas Europe was not so successful and was suffering a brain drain of academics to the USA. To achieve 'global attractiveness', they committed their governments to 'harmonising the architecture of the European Higher Education system'. Two years later, in 1999, the rectors made a substantial shift towards endorsing the role of universities in economic competitiveness. In a meeting jointly prepared by the two European associations of rectors and the EU, 29 ministers of education signed up to the Bologna Process (Henckel and Wright 2008). As mentioned above, this committed them to a process of coordinating higher education in Europe, through comparable degrees, a 2-cycle system (BA and MA), transfer of student credits, student and staff mobility, quality assurance, and a European dimension to higher education. Its stated aims were to prepare students for a global future, and some countries, notably Denmark, interpreted this to mean 'employability' in the sense of aligning the curriculum to specific and current professional needs (Sarauw 2012). However, the Bologna Process also included a strong emphasis on students' cultural and democratic competences and a broad, advanced knowledge base to equip them for navigating an unforeseeable world. Although the Bologna Process was officially independent of the EU (as higher education was not included in the EU's remit) its aim, to increase the competitiveness of Europe by equipping its citizens for mobility, employability and lifelong learning, chimed with those of the EU. A year later, the Bologna Process became a crucial element in the European Council's Lisbon Strategy to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' by 2010 – an imaginary in which 'an emphasis on intellectual, cultural and democratic competencies still prevails alongside the newer market-oriented discourse' (EC 2001: 2 quoted in Sarauw 2012).

Policies were forming fast, so far dominated by the vision of universities as playing a support role in a knowledge-based European society and economy and a key role in the international trade in students. The rectors had quickly moved away from their earlier resistance to the marketisation of higher education and joined these fast-moving developments. Education International, an organisation of educational professionals, including tertiary education lecturers, had held out for the Magna Charta position and was excluded from the Bologna Process until 2005, by which time the agenda had been set. The European association of student unions (ESIB) joined the first of the biennial ministerial meetings of the Bologna Process in Prague in 2001, and managed to get a clause included in the Bologna Process referring to governments' 'public responsibility' towards universities (European Commission 2001; Henckel and Wright 2008). The Bologna Process therefore contains both clauses referring to the coordination of higher education to make the region more 'attractive' in the global market, and to the public responsibility of governments to provide higher education – although it was never clarified whether this meant they were responsible for the supply of higher education, or for its funding (Henckel and Wright 2008). These apparently contrary visions of higher education as an investment in a high-skills labour force and European competitiveness, or as a public good for creating a citizenry with the knowledge, personal and democratic competences to navigate an unknown future have remained side by side in the Bologna Process. They were even present in the report to the London ministerial meeting of the Bologna Process in 2007 about projecting the Bologna Process to the rest of the world (Zgaga 2006). By the 10th anniversary of the Bologna Process, the Budapest-Vienna ministerial meeting in 2010 launched the European Higher Education Area, using the Bologna Process as the model for forming world regions with the same degree cycles and mutual recognition of degrees, grades and quality assurance. This was clearly a ploy for dominating the organisation of international trade in higher education – but still an image of cooperation for intellectual betterment and the 'fostering of peaceful democratic societies' lingered alongside (Bologna Process 2010).

The vision of a future 'learning society' or 'knowledge economy' had been first and most clearly articulated by the OECD. Unlike the WTO, UNESCO and EU which are international organisations with various statutory powers, the OECD is a club or think tank for the 36 richest countries in the world, which has to maintain its members' interest to secure its income from their fees. It does this by producing authoritative statistics and well-researched reports and by building a shared understanding among members about the global future (Wolfe 2008). The reports offer theory-driven explanations of emerging trends in the world economy, pointing to a vision of the future, backed up with concepts, broad objectives and strategies for governments to reap the benefits and avoid pitfalls. The OECD's McCracken report in 1977 is credited with displacing the Keynesian paradigm and marking the 'beginning of the hegemony of neoliberalism' (Mahon and McBride 2008). By the 1980s the OECD's arguments for free market economics and flexible labour markets had gained the status of an 'institutional truth', especially in ministries of finance, and proponents of these ideas succeeded in making alternatives 'unthinkable'.

Hegemonic discourses, however, needed to be continually bolstered, and members' enthusiasm for OECD's ideas continually invigorated.

In the 1990s the OECD succeeded in reinvigorating members' support by operationalising the concept of 'global knowledge economy'. The OECD made a standard definition of its new policy concept and devised a scoreboard of statistical indicators to judge how well members were following policy prescriptions, with published rankings to praise or shame them (Godin 2006). In 1991, OECD units on educational research, university management and buildings had been brought together in one, high profile directorate (Henry et al. 2001: 132) and in 1998 it published a ground-breaking report, *Redefining Tertiary Education* (OECD 1998). This report was based on a major review of 'the first years of tertiary education' in ten countries, including Denmark (OECD 1997) and drew on the OECD's previous work on higher education: notably Trow's (1974) argument for the shift from elite to mass, and ultimately universal higher education; and Taylor's discussion of the current and future roles of universities in society (OECD 1987). It also chimed with the OECD's reformulation of human capital theory, with the argument that education was a personal and positional good, rather than a public good, and that individuals should invest in their own education and skills throughout their life in order to remain employable in fast changing knowledge industries (Brown et al. 2007). The report put this accumulated work in the new frame: a vision for universities in the future context of a knowledge economy. The report made a comprehensive overview of the implications of this new role of universities for curriculum design, quality management, university leadership and public and private funding. Yet, as will be shown below, in constructing its argument, the text of the report still made references to a 'traditional' view of the university, like that set out in the Magna Charta and the social and democratic aspects of the Bologna Process.

### 3.4 Policy Narratives

A detailed analysis of the OECD's report, *Redefining Tertiary Education* shows why and how the OECD sustains both the 'market' and the 'traditional' vision of universities. Their conjunction is crucial to the OECD's rhetorical strategy for mobilising particular constituencies and alliances or historic blocs in favour of urgent university reform, while trying to silence possible alternatives.

Policy documents such as *Redefining Tertiary Education* construct a narrative, which presents a picture of the past in such a way that it defines a problem in the present and projects only one possible solution for the future (Shore and Wright 1997). The OECD's report starts with a view of the past, where governments took a supply-led approach to universities. According to this view, universities focused on their own 'self-formations, their traditions, culture and inner workings' and were unresponsive to the needs of 'clients' and surrounding society (OECD 1998: 15–16). Instead, policy makers should now focus on the interests of 'clients' – the 'dominant motif' of the report. This would enable them to challenge these 'orthodoxies and

pre-suppositions of institutional life' and drive change, so that in the future universities would not focus on their own needs, but on those of students, the society and economy (ibid.). The report seems as if it is going to set out a classic policy narrative: to paraphrase, the problem of the past was the university's concern with its academic freedom, collegiality and institutional autonomy, which produced the problem in the present, where (as British Prime Minister Thatcher had put it) universities had 'failed the economy', and this in turn points to a solution – to make universities focus on clients (whether students or industry) and serve their needs in future. But *Redefining Tertiary Education* does not just make such a simple temporal trajectory.

The report sustains this normative stance throughout, but it also continues to give cognizance to the fact that there are two divergent views of the purposes of tertiary education, which it labels two 'models of the university'. The first it calls 'utility in the market place' and the second, 'independent or unconstrained advancement of knowledge' (OECD 1998: 10), which it also refers to as the 'classical liberal', 'critical intellectual' 'Humboldtian' or 'Newman' model. The text constructs a clear relationship between the two.

The instrumental or market approach is always described first. In this model the student is a consumer or customer who wants to acquire with minimal effort, cost and time, marketable competences and qualifications that converge on employment opportunities in the labour market. A variety of providers (universities, private higher education companies, corporate universities and commercial 'edutainment' corporations) compete to provide such programmes, making bids to the funding agency or government. Denmark is quoted as 'a particularly good example' of a country moving steadily in this entrepreneurial direction. Education becomes an internationally tradable commodity, in which fee-paying overseas students are a significant export earner, and for-profit institutions expect trading returns like any other business enterprise. If the tertiary education market is to function effectively, the management of universities needs to react quickly to tailor services to clients' wants and market them vigorously. In sum, in this 'utility in the market place' model, '[p]rimary values include customer satisfaction, a good match between the labour market and courses and qualifications on offer, and efficient and cost-effective delivery of service' (OECD 1998: 45).

When the report turns to the second model, the 'classical liberal position', the description starts negatively, making contrasts with the 'instrumental' approach, which thereby is promoted to the status of a norm. The 'classical liberal' model's 'starting point is neither economic or social utility, nor the student as consumer, nor the institution as service provider; it is, rather, the academic community's mission of knowledge creating and disseminating' (1998: 45). The report continually contrasts 'the traditional' negatively with the normative instrumental approach:

Scholars and students – not suppliers and customers – make up the academic community... The conceptual framework and language are not that of clients, service-providers, contractual obligations, management, efficiency, competence and skills and so forth but the qualities of the educated person, the self-governing or collegiate body of scholars, academic

discourse and interchange, and the endless quest for knowledge and understanding (1998: 45).

In this quest for knowledge, the academic community acts with a ‘civic conscience with moral obligations’:

Detachment from, rather than intimate engagement with, the world of commerce, industry, the professions, the schools and the government service is necessary to provide the right conditions for reflective, analytical, objective research, study and learning and, indeed, to provide a deeper level of service than meeting immediate wants and needs (OECD 1998: 45).

In the traditional model, relations with other social sectors and institutions are on the basis of ‘mutual respect’ and contracts, regulations and funding, whether from government or private sponsors, are in forms that protect ‘the rights and freedom of the academics and preserve institutional autonomy’ (OECD 1998: 46). The negative contrast to the instrumental model has by now been so firmly entrenched in the report that ‘mutual respect’, ‘freedom of academics’ and ‘institutional autonomy’ sound like a far cry.

The report implies a clear hierarchy between the two models but does not attempt to reconcile them or even debate their respective merits, for fear it would ‘all too easily give rise to false or misleading dichotomies’ (1998: 46). The section entitled ‘Towards convergence?’ prescribes a list of changes which both reinforce the privileged position of the ‘instrumental, market model’ and tuck in references to the ‘classical liberal position’ but without attempting to reconcile the contradictions. Most noticeably, the last two points on the list are:

- ‘The collegial concept of decision-making’ is still ‘relevant’. By including students, academic and non-academic staff and external representatives in decisions, it ensures they are academically and professionally informed, and responsibility for them is shared. But ‘inefficiencies and opaqueness of decision making’ need to be addressed.
- Because of the scale and complexity of decision making and the damaging consequences of errors and inefficiencies, a wide range of modern management and evaluation practices need to be introduced, including financial management, strategic institutional profiling and quality assurance.

The list is rounded off with a claim that there need be no ‘fundamental conflict’ between ‘collegial’ and ‘managerial’ styles of governance (1998: 48). It claims that convergence between the utilitarian market model and the ‘classic liberal’ or ‘critical knowledge’ model is possible, but gives the problem to universities themselves to solve.

The report does not simply propose that the ‘market’ model replaces the ‘classical liberal’ model. From mid-way, the report mainly focuses on the instrumental, market model, but there are periodic reminders that the traditional model is also present. They jog alongside each other with no attempt to make clear how they can co-exist, how teaching and research can be informed both by the rationalities of market utility and the advancement of knowledge for its own sake, and how



universities can be run by both managerial and collegial approaches. Henry et al. (2001: 128) call the report ‘greedy’ because it wants the future university to sustain both these contrary visions, and they criticise it for ‘suturing’ together these two discourses, which represent competing interests, traditions and value orientations. Our analysis of the report (Wright and Ørberg 2011), by focusing not just on the substantive content but on the mode of description, reveals that the two discourses are in fact never sewn together: rather, the two models are held in a particular relation which creates the dynamic to push the OECD agenda forward.

### 3.5 OECD’s Double Shuffle

Hall’s (2003) analysis of a British political strategy he calls the ‘double shuffle’ can be used to shed light on what is happening here. He shows that bold political moves towards a market model are most effective when accompanied by a matching step that reassures and carries along those who seek signs of hope that traditional values will not be extinguished. If his insight is applied to the OECD, it is immediately noticeable that the more extreme market model is always accompanied by the ‘traditional’ or ‘classic liberal’ model, referring to collegiality and the pursuit of critical understanding. There is a clear hierarchy between the two models of the market and of traditional academia but they derive from different political repertoires and there is no attempt to reconcile them. Rather, the relationship between the two discourses hinges on the use of keywords or even ‘weasel words’ – that suck the life out of a word, whilst seeming to keep the idea intact, just as a weasel sucks the egg and leaves the shell. Good examples are ‘autonomy’ and ‘freedom’. When the market model uses these words, they refer to universities’ using their free agency in ways that prosper the competition state and are accountable to the state, but academics ‘hear’ them as referring to their traditional meanings of institutional self-management and freedom to pursue their own research and teaching. Such words make a double address to different publics and the subordinated discourse appeals to and mobilises the engagement of academics and students, without whose consent the reform of the sector could not take place. At its most effective, the positive charge of the subordinate discourse is mobilised and transferred to the dominant discourse’s very different, even contrary stance (Hall 2003: 23). At the very least, this double mode of address re-presents a broadly neo-liberal project, favourable to the interests of corporate capital, in such a way that, even if it cannot mobilise popular consent, it sows confusion, obscures the long-term objective and prevents a coherent and organised opposition from emerging (Hall 2003: 20).

Central to Hall’s double shuffle is the idea of continual movement. In a process Gramsci calls ‘transformism’, with every step the market discourse takes towards a more radical vision of a marketised future, the supporting discourse is continually modified and takes on aspects of its dominant partner (Hall 2003: 19). Even within *Redefining Tertiary Education*, the market model gets progressively bolder throughout the report, whilst the disparaged ‘classic liberal’ model becomes a shadowy

presence, losing detailed features, but it is never allowed to disappear completely: it hovers as a feint ray of hope in the background.

The OECD followed *Redefining Tertiary Education* with a project to build scenarios for university futures. In successive versions of these scenarios, the two models were incrementally transformed. At first, six scenarios were developed (OECD 2005; Vincent-Lancrin 2004) and presented to a series of OECD meetings (e.g. World Bank, Washington, January 2005, and a meeting of stakeholders at Istanbul in June 2006).<sup>4</sup> The scenarios were revised in the light of feedback from each these meetings, and finally four scenarios were presented to the 2006 meeting of Education Ministers in Athens (OECD 2006a, b) – the one where the Danish minister voted for the most marketised scenario as mentioned above.

Through this sequence of scenarios about the future university, it is possible to trace the moves of both the market model and its supporting partner. In the initial ‘market’ model, the state plays a role in moderating the market and assuring quality. In the next set of scenarios, it is replaced by the ‘entrepreneurial university’ and commercial ‘edutainment’ and in the final scenarios, the most extreme vision of the future is called ‘HE Inc.’. In that process, HE Inc. splits from New Public Management. This is a surprising separation as New Public Management is usually associated with the concepts and technologies through which neoliberal logics entered institutions and professional practices. In HE Inc. universities shed their academic values, government funding and social agendas (e.g. commitments to equity), the state is absent, each university seeks out its own niche in world competition and rankings, and there are no brakes on free trade. In sum, over this sequence of documents, the ‘market’ model strides out progressively in the direction of global free trade, with market imperatives steering universities and little or no role for government, let alone collegial rule.

The subordinate discourse is progressively transformed in keeping with these moves. What had been called the ‘classic liberal’ or ‘Humboldt’ model in *Redefining Tertiary Education*, is replaced by ‘Tradition’ in the first set of scenarios. In an account which emphasises shortcomings, omits strengths and invites dismissal, ‘Tradition’ is a caricature of ‘universities as they are today’ – a temporal fixity which disqualifies them as serious scenarios for the future. In the final document, where four scenarios are offered, both ‘Humboldt’ and ‘tradition’ have gone completely and the most moderate scenario is now ‘New Public Management’, which takes on the reassuring subordinate position and the mantle of ‘Tradition’, appealing to the vestiges of university values to which it was initially opposed. In this model universities use their autonomy to reconcile the demands of the government and the markets, in much the same way as they did in the original ‘market’ model.

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<sup>4</sup>These six scenarios bore some resemblances to Milojević’s six models of the university: a business corporation focused on students as consumers; a sanctuary for the pursuit of academic knowledge and truth, with academic leadership; the cultural arm of the nation state, educating people for citizenship; poliversities with multiple, shifting roles; global electronic university with open access and learning based on cooperation not disciplines and hierarchies; and the community-based institution emphasising public service and outreach to local populations (Milojević 1998).

In short, the subordinate discourse has been repeatedly transformed to support the growing ideological dominance of the free market discourse. But the Danish minister was alone in voting for the extreme market version which strode out on its own. Most other ministers endorsed the political strategy that supported the dance between the two versions of the university with their dual appeal both to those seeking new market opportunities and to those wanting signs that academic values had not been completely abandoned.

### 3.6 Time Tricks and Urgency

The double shuffle is not the only political strategy embedded in this sequence of policy documents. The message that countries need to reform their universities as a matter of urgency is also conveyed through tricks and tropes of time. The narrative plot of the OECD texts, referred to above, shifts from ‘universities as they are now’ to how they are to be in a future global knowledge economy. Yet the future scenarios are described in the present tense, and the transition in between is left out of the story – that is for others to achieve, guided by ‘best practice’. An example is: ‘universities take a market-oriented approach to operations without losing basic academic values’ (Vincent-Lancrin 2004: 259). This linguistic strategy is called pragmatic presupposition: by using the present tense, it states a vision of the future as if it is already enacted, and is silent on the means for its achievement.<sup>5</sup> This strategy collapses the near future and gives the distant future a sense of urgency and inevitability, making it appear as if it is about to arrive in the present.

This narrative construction not only projects the future as ‘marketisation’ and ‘globalisation’ but prescribes a limited set of possible ways of acting on its anticipated impacts. The 1980s and 1990s were marked by the growth of think tanks, including the OECD, with teams of analysts and consultants employed by governments and companies to predict and prepare for a world yet to come into existence. As Cameron and Palan (2004) put it, if the consultants’ vision of the future is believed by policy makers and company executives, and if they invest serious time and money in preparing for that eventuality, then the future comes closer:

in the process of adapting to and preparing for globalisation, company managers and state administrators also contribute to the very process they claim to be responding to and, in doing so, contribute to and extend its meaning (Cameron and Palan 2004: 2).

Similarly, if states adapt institutions, like universities, to the predicted new terrain, they set in motion processes that accelerate the creation of the very thing they prepare for. There is a ‘compression of historical time as the future is drawn, through competitive emulation, into the present’ (Cameron and Palan 2004: 10). Added to this, there is a sense of urgency and impulsion, as the narrative emphasises that the

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<sup>5</sup>I am very grateful to Signe Pildal Hansen and Taina Saarinen for clarification of the concept of pragmatic presupposition.

global future is inevitable and movement in that direction is inexorable. This is a transfer into the public sector of the feeling of rush and intensity which Tsing shows is conjured up by speculative capitalists whose performance must always convince that profit can be imagined before it can be extracted (Tsing 2001: 159, 186). With the imagining of new frontiers for universities, states and businesses need to act urgently to prepare for this fast approaching future. The future is being drawn into the temporal space usually occupied by the present.

In the 1990s, Guyer (2007) also noticed a shift in the temporality of public culture, with a focus either on the immediate situation or on the very long-term future and an evacuation of the intermediate ‘near future’. She associated this ‘combination of fantasy futurism and enforced presentism’ with structural adjustment policies and military rule in Africa, only to find the same strange temporality in the USA and UK in the early twenty-first century. What fell between points of origin in the distant past and the horizons of the distant future – the intense suffering and hunger of people under structural adjustment – was ‘attenuated into airy thinness’ (Guyer 2007: 410). She turned to economics as one of the sources of this time frame. If Keynes had argued for governing the short term, Hayek had advocated orientation to the long term. Taking up the latter’s argument, the monetarists in the 1980s argued that governments should not be concerned about short term price fluctuations as these even themselves out; instead they should focus on regulating the money supply to stabilise its value and provide the conditions for capital accumulation and growth in the long run. According to this credo, if governments stopped intervening in markets through regulations, protective measures, redistributive taxes and subsidies, this would free up market dynamics and remove barriers to the free exercise of human ingenuity, leading to innovation, investment, growth and progress (Guyer 2007: 144).<sup>6</sup> This strategy depends on modelling a future when prices achieve stability so that ‘market fluctuations can be anchored retrospectively from the futuristic point’ (Guyer 2007: 413). When, then, does that futuristic point happen? It is always displaced into the future.

This evacuation of the near future and continual displacement of the ultimate future has a moral and political dimension. According to Guyer, Hayek claimed that humans have very limited capacity to comprehend the entire economic process, so instead they analyse events in the present and near future in what he calls a ‘craving for intelligibility’ (Hayek 1944: 204 cited in Guyer 2007: 409). Hayek held that this near-future reasoning based on analysing experience in terms of existing ideas produced ‘erroneous rationalism’ and posed the danger of humans intruding into his sacrosanct long term market forces (Hayek 1944: 205, cited in Guyer 2007: 412). Guyer argues that ‘everyday intelligibilities’ are forged (Guyer 2007: 410) in this

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<sup>6</sup>The Danish government impressed upon universities the need to create strategies that matched its vision for the long term, but has not evacuated the near future. As discussed further in Chap. 5, the government has sought to tightly steer universities through fluctuations in funding, control of cash flow and limitations on their access to borrowing. In this peculiar mix of long run and short term governing, it has been unclear how universities were meant to reconcile the government’s long term policy and short term manipulations.

‘near future’, so that what she calls this ‘strange evacuation of the temporal frame of the “near future”’ is not just an economic strategy, it is also an evacuation of

the reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influences, of engaging in struggles for specific goals, in short, of the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world that used to be encompassed under an expansively inclusive concept of ‘reasoning’ (Guyer 2007: 408).

The evacuation of the short run not only dislocates the flow of time from present through near future to distant future, but it also marks the evacuation of people’s experience. In Guyer’s African field site, for example, the experience of poor and marginalised people who were suffering from trying to live within systems of long-term Structural Adjustment, clearly showed these policies were based on an incorrect analysis and would not deliver what they promised. But by delegitimising people’s experience, the policy narrative sustains a disconnect between the pain of living in the present and images and promises of long-term future gain. Guyer makes clear that this evacuation of the short run and with it the politics of experience is explicit and has been deliberately translated into policies and programmes (Guyer 2007: 411). For example, ‘monitoring movements in very specific indicators and applying financial instruments that discipline very specific temporal zones explicitly preclude linking long and short runs through a humanistically based concept of shared intelligibility’ (Guyer 2007: 412–3). Audit processes in universities (Shore and Wright 1999; Strathern 2000) similarly determine the long term goals that will ‘count’ and evacuate the space for practitioners to act on visions of their own futures based on reflecting on their own experience. Guyer points out that Friedman and Friedman (1980) call this evacuated zone ‘freedom’ – but freedom for whom? If the long run is based on a different reasoning than that available to people thinking through their experience, then that is a recipe for manipulation of the governed. This trope or time trick disables opposition by delegitimising politics based experientially on what is happening in the present, and hollows out democracy and government accountability.

### 3.7 Technologies of Soft Power

The double shuffle, which tries to gain popular acceptance whilst moving towards a marketised future, and time tricks, which evacuate the near future and delegitimise experience as a basis for dealing with the inexorable and fast arrival of the distant future, are techniques of soft power. The OECD, as a think tank, has no ‘hard powers’ – no instruments of regulation or control, no powers to demand compliance and no independent source of funds. Even though other international agencies have a range of ‘hard powers’ – such as the EU’s and UNESCO’s ability to pass directives, or the World Bank and IMF’s coercive power to attach conditions to their loans to governments – they are increasingly copying the OECD’s (and also the Bologna Processes’) methods of operating through ‘soft powers’ to enact their visions of the

world. The OECD does not just act as an international forum for the exchange of ideas and information between member countries; nor is it just managing the process of policy production: it functions as a 'policy actor' (Henry et al. 2001: 145) operating with several techniques of soft power.

Policy itself, by setting out a vision of the future world for members to think in terms of, is a 'meditative' form of soft power (Jacobsson 2006). As shown above, the documents on university reform frame policies normatively, yet in ways that conform to a particular ideology. The OECD uses policy prescriptions in combination with reports, guidelines for reforms, statistical indicators of performance, rankings, country reviews and methods of naming and shaming, to proselytise its approach and persuade governments to review their activities in terms of its vision of the future. All member governments are obliged to be open to policy scrutiny and to supply statistics. To this data, the OECD applies its formidable research capacity and ability to engage in complex technical work. It identifies trends, generates indicators and scorecards, and assesses and ranks each member's performance (Mahon and McBride 2008: 10). By publishing its measurements and rankings, not least in press releases in each country, the OECD convinces member governments to take its analyses and policy prescriptions seriously. This, combined with respect for the quality of the OECD's work and a desire to compete successfully, rouses an emotive commitment to its agendas. There is also a redemptive aspect to these soft forms of power, as the OECD convenes working groups and conferences to produce success stories, expert advice, best practice, guidance notes, check lists, policy briefs and action plans, which are then offered to governments to adopt if they want to succeed. The process is voluntary: member states decide for themselves whether to follow the path of reform that the OECD recommends, but if they don't, they count themselves out of the game (Fejes 2008). In vying to act according to OECD's policy prescriptions and standards of performance, governments gear themselves to the OECD's projected new 'reality'.

Moutsios argues that, as part of their vision of the world, agencies such as the OECD are establishing a trans-national form of governance that operates without politics, in the sense of 'the participation of citizens in public activities aimed at dialogue, critique, and deliberation on existing or new policies' (Moutsios 2010: 123). Shore (2000) makes a similar argument for the EU, that it is evolving a form of government without a demos. Instead, these international agencies operate through a particular form of 'civil society': they form networks of key individuals from different countries and from the spheres of government, business, unions, academia, think tanks, consultancies, non-governmental organisations and business-friendly media. These people are recruited for their ability to act across the interface between international and national policy and their willingness to work with, and help develop, the agency's prevailing vision of the world. Mahon and McBride (2008: 20) vividly describe these well-placed individuals as those who will sing from the same hymn book, even if they choose different hymns. They form an 'epistemic community' (Haas 1992) that is, professionals from diverse backgrounds and countries who, independently and not at the behest of their governments, evolve into a community whose shared beliefs provide a consensual basis for international

action. In the words of Keck and Sikkink (1999), they work as ‘trans-national advocacy coalitions’ across different global, national and local scales. Mahon and McBride (2008) describe how the OECD Secretariat uses this network to commission reports, recruit peer reviewers, assemble groups of experts to distil best practice and select people to invite as conference speakers and participants. These individuals not only contribute to the OECD’s arguments and ideological slant, but create receptive audiences for OECD’s concepts and policy recommendations in the member countries. Some take up the debate in their national and local contexts; others are positioned as policy makers or university rectors and take on the role of activists, putting the OECD prescriptions into practice in their own milieu. Other agencies have developed similar networks and most notably the World Bank used this strategy in its campaign to become known as ‘the Knowledge Bank’. There is considerable overlap between the memberships of these networks, so that they form a complex patchwork, which spreads analytical concepts and policy prescriptions from one agency to another.

The way this ‘epistemic community’ is formed can be seen from Denmark’s involvement in the OECD. As the OECD had built up a strong reputation as a rich milieu for policy learning, it became prestigious and career-enhancing for a national civil servant to be seconded to the OECD for 3–5 years. Several from the Danish Ministries have been seconded to the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). In addition, the head of the Danish Department of Higher Education and International Cooperation who was also Deputy Director of the Danish Ministry of Education (Torben Kornbeck Rasmussen) was a member of the OECD’s Education Committee for 5 years, and then was elected as its chair for 2005–2008 (Klingsey 2005). This committee was closely involved in the Bologna Process and in committees and review boards for the EU, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers. Denmark’s official representative on the Governing Board of CERI (Joern Skovsgaard) was also on the Strategic Management Group and the Programme for Indicators for Education Systems. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation have treated these well-placed civil servants as conduits between their own and international policy making.<sup>7</sup> They helped shape the OECD’s emerging issues and policy prescriptions, they had strong ties with the OECD networks, and fed up-to-date information and emerging views back into their own ministry’s surveys, analysis and policy developments.

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<sup>7</sup>In repeated reorganisations during the 1990s and 2000s, the remits for higher education and research have been divided in various ways between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Research. Hence Bertel Haarder attended the 2006 OECD ministerial meeting as Minister of Education, even though his ministry was not responsible for universities, but only shorter cycle vocational programmes including e.g. teachers colleges. In 2011, the Social Democrats, Social-Liberals and Socialist People’s Party government allocated research and nearly all higher and further education (above the level of high school) to the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education collecting all relevant seats on international agencies into the same ministry.

Danes also participated in the OECD's formal networks in multiple ways. For example, Denmark's six largest universities<sup>8</sup> along with the Danish Ministry of Research (VTU) were all institutional members of the OECD's Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE). One of the Danish ministry officials responsible for coordinating with the OECD also networked with OECD's epistemic community as a local activist. He kept in touch with colleagues seconded to CERI and knew the then head of CERI (a Norwegian Jarl Bengtsson who later became a member of the governing board of the Danish University of Education). In an interview, the Danish ministry official told us how such contacts yielded frequent invitations to make presentations on the Danish reforms at OECD meetings and keep in touch with a wide network of similar activists worldwide. For example, the OECD had sent him and a former Minister to visit the Japanese government and exchange information about their respective university reforms. Later, he had made presentations to an OECD conference and two seminars in different countries on the way the Danish Ministry managed to make university mergers happen voluntarily and without funding. Some Danish university rectors received similar invitations.

In all areas of policy making, through its Policy Learning Networks, its Business and Industry Advisory Committee (BIAC) and Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), the OECD selects activists sympathetic to its ideas and organises out those who are not (Woodward 2008). The OECD also organises an Annual Forum, sponsored by business lobby groups, to expand OECD's interaction with civil society and its global reach. In Woodward's (2008: 94) terms 'choirs of neo-liberal prophets congregate [at the Annual Forum] to extol the benefits of capitalist globalisation' and tellingly, out of 914 speeches he analysed, 227 were by pro-capitalist corporate interests, most were from the richest states and only 13 were by Africans. Through such forums, the OECD assembles an epistemic community – a historic bloc of powerful corporate economic forces, civil society networks and allies in government (Cox 1999: 12). The strategy is to maintain a hegemonic discourse through highly selective interactions with these carefully chosen social forces.

Even if the OECD secretariat selects like-minded people for its networks, Kallo (2009) still asks how a 'semiotic mass' of shared meanings manages to emerge and predominate? Pal (2008) points to the paradox that a dynamic and loose coupling of actors and organisations in non-coercive processes creates a diffuse, messy, and variable geometry, yet it creates order. But this order 'is fragile, unlike hierarchies of command and control backed up by force and sanctions, and so has to be constantly recreated and recalibrated' (Pal 2008: 74). As members of this epistemic community become inspired by the conceptual universe of OECD reports and learn from each other, they come to speak a similar language and coordinate policies, so that what look like systematic changes begin to emerge, all without a central coordinator. These ideological visions are not constant or stable: only when they match with the internal policy making of a country does the OECD exert influence;

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<sup>8</sup>The universities of Copenhagen, Aarhus, Aalborg, Southern Denmark, the Danish Technical University and Copenhagen Business School.



otherwise it can fall out of favour. The Secretariat seems to be alert to the ways OECD reports and statistics are being used and how activists are adapting policy ideas to their local political contexts. Using these insights, the Secretariat is continually coordinating discussions and adjustments and making permutations to its policy guidance. These studies suggest that rather than OECD ideas flowing down to national governments, the 'OECD method' seems to involve a fine-tuned balance between coordination and dispersal, with an extensive network of like-minded people acting on the meta-narrative in their own ways, yet also being involved in orchestrated discussions which adjust the vision of the future to slough off criticism and keep it in play.

### 3.8 The Epistemic Community in Action

By following one of the techniques of soft power, the 'country review', it is possible to see how the Danish Ministry mobilised the OECD's epistemic community. This example reveals how Danish activists are involved in creating the policies and recommendations that the OECD passes back to them, and how in the process, the OECD's vision of the future is enacted and further developed.

In December 2002, just when the Danish political parties had reached agreement on the government's proposal for university reform, but the draft law had not yet started its passage through parliament, the Ministry asked the OECD to conduct a 'country review' of its universities. Many people in the university world expected the passage of the university law to be followed by a period of calm to work through the changes. Instead, the review would generate a further agenda of reforms and keep up a continual pace of change. The OECD has developed a standard procedure for a country review, which starts with a country inviting the OECD to conduct a review of all or part of its education sector. The second step is that the Ministry prepares a background report (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003), which, in this case, reflected on what they considered to be Denmark's progress, in terms of the OECD's ways of defining and measuring the knowledge economy. The Ministry recorded the following achievements: the new university law would make universities 'autonomous and self-governing' with a governing board and appointed leaders; government steering was through development contracts and payment for teaching by results; and the new BA-MA structure complied with the Bologna Process (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003: 11). In addition, the research councils had been reformed. Against an OECD target for countries to spend 3% of GNP on research and development, Denmark already spent 2.4%, and university research output ranked among the highest, according to the European Commission (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003: 45, 94). Despite these achievements, the Ministry was looking ahead to further reforms intended to make universities play an even more central role in the predicted emergence of a global knowledge economy.

The third step in a country review is for the OECD to appoint examiners, sometimes called ‘peer reviewers’, from its ‘epistemic network’. They included Jarl Bengtsson, the former head of CERI whom our ministry interviewee said he knew well, and the former Minister of Education from the Netherlands, who featured in the Athens ministerial meeting referred to above. There were also senior Ministry officials from Germany and the UK, a professor in Educational Leadership from the USA, and a member of the OECD secretariat.

The fourth step is to agree the terms of reference for the OECD review (OECD 2004a: 5 para. 3). Whereas the examiners felt a wider study of tertiary education in Denmark ‘could have been helpful’, the Ministry insisted that the review should concentrate only on universities, their contribution to the economy and society, and a comparison with university management and organisation in the examiners’ own countries. The Background Report then directed the OECD examiners’ attention to certain problems:

- the 22 government research institutions needed to be better integrated with universities
- knowledge transfer and half of research and development investment was concentrated on 50 large firms, with very little going to the small and medium enterprises that predominate in the Danish business sector ((Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003): 57, 60)
- academics’ contributions to public debate tended to be comments on political events rather than ‘disseminating research findings as such’ (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003): 113).

The next questions the Ministry was asking were: How do the missions of Danish universities in research and research-based education and in knowledge transfer to the economy and society compare to other OECD countries? What are the strengths and weaknesses in the universities’ capacity to manage and organise themselves in relation to that mission? How should the steering relation between the government and the universities be assessed? Which academic environments are internationally competitive and which need to be strengthened by reorganisation? What barriers are there to universities’ interaction with the economy and society? How good are Danish universities at attracting foreign students, how do the BA and MA compare internationally?

The fifth step involved the examiners conducting fieldwork, which was carried out during an 11 day visit in May 2003, even before the passage of the new University Law was completed.<sup>9</sup> The OECD delegation was hosted by the different central players in the Danish higher education sector and the individual universities. In the sixth step, the draft review and its recommendations were debated at a meeting between the OECD Education Committee and the Ministry in Copenhagen, in November 2003. Following standard procedures, the Danish side responded to

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<sup>9</sup>Parliament finally approved the University Law on 8 May and it received royal assent on 28 May. In between, the OECD visit was held on 13-23 May.

recommendations and insights provided by the reviewing team and they had the right to amend the report. Only when a report is agreed is it published (OECD 2004a). Examiners are said to conduct such meetings in the deliberative style of an academic argument, and their questions can reportedly be sharp and there can be strong disagreements, with the Secretariat assuming the role of mediator (Mahon and McBride 2008: 9). In this case there seems not to have been such a strong interchange and very few alterations were made to the report.

Up until this moment the processes, which followed normal OECD procedures, could be characterised as an intense discussion between Danish bureaucrats and their international peers. But on publication, despite this interaction, the report was presented as an authoritative statement about Danish university policy coming from the OECD, as an independent and external agency. It was also presented as objective and evidence-based, even though its evidence was viewed through the OECD's neo-liberal glasses, concepts and problem definitions (Rubenson 2008). The report took on a life as 'the OECD's recommendations' both in the media and in different public committees as well as union organizations such as Akademikerne Centralorganisation (AC).<sup>10</sup> The Ministry then made a selective interpretation of the OECD's recommendations to create an action plan of future reforms (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2004). This provoked an objection by one of the OECD's panel of examiners (Jarl Bengtsson, former head of CERI and by now a member of the Danish University of Education's (DPU) governing board) in the Danish media. He pointed out that whereas the Minister was claiming that the OECD recommended halving the number of Danish universities, the examiners had actually recommended not mergers but greater cooperation between the single faculty universities and the multi-faculty universities. That was the more usual model in OECD countries, and any mergers needed careful planning and proper financing (Thorup 2006). The Ministry continued to present its desired policy<sup>11</sup> as a recommendation from the OECD. Given the interactive procedure for conducting a country review, it is clearly a sleight of hand to represent the OECD as an actor independent of the country that it is purportedly acting upon.

There is no suggestion that the procedures followed in the Danish case were any different from OECD reviews elsewhere, but what is interesting is the proactive and strategic way that Danish policy makers involved the OECD in their policy making. The OECD's 'country review' of Danish policies on higher education and a parallel report on educational research and development in Denmark (OECD 2004a, b) provide good examples through which to understand the ways that members of the national 'issue network' (Marsh and Rhodes 1992) shape the agenda that the OECD

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<sup>10</sup>AC (renamed Akademikerne) is known in English as The Danish Confederation of Professional Associations. It is a coalition of unions concerned with the working conditions and salary negotiations of graduates of higher education.

<sup>11</sup>The recommendation to create larger multi-faculty units was taken up in the Danish Research Policy Council and became part of their policy suggestions (Danish Research Policy Council 2005). Later, the ministry used this same recommendation as a motivating factor for encouraging mergers.

then passes back to them.<sup>12</sup> What we find is an intense interaction across the OECD-Danish ‘interface’,<sup>13</sup> which is a far cry from the usual representation of inter- and trans-national agencies and national governments as discrete entities, with policy making flowing down from the former to the latter. In contrast, our study reveals a complex set of relations between OECD committees, forums and international ‘epistemic community’ and the politicians, ministry officials, university and business leaders involved in Danish policy making. As the review process shows, Danish policy makers are deeply involved in *creating* the OECD’s agenda and recommendations that they then *receive* marked with OECD’s imprimatur and accompanied by a rather curious claim to independent authority and objectivity.

### 3.9 Conclusion

By 2007, when the Ministry had reformed university governance and management and achieved the merger of Danish universities and government research institutes into fewer, larger institutions that would supposedly be more competitive on the global stage, Denmark counted itself as one of the OECD’s success stories. Indeed, according to an interviewee from the ministry, Danish activists had engaged with the OECD so intensely that other small countries were complaining and asking the OECD to turn its attention elsewhere. How had such a small group of people been so successful? The chapter started with a Danish minister, a rector from the Netherlands and a few others pushing the OECD’s agenda in the direction of marketisation and free trade in higher education. The chapter ends with a similarly

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<sup>12</sup>The report was undertaken by CERI whose work includes evaluations on a national basis and national policy recommendations. CERI had already made an evaluation of the Danish universities in 1997, where the taximeter system was praised as innovative. CERI had also reviewed the Danish universities’ effect on regional development, and later, CERI conducted a review of Danish capacity for research in education (OECD 2004b).

<sup>13</sup>There are also other ways in which ideas pass between the Danish ministry and the OECD: the interface is more diverse. The council of ambassadors had the final say on the allocation OECD’s 15 million Euro core budget which funded five committees and the secretariat. The Education Committee, then chaired by Torben Kornbech from the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation had the mandate to govern the programmes developed by the secretariat in its area. But other organisations and activities within OECD are membership organisations. An example is IMHE (Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education), which organizes conferences and produces reports, articles and papers on the challenges and opportunities facing universities and their leaders. Its membership includes six Danish universities as well as Dan-Eurashe (an association of tertiary education colleges) and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. IMHE and other units including CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation), PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and PEB (Programme on Educational Building) are all funded by participating countries and each has its own governing board. A country can also make separate contributions to promote particular activities. There is thus considerable scope for active members of a national policy community or issue network, including civil servants at various levels, stakeholder organisations and university leaders as well as politicians, to influence the OECD’s agenda.

small number of people working through the OECD to push the Danish reform agenda towards university mergers. All these individuals – ministers, civil servants, business leaders, rectors, and academics who act as OECD examiners – are activists within the OECD’s epistemic community. This network of people who sing from the same hymn book is a community in the sense they know each other and meet each other at seminars, conferences, and panels to devise best practice or to conduct reviews. Through their interactions, they build up a shared sense of commitment to a vision of the future and they use both the resources of the OECD and the sites where they themselves are active, to bring it about. The strength of the OECD, as of many think tanks that formed or flowered with the onset of neo-liberalism (Beder 2002), is that they have created a narrative, which in this case is about how the ‘self-serving’, ‘traditional’ or ‘Humboldt’ university of the past has produced the problem of the present, which can only be solved through their vision of a future, outward-facing university driving the global knowledge economy. Such visions are designed to appear coherent, all-encompassing, and inevitable. The OECD’s epistemic community propounds this vision, enhances it and defends it – and through their actions it gained an unquestionable status in international policy circles. In this sense they enacted a vision of the future and brought it about through their discourse, their contributions to OECD policies, reports, best practice, legislation in their own country and actions in the places where they were employed and had influence. But did their actions enact the university? And if the OECD’s most extreme scenario were to come about, would it be possible to live and work in such a university?

In the OECD’s vision of ‘HE Inc.’ all the activities of research and teaching are organised through markets, with universities competing with a range of commercial providers. There is no mediating or regulating role for the state, or for academic values. This vision resembled that put forward by Bertel Haarder in the 1990s (Haarder 1990a, b) and was similar to the EU’s ‘5th Freedom’, the free movement of knowledge, strongly advocated in the 2000s by the then-Danish Liberal Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. This is the university’s equivalent of Polanyi’s (1944) starkly utopian self-regulating market system. According to his analysis of the growth of *laissez-faire* in the nineteenth century, the core problems were attempts to remove government regulation of markets and to turn land, labour, money, (here could be added ‘knowledge’) and aspects of society itself into ‘fictitious commodities’ subject to the laws of the market in conditions of scarcity (Wright 2017). The latter are ‘fictitious’ because they all possess qualities that cannot be expressed in the rationality of the market. ‘HE Inc.’ shares both of these features. For Polanyi, the extreme ‘self-regulating market’ undermines social relations and the systems of redistribution and reciprocity that sustain them. That provokes a ‘double movement’ – a tension between reforms to establish a ‘self-regulating market’ and an upsurge of political and social movements to limit its effects. Polanyi’s ‘double movement’ is not to be confused with Hall’s ‘double shuffle’. The former identifies the damaging effects of the market model and seeks alternative visions for the organisation of society; the latter is a conceit or deceit, whereby ‘traditional’ visions are co-opted into a supportive role for the market model, in a ruse that they will still

find some manifestation alongside the achievement of the self-regulating market. This raises ethnographic questions, whether the double shuffle impedes the emergence of Polanyi's double movement? Do those who hold dear the values of collegiality and free inquiry get hoodwinked by the double shuffle or are they able to de-couple the subordinate discourse from this dance and re-work its concepts and narratives into a political strategy for an alternative vision of the future university? How do non-activists live in the gap between the market and the traditional models? When they live their daily life as managers, academics or students, and are shaping the university as a workplace and as a site for the development of research and education, in what sense are they too enacting a university?

These questions make the other political strategies identified above very pertinent. The tricks with temporality not only evacuated the near future and made the distant future seem to be entering the present, but they delegitimized the process of reflecting on experience from the recent past to work out how to act in the near future. Dansk Magisterforening and other organisations like the Danish Royal Society (Kærgård et al. 2007) that 'sing from a different hymn book' involved themselves with agencies like UNESCO and the Council of Europe, which promoted values of academic collegiality and freedom. Their approach was based on empirical data and people's own experiences – the 'everyday intelligibilities' of the near future, which were dismissed as illegitimate and occluded by the OECD's construction of a distant future fast coming into the present. Danish ministry officials attended UNESCO meetings and signed up to its declarations and conventions but these had far less traction on domestic policy making. Policy makers were quick to accuse protesters who appealed to the provisions in such UNESCO documents of resisting change and clinging to 'Humboldtian tradition', the scenario that had been ridiculed and dismissed by the OECD. How did protesters respond to such accusations? How successfully could they use their experience of the present to try and shape the near future?

Both the pro-market epistemic community and Dansk Magisterforening drew international agencies into the Danish debate and appealed to their powers, authority or moral status to bolster their position. But this contest was far from equal. Whereas DM could lobby these agencies and used UNESCO's formal, 'hard' powers to make a complaint against the Danish government (Dansk Magisterforening 2008), our analysis of the Ministry's interface with the OECD showed the operation of a very different, 'soft' form of power. The active involvement of Danish officials, politicians, like-minded interest groups and university leaders in the OECD's techniques and procedures of soft power gave them scope to shape the policies and recommendations that were then presented to parliament, the press and the public as the objective and authoritative view of an external agency. These lent strength and legitimacy to those wanting to advance such arguments for reform, and made it more difficult to put forward opposing views. These forms of power are not only 'soft' because they do not rely primarily on 'hard' directives, legislation and regulations, but because they are diffuse and hard for those outside the epistemic community to grasp, let alone resist.

If this chapter has analysed the discursive frameworks for university reform, the organisation of activists across the international-national interface of policy-making, and the rhetorical strategies and techniques of soft power they deploy, the next chapter looks further into the how Danish members of the international epistemic community and others who ‘honey pot’ around the Ministry engaged in constructing a narrative about the ‘problem’ of Danish universities, which projected only one ‘solution’ to meet the fast approaching future.

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# Chapter 4

## Contested Narratives of University Reform



Susan Wright  and Jakob Williams Ørberg 

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified the ways in which a relatively small number of Danish politicians, civil servants, rectors, management consultants and academics were networked by agencies such as the OECD into an international ‘epistemic community’. This international epistemic community was an ever-changing network in which people shared, however loosely, a vision and an agenda for reform. Members were more than what consultancies call ‘thought leaders’; they were ‘imaginators’ (Wright 2015) who tried to navigate and engineer an imagined future university into effect through policy prescriptions, best practices, score cards, rankings and reform procedures. Some of them were also ‘activists’ who held leadership positions in universities or in government in their own country, which they used to try and enact these visions. In Denmark, these members of the international epistemic community came up against a range of individuals and organisations who held divergent and opposed views about the purpose and organisation of the university. In sometimes very fraught processes of contestation, these diverse people and organisations tried to bring their conflicting views to bear on a policy, and for that reason we call them an ‘issue network’.<sup>1</sup> This chapter charts the participation of individuals and organisations in this Danish ‘issue network’ – the aggregation whose interests make them ‘honey pot’ around the ministry responsible for universities and who, at times when policy debates reached a crescendo, found themselves

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<sup>1</sup>See Chap. 1 footnote 7 for a definition of an issue network and see Chap. 2 for a distinction between Sabatier’s concept of an Advocacy Coalition Framework and this study’s concepts of an international epistemic community and the formation of a policy alliance or historic bloc.

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‘camped permanently around each source of problems’ (Colebatch 2002 [1997]: 33, quoting Davies 1964: 3). The chapter asks, How did different members of the issue network define in different ways the ‘problem’ with Danish universities? How did definitions of the problem shift, combine, become inverted or get shed through time? How, at a particular moment, did a political alliance or ‘historic bloc’ form around one definition and make it sufficiently dominant for a law change? What were the key words in this dominant definition, and how did their meanings shift in relation to each other to form a semantic cluster? What contrary tendencies of meaning were encompassed in the keywords defining the problem of the university that might surface as tensions when enacting the law?

This chapter follows Danish members of the international epistemic community, discussed in the previous chapter, in their involvement with a national network of political, industrial interests and unions concerned with university reform. By analysing a corpus of the documents produced by the issue network over thirty years, the chapter traces the construction of three contested narratives about universities, each defining a ‘problem’ and a presumed ‘solution’. The three narratives concern the role of universities in driving the Danish knowledge economy, the inclusion of universities in the reform of the Danish state, and the different ideas about how to manage ‘knowledge organizations’ and ‘knowledge workers’ in a way both responsive to industry and accountable to the state. The analysis shows how at one moment in the process of contestation, the three narratives came together in a roughly shared discourse about university reform that was made dominant by an alliance or historic bloc formed between some members of the interest network. They tried to sideline opposing views, yet tensions between the arguments in the three narratives and their definitions of the ‘problem’ were written into the law text, enabling the process of contestation to resurface when it came to implementing the reform.

## 4.2 Tracing the Issue Network

Whereas we mapped the ‘field’ of the potential actors in a ‘democratic’ view of policy making in Chap. 2, this chapter traces who actually took part in the Danish issue network and what influence they wielded. We did this by studying the documents they produced and holding interviews with 15 of those we identified as key players, supplemented by participant observation after 2004. Through this method, the chapter tracks the emergence and contestation of successive policies for university reform, briefly from the 1960s, in more detail through the 1990s to the passage of the new University Law in 2003, and then through subsequent changes.

Policy, in this view, involves many actors, some in face-to-face relations and others who may not even know of each other, in a social and political space articulated through relations of power and systems of governance (Shore and Wright 1997). Some members of this issue network – the Minister, civil servants, and other interested politicians – are easily identified through their contributions, which take the form of political speeches, the proposals of parties, political agreements, draft laws

debated in Parliament, and discussions in the media. We identified other members of this issue network through the position papers and lobbying documents they produced. These documents referred to more ephemeral press articles, conference papers and background documents pointing to further organisations and individuals. Some of these documents were produced by organisations and individuals that were invited to participate in national commissions, hearings, and even, according to an interview with a leader of the national students' union, DSF (Danske Studerendes Fællesråd), in regular meetings with senior ministry officials whilst drafting the legislation. Others were not invited to participate in forums created by politicians and ministry officials; instead they tried to create their own spaces in which they formulated viewpoints and mobilised support to try and exert influence over the policy-making honey pot from afar. Sometimes they formed alliances which strengthened their voices; in some cases the ministry invited them to come closer; at other times they were increasingly ignored.

This mapping of how participation in the issue network changed through time, both in authorised forums and in peripheral spaces, generated a corpus of texts. This corpus consists of the reports of commissions set up with the consent of nearly all the political parties, and other inter-party agreements; ministry reports, law proposals and consultation documents; position papers and lobbying reports produced by interest groups, notably the Confederation of Danish Industries, (Dansk Industri) and the Academy for Technical Sciences (Akademiet for de Tekniske Videnskaber, henceforth ATV); and newspaper articles, books and research papers produced by academics. Further written traces of participation in the debate amongst the issue network were found in more ephemeral materials like conference programmes, petitions, professional news sheets and opinion pieces in blogs and in the press (see the corpus of documents listed at the end of the chapter).

Texts are products of a political process but they can be read for clues about how debates and conflicts over university reform went on over time. In tracing how and why the voices of some members of the issue network prevailed and others lost influence, it is sometimes possible to glean from the texts the practical politics of political parties, interests and pressure groups, and identify which coalitions formed and what lobbying tactics they deployed. For the period from the start of our project in 2004 we have additional insights from participant observation, attending conferences, watching television discussions and reading the daily press. For the period before 2004, we also interviewed key players and recorded their recollections of the earlier debates. Whilst such interviews gave a 'hindsight view', as they were speaking about the past from their position in the present, they also provided many valuable political insights into why events panned out in certain ways, which were not available in the written record.

### 4.3 Policy Discourse

From our close reading of the corpus of texts, informed by these insights into the political process, we developed our main focus on how the policy discourses were contested and changed. Policy discourses have three components. First, they are composed of narratives, which, according to Hanne (2014: 4–5), are ‘connective devices’ that ‘grasp together’ events (past present and future), agents, sequence, context and causality into a newly invented and more or less unified plot. In our case, members of the issue network put forward competing ways of constructing a narrative, each representing the past in such a way as to claim there is a particular ‘problem’ in the present and to argue for only one possible ‘solution’ or course of action for the future (Shore and Wright 2011: 13). Second, different narratives about the ‘problem’ with universities hinge on contestations over the meaning of ‘keywords’. Following Williams (1976), ‘keywords’ accumulate a history of different ‘ways of seeing’ society and its institutions. New policy narratives sometimes entail launching new keywords, and also in our case a new ‘key phrase’, but they also rework, stretch or invert the meaning of existing ones, and assemble them in new associations with other words that lend each other meaning in ‘semantic clusters’ (Wright 2005). The third component of a policy discourse is ‘argumentation’. We share Finlayson’s (2013: 319) view that core to any political dispute is a contest over the premises about the situation to be addressed; or, as Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) rephrase it, over ‘what is going on’ from which, in successful rhetoric, it ‘naturally’ follows ‘what is to be done’ (Fairclough and Fairclough 2013: 6). In the more formal language of rhetoric, policy narratives put over propositional claims with premises that entail a conclusion (Zarefsky 2001: 35). By tracking shifts in the construction of policy narratives, the choice and meaning of constituent keywords and their formation in new semantic clusters, we trace the ‘movement’ in the process of argumentation, how the definition of a ‘problem’ is contested, and whether and how it becomes dominant. It is not just meanings that are gained and lost through such struggles over the narratives, keywords and arguments framing policy problems; nor is it just the displacement of some privileged speakers that is at stake: as Ball (1990: 17, 18) argues, this process of contestation is over the emergence of a new discursive regime that imagines and tries to constitute the objects of which it speaks with new forms of authority.

We use a process called ‘studying though’ (Wright and Reinhard 2011) to trace the emergence of a new discursive regime through a sequence of texts. We analyse how the construction of narratives shifts through time; how keywords and arguments ‘move’ between texts produced by different actors in the policy field (or how they are resisted by other actors who propose alternatives); and how, though this process of contestation, key concepts about the university and its role in society become transformed. This approach owes much to Bacchi’s (2000, 2004) analysis of ‘what a policy problem is represented to be’ but whereas she focuses on one policy text, we trace the different formulations of the university ‘problem’ through a corpus of documents produced by different members of the issue network over a

number of years leading up to the University Law of 2003 and beyond. We are also indebted to Fairclough's (1989, 2004) formulation of Critical Discourse Analysis and especially his insight into how policy narratives, keywords and arguments are continually recontextualised as they move through a chain of genres (for example, speeches, reports, debates, newspaper articles, law texts) in a process of contestation leading to the emergence of a new policy discourse, and thence into a process of governing, where the discourse is recontextualised again in documents setting out operations and procedures.

Many documents in our corpus contain two or more discourses about Danish universities, which are sometimes contradictory. Some narratives, keywords and arguments travel fairly intact from one document to another; others are contested by another document, but still in the original terms. Rarely, a line of argumentation is just dropped and does not reappear in subsequent documents. Some discourses appear to be similar as they move between documents, in that the keywords are retained, but the argument or rationale is changed. In policy discourses a high degree of contradiction and incoherence can be sustained and managed (Ball 1990: 30), and like a starburst, the ideas in any text can be taken in any number of directions in subsequent texts: only with the benefit of hindsight can the lines of flight and contested paths to ascendancy of particular images, arguments and problems be discerned.

As Gramsci (1992) showed, even when an alliance of different interests, or a historic bloc, is able to bolster its stance with the authority of state institutions, its dominant narrative can still be far from hegemonic – one that goes without saying and where alternatives are nearly unthinkable. Rather, the dominance of a narrative can always be contested and has to be continually reasserted. The passing of the 2003 university law represented a brief hiatus in this political contest over the discursive creation of what universities are, or ought to be. It captured a moment when a political majority was able to assert its version of the future university. But no sooner had the law been passed, than the process of contestation (Brenneis 2008, 2009) started again. The corpus of texts on Danish university reform contains a vast number of contested narratives, moves in the meanings of keywords, arguments and images. How then to group them and trace selected strands for analysis?

We did this empirically, as, from the 1980s to the turn of the century there were two quite separate processes of constructing narratives, running in parallel, with separate arguments over the 'problem' of the university and why and how it needed reform. The first defined the 'problem' as the emergence of a new context for the university, eventually named the global knowledge economy, in which universities were expected to play a new role. This reflects the OECD's discourse (discussed in the previous chapter) but in the early stages, various political and interest groups in Denmark identified quite different 'problems' about how to maintain Denmark's competitiveness in this global economy, and consequently proposed different kinds of university reform 'solutions'. The second process of argumentation was over redefining the state – from the delivery of welfare through a bureaucracy to what the government called 'Aim and Frame' steering. The latter involved devising new forms of governance and mechanisms to steer the activities of public institutions,



including universities, with the aim of maximising the effectiveness of the country in what various academics were arguing was a new competitive environment for firms, regions and states (Porter 1990; Brenner 2004; Pedersen 2011). These were two separate processes of creating two narratives – about the global knowledge economy and the Aim and Frame steering of the state – each with different interests contesting the power to define ‘the problem’ and its ‘solution’. These two discourses only came together in the late 1990s. At that point, a third ‘problem’ of university governance and management, which had been lurking in the background in the first two narratives, came to the fore in many texts: What kind of organisation should universities become and what kind of leadership should they have so as to make them both accountable to the state and deploy their capacities and resources in the global knowledge economy?

In this chapter, the people and organisations involved in making and contesting the first and second narratives and the interests and ideas that helped form the dominant ‘problem’ and ‘solution’ in each case are explored in turn, before showing how an alliance or ‘historic bloc’ brought those narratives together and dominated the definition of the third problem in the text of the 2003 University Law. Although they made their combined narrative ‘stick’ (Thompson 1984: 132) and made it authoritative by drawing on the powers and institutions of the state (Asad 1979), our analysis shows that the process of narrative formation was not completely closed and the debate took even more radical forms thereafter.

#### 4.4 Problem 1: The Knowledge Economy

In the 1990s, government, industrial interests, or academic unions, all agreed on one thing: Danish universities were excellent. For example, a report by the Confederation of Danish Industries (Dansk Industri) made clear that, despite the private sector and government under-funding research and despite staffing levels far below countries like Japan and Sweden, Danish academics were to be praised for their productivity and for the international standing of their publications (Dansk Industri 1997a: 20–21). Denmark came fourth in the OECD ranking of the number of citations per scientific article (Dansk Industri 1997a: 20) and maintained this position for the period 1994–2004 (Globalisation Council 2005a: 3). Denmark was also fourth among OECD countries for the number of scientific articles per million inhabitants (Globalisation Council 2005a: 2). Despite this, industrial organisations and the government all said that universities needed reform.

According to industrial organisations, the ‘problem’ was that universities were operating in a changed context. Danish government and industry took seriously the narrative coming from the EU and OECD claiming that a country’s prosperity lay in its ability to compete in a future global knowledge economy (Chap. 3 of this book). In this narrative, success depended on new collaborations between universities, industry and government to generate knowledge targeted at economic innovation, new ways of organising production, and solutions to social problems. Etzkowitz’s

modelling of these new relations as a ‘triple helix’ was influential (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 1997) while Gibbons et al.’s (1994) idea of an epochal shift to interdisciplinary and problem-oriented ‘mode 2’ knowledge became taken-for-granted among decision makers, not least in the Danish Ministry of Research (Hansen 2011: 32–33). However, the ‘global knowledge economy’ meant a different thing in each country. In the USA’s narrative, liberal arts education was an important foundation for creating ‘symbolic analysts’, the new internationally mobile workers that the Secretary of Labour, Robert Reich (1991) identified as central to globally organised industry. Meanwhile Britain espoused the ‘thin air’ thesis. According to Prime Minister Blair’s policy adviser, wealth would come from ‘thin air’ as people in creative arts and IT would use their ‘creativity, ingenuity and imagination’ to drive knowledge-based economic growth (Leadbetter 1999: vii). In contrast, Denmark’s narrative focused on certain manufacturing firms with a global reach. Numerous documents in the 1990s argued that the country’s success depended on educating scientists and engineers with the ability to translate research into innovative products and modes of organising. Two voices were especially influential in putting this argument forward. Dansk Industri (the Confederation of Danish Industry), with 10,000 member companies, produced a series of reports on the knowledge society (Dansk Industri 1996, 1997a, b, 1999a, b). They emphasised that from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s there was no growth in the value of manufacturing in Denmark or the EU, whereas it was growing in Japan and the USA (Dansk Industri 1997b: 18). The Academy for Technical Sciences (ATV), a private organisation with 630 members from the technical and natural sciences whose aims were to promote research and ensure its application ‘to the benefit of Danish society and industry’ (1998 cover),<sup>2</sup> set up an ‘expert group’ to review the whole knowledge system in the late 1990s (Interview with ATV, 16 June 2004). They also produced a series of reports (ATV 1997, 1998, 2001). Neither organisation criticised Danish academics, their research or their high quality graduates, but they wanted universities to expand their activities in sectors where Denmark’s future competitiveness depended on industries reaping the benefits of publicly funded research, taking up new scientific and technical knowledge at great speed and turning it into innovative products (ATV 1998: 42, 2001: 29).

A similarly optimistic and expansionist discourse was found in the Education Ministry’s report, ‘Universities in Growth’ (Education Ministry 1994). This announced that the new Social Democrat government was reversing the long-term underfunding of universities to enable them to amplify their ambitions and operations as they repositioned themselves in a new internationally competitive context. The government aimed to boost the university’s primary roles and main contributions to society by strengthening basic or ‘free’ research that was capable of competing internationally and that would be translated into higher education (1994: 13). The Minister’s foreword mentioned briefly that universities should work closely

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<sup>2</sup>Later ‘industry’ was replaced by ‘value creation and welfare of Danish society’ as a way of claiming that industry is part of a social whole (Interview with ATV). Note: the 2003 University Law refers to ‘society’ instead of industry, showing that the elision worked.

with industry to use research results and ensure the relevance of educational courses, but he also made clear from the start that:

the country's universities are at the centre of knowledge (*kundskab*), scholarship (*lærdom*), research and social debate. Therefore universities play a decisive role not just in economic and social development but also for the cultural development of society (1994: 1, authors' translation).

In short, in 1994, the government confidently depicted basic research and its translation into education as the universities' two main purposes, the source of their high international reputation, and their benefit to society, which meant culture as well as the economy. The report's title 'Universities in Growth' concerns the growth of universities themselves, their buildings and capacity for basic research and higher education; the title does not imply that universities are responsible for the country's economic and industrial growth.

This government discourse changed quickly in just four years. In 1997, in '*Business and education institutions: a report on the interplay between business and higher education institutions*' (Education Ministry 1997a) the Ministry redefined the purpose of universities as supplying knowledge and education to Danish industry so as to support the growth of a globally competitive economy. Universities were to turn their attention towards supporting business through knowledge transfer and equipping graduates to be 'flexible' workers. The next year, the Education Ministry's (1998) '*21st Century education institutions. Discussion paper on higher education's institutional structure*' retrospectively redefined the 1994 strategy '*Knowledge in Growth*'. Whereas the earlier document had clearly referred to the growth of universities' own knowledge, the 1998 discussion paper claimed the earlier document's ambition had been for universities to be responsible for the growth of the Danish economy, its innovation and competitiveness, and it blamed universities for not delivering on this revised meaning of 'growth'. The Ministry's discussion paper argued that universities should become the flexible and dynamic providers of educational resources for business, and for this reason should have a new legal obligation to collaborate with 'surrounding society'. How, in such a short time, had government discourse redefined the purpose of the university, changed the meaning of 'growth' from the growth of universities themselves to the growth of the national economy and elided the interests of 'the economy' with 'society', occluding other social and cultural dimensions of the university?

#### **4.4.1 Four Moves**

In the period 1994–1998, the 'problem' of Danish competitiveness in the global knowledge economy was redefined in four moves that shifted responsibility for its solution from industry to the universities and 'repurposed' universities in the process. The 'problem' of industrial innovation in Denmark was originally defined as a structural weakness in the industrial sector. Denmark had a few very large companies

and a very large number of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). In a sample of 2228 companies, 84% had fewer than 50 employees and only 3% had more than 150 employees. Seventy-two per cent of the large firms were active in research and innovation whereas 76% of the SMEs were inactive (Graversen and Mark 2005: 7–9). Moreover, SMEs relied on incremental and low risk innovations with existing customers, rather than developing new products, operations and markets. This definition of ‘the problem’ was made by Bengt-Åke Lundvall (2001), Professor of Business at Aalborg University and Director of DRUID (Danish Research Unit for Industrial Dynamics). He was a leading international figure connected to the OECD’s and the EU’s epistemic communities who wrote reports for the OECD and World Bank and was involved in the preparation and follow-up to the EU’s 2000 Lisbon Strategy (see Chap. 3). His ‘learning economy’ approach to innovation gave a central place to universities, not so much as the source of new knowledge but as the producers of graduates (Lundvall 1992; Lundvall and Johnson 1994). His research showed that Danish SMEs that employed graduates were twice as likely to collaborate with research institutions on product development (Lundvall 2006: 10–11, 14). However, only 11% of Danish SMEs (companies with fewer than 50 employees) had a graduate employee and only 10% cooperated with universities. The Danish Centre for Analysis of Research Policy confirmed that SME managers were less interested than large firms in transferring knowledge from universities (Schmidt 2003, 2008: 627). A mediating role was needed. Lundvall concluded that the government should focus on increasing the mobility of personnel between the public research and private sectors and on facilitating the employment of graduates in SMEs. Lundvall’s approach to generating a ‘learning economy’ among SMEs did not seek an answer in university reform, but his view was eclipsed by the interests of large firms already engaged in a ‘knowledge-based economy’.

A torrent of reports from Dansk Industri and ATV in the mid-1990s made the first move to redefine the ‘problem’ as the transfer of university knowledge into industrial innovation not in SMEs but in larger firms – even though academic research showed that this was hardly a ‘problem’ at all. Large manufacturing firms in the fields that government prioritised – pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, engineering (pumps and windmills) and information and communication technology – were already very successful at translating universities’ specialised scientific knowledge and technologies into the development of new products. A study of 600 industrial leaders by the Danish Centre for Analysis of Research Policy found that 75% of large firms in the fields of IT, life sciences and pharmaceuticals had well-established and satisfactory collaborations with specific research teams in universities (Graversen et al. 2003: 59, 48). Such firms benefitted from universities’ high risk, long-term scientific research to develop new materials and products shielded from market competition (Schmidt 2008: 632).

ATV and Dansk Industri argued that further expansion of knowledge transfer from publicly funded universities to certain sectors was for the public good (ATV 2001; Dansk Industri 1997b: 7). In two highly influential reports, Dansk Industri highlighted a need for more Danish firms in knowledge-intensive sectors (medicine, technical instruments, IT and electronics) (Dansk Industri 1997b: 21). They also

argued that more graduates had to be attracted to work in such firms: universities needed to produce 3–4000 more engineers each year (1997a: 9), 50% more graduates overall and double the number of industrial PhDs (1997b: 12, 32–3). ATV and Dansk Industri furthered this argument in a series of publications, conferences and working groups with participants from industry, universities and the Danish central administration that had even more impact on public debate and among politicians and ministry officials. Between them, they shifted the ‘problem’ from the structural weakness of SMEs to the harvesting of university knowledge and graduates to expand existing knowledge industries.

In a second move, universities were re-purposed to serve the needs of industry. Dansk Industri redefined universities as one of industry’s ‘knowledge suppliers’ and claimed ‘A national knowledge base that has no applicability to industry or society has no value’ (1997b: 43). Suddenly the universities’ strength in international publishing was turned into a national weakness: the ‘problem’ was that publishing deflected universities’ attention from converting knowledge into business possibilities and industrial value (Dansk Industri 1997b: 9, 18). Dansk Industri’s report called for a change in the law to give universities a third statutory role of ‘obligatory collaboration’ with industry (1997b: 20). Elsewhere called the ‘third leg’ or the ‘third mission’, Dansk Industri referred to the ‘three-winged university’ (*trefløjede universitetet*)<sup>3</sup> that was engaged not only in research and education but also through ‘industrial contact’ (*erhvervskontakt*) would become ‘partners in the knowledge-based industrial environment’ (1997b: 13, 38). This language made it sound as if the interests of large pharmaceutical, bio-medical, engineering and IT firms coincided with all industry (whereas SMEs had quite different and specific needs), and as if not just relevant departments should collaborate with these firms, but the whole of the university should be oriented to their needs. Lundvall criticised the ‘tendency to ... use those exceptions as the basis for general strategies to change the universities’ and argued that it was not realistic to make ‘whole industry’ cooperate with ‘whole university’ (Lundvall 2006: 9).

A third move was to re-purpose university education so as to serve the labour needs of industry. Dansk Industri argued that the 1997 national budget continued to build up qualified labour for the public sector. This gave ‘completely the wrong signal’ and ‘had to end’ because it threatened industry’s recruitment of suitably qualified staff and its ability to finance the welfare state (1997a: 16, 70, 29).

Dansk Industri’s figures showed a growth in humanities, health sciences and education and a ‘catastrophic’ decline in natural science and technical subjects (Table 4.1). Predicting they would need 100,000 more qualified staff by 2008 (1997a: 16, 8), Dansk Industri argued that universities should be required to align their education with industry’s future needs (1997a: 13). This argument *against* a free market in education and *for* a more centrally managed system of education only

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<sup>3</sup>This is a building metaphor, evoking the three wings of barns around a traditional Danish farm house.

**Table 4.1** Intake of students in selected educational areas

	1993	2000	Change	Change in %
KVU technical <sup>a</sup>	5400	4100	-1300	-24
Technical education	4000	3200	-800	-20
KVU business <sup>a</sup>	2600	2600	0	0
Social Science	6500	6500	0	0
Natural Science	2900	2500	-400	-14
Humanities	5200	6600	1400	27
Health Science	1800	3100	1300	72
Education	7200	11,400	4200	58
Total	35,600	40,000	4400	12

Source: Dansk Industri (1997a: 30)

<sup>a</sup>KVU (Korte Videregående Uddannelser) means short-cycle higher education, with programmes offered by Business Academies, lasting 2–3 years and leading to a professional degree

gained full purchase much later, under Social Democrat/Social Liberal government in 2014.

The fourth move was to argue that the ‘problem’ of Danish competitiveness was not due to lack of private investment in the industrial economy, but because more public investment was needed. Total expenditure on research and development reached 1.9% of Gross National Product by 1995 and exceeded the average for EU countries for the first time. However, in its reports about the challenges posed by the knowledge economy, Dansk Industri said public funding needed to increase and private investment in research and development needed to grow by 30% to reach the OECD average (Dansk Industri 1997a: 23). Contrary to this, after 1999 public funding for research actually started falling (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2** Public Funding for Research and Development (FoU) 1997–2004, in million kroner at 2004 prices

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total	11,648.4	12,029.3	12,117.5	11,613.0	11,585.0	11,365.3	11,329.0	11,250.7
Annual % change		3.3	0.7	0.1	-0.2	-1.9	-0.3	-0.7

Source: Finansloven 1997–2002: Dansk Center for Forskningsanalyser database over offentlige forskningsbevillinger quoted in Horsten (2005)

Even though this fall in public funding made the proportion from private sources rise, Danish firms’ contributions to the cost of university research remained so poor that Denmark ranked 24 out of the 28 OECD countries (OECD 1999: 32 quoted in Lundvall 2006: 10) and by 2001 the business sector only financed 3% of university research expenditure in Denmark (compared with an OECD average of 6% and 12.2% in Germany) (OECD STI Outlook, 2004 quoted in Globalisation Council 2005b: 4).

In 2002 the Danish government signed up to the EU’s Barcelona goals for public sector research funding to reach 1% of GNP and private sector funding to reach 2%

of GNP by 2010. The political agreement that paved the way for the 2003 University Law accepted the argument that universities needed to be reformed in order for government to trust them with increased funding so that they could drive Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy (Ørberg 2006). This increased funding materialised in the 'globalisation fund' from 2007–2012 which started with an additional 1 billion kroner of funding, rising to 5 billion kroner (Table 4.3). The resulting budget expansion was later prolonged until at least 2018.

**Table 4.3** Globalisation Fund. Political Agreement on Investment in Research and Development 2007–2012 in million kroner at 2007 prices

Budget categories	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Basic funding	300	800	1.010	720	950	1.090
Development of research capacity	230	240	250	60	60	60
Free research	85	385	450	–	–	–
Strategic research	330	435	435	200	–	–
Collaboration with the private sector on research and development	55	140	150	–	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.000</b>	<b>2.000</b>	<b>3.300</b>	<b>4.600</b>	<b>4.900</b>	<b>5.200</b>
<i>Of which unallocated reserve</i>	–	–	<i>1.005</i>	<i>3.620</i>	<i>3.890</i>	<i>4.050</i>

Note: the figures are rounded and this can make the totals appear incorrect

Source: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2006 (Author's translation)

In sum, through four moves in a matter of a very few years the 'problem' of Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy had been transformed. In this sequence of documents, the emergence and use of just one key phrase, 'From knowledge to invoice', makes it possible to trace the political process by which the arguments of industrial organisations became inscribed in government texts, to the extent of redefining the purpose of universities and turning what had hitherto been their strengths into a 'problem' to be dealt with by legislation. In its 1997 report, Dansk Industri claimed the central issue was 'making the route from knowledge to invoice as short as possible' (Dansk Industri 1997b: 3). A year later, ATV used a snappier phrase: 'turning knowledge into business' (*omdanne viden til forretning* ATV 1998: 5). Dansk Industri used 'From research to invoice' (*Fra forskning til faktura*) as a chapter heading (Dansk Industri 2000: 29) and in 2001 this key phrase was the title of a report Dansk Industri published jointly with Dansk Metal, one of the unions closely connected with the Social Democrats (CO-industri and Dansk Industri 2001). This was a clear sign that the Social Democrats and the unions, which were concerned about the migration of Danish jobs to cheaper labour in Asian countries, had aligned with Dansk Industri in looking to the future in the knowledge economy and to universities as the source of knowledge and graduates to drive that economy.

The unions representing university teachers and researchers did not seem to pay heed to the emergence of these narratives, keywords and arguments about the central purpose of their research and of the university itself. The unions' magazine, *FORSKERforum* did not review Dansk Industri's or ATV's reports in the 1990s – instead it focused on the practice and politics of researchers' working conditions.

However, in 2001, the new president of the union with the greatest number of members working at universities, Dansk Magisterforening, was outraged by Dansk Metal's joint report with Dansk Industri. She wrote a leader in the union magazine to point out that the idea that university research was only valid if it produced an invoice was a complete change from traditional university values. But this still did not rouse debate among union members (Interview with Dansk Magisterforening's president, 13 March 2007). When the new Liberal-Conservative coalition government started political negotiations over the law text in 2002, the party on which it usually relied to get a parliamentary majority for its legislation, Dansk Folkeparti, refused its support, saying 'the Minister aims to link university research and business life together in such a way as business gets the greater advantage. That is a rape (*voldtægt*) of the idea of the university' (*FORSKERforum* 2002: 1). The coalition behind the university law was instead based on collaboration with the Social Democrats. They, along with industrial unions, were aligned with the 'knowledge to invoice' discourse but tried to assuage the academics unions' concerns over research freedom by demanding that industry should not dominate university governance. The Liberal minister celebrated the passage of the 2003 University Law by upping the stakes even further. His next report was entitled '*New routes between research and industry – from thought to invoice*' (*Nye veje mellem forskning og erhverv – fra tanke til faktura*) (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2003): no longer satisfied with 'research to invoice', his ambition was for academics' very thoughts to be turned into invoices. Two years later, even AC, the umbrella for academic unions, joined with the industrial unions and Dansk Industri in a joint report '*From knowledge to growth and employment*' (Hansen et al. 2005). The Minister's adoption of the key phrases linking knowledge, research and even thoughts to the generation of economic activity and invoices and the academic unions' normalization of this way of thinking, marked the speed with which, in just a few years in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the function and responsibility of universities had been redefined and the 'problems' of Danish competitiveness in the knowledge economy were turned inside out.

## 4.5 Problem 2 Public Sector Reform

A second, separate strand in the argument for university reform developed along a parallel historical trajectory and concerned reforming the public sector. Just as, in the previous section, in the 1990s academics had taken little notice of the industrial interests that were lobbying politicians to re-purpose the university, so our analysis of documents and interviews with university managers and the unions indicated that academics made little connection between widespread reforms of the state and what might happen to universities. Indeed this link between university reform and wider reforms of the public sector is largely missing from international academic literature too.



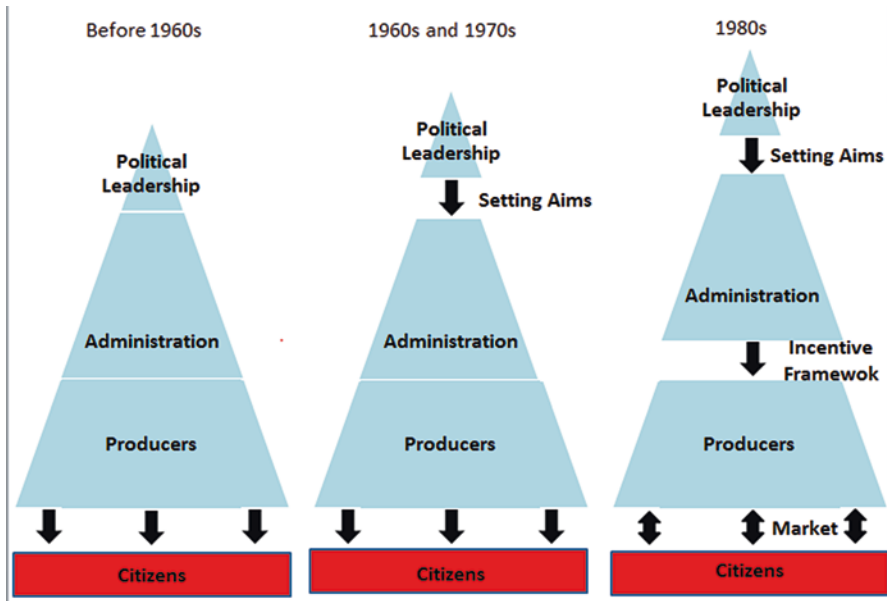
Like most of Europe, following OPEC's hikes in oil prices in the 1970s, Denmark was rocked by financial crises and by 1979 the Social Democratic Minister of Finance claimed that Denmark 'was heading for the abyss' (Østergaard 1998: 12–13). The Ministry of Finance from then on initiated a programme of public sector reforms, acting both to control public finances and pursue a role as a 'think tank' on public management (Ejersbo and Greve 2005: 10). The programme achieved political continuity, as successive governments passed the reform programme from one to another like a baton, just shifting the 'political spotlight' within roughly the same overall agenda (Ejersbo and Greve 2005: 1, 9).<sup>4</sup>

From the early 1980s, Denmark looked for inspiration to the OECD and sent a senior civil servant to work on the OECD's Public Management Committee (PUMA), ultimately becoming its head (Ejersbo and Greve 2005: 10). PUMA produced a hugely influential report with a broad review of reforms to the public sector and the management of the state (OECD 1995). This report adopted a tone of 'naked urgency', arguing that governments were faced with such fiscal pressures, economic competition, declining public trust, political turbulence and 'ever-faster, multi-fronted change' that nothing short of a paradigm shift to a new way of ordering the state was required (Pal 2008: 60–63). Whereas Hood (1991) had coined the term 'New Public Management' to capture common features from widely different histories of reform, the OECD turned 'NPM' into a policy prescription for the future. In a 'global trend' (Sahlin-Andersson 2000: 2, 18) reputation-conscious governments adopted NPM as the image of the 'ideal modern state' (Pal 2008: 72). As with the OECD's policies on the Global Knowledge Economy (discussed in Chap. 3), PUMA developed toolkits, checklists and best practice guides, identified successful countries for others to follow, and created templates to compare, assess and rank countries' progress. Danish and other members of the international 'epistemic community' fed their ideas and experience into PUMA's formulations of public sector reform; activists among them then selected from PUMA's array of policy proposals and management techniques, and 'edited' them to suit their own political and organisational environment (Sahlin-Andersson 2000: 10; Wright and Ørberg 2011). As a result, each country and each sector has taken its own slant on New Public Management – putting together selections from a repertoire of ideas and technologies in a distinctive way.

In 1996, the Ministry of Finance reviewed the way public sector reforms had developed in Denmark over 30 years (Fig. 4.1). This report divided the public sector into three categories: 'political leadership' (Ministers and political leaders of local

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<sup>4</sup>Proposed reforms to budget and administrative systems (including marketisation and contracting out, which were dropped as too much of a hot potato) were developed by the Social Democratic government which fell in 1982 and largely taken up by Schlüter's Conservative-Liberal coalition (1982–1992) which launched a 'modernization programme for the public sector' in 1983. Nyrop Rasmussen's Social Democratic government (1993–2001) continued with 'A New Perspective on the Public Sector' in 1993, and the Liberal-Conservative coalition of Fogh Rasmussen (2001–2009) launched 'Citizens at the Wheel' in 2002, a 'Structural Reform' of local government in 2004, and the 'Quality Reform' in 2007.



**Fig. 4.1** Steering system: Relations between political leadership, public administration, service deliverers and citizens. (Source: Finance Ministry 1996)

authorities); ‘administration’ (*forvaltning*) (leading civil servants and managers in the public administration); and ‘producers’ (*producenter*) (those who deliver public services). In the triangle on the left of Fig. 4.1, in the pre-reform (1960s) phase, all three categories were integrated into a hierarchical system of bureaucratic command and control, in which the political leaders assumed that their decisions were carried out down the hierarchy. But this was not necessarily the case: the ‘problem’ was that political leaders had insufficient control over the services provided by people at the bottom of the hierarchy, and the size and cost of the public sector was also rising out of control. The Ministry of Finance’s reforms were intended to ensure ‘an alignment between the political aims and the service deliverers’ behaviour’ (Finance Ministry 1996: section 1: 1).

The first reforms, represented in the central triangle (Fig. 4.1), involved politicians in what Osborne and Gaebler (1992) called a shift from ‘rowing’ to ‘steering’ the public sector. That is, instead of involving themselves in the detailed management of operational tasks and making payments, politicians should focus on setting the overall political aims and budget for a sector and leave administrators (*forvaltning*) to achieve the desired results in negotiation with the service deliverers. The Finance Ministry called this system ‘Aim and Frame Steering’. At this stage, the reforms had three main components. First, managers were given greater autonomy over budgets and personnel and reporting was simplified to an annual account of performance (Thorn and Lyndrup 2006: 2, 3). Second, Ministries were separated into ‘departments’ where policymaking and evaluation were carried out, and ‘free

agencies' (*fristyrelser*) responsible for policy implementation and administration. The separation resonates with Pollitt et al.'s (2001) 'principal-agent' theory, if a commissioning 'principal' department was separated from an independent supplier, a free 'agent', the latter was expected to organise itself much more effectively.<sup>5</sup> Third, in keeping with this principal-agent theory, departments steered the free agencies through contracts whose precise performance targets reflected the political aims for their work, for example, demanding they rationalise their work processes and improve productivity and quality (Finance Ministry 1996: section 1.2). The third phase, the right hand triangle in Fig. 4.1, was to extend 'Aim and Frame Steering' to relations between the 'administration' and 'service deliverers' (Finance Ministry 1996: section 1.1). This included giving local managers greater control, shifting from input to output funding and introducing a number of 'quasi-market mechanisms' under the rubric of 'citizens' choice' and competition between service providers. User panels in schools, nurseries and later universities were to provide an awareness of 'market' needs as well as 'to act as a counter force to the institutions' professionals' (Finance Ministry 1996: section 1: 2).

Some Ministries turned service providers into some form of 'free agency'. Aiming to be in the forefront of reform, in 1991 the Ministry of Education converted technical schools (*erhvervsskoler*) into 'self-owning institutions' with a governing board, control over their own budgets and the ability to allocate funds (Thorn and Lyndrup 2006: 2). Although technical education was still under strict regulation by the Ministry in partnership with employers' representatives, state funding was changed to 'output payments'. To induce technical schools to compete for students and improve their education and pass rates, they clocked up a unit of funding every time a student passed an exam – the so-called taximeter system. A similar system of 'taximeter' output funding was later introduced more widely, e.g. to hospitals and, in 1994, to universities. Other aspects of these reforms were applied to universities in a piecemeal fashion. For example, in 1999 the Ministry entered into 'development contracts' with rectors, but, as analysed in detail in Chap. 5, these were initially a pedagogical tool to help rectors develop their leadership role in universities and were not tied to output payments or outsourced service delivery (Andersen 2003).

If the Ministry of Finance's initial aims had been to make Danish institutions responsive to political priorities and economic incentives (Ministry of Finance 1996), by the late 1990s these New Public Management reforms were recast in the guise of 'competitive advantage' (Porter 1990) in a globalised economy made up of 'competition states' (Cerny 1990). This discourse was very influential in Denmark with a focus on competitiveness (*konkurrenceevne*) shifting to the broader concept of 'capacity to compete' (*konkurrencekraft*) in the early 2000s (Globalisation Council. 2006c, Pedersen 2011: 139) Arguments about public sector reform were

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<sup>5</sup> There were 7 *statslige fristyrelser* in 1992 and 26 by 1996 (Finance Ministry 1996: section 1.2). The Danish use of principal-agent theory is said to come from the UK, but in the UK this is called 'the Swedish model', as they went to study Sweden's centuries-old system of independent agencies, as a result of which Sweden has now begun to reinterpret its agencies in New Public Management terms (Sahlin-Andersson 2000: 12).

woven together with the industrialists' narrative about the impending arrival of the Global Knowledge Economy (Problem 1 above and see Chap. 3). This propelled universities centre stage and brought them into the ambit of public sector reforms.

In 2002 the new Liberal/Conservative coalition government reached a political agreement with the Social Democrats for a major reform of the universities (Government of Denmark 2002). The document echoed the language of the Ministry of Finance's 'aim and frame' steering, combined with the Ministry of Research's adoption of the industrialists' arguments about competitiveness in a global knowledge economy. The reform would 'set universities free' by ending the government's detailed steering and by introducing a version of the Finance Ministry's 'framework steering' (*rammestyning*) (Government of Denmark 2002: 3). Universities would be established as 'self-owning' free agents, with a governing board dominated by outsiders who were experienced in managing large organisations. The governing board would appoint leaders responsible for delivering on a 'development contract' with the Ministry that set out clear performance targets and strategic priorities. User panels and taximeter (output) payment were intended to make university education responsive to students and employers. In return, universities were expected to meet the new and sharper demands of 'national and international competition over knowledge and competences', collaborate closely with the 'wider knowledge system' and thereby 'contribute to the growth and welfare of the whole society' (ibid: 3, 11). In short, this political agreement extended to universities the kind of 'Aim and Frame' steering that, by that time, had been applied to much of the rest of the public sector. It seems that few university leaders, let alone academics or students, were aware that their institution had been implicated in this 'problem' of public sector reform. Rectors puzzled over the meaning of 'self-ownership' (Wright and Ørberg 2008: 44) and academics tended to assume 'setting universities free' meant better protection against government interference in their work (Wright 2014). On the contrary, the Aim and Frame reform was intended to tie universities closer to political agendas through contracts, output steering and other funding incentives on the one hand and get them to establish more extensive links to 'society' on the other. This became a tension when the government-university relationship always trumped attempts by other parties to influence or collaborate with universities.

The Ministry immediately involved the OECD in advising on university mergers (as mentioned in Chap. 3 and discussed in more detail in Chap. 5). In 2006, the Ministry then activated the leaders' new capacity to act without reference to downward accountability, by inviting them to merge with each other and with government research institutions. This coincided with a wider reform to create larger regions with one hospital, one university and larger local authorities (Ejersbo and Greve 2005: 2). Within a year, the Minister announced a new 'university map' of fewer, larger universities (discussed further in Chap. 5).

The Prime Minister set up a Globalisation Council with extensive research input from across the ministries and from individuals and organisations in the issue network to create a strategy to 'maintain Denmark's position as one of the wealthiest countries' in the global knowledge economy (Globalisation Council 2006a, b: 4). The goal was 'World top level education' so that Denmark would become a 'top

performing' knowledge society, entrepreneurial society, and innovative society – in short, 'Denmark should be the world's most competitive society by 2015' (ibid.: 8). The strategy and targets of the Globalisation Council were translated into a political agreement amongst the governing and the opposition parties and the establishment of a 'globalisation pool' to fund the government's expectations that 95% of young people would take secondary education, 50% would complete higher education, and a more innovative society would be achieved with 1 billion kroner's additional funding for research (Finance Ministry 2006: 37, 53). In setting the political aims<sup>6</sup> along with the budget and regulatory frame for a sector, the Minister not only outsourced service delivery to universities as self-owning, self-managing and self-disciplining contractors, but devolved responsibility to appointed leaders for fulfilling their political and policy aims. It was called decentralisation, but was designed to make leaders (qua their organisation) more responsive and accountable to the top (Wright and Ørberg 2008: 39).

#### 4.6 Problem 3: University Organisation and Management

The first problem, how to get universities to drive Denmark's competitiveness in a knowledge economy, and the second problem, how to align them with the 'Aim and Frame' steering agenda, required reforms to the organisation and leadership of Denmark's universities. But the two problems implied different forms of organisation that were not necessarily compatible, and neither meshed neatly with further arguments about university autonomy (*selvstyre*) and democracy that had been hotly contested since the 1970s (Gravesen et al. 2009).

A government-commissioned report on 'Leadership, organisation and competences' (Employment Ministry et al. 1997) argued that Danish companies needed higher education institutions to be part of a network of flexible organisations operating in a knowledge economy. Companies' hierarchical structures were outdated: they needed 'a flat decision-making system, self-managing groups, cross-disciplinarity, and leadership based on values rather than steering and control' to operate in a continually changing world (ibid 1997: 12). 'Flexible' firms needed networks of consultants, educators, researchers and collaboration partners to keep developing new competences, products and forms of organisation (ibid 1997: 14). To be a knowledge resource for such networks of firms, universities should also be flexible organisations with more mobility of researchers, teachers, students, managers and employees between them and industry (ibid 1997: 9, 28–9, 32).

Industrial pressure groups presented conflicting images of the university as a knowledge organisation. In an interview, the Director of ATV drew on work experience in an engineering consultancy to argue that a university board with overall

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<sup>6</sup>Parliament is notably not involved in setting performance targets, and there has been a shift of power from Parliament to Ministers and the government (Thorn and Lyndrup 2006: 6).

control and strategic powers could be combined with academics working in teams and taking responsibility for gaining their own contracts, solving problems and setting their own standards, if only managers had the right personality and qualities. Dansk Industri similarly wanted universities to have a flatter structure to interact with firms and respond flexibly to their needs:

The form of management has changed from a 'stratified hierarchy' (*lagdelte hierarki*) to a flatter organisation with many self-steering and cross-disciplinary groups. The individual worker is increasingly required 'to be self-supporting' (*selvbærende*) and able to create results in groups on the basis of an understanding of the overall aims of the company (Dansk Industri 1997b: 30, authors' translation).

Danish academics, arguably, already had such flexible, networked and self-managing groups with flat governance structures. But Dansk Industri also argued that universities needed stronger leadership to overcome their inward focus; leaders who could direct resources to research areas needed by industry and with whom industry could do business. To become flexible organisations, they needed a new management that was not dependent on collegial rule. How would a rector envisioned as a strong, central decision maker, who was mainly accountable upwards to the governing board and government, create the 'flat' characteristics of a networked knowledge organisation, as employees would also have to look upwards, to the leadership to whom they were accountable, and not outwards to 'surrounding society'.

'Aim and Frame' public sector reform (following Problem 2) did not envisage a flat, networked structure: on the contrary, the university would be 'set free' from Ministerial control, to become an autonomous, clearly bounded unit or 'agent' led by a strategic manager. Ministries, industry, health, education and other public agencies, local authorities and community groups could all legitimately make demands on the university for education and research services. It was up to the university as a 'free agent' to negotiate these demands and enter into contracts about what it promised to deliver. Importantly, the university was required to make periodic contracts with the ministry, with performance targets through which it would be closely bound to government policy and held accountable for its efficient use of public funding. This system needed a hierarchy of leaders at each level of the organisation who could sign contracts and be held to account. Both the PUMA reports and the OECD's higher education unit projected a new heroic role for these managers (Wright and Ørberg 2011: 284–6). They described New Public Management reforms as challenging and dangerous; they were fraught with uncertainty and disastrous if done incorrectly. Reforming managers were said to have an urgent and exciting vocation, making hard political choices and steeling their will to ride through employees' resistance to change, which was claimed to be workers' understandable but irrational universal reflex (Pal 2008: 70–71). These ideas of public sector reform were in stark contrast to the network model described above. Public sector reform texts depicted universities as organisations with a strong boundary against 'surrounding society' and a coherent and hierarchical internal structure focused on delivering contracted outputs and performance targets upwards through

tiers of strong leaders and ultimately to the ministry. They further elided the difference between academics' being co-opted into governmental and managerial agendas and academics' managing themselves and generating their own initiatives through widespread networks.

#### ***4.6.1 Democracy Versus the Right to Manage***

These two contrary ideas of universities as fluid, networked knowledge organisations or as clearly bounded units in government's aim and frame steering, converged on a long-standing debate about the organisation and leadership of universities, which in Denmark took place under the label 'democracy'. Hotly debated over several decades, 'democracy' originally referred both to the institution's internal organisation and its obligation to society. As recounted in Chap. 2 (and explained further in Chap. 10), following the Paris events of 1968, widespread dissatisfaction with 'professors' rule' had resulted in a 'remarkable alliance' between students who revolted and occupied the Copenhagen rector's office, new categories of junior academics, and politicians from both left and right (Hansen 2006: 5–6). In an interview, a retired senior civil servant explained that the education ministry had become frustrated by the professors' resistance to new ways of organising education while the finance ministry had given up trying to get universities to reform themselves from the top. According to this civil servant, the Radical Liberal and Conservative coalition government passed a law in 1970, which was revised slightly by the Social Democrat government in 1973, to establish the most wide-ranging democratic university law in Europe.

These laws in the 1970s described universities as state institutions supervised by the Ministry of Education, and widened the definition of the university community to include three constituencies: academics, students and administrators. Students and academics elected study boards and all three constituencies elected the senate, faculty boards and department boards. These bodies had decision-making powers and they elected heads of study boards and departments, deans and the rector to carry out these decisions. All who worked and studied at the university were now brought into the ambit of workplace democracy. According to an interview with a professor who was then a student activist, organisational democracy was politically controversial at that time but the Social Democrats successfully argued that if the public sector was to lead Denmark's transition to Scandinavian workplace democracy, then the universities should spearhead that within the public sector. In addition, support staff and students were considered participants from society at large. The university was conceived of as responsive to and contributing to democratic society.

This form of participatory democracy was soon criticised. Critics questioned the division of seats on the senate and boards between the university's three constituencies (academics, technical and administrative staff, and students) – surely this would encourage inexpedient consensus-seeking decisions for the sake of keeping the

‘domestic peace’? According to critics, surely the system would not function if decision making was distributed ‘horizontally’ between departments and study boards, and the rector did not have ‘vertical’ decision making functions? And if elected leaders returned to academic life amongst their colleagues afterwards, how could they take harsh decisions – surely this was not an efficient way of organising?<sup>7</sup> A Liberal government (1973–1975) commission proposed major reforms, but that was stopped when they lost the general election. For a decade, the debate did not die down and proposals to change the law were presented to parliament on a number of occasions. In 1984, the Minister of Education, Bertel Haarder, established a committee to prepare a law revision that worked in parallel to the government’s ‘modernisation’ of the public sector (Ørberg 2007).<sup>8</sup> Whereas the principle of participatory democracy in collegial organs was typical of the 1970s and aimed to ensure decisions were based on locally specialised information and protected the critical and independent status of teaching and research in relation to superordinate authorities, the committee argued that this hindered effective leadership and clear allocations of responsibility (Education Ministry 1985: 1,3, 11–16, 60).<sup>9</sup> The committee wanted to protect the university’s ‘traditional’ status as a self-managing autonomous institution (*selvstyre*) against the doubts of politicians and civil servants by making the university function as a strong, active and credible partner in dialogue with public authorities and private companies, capable of responding to ‘the demands of society’ (Education Ministry 1985: 60). To do this, it recommended simplifying the administration that was currently spread ‘horizontally’ across the university by clarifying the leader’s responsibilities and powers (Education Ministry 1985: 60–1, 19). In short, the aim was to transform the university into a ‘democratically accountable’, coherent organisation whose strategic leaders could engage with the government’s aim and frame steering and use their ‘freedom to manage’ to focus the efforts of their workforce on delivering what the minister deemed the needs of society.

It proved only possible to muster a parliamentary majority for the partial implementation of these suggestions. The University Law in 1993 (Parliament 1993) was based on two principles: decentralisation of tasks from the Ministry to more autonomous universities; and a change from participatory to representative democracy so as to create more visible and powerful leaders, clearly distinguished from other

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<sup>7</sup>According to an interview with a Humanities professor, the latter argument derived from the oil crisis in the 1970s, which happened soon after the new democratic system was set up and before the universities had worked out how to operate it. Government asked the universities to make cuts and when they refused on principle, they got a reputation for not being able to make difficult decisions or act ‘responsibly’.

<sup>8</sup>Lecturer Erik Nilsson from the Danish Technical University was a member of this committee. He co-authored with Bertel Haarder, the Liberal Party Minister of Education (1982–1992) the book ‘Neo-liberalism and its roots’ (Haarder et al. 1982).

<sup>9</sup>Although in the view of some liberals and conservatives, the role of universities was not to further a democratic culture in future generations of citizens, public servants and leaders of Danish society, this was not uncontested. The Education Ministry (1997b) argued that democracy has to be constantly nurtured and education should support this process.



members of staff (Rasmussen 1995: 335–6 and discussed further in Chap. 5). Now the rector was directly elected by all students and employees, making him or her accountable to the institution as a whole rather than to the governing boards that had selected him or her previously. The Senate was still elected, but reduced in size. It gained more power to allocate the budget but some of its executive powers were put in the hands of the rector and it seems it was no longer effective as the top executive body, nor acting like a company board. Faculty boards were also weakened and no longer had executive responsibilities or a role in daily management (Rasmussen 1995: 340–1). Instead, the deans' circle became very powerful as between them they formed the largest block on the university senate. Gyrð Foss, a student on the Senate of Copenhagen University in 1997, referred to 'skin democracy': 'in practice, university democracy is only as democratic as the leadership chooses to make it' (*FORSKERforum* 1997: 14). Rasmussen (1995) drew a similar picture at Aalborg University where decision making was divided between the rector, deans and senate. In the experience of the scientific staff he interviewed, participation in the running of the department or university had become increasingly futile. Instead, outside the formal concentration of power, small groups focused on securing their own work conditions and external funding.

#### 4.6.2 *Coherent Organisation and Strategic Leaders*

The 1993 University Law was meant to be the major 'reform to end all reforms', but it was a compromise between different meanings of democracy, freedom, and organisation and the debate did not die down. The volume of reports on university steering, organisation and management increased. For example the evaluation agency EVA (1995) published 'The Changing Universities' proposing universities should have boards with external majorities; the industrial lobby group ATV (1997) produced '*A Difficult Balance*' (*Den vanskelige balance*) about research leadership; and in 1998 a new Education minister produced a 'statement' (*redegørelse*) arguing for a debate about the structure of higher education institutions. In October 1998 the Chair of AC (the academic unions' umbrella organisation) published an article titled 'Universities must be forced into leadership reform' in *Mandag Morgen* (1998), a newspaper read by politicians. This article argued that elected university management was 'outdated, weak and incoherent', and this caused uproar among AC's university members (Salinas 1998).

The government did not take up EVA's or ATV's proposals in a further University Law in 1999, but continued to experiment with ways to strengthen governance and management of universities. The 1999 law (Parliament 1999) gave the Minister of Research competence to engage in 'development contracts' with the university in order to clarify the mission, objectives, and strategy of the institution, and make these transparent to the wider society (Andersen 2003: 54). According to an interview with a retired senior civil servant, the Ministry of Education, which was still responsible for university education, opposed development contracts because they

would turn universities into a ‘steering hierarchy’ with the ministry at the top. Instead, they favoured steering through incentives, funding allocations attached to simple outputs, as this gave universities scope for their own decisions about how to use their income. There was clearly a continuing contestation over these different ways to steer universities.

In 1999, the work of the OECD’s higher education programme (IMHE) on ‘The governance and leadership of HEIs’ (1999–2000) provided a context for the Danish Council for Research Policy (1999), an advisory group to the ministry,<sup>10</sup> to propose more fundamental changes. Their report ‘University Governance and Leadership’ stated there should be a majority of external members on the Senate and the Faculty Councils, the Senate should appoint the Chief Executive (rector and pro-rector), the rector should appoint the deans on the recommendation of Faculty Councils, and universities should organise their own departmental governance. This new governance structure should restore ‘the confidence of society at large’ and be a prerequisite for granting universities the greater freedom of action and budget stability that they need to meet the needs of the knowledge economy (Danish Council for Research Policy 1999: 1). This focus on making universities into organisations with a coherent structure and strong leaders, akin to the requirements for the Finance Ministry’s Aim and Frame steering, not only occluded the idea that universities had a ‘democratic’ role, but also the arguments about the need for universities to be fluid and networked into a web of knowledge organisations.

The industrial lobby organisation, Dansk Industri, weighed in with the report, *It takes two to tango – universities and industries*, published in February 2000. Dansk Industri and ATV had briefly mentioned organisational reform in their early reports, but they had first concentrated their efforts on repurposing universities to provide the research and skilled labour needed by their firms in the global knowledge economy (Problem 1, above). Now Dansk Industri clearly felt they had won that argument, writing with the assured and authoritative style of a national commission or government report, not a lobbying document from an interest group:

To say it straight out, universities must take a direct co-responsibility for Danish competitiveness...[and] firms have need for long-term building up of research which only universities can deliver (Dansk Industri 2000: 31, authors’ translation).

According to Dansk Industri, there was a complacent culture in universities (*laden stå til kultur*) and a self-satisfied attitude (*selvtilstrækkelige opfattelse*). The report referred to a newspaper campaign to identify ‘nil researchers’ – academics who had not published recently. Dansk Industri used this as evidence of a need for university reorganisation, to have a clearer view of the surrounding world’s needs and be more receptive to firms’ interests, and for stronger management to maximise use of resources (Dansk Industri 2000: 7, 13, 20). The report argued that universities needed more public funding and greater freedom but the political system lacked confidence in universities and had increased its political and economic steering. ‘A

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<sup>10</sup>The Council had nine members, with six senior managers of private companies, consultancies or national research centres, and three from universities.

precondition of greater freedom is that the surrounding society [by now this is elided with ‘industry’] has confidence that universities carry out tasks in a responsible manner’ (Dansk Industri 2000: 15). Dansk Industri’s prescriptions struck a more stringent tone than the Danish Council for Research Policy: collegial leadership does not give sufficient independence and ‘strategic power for action’; senate needs to focus on long-term strategic planning, leaders need to be able to prioritise resources, and employment conditions need to be changed, so less essential research areas can be closed and resources concentrated on a smaller number of disciplines that are globally competitive (Dansk Industri 2000: 18–19). However, Dansk Industri critiqued the way ‘development of leadership’ had become ‘synonymous with an authoritarian or strong man who will run the university like a sausage factory’. Modern management, Dansk Industri claimed, was not like that (Dansk Industri 2000: 18, 16).<sup>11</sup>

### 4.6.3 Political Alliance

As mentioned above, *Fra Forskning til Faktura*, which was published in June 2001 jointly by Dansk Industri and Dansk Metal, a major trade union associated with the Social Democrats, marked a momentous shift in the political formation (Dansk Industri and COIndustri 2001). The report struck the same assured and prescriptive tone and argued for changes to the organisation and leadership of universities. But now there was no mention of the idea that universities should have the best of modern industrial leadership in networked organisations (as against being a sausage factory). Nor was there any vestige of internal ‘democracy’ from the Social Democrats. Instead, much of the language of the public sector reformers was adopted: universities should become self-owning with independent boards, who appoint the leadership (Dansk Industri and COIndustri 2001: 7). Results contracts with real demands was the steering mechanism that would commit universities to collaborate not just with government but with other organisations and firms (Dansk Industri and COIndustri 2001: 34). This required clear (*entydig*) leadership, responsibilities and powers and a salary reward (Dansk Industri and COIndustri 2001: 34). But strengthening leadership at all levels must not weaken research freedom and quality, ‘On the contrary, professional leadership will ensure that researchers are freed [from involvement in university governance] to concentrate on their research tasks (Dansk Industri and COIndustri 2001: 34).

In the same month, the Social Democrats (2001) published a discussion paper, *Universities in the Knowledge Society*, written by 12 authors, only one connected to a university. They accepted that the university’s ultimate authority should be a board

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<sup>11</sup> In an interview for this project on 19 November 2007, the senior liberal politician, Bertel Haarder, who as Minister for Education had reformed many other institutions in the education sector in line with ‘new public management’, said that the governance and management model of the 2003 University was inspired by the Danish high schools and not industrial manufacturing.

with a majority of external members who appointed the rector. An academic council would be responsible for some academic tasks and there should be employee and student representatives on all decision-making bodies. It then tried to soften other proposals by letting universities choose whether there would be a majority of external members at faculty level, whether the dean and head of department would be appointed or elected, and even suggesting an opportunity for universities to opt out of reform altogether. A year before, at a conference to discuss Dansk Industri's paper *It takes two to tango*, the Social Democrat Minister of Research, Birthe Weiss, had said she completely disagreed with some of Dansk Industri's proposed management reforms and stated categorically, 'University democracy has come to stay' (FORSKERforum 2000a: 4). By 2001 the Social Democrats had made a volte face. At a conference held to discuss *Fra Forskning til Faktura*, Dansk Industri and CO-Industri displayed their self-assurance to the assembled delegates from large Danish firms, the ministries, research institutes and universities: they were defining the agenda to reform university management and they had the political alliance to make it 'stick' (FORSKERforum 2001b: 4–5).

In autumn 2001 a Danish Research Commission, which had been set up by the Social Democrat Minister of Research in May 2000, published its reports. Its remit was to make recommendations for reform, hoping it would resolve the tension between the different ways of imagining universities as networked knowledge organisations, as clearly bounded, strategically led and upwardly accountable public sector organisations, and as bastions of workplace democracy. The members of this commission came from universities, the industries central to the knowledge economy, and experienced public servants, with a secretariat from both the ministries of research and education.<sup>12</sup>

An interview with a member of this Commission gave some insight into its deliberations. They conducted research on comparative countries – Sweden, Austria, the UK and the Netherlands. Only Switzerland (Zurich Technical University) had a well-functioning democratic system with a strong sense of collective responsibility for shared management, which made it unacceptable to act opportunistically for individual advantage and it was an honour to take a turn as head of department. Danish universities, in contrast, were thought to not share this ethos; democracy had degenerated, people were reluctant to stand as head of department, or they cornered the position among a group of cronies. The kind of workplace democracy of Danish

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<sup>12</sup>The members of the Danish Research Commission were Leo Bjørnskov (Chair, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Information Technology and Research), Ninna Wurtzen (Chair from 1 November 2000, Governor of Fyn), Lauritz Holm-Nielsen (Vice-chair, World Bank), Torsten Freløft (Managing Director, Sophion Bioscience), Ellen Hauge (Århus University Hospital), Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen (PhD student, Copenhagen University), Arne Jensen (Managing Director, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences), Aase Lindahl (Chief Librarian, University of Southern Denmark), Lars Mathiassen (Professor, Aalborg University), Hans Siggaard-Jensen (Professor, Copenhagen Business School and Learning Lab Denmark), Birthe Skands (Development Manager, Vikas A/S), Nina Smith (Professor, Aarhus Business School), Henrik Tvarnø (Rector, University of Southern Denmark, from July 2001 Secretary General, The Danish Parliament).

universities was seen as a system ‘out of time’ rather than a potential competitive advantage in a knowledge economy.

The Commission drew on Rasmussen’s (1995, 1998, 2000a, b) studies of the 1993 law reform and especially the ways research units were organised. Jensen’s literature review for the Commission (published as Jensen 2010) argued that a university has a mix of two co-existing organisational forms. First, it has a line organised, professional bureaucracy (drawing on Mintzberg 1983), with fairly standardised operations and case administration, e.g. to run degree programmes and maximise taximeter income. Second, its research is organised as an adhocracy (drawing on Cohen and March 1974) or ‘organised anarchy’, where independent experts respond to a dynamic environment by organising projects, often externally funded and each different from the next, and they collaborate without developing rules or standardisation of skills. Jensen concluded that attempts to manage such a complex matrix of organisational forms through the use of centralised power, political control or standardisation of tasks or products is inefficient.

The Danish Research Commission’s report (2001a: 29–30) put forward a compromise: a mix of strong leadership and democracy: it proposed that universities should have independent governing boards with a majority of external members, and rectors and deans should be appointed on limited-term contracts, but universities should decide for themselves whether to elect or appoint departmental leaders, and study boards should continue to be elected by academics and students.

At this point, DM and the other unions for academics began to enter the discussion and tried to join the issue network. On 10 October 2001, the unions held a conference at Parliament to discuss the ideas about universities’ structure, leadership and funding in these and Dansk Industri/COmetal’s report, *Forskning til Faktura* (FORSKERforum 2001h: 1). Union speakers quickly realised that politicians had already decided that there will be a reform, but academics had missed the debate from the mid-1990s in which Dansk Industri and ATV had risen to ascendancy in the issue network and had redefined the purpose of the university as providing the knowledge and skilled labour to support or drive knowledge industries (Problem 1, above). By the time it came to their notice, Dansk Industri, the Liberal Minister for Research, and the union COIndustry with their links to the Social Democrats had already formed a political alliance around the need to reform the purpose of the university and therefore its management; the remaining ‘problem’ was just to work out the details. Other unions’ were taken by surprise when Max Bæhring from COIndustry at a public meeting set this out as a *fait accompli*:

Some researchers will take our proposals as an attack on their acquired rights, and so it is. But Dansk Industri and COIndustry represent users and employees who have a direct interest and it’s too important for Danish society to leave it to researchers alone (FORSKERforum 2001g: 16–17, authors’ translation).

The unions’ responses to consultations tried to make three strong and reasoned arguments for university’s democratic self-governance (*selvstyre*) to protect its independence (*uafhængighed*). First, they pointed out that the Social Democrats had started their discussion document with a clear statement:

They [universities] shall take part in ensuring that public debate is critical, free and vibrant and contributes to the democratisation of society. They shall deliver trustworthy and independent expertise and form a counterweight to political, media and economic powerholders' (quoted in *FORSKERforum* 2001e: 15, authors' translation).

The academic unions argued that the Social Democrats' and Dansk Industri's proposals to give powerful special interests direct influence over universities through seats on a governing board would demolish that independence. They quoted the 'frightening example' of the 'Dandy case', in which the rector of Aarhus University had recently used his existing powers to protect a firm's interests rather than the rights of two researchers to publish their results (*FORSKERforum* 1999: 7, 2000c). Now,

To put industry representatives or leaders of public institutions on the governing board is to make single interest groups and particular interests represent the public interest in the social institution that perhaps more than any other is democracy's independent representative (*FORSKERforum* 1999: 7, authors' translation).

Second, speakers at the conference referred to several experiments in university governance that were underway at Copenhagen University (*FORSKERforum* 2001f: 3) and Aalborg University (Rasmussen 1995: 339), the leadership models at the newly established Danish University of Education, the shift of the Danish Technical University (DTU) to 'self-ownership' under a governing board and appointed leaders, and not least, a bid by the Dean of Natural Science at Aarhus University to follow DTU and establish a 'free faculty' with its own board and appointed leader (*FORSKERforum* 2000d: 1). This argument was supported by the Minister of Education from the Radical Liberal party, Margrethe Vestager, who said that industry was applying an 'imperial logic' in its haste to make universities resemble themselves, and that there should be time out from the debate to learn from current experiments before making changes (*FORSKERforum* 2001d: 15).

Third, the union's response to consultation and several conference speakers pointed out that the arguments for changing university governance had no evidential base.<sup>13</sup> The Social Democrat's spokesperson on education policy, admitted that he could not document whether what Dansk Industri and the Association of Danish Employers (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening) told him was true:

Yes but, I cannot document that the situation is such, but when serious people (*seriøse mennesker*) say that they do not think there is sufficient contact between universities and firms, and that there should be a faster use of university's knowledge, I take it as a sign that something is wrong (*FORSKERforum* 2001c: 8–9, authors' translation).

<sup>13</sup>In addition, we have noticed that several statements in Dansk Industri reports reflect hearsay and surmise, rather than research. For example, 'Institute boards are often talked about as awful leaders' (Dansk Industri 2000: 18). It then surmised that if department and study leaders are chosen by colleagues they must have weak legitimacy and too many unpopular decisions will never get taken because 'who wants to make uncomfortable decisions about colleagues research and teaching when after 4 years you'll be an equal colleague again' (Dansk Industri 2000: 19).

Similarly, at the conference in Parliament, Ninna Wurtzen, chair of Research Commission, said the short time they were given to do their work meant that their proposals were not grounded in research:

No, the Research Commission has not come up with resounding documentation of the problem with employee-elected leadership as the background for our proposal about introducing boards and appointed rectors (*FORSKERforum* 2001j: 20, authors' translation).

At the same conference, the Social Democrat's spokesperson also confirmed that they could not document the need for the external leadership they were proposing (*ibid.*). The union's consultation response and an editorial by Leif Søndergaard, DM's spokesperson for university employees, made a plea for generating evidence by everyone who has been part of the debate – university teachers, politicians, the rectors association, the Research Commission, the union's umbrella AC, Dansk Industri and others – by mapping out and documenting what does and does not function well at universities, and looking at the experience at DPU and DTU and other current experiments (*FORSKERforum* 2001i: 2). But it was too late for such pleas. The political alliance for university reform that had been building up since the mid-1990s had eventually come together, and the last thing those parties were going to entertain was a re-examination of the basis for their decided action. A historic bloc involving the Liberals, Social Democrats, organisations representing large knowledge-based firms and unions representing both manufacturing workers and university graduates (but against the wishes of many of their members who were university employees) had formed around a shared narrative about the 'problem' with universities that was based on the revised meanings of a cluster of keywords and an argument about the solution needed for the future success of Denmark. They were poised to legislate and make their new discourse authoritative.

## 4.7 An Authoritative Discourse

The way the narratives, keywords and arguments of the three Problems come together to form a discourse is captured in a Memorandum (*Bemærkninger*) that accompanies the draft law text (Parliament 2003b). Publishing this Memorandum is standard procedure in Danish law-making, and it is a source of law through which the interpretation of the law itself is defined. In particular, the first two pages explain the intentions and rationale of the law as already agreed by the coalition of political parties that will support the law's passage through Parliament and make the discourse authoritative. After an initial statement that reform of Denmark's universities, knowledge and innovation system is to 'release Denmark's potential' in the international knowledge economy, the first page takes the rhetorical form of what in Chap. 3 we called a 'double shuffle' (Wright and Ørberg 2011). That is, each statement about the radical purpose of the reform is juxtaposed with a mollifying statement about preserving the traditional values and purpose of the university, as if to reassure the sceptical reader that the latter will survive, but without showing how or

reconciling differences between the two. For example, one radical paragraph states, ‘The law reforms the tasks, obligations, management, departmental structure and control of universities by central political and administrative levels’<sup>14</sup> while the next paragraph seems to reinstate the status quo: ‘it is a target...to maintain the academic self-government of universities and their independence from special interests’ (Parliament 2003b: 1). While a reader seeking reassurance could take ‘academic self-government’ to mean autonomy (*selvstyre*) and participatory democracy, those following Problem 2’s debates know that this phrase now means universities are ‘set free’ from the ministry as a self-owning agent or contracted service provider. In a further ‘double shuffle’, one paragraph states boldly that management will be strengthened to make the priorities of universities stronger and more visible to society and ‘to ensure dissemination of knowledge, application and development... between the universities and their partners’. But the next paragraph reassures that:

They [universities] guard the principles of scientific ethics and freedom of research and undertake basic research, and based on this they maintain essential basic disciplines. By doing this they contribute to maintaining and challenging the cultural and intellectual life and values of society, and they are part of the efforts to ensure a free, objective and critical public debate. The universities are open institutions with dedicated researchers and strong research and educational environments of the highest international standards, and they exchange knowledge and competences with society (Parliament 2003b, authors’ translation).

No efforts are made to reconcile such contradictions between managerial steering of universities to meet ministerial objectives and dedicated academics’ guarding scientific ethics, free research and critical public debate. ‘Culture and intellectual life’, ‘values of society’ and objective and critical public debate’ are not mentioned again in the text, and from then on the text is dominated by repeated use of terms such as stronger management, priorities, control, trust, visibility and knowledge exchange.

The final four short paragraphs of the Memorandum’s introduction then connect together the solutions to the three ‘problems’ traced in this chapter, setting out an assured and assertive discourse that casts no more glances at more traditional meanings.

This document also clearly demonstrates the words and meanings that have been changed or shed by this dominant discourse. The wider purposes of university research and teaching – as a cultural repository, as developing critical capacities and public debate – are absent, and the focus is exclusively on the research and labour needed for competitiveness in the knowledge economy. The high number of SMEs relying on low level technologies is mentioned once but the proposed changes would not solve that weakness in the economy. The new university structure, which the Memorandum explained was necessary to ensure that universities engaged with society, included a Governing Board with a majority of members appointed because of their experience in ‘surrounding society’. The Social Democrats claimed credit

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<sup>14</sup>This law also reformed education programmes, and introduced the Bologna degree and modular structures to Denmark, but this is not mentioned at all in the Memorandum’s introduction and only explained in a later section.



for the inclusion of the word ‘society’ and for modifying ‘industrial dominion’ (*erhvervsvalde*). Their publications explaining their stance in the negotiations said that the government’s initial proposal for external members of the Governing Boards was in order for the business world to control Danish universities (Socialdemokratiet 2002b: 1). According to the Social Democrats, their arguments that universities were both knowledge and cultural institutions ensured that external members of the governing board should come from all parts of society and not be dominated by industry (Socialdemokratiet 2002a: 1, 2002b: 1). However, Rasmussen’s (Rasmussen 2004) analysis of the first generation of governing board members showed that 80% of the 47 external members were CEOs, board chairmen or research directors of important firms or institutions, and all governing boards contained a member of one of Denmark’s seven top firms, with the pharmaceutical and food industries especially well represented.<sup>15</sup> Although members also came from the media and national cultural institutions, noticeably absent were unions and NGOs representing other aspects of ‘surrounding society’ – and Rasmussen makes no mention of any coming from SMEs. As shown in the discussion of ‘Problem 1’, Denmark’s structural weakness in the lack of knowledge transfer and innovation among SMEs had been shed and transmogrified into those large knowledge-based firms that already had strong relations with relevant research departments gaining strategic influence over the whole university.

The solution to the second ‘problem’, to bring universities under the state’s Aim and Frame steering, was summarised in the Memorandum as greater freedom from central control combined with stronger management. The first was compatible with the industrialists’ solution to Problem 1. They argued for setting universities free from direct Ministerial intervention, so that they would be open to demands from what the Memorandum called ‘many different parties’ in the economy and society. The new status of ‘self-owning’ was translated as ‘autonomy’ in the English version of the law, but positioned the university in society quite differently from the autonomy (in the sense of self-management, *selvstyre*) that academics saw as essential for their institution’s independence from economic and political interests and their contribution to the democratisation of society. But *selvstyre* now disappeared from the discourse. The law gave the universities the legal status of ‘persons’ that can enter into contracts and a legislative requirement to engage in knowledge exchange with surrounding society. But the law also made it compulsory for universities to enter into ‘development contracts’ with the Ministry, which were intended as a tool to tighten government steering: would these skew the focus of the universities, or would universities be able to moderate the ministry’s influence by contracting for a diverse range of other activities with other elements of ‘surrounding society’? The next chapter traces how the university’s new ‘self-owning’ status developed in practice.

The first and second ‘problems’ both called for a change to the internal management of universities, but they posed a third problem, as explained above, as they

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<sup>15</sup>Danisco, Arla, Novo Nordisk, Grundfos, Topsøe, Novozymes, Mærsk (Rasmussen 2004: 9).

envisaged quite different types of organisation and leadership. The Memorandum refers to the industrialists' call for universities to join networks of knowledge organisations and to be able to respond flexibly and quickly to changes in the economic environment. As recorded above, the industrialists' idea of flexible, networked universities had already lost out against the requirements of the state's Aim and Frame steering for units with identifiable boundaries and a hierarchy of strong leaders who could get their employees to prioritise the delivery of contracted services. The Research Commission had offered a compromise position with appointed top leadership and local arrangements for organising the complex of teaching's line management and more open, networked and anarchistic research. The government rejected this compromise by instituting appointed leaders at all levels and removing the elected senate, faculty boards and departmental boards. Only a minority of places on the governing board, an academic board for quality control and study boards were elected. Institute leaders are empowered to allocate tasks to academics, without limits or guarantees that they would have time to exercise their research freedom.<sup>16</sup> The law attenuates and hardly mentions representative democracy, and participatory democracy has become unsayable. Managers are given all executive powers, and, apart from in the study boards, 'employees' no longer have the forums in which to deploy their specialised knowledge of research and education for the development of new activities and strategies. The Minister's Report (*Betækninger*) on his responses to the parliamentary debate of the law indicated that he *did* wish leaders to involve employees in important decisions (Parliament 2003c). Although this Report is formally part of the law, the 2009 international review of the law found leaders were not complying to a satisfactory level (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009: 12). The law was revised in 2011 in order to improve leaders' consultation with employees at all levels and even delegate some powers to elected committees, but the annual workplace environment surveys and the Ministry's subsequent research shows that very few leaders have found ways to combine their executive powers and line management with 'co-decision making' or even 'involvement' of employees (Agency for Higher Education 2014). The result, far from an open and networked knowledge organisation, was much more akin to the sausage factory that both industrialists and academics had resisted.

## 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has traced processes of contestation over three related narratives about Danish universities, each constructing a 'problem' and a presumed solution. The first 'problem' started with a narrative in the mid-1990s that the 'problems' with the Danish economy were, first, that large numbers of SMEs pursued incremental and

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<sup>16</sup>This maybe reflects an argument from Dansk Industri that 'the law needs to give leaders explicit competences to enter into agreements with employees about the tasks they will do for the institute or faculty in a set period of time' (Dansk Industri 2000: 19).

low risk innovation and did not employ the problem-solving powers of graduates, and, second, that private-sector investment in research and development was very low. At the start, it was agreed that a small number of large and research-intensive firms in the Danish industrial sector had good links with relevant university departments and benefitted greatly from their publicly-funded research. But by the late 1990s this narrative had flip-flopped. The problem was now that universities needed to focus their resources on producing the kinds of knowledge and graduates needed by large knowledge industries and they should take responsibility for driving Denmark's competitiveness in the global knowledge economy. Only then would politicians have sufficient trust in universities to increase their public funding to produce these raw materials for industry, thereby filling the gap caused by private companies underinvesting in research and development.

The second problem concerned bringing universities into the state's 'Aim and Frame' steering system. In making universities into 'self-owning institutions', a tension emerged in the narrative: would they be 'free' to decide how to respond to the diverse demands of all stakeholders in society (and importantly industry) or would their contract to fulfil politicians' ambitions for the sector skew their attention? The third problem was that industry's and government's problems both required changes to the organisation and leadership of universities – but in contrary ways. Could they be both a hierarchy of tightly bounded units controlled by upwardly accountable strategic leaders, and a flat structure, flexibly networked with industry and other stakeholders in 'surrounding society'? These tensions are seen in the struggle over the power to define keywords – self-ownership, democracy, effectiveness, freedom, leadership, self-management, autonomy, accountability, trust, steering, openness, surrounding society – and their formation in a new semantic cluster.

The analysis has shown how particular members of the issue community managed to make their versions of one of more of these narratives and keywords dominant. It has also identified which versions were made invisible or unsayable, or became altogether absent. Finally a political alliance was made between members of the issue network who normally had opposed positions, but who were able to bring together the three problems into a sufficiently shared discourse about the re-purposing of the university and how it should be organised and managed. This discourse was inscribed in the text of the 2003 University Law as a definitive, if only momentary, conclusion to the issue network's debates.

This moment was achieved after the general election of November 2001, when the Social Democrat/Radical Liberal coalition lost power and a new Liberal-Conservative coalition government formed. For the first time for many years, the Radical Liberals did not hold the balance of power and were not in the governing coalition. Whereas the previous Minister of Education had opposed attempts to change the university law, that party was now unable to hold the centre ground.

The Coalition's support party, the Danish Folk Party, was vehemently opposed to industry wielding power over the university. The coalition therefore relied on the Social Democrats, the party they had just defeated, to sustain the pre-election political alliance over university reform and publish a political agreement for a new university law (Government of Denmark 2002). In this way, the political alliance and

the argumentation about the three problems with universities that needed to be solved by the new law survived the election intact. Indeed the political alliance was so strong that although the ministry invited rectors to make their own suggestions for law reforms and went through the usual consultation processes, the government rejected the compromise position offered by the Research Commission and the law was passed without the agreement of academics, and even with strong objections from some rectors (Ørum 2002).

The next chapter follows subsequent developments to show how after the passage of the law, these key terms immediately became contestable again. As Fairclough et al. (2004) argue, whereas a discourse *construes* the world in certain ways, when it materialised in steering technologies, the way people *construct* the world is contingent. The next chapter traces out how the keywords of this discourse became instituted in steering technologies and used in practice.

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<sup>17</sup>Note: The list contains the documents that have been assembled and used in the analysis for this chapter. The documents were produced by government, political parties, lobby organisations, professional associations, unions, and academics during debates over reforms to universities and the public sector. The corpus includes newspaper articles written by politicians and academics active in the issue network, but we have not made a completely comprehensive search of all articles concerning universities in the national newspapers.

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# Chapter 5

## Steering Change – Negotiations of Autonomy and Accountability in the Self-Owning University



Jakob Williams Ørberg  and Susan Wright 

### 5.1 Introduction – The New University?

When the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Helge Sander of the Danish Liberal Party, announced the reform of Danish universities that became the University Law of 2003, it was as if he was presenting a completely new institution to society. He called it the most significant thing to happen to Danish universities since the establishment of the University of Copenhagen in 1479 (Copenhagen University 2002a: 15). Academic critics of the reform were soon to latch on to this rhetoric and, as depicted in Chap. 1, published on the cover of the union’s journal, *FORSKERforum*, a death notice for the ‘Free university’ dating its birth to 1472 and its demise to 2003 (Øllgaard 2003: 1). The minister successfully portrayed a clean break with tradition, but its meaning was contested immediately.

In contrast, when the law passed through parliament the majority of politicians supporting it argued that the law aligned with university tradition. For example, an argument over whether the law altered research freedom was settled by the Minister stating that the meaning and effect of the clause on research freedom was unchanged, and that the law would be revised if this was proven to be incorrect (Ørberg 2006a: 12–15). The law did indeed contain many significant similarities to earlier legislation. Rather than setting out an entirely new purpose for the university, the law added to the existing ones. Now in addition to teaching and research, the university had a third function, to disseminate research and make it valuable to society (Danish Parliament 2002: Clause 2 point 3). The law made a major change from elected to hired university leaders, but there was continuity in the names and levels of units – departments, faculties, and the rectorate were still lead by heads of departments, deans and rectors. Rather than changing the elements of university organisation the

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change was in how they articulated with each other. Change was happening, but not much was new.

If the previous chapter concerned the policy debates about the need to reform the universities, this chapter focuses on the governance system and steering instruments through which the government and the parliamentary majority supporting the law intended to fulfil that need. It is a story of how the reform of Danish universities re-worked elements of the existing university system and combined them with others derived from wider reforms of the public sector to create a new university steering system. In doing this, government sought to solve the ‘university problem’ it had defined and to inscribe universities in the New Public Management reform of the Danish state that was meant to reposition public institutions to compete in the global knowledge economy (Danish Parliament 2002; Pedersen 2011; Wright and Ørberg 2017). The 2003 University Law made universities independent of the formal grip of government yet responsive to government’s policy aims. They were ‘set free’ as ‘self-owning’ universities to act within the control of a government framework, but this meant both the universities and the government framework began a process of transformation. This chapter explores how the tension between state steering and the universities’ self-determining and strategizing capacity was negotiated in a succession of further reforms and interventions by ministers and ministry officials, and through the work of the university leaders who were appointed following the 2003 University Law.

## 5.2 Assembling and Articulating Universities

Saskia Sassen’s (2006) analysis of changes in national institutions, policies and practices in the light of ‘globalisation’ shows how new orders and organising logics are often not novelties at all. They do not ‘fall from the sky’. Instead, she argues, national capabilities that were developed in the organising logic of the nation state are re-gearred to function in that of globalization. We suggest that the reform of universities in response to the purported arrival of Denmark in the global knowledge economy is, similarly, a re-gearing of the universities and their capabilities rather than their complete undoing. The universities’ capabilities include their ability to conduct independent research, their provision of teaching courses, their interaction with society, and their ability to govern themselves. Each of these is multivalent in the sense that its meaning is dependent on the ‘relational system’ within which it functions (ibid.). We follow Sassen in suggesting that the 2003 university reform sought to reorganize different capabilities developed through ‘time, making, competition, and conflict’ (ibid.: 7–8). In this way we avoid being confined in an ‘old’ versus ‘new’ dichotomy. What we bring to the fore instead is the ‘in-between dynamic’ (ibid.) of negotiation and contestation that forms part of a process of transformation. From this perspective, presentations of the university as either radically new or dead at the time of the 2003 University Law are negotiating ploys that attempt to articulate a reinvention of the university.

We use the concept ‘steering assemblage’ to describe the array of laws, steering technologies, practices, persons, financial incentives and other elements that are available for steering and developing Danish universities. The concept works in opposition to the idea of a ‘steering system’ as that would suggest an instrumental organisation of these elements around one coherent logic. The use of ‘assemblage’ has four advantages for our argument. First, it allows us to be sensitive to the ‘heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, and situated’ (Collier and Ong 2004: 12, also Ong 2008) mix of technologies, politics, and actors involved in steering Danish universities. Second, by employing ‘steering assemblage’ we emphasise that these elements (be they discursive or technological) are similar to ‘keywords’ (see Chap. 2 and Shore and Wright 1997: 18–19) in that they each carry with them multiple historically acquired meanings and valences and undergo shifts in use and meaning as they come together in new formations. Third, through the use of steering assemblage we emphasise the positionality of actors engaged in the space of university reform and the lack of necessary alignment between these actors’ visions and the ‘view of everything from nowhere’ (cf. Haraway 1988) that is often present in policy documents and laws. Fourth, the use of ‘steering assemblage’ allows for variations in the relations between the elements of university steering as they are articulated and put to use in different contexts.

If ‘assemblage’ refers to the array of elements available for steering universities, we use the term ‘articulation’, as developed by cultural studies, to capture the act of recombining these elements with new formulations of their purpose, internal governance and external relations to reposition universities in the society and economy. Articulation has a double meaning: to clearly state an idea; and to join separate parts. As in an articulated lorry: it is not a natural necessity to connect *this* cab with *that* trailer, and the linkage can be broken again. Articulation thus describes how linkages between disparate elements form a contingent unity at particular moments in particular ways with no necessary ‘belongingness’ to each other (Hall quoted in Grossberg 1996: 141). But when a unity of disparate elements can be articulated in the sense of stating a new conception of the university and its context or world, this makes intelligible to the people involved how they are emerging as a new social force.

The concept of ‘articulation’ works in concert with ‘steering assemblage’ in that it highlights interventions that aim to unify, develop and give direction to the disparate elements of the university steering assemblage. The 2003 University Law articulated the universities as subjects that on the one hand could be governed to deliver on political aims through contractual agreements and funding incentives, and on the other hand would develop their own strategizing capacity so as to better service the interests of business and society. ‘Articulation’ pushes us to explore the way specific combinations of steering instruments and organizational elements are combined to underpin institutional capabilities in new contexts and steering logics. Whereas earlier criticisms of neoliberalism or New Public Management have focused on the alignment of steering technologies and rationalities in education reform (cf. Rose et al. 2006; Pollitt et al. 2001), we want to focus on the contingency of the 2003 law’s articulation of the discursive, legal and bureaucratic elements in the steering assemblage to create a new university identity.

By using the concept of ‘assemblage’ in parallel with ‘articulation’ we highlight both the constraints and possibilities for actors involved in the reformulation of Danish universities, and acknowledge the temporality and partiality of attempts in the 2003 University Law and subsequent initiatives to recreate Danish universities and their steering. Drawing on Strathern’s (1991:114) term ‘partial manifestation’ we seek to point out how, when people *articulate* ‘the university’ in law, in discourse or action, it is but a partial (in both senses of incomplete and not disinterested) manifestation of the university-whole, which they presume to exist. This means that the reform of universities as an object of study can only be seen as the creative encounter of a series of these kinds of partial holisms or positioned works of articulation initiated from different positions in the university steering assemblage. The 2003 University Law aimed to reorganize universities in response to a shifting context, but this particular articulation in law was but one moment in a continual contestation over a transforming institution. Rather than a disruption of Danish universities or spelling the final death of universities in Denmark, the reform was a recreation of universities and their relationship to government through the articulation of steering instruments, discursive figures and actors that each had their own history. As we will see below, a tension developed between the strategizing self-invention of the universities and the seemingly tight steering by the state in the decade after the 2003 University Law (see also Ørberg and Wright 2009).

### 5.3 Self-Owning Universities

As explained in Chap. 4, the 2003 University law changed the status of universities from *selvstyre* (autonomous in the sense of self-managing) to *selvejende* (autonomous in the sense of self-owning). The law presented self-ownership as a tool with a dual aim of enhancing accountability to government and increasing universities’ direct engagement with society. We argue that this constituted a central tension in the steering of universities as the steering assemblage that the reform came to signify was further developed. One interviewee in our project from the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation told us that during the OECD review of the Danish university sector in 2003–2004 (OECD 2005), an OECD expert had remarked that the 2003 University Law and its creation of a strong top management set up a new ‘power force’ at the universities to *challenge* the government. According to the ministry official, this was not thought about during the passing of the law. Instead, their focus had been on the trustworthiness of the new strategic management as a partner in the implementation of the government’s research and higher education policy. How this trustworthiness might develop into a capacity that would challenge government was not a central part of their thinking. However, it had been envisaged by the former education minister, Bertel Haarder, who had long wanted universities to be self-owning. He saw the development of self-ownership as involving a gradual shift towards a situation where universities would increasingly take charge of defining a visionary research policy for Denmark. Meanwhile, as he saw

it, when we interviewed him in 2007, the government's confidence in universities was still not great enough for that.

Throughout the 1990s, policy documents had conveyed the idea that the new way of managing universities was not just to steer them, but to articulate them as subjects responsive to a greater diversity of interests in society. With the idea that universities would be more responsive to private sector needs, the new trustworthy institutions were looked upon as the agencies to 'save Denmark' in a new international context of fierce competition (Ministry of Education 1994). Self-ownership is a key word in the sense that it has a long history of accumulated meanings. It was the word around which the 2003 University Law presented the universities as something that could become responsive to society's diverse interests and help realize Denmark's potential in the global competition. But as the university was continuously rearticulated in subsequent events and law amendments, the meaning of self-ownership came to draw on other parts of its heritage and be connected to other elements in the steering assemblage.

The meaning of self-ownership was already contested when the law reform was introduced. The concept itself and the various elements of the steering assemblage it was to organize had different valences and histories that were only temporarily fixed in the articulation of universities in the 2003 University Law. However, the formation of the self-owning university came to entail an intensive relationship between government and ministry on the one side and university leaders on the other. Aligned with parallel developments in modernising the rest of the public sector, the universities were being tied closer to government policy (Ministry of Finance 1996). The reform set up a new and strong university leadership both to respond better to government steering, and to act as the vanguard of a university policy centred on opening up the university and engaging with society. What we ask is whether the intense university-government relationship that developed in the wake of the 2003 University Law was successful in achieving both aims. In the following, we focus on moments when the steering assemblage shifted in its formation and the actors who participated in influencing these moves. We call these actors activists in the sense that they occupied institutional positions from which they could advocate and carry out specific projects for the re-articulation of universities and transformation of the steering assemblage. The activists in government, parliament, the ministries, and in the universities all took part in negotiating the intense university-state relationship; they all sought to implement their aspirations for the university and set in motion a dynamic transformation of the university sector, its institutions, and how they were governed. At the same time, we found that they focused on the development of the government-university relationship and bracketed out other relations within the university and with surrounding society. An important question arising from this analysis is how this new emphasis on the relationship between government and university leaders changed the universities and their activities as seen from other positions such as academics and students. This question is a major concern of the subsequent chapters, which explore the changing leadership, and academic and student activities at the universities under reform.



In the following we first trace the development of the self-ownership model that articulated universities as independent institutions with a strong central leadership and that were the object of government's steering at a distance (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Neave and van Vught 1991). Next we describe how this model was put in place in the universities and how the former elements of their governance and state steering were reorganized to transform the university's steering assemblage.

There were three moments when new articulations of the concept of self-ownership became especially clear: the consolidation of the sector in mergers, the implementation of a new budgeting and accounting system, and the further expansion of both the development contract system and the supervision (*tilsyn*) routines following from the legal shift to self-ownership. We explore these in turn and argue that the steering assemblage for universities is more than a collection of instruments for the implementation of reform; it creates a space – populated with activists in both the ministry and the universities – where reform can take place. Finally, we use interviews with reform activists at universities and in government and the ministry to explore how the steering assemblage was being developed in the continued effort to transform the Danish university sector.

#### 5.4 Self-Owning Universities and Modernization of the Danish State

The concept of self-ownership can be traced through three different phases of policy making that led to its introduction at universities. First ideologies about decentralization and consumer choice in the 1980s drew on the concept's background in Danish history. Second, the concept became a tool for government's intensifying influence over education institutions during the 1990s. Third we show how its use as the central steering concept in the 2003 University Law facilitated both increasing political interest in university activities and the change of universities into strategically acting organizations ruled by new strong activist leaders.

The explanatory memorandum accompanying the 2003 University Law states that most of the law's provisions spring from the concept of self-ownership (Danish Parliament 2002). The memorandum calls self-ownership an age-old concept, which had been in use in Denmark for at least 100 years. The concept carries positive connotations of the Danish peasants' taking over ownership of their farms and breaking free of serfdom through the land reform of 1788 (*FORSKERforum* 2002: 16).<sup>1</sup> From the end of the nineteenth century the concept was used to organize grass-roots schools connected to the Danish peasant movement that formed around the theologian and enlightenment philosopher N.F.S Grundtvig. Education Minister

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<sup>1</sup>The abolition of serfdom is itself a contested event in Danish history. Of particular relevance to our discussion, it is unclear to what extent the reform was directed by the king and some of the nobility, and to what extent it was a bottom-up peasant movement to break free.

Bertel Haarder, who was instrumental in using the concept as a tool for reform in the 1980s and early 1990s, heavily referenced this Grundtvigian movement in his description of the concept and emphasized self-governance and student's freedom of choice as central to it.<sup>2</sup> During his first tenure as Minister of Education, self-ownership became a model for steering education-sector institutions in alignment with the government's modernization program (Ministry of Finance 1996; Ørberg 2006b). Haarder was himself a strong voice within this program. He aimed to make the Ministry of Education a reform frontrunner, and he took part in formulating a Danish version of the 'neo-liberalist' movement (Haarder et al. 1982). The model gave educational institutions a high degree of decentralized accountability and mirroring this, the ministry was to turn itself into a strategic organization working to improve the framework and incentives within which local institutions made their own decisions (Ministry of Education 1990).

### ***5.4.1 Output Funding and Budgetary Freedom***

Self-ownership as an institutional characteristic was initially introduced in combination with reforms to make the funding of education institutions output-based. It became the Ministry of Education's version of what the Ministry of Finance called 'free agencies'. These were conceptualized as part of the Danish modernization program in the 1980s and early 1990s (Ministry of Finance 1996; see also Chap. 4). Bertel Haarder envisaged self-ownership together with a real-time relationship between funding for teaching and the production of graduates. Called the taximeter system, this funding arrangement made one standard payment to universities for each full-time equivalent student who passed a year's exams (Ministry of Education 1988). First introduced in further education centres in 1990 (Ministry of Education 1998a), it created a direct link between 'output' and payment which meant that the yearly budgets of education institutions were adjusted retroactively according to student performance. At the same time self-owning institutions were given more freedom over how to use their budget, as long as they kept within the overall purpose of their institutions. The taximeter funding was thus meant to give leaders an 'objective' mechanism within which to estimate their institution's budget and plan its activities. Furthermore, by fixing the taximeter price through political decisions rather than directly based on past costs the system was meant to put a ceiling on the upwards creeping costs of education and incentivize leaders to economize within their budgets (Ministry of Education 1998a, 2001).

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<sup>2</sup>Establishing and running these self-owning schools and associated co-operative dairies and slaughter houses not only politicised and empowered the peasantry, but made agriculture into a highly profitable basis for the Danish economy. There are echoes of this in the government's looking to self-owning universities to provide a basis for Denmark's success in the global knowledge economy.

According to our interview with Bertel Haarder, the introduction of self-ownership and taximeter funding was primarily driven by a desire to increase local decision making and accountability, but the fine tuning of financial incentives to optimize institutions' performance became a central concern both in the further implementation of the taximeter model and in the wider program to modernize the public sector.

The taximeter system for funding teaching was introduced into universities in 1994 with the payment being calculated on the basis of the number of credits from exams passed. Haarder had already proposed to make universities into self-owning organizations in 1991 (Haarder 1991), but could only get a less radical law change through parliament (Authors' interview with Bertel Haarder in 2007; Danish Parliament 1992). The diluted version that was passed by parliament in 1992 appointed a minority of three external members to the university senate, gave the rector the power to approve and dismiss leaders at faculty level, introduced the taximeter funding mechanism for teaching and gave budgetary freedom to the universities within their general purposes (see also Chap. 4).<sup>3</sup>

### *5.4.2 Universities as Organizations*

At the time, the 1992 law was heralded as the ultimate reform of universities, but the search for a strengthened university leadership and increased coordination between the state and the university management continued. At the change of government in 1993, a new Ministry of Research was set up, and, significantly, the Social Democrat minister for research, Jan Trøjberg (1998–1999) shared the aim of steering universities to realize their own potential to make strategic contributions to society and the economy. Instead of trying to change the law to make universities self-owning institutions, he worked through a gradual approach (Ørberg and Wright 2009).

In 1998 Trøjberg proposed that universities should enter into contracts with the state in order to call forth the strategic leadership desired (Ministry of Research 1998). The intended reward, it was said, would be increased independence from the state through experiments with new organizational formats – i.e. an incremental form of self-ownership.

In a significant university law amendment in 1999 (Danish Parliament 1999) the minister invited each university to enter into a 'development contract' with the ministry through which they would coordinate their own activities around a particular theme (e.g. internationalization) with clear aims for its future development (Ministry of Research 1999). This would provide the ministry with an instrument to begin to orchestrate government influence over an independently governed

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<sup>3</sup>Already in 1980 the funding had been tied to teaching performance, but from 1994 a real-time relationship between the passing of exams and the education funding was established and thereby a tighter link between performance and liquidity.

institution.<sup>4</sup> The ‘offer’ of development contracts was meant to give the university’s central leadership a flexible steering mechanism that they could use to organize their institution to deliver on the diverse demands of society. No funding was to be attached to the contracts.

A report, ‘*Udviklingskontrakter. Stærkere selvstyre, stærkere universiteter*’ [*Development contracts, Strengthened self-governance, Stronger universities*] (Ministry of Research 1999), explained that the development contracts were a means for universities to clarify and enhance their internal organization both for their own benefit and as a means of communicating their identity and activities to the surrounding world. It was expected that development contracts would increase the ambitions of universities and that universities, if given the freedom to do so, would ‘consolidate, progress and innovate’ (ibid.). Development contracts were presented as a technology the universities could use on their own volition to form a more active part of the national knowledge system and become outwardly oriented partners for other knowledge-producing sectors such as research institutes and innovative private companies. Development contracts were in this way a pedagogical tool to show the university leadership how to turn their institution into a centrally managed organization and enact the capacity for strategic leadership offered by the 1993 reform, as an alternative to the implementation of the self-ownership model.

### 5.4.3 *Self-Ownership without Assets*

Through the 1990s, the self-ownership model had been introduced into more and more parts of the education sector, but there had not yet been a parliamentary majority willing to abolish the universities’ internal governance by forcing the model onto them. As its use spread, the meaning and use of self-ownership as a reform tool was continuously refined (cf. Ørberg 2006b; Wright and Ørberg 2008). A report from the Ministry of Education in 1997 sought to define self-owning institutions as publicly funded, but with the status of legal persons that were responsible for all their assets including buildings (Ministry of Education 1997). A self-owning institution had to have a clear purpose set out in its statutes and its ultimate decision-making body had to be an independent governing board with a majority of members from outside the organization. Self-owning institutions were paid a subsidy from the state to support their activities. The state retained the responsibility to audit the organizations and the power to inspect their activities (*tilsyn*) and ensure they were in keeping with the law. Audit and supervision were central elements in the tension between external control and the institutions’ self-determining strategizing capacity. Apart from financing and law making, they were the only instruments through which government could intervene directly in the self-owning institutions.

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<sup>4</sup>It is telling of the different ways of managing universities as institutions and as education providers that parallel contracts with the Ministry of Education took the form of result contracts with quantitative targets.

After the 1999 university law, most elements of the later 2003 University Law's self-ownership steering assemblage were at work in the university-state relationship, but they did not yet articulate with the self-ownership model. Between 1998 and 2000, the Ministry of Education reorganized the Professional Education Colleges (MVUs) as self-owning, with their own assets, including the buildings in which they operated. This reform included the establishment of a new Danish University of Education, which was set up as the first self-owning university in 2000 under the Ministry of Education.

The other universities came under the Ministry of Research (Danish Parliament 2000a). A cross-ministerial reform of the state's management of its buildings finally sparked the development that set in motion the transformation of the rest of the university sector into self-owning institutions. In 2000, the Minister of Finance, Mogens Lykketoft of the Social Democrats, presented a reform of the management of public property, including that of universities (Ministry of Finance 2000). The reform aimed at rationalizing the state's use of space in buildings. By making institutions into tenants of the state, they would have an incentive to utilize their rented spaces more efficiently, creating surplus property for the state to sell off.

All university buildings would be owned by a state agency and rented back to the universities at a market rate. The universities would be compensated according to their production of students, the so-called taximeter count, thereby pushing them to optimize both use of space and student throughput. For some universities this scheme promised financial trouble since they occupied prime real estate in the big cities or had an above average use of space per student. Denmark's Technical University (DTU) had large research and experimentation facilities and relatively few students, so the funding DTU would receive from the ministry to pay for their buildings was seriously inadequate in relation to the cost of the rent. Negotiations between the university and the ministry concluded with the university asking the ministry to be established as the country's second self-owning university (Danish Parliament 2000b).

As a self-owning institution, DTU bought its buildings from the state by borrowing state money against them. In addition, DTU expected to raise a private sector mortgage on its buildings to pay for their modernization and mark the birth of a new, bold DTU. DTU was to establish a governing board, with a majority of external members, which had responsibility to manage these assets. The governing board would then hire the rector (rather than the academics, support staff and students' electing the rector as previously).

The arrangements immediately hit new financial problems in that the state's valuation of DTU's buildings was highly exaggerated compared to valuations used by mortgage companies and DTU could not raise the desired loans on the private market. The relative independence from government finances sought by DTU proved imaginary at least in the short run, and the DTU experience sent shock waves through the sector (Øllgaard 2002a; Wright and Ørberg 2008). Both the state and other universities were reluctant to experiment further with the transfer of buildings related to universities' self-ownership on this basis.

In 2001 a new conservative-liberal government took office with a reform program that included the expansion of the self-ownership model to the rest of the university sector. But when in 2002, the new Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Helge Sander, wanted to reform all the Danish universities, the trouble at DTU was widely known and raised questions about the viability of university ownership of buildings. The Minister responded to the situation by proposing the concept of ‘institutional self-ownership’ or ‘self-ownership without buildings’. Universities could continue to own whatever assets were already indisputably theirs but the ownership of the state buildings they occupied would not be transferred to them.

The resulting introduction of self-ownership meant the setting up of governing boards independent of politicians and with a majority of members from outside the organization. The old governance structure with elected leaders and committees on each level of management from department to university was abolished. Now the governing board appointed a rector, who appointed deans, who appointed heads of department. This reversed the line of accountability of the former governance structure and created a management capable of acting on behalf of the institution without being tied to the interests of academics, support staff and students. However, because universities did not gain ownership of large assets that could be used as collateral for loans or realized through sale, their financial room for manoeuvre was still very limited and politicians could tightly bind university liquidity to government priorities.

## 5.5 Self-Ownership at Universities

The self-ownership of universities aligned universities with the Danish modernization program by transforming universities into organizations with a leadership and administration acting strategically in relation to government steering. However, in the following we emphasize the flexible nature of the emerging steering assemblage, as well as the particularity of the self-ownership model applied to universities.

We focus on three specific reforms that show the working out of the tension between ministerial control and the universities’ enhanced capacity for strategic leadership. First, we analyse how the public research sector and the universities were amalgamated in a series of decisions agreed between the universities’ leadership and the ministry, which was made possible by the capacities for decision making set out for the university leadership in the 2003 University Law. Second, we discuss the increased use of output funding and targeted funds and how they were deployed to strengthen the direct role of government and university managements in shaping university profiles and research agendas. Third, we explore how development contracts and the new inspection regime kept universities more tightly accountable to and in a close dialogue with government over their strategic plans.

### 5.5.1 *The University Steering Assemblage*

In a report from 2003 the Auditor General warned that universities may have exaggerated expectations over the degrees of freedom springing from self-ownership (Auditor General 2003: 9–10). The former rector of University of Copenhagen, Linda Nielsen, was not so sanguine; she warned that the concept undermined the self-governance of universities and heralded a plethora of new ways to be audited and held accountable (Copenhagen University 2002b; Øllgaard 2002b). The Auditor General and parliament's Public Accounts Committee attempted to establish a definition of the term, but concluded that the concept was unclear in its effects and had to be evaluated in each instance of its application (Public Accounts Committee 2002: 9–11). In the case of universities, the Public Accounts Committee argued, the concept did not bring in any radical break in government steering (*ibid.*) since several of the elements normally included in self-ownership were already in place. From the point of view of the Public Accounts Committee, the application of self-ownership to universities was yet one more iteration of the self-ownership model, which the ministry had been 'testing' in the DTU law (*ibid.*: 5).

However, what we argue here is that the 2003 University Law rearticulated existing elements of the steering assemblage to transform both the meaning of self-ownership and the university. Self-ownership and the governing board's control and the unified management it entailed were set to work in concert with other old and new elements of the steering assemblage that were modified as they were articulated together. These included notably the taximeter funding of teaching and buildings, the invigoration of audit, the state's shift to accrual budgeting and a new version of the development contract. All these instruments could be used to tie universities closer to government policies in two ways. First, in alignment with the overall modernization programme for the public sector, central government first devised strategic aims for a sector and then outsourced those aims to individual institutions with a contract and funding mechanisms to try and ensure compliance and a leadership that could be held accountable for their delivery. The overall function of the system was to reduce the distance between the political aims and the actions of the university service providers. In the 2003 University Law this model was articulated with an expanded university purpose to be a generative resource for innovations and developments in society.

The second aim of university reform, to release universities' creative capacities and enable them to act in ways beyond the imagination of government was not successfully articulated within the steering assemblage at this time. However, this central tension between the universities' capability to act strategically and the necessity of their becoming governable subjects was played out further as the self-ownership model was developed in the following years. As will be shown below, subsequent developments displayed a clear tension between government's wish to be able to define the strategic situation of universities and their governing boards' and leaders' ability to develop the capability to negotiate over or go beyond those visions.

### 5.5.2 *Space for Reform – Consolidation*

As soon as the government had seen the 2003 University Law through parliament, and whilst the new governing boards were being appointed and finding their feet, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation initiated a further raft of reforms. As mentioned in Chap. 2, one interviewee in a senior position in the Ministry informed us that they initiated an OECD review of Danish universities just as the 2003 University Law was being passed with the purpose of keeping up the momentum for reform. In the four years that followed, the Ministry initiated a process of merging universities, there were accounting reforms, and there was a tightening of the frameworks for development contracts and for the inspection regime (*tilsyn*). Each of these moves seemed to be strengthening government's control of universities, but alongside them universities continued to experiment with staging themselves in new ways and making themselves relevant to new sets of actors and contexts. These experiments provided them with levers to influence the government's steering. Likewise universities came to be increasingly powerful and important actors, as seen from the government's point of view, and notably as expressed in the central role of universities in the Government's globalization strategy from 2006 (Government of Denmark 2006). The merger story below shows how government could not steer universities directly, but had to constantly negotiate its policies against university leaders' own strategizing. The question these examples raise is how the tension between government steering and universities' capacity for creativity was being played out through these projects and what kind of (or lack of) balance emerged from them.

The push to consolidate universities and government research institutes into one sector had been present in two strands of debate over higher education since the late 1990s when universities as institutions still came under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 1998b). In the early 2000s, these debates about redefining the sector intensified. In one strand, a number of reports argued for restructuring the whole of the Danish higher education sector, including both universities and university colleges that offer four year programs in various fields of vocational training including engineering, shorter business programs, primary school teaching and nursing. A second strand, as reflected in the 2004 OECD review, recommended that university governing boards and government should consider the scope of incorporating single faculty universities into multi-faculty ones, and that government should work to transfer government research institutions to universities to strengthen research capacity and to ensure the contribution of public research to teaching (OECD 2005, see also The Danish Research Commission 2001).

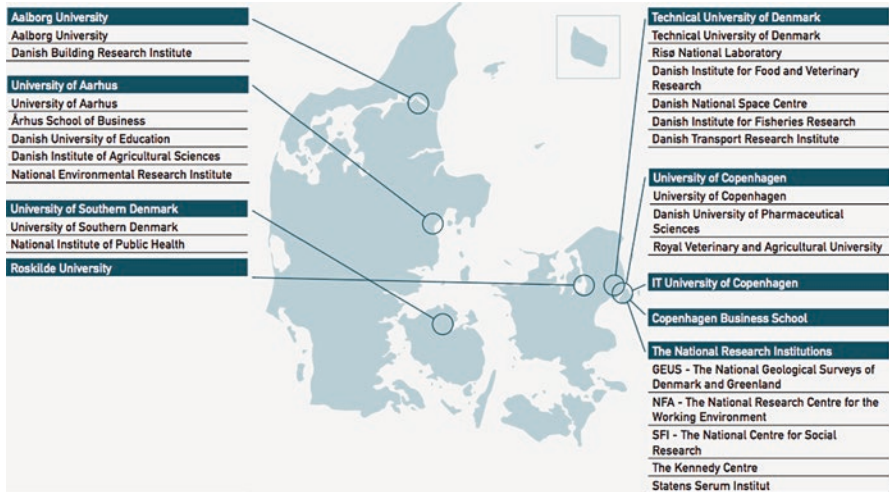
In the second term of the Liberal-Conservative government, which began in early 2005, it became the government's declared policy to consolidate Danish universities through 'university consortiums' (Government of Denmark 2005). This signalled government's intention to create mergers, but the ministry could not instruct the self-owning universities to merge. The government had to find a new way of operating with the self-owning universities it had created, since they were legal persons



and could only be subject to laws agreed in parliament. The minister was reluctant to try and negotiate a political agreement in parliament for university mergers. Instead he sent a letter to the chairs of the university governing boards asking for universities' own ideas for mergers. It immediately prompted intense lobbying, and each university sent in their list of preferred mergers by the ministry's deadline. The minister then announced which mergers met his approval. Less than a year after the letter from the ministry set the process in motion, the mergers came into effect. This was the first example of a new kind of 'voluntary' politics in the university sector, which combined bottom up input with top down initiatives and expectations, and which underlined the capability of government and ministry to negotiate wider transformations of the university sector with an activist leadership at universities empowered by the 2003 University Law.

The process raised massive confusion about where the decisions were made and who was in control of the process. Whereas the government research institutes were in principle subject to whatever orders and reforms came from the government, universities – and specifically their governing boards and top management – had significant room for manoeuvre in the process due to their status as self-owning. If universities had resisted mergers, government would have had to go through the uncomfortable process of getting the mergers through parliament, thereby opening up the process to national politicians and their complex constituencies. Instead, there was intense lobbying and negotiation on the side of the universities together with a new and very apparent leadership role for the rectors and governing board chairmen (Ørberg 2007). The merger episode created an increasing awareness in universities that university leaders were no longer simply representatives of the academic community who occasionally had to deliver on unpopular government policy aims; now they were themselves powerful actors in shaping their institutions' futures and did not naturally act in alignment with the wishes of their academic staff.

The resulting university landscape was a reduction of the 12 Danish universities to three large universities, four medium sized ones, and one small (Fig. 5.1). All but two universities were involved in mergers. Of the 13 government research institutes only four remained independent (Danish University and Property Agency 2009; see Fig. 5.1). Mergers significantly enlarged the three largest Danish universities and gave them new and greater powers over the shaping of Danish research policies. However, a law amendment following close after the mergers in 2007 redefined once again the relationship between the increasingly powerful university leaders and the government. It stated that development contracts should cover the universities' activities in total (Danish Parliament 2007). While creating larger universities and stronger university leaders, the merger process also resulted in a clearer articulation of the strategic relationship between government and universities' top leaders.



**Fig. 5.1** The Danish university sector after the mergers. The figure lists the eight universities and the institutions with which they have merged. (Source: Ministry of Science, Technology and Development 2009)

### 5.5.3 Funding Incentives and Accounting Technologies

The process of converting universities into self-owning institutions (with the modification, ‘without buildings’) happened in parallel with other reforms instigated by the Ministry of Finance’s ‘Aim and Frame’ modernization of the public sector. One of these was the introduction of accrual budgeting and accounting across the Danish state between 2005 and 2007. This way of budgeting, normal in private businesses, fits into an overall conversion of public service providers into company-like organizations detached from the state’s central policy making functions. Accordingly, the report framing the reform referred to the ministry as the ‘corporate level’ (Ministry of Finance 2003: 165). The aim of budgeting is in this way directly translated into measures for the delivery of desired outputs from the sector. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation tried to postpone the accrual budgeting reform in order not to overburden the university sector with new initiatives, but in the event it was carried through in parallel with the shift to self-ownership, and it provided both the university leadership and the government with new tools for negotiating the university steering assemblage.

In the report presenting the background to accrual accounting and budgeting in the Danish state, the Ministry of Finance introduced this way of financing as a means to push self-governing state institutions to behave with economic efficiency. As the report stated, a way to avoid over-spending is to keep the level of liquid funds

in institutions low (*ibid.*: 148–151; see also Wright 2012). The report suggested that institutions should be financed strictly in accordance with their delivery of outputs or services. In addition, the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation kept the universities' liquid capital low by making advanced payments for their expected teaching production in monthly portions. If the teaching activity, measured by how many exams students had passed, was lower than what the universities had already been paid for, the ministry subtracted their debt from the following payments. As a result, universities' education funding was constantly at risk of sending the university economy into the red. In this way, universities depended on the state or other outside partners for liquid capital for investments of a larger size.

With the enhanced focus on liquidity and the use of accrual accounting, the treatment of a university as a company was no longer a metaphor, but an accounting reality. The use of accruals means that the income from every output potentially can be matched against the 'real' cost of its production, including the depreciated value of assets, use of space, staff costs, and materials. Whereas the previous system of cash-based accounting (the usual method of public sector accounting) focused on probity and adherence to purpose in the use of funds, accrual accounting made possible a standardized calculation of the profitability of each output potentially as a measure of efficiency. This could raise questions about which of the universities' activities could be converted into outputs and generate a profit, and which could not, while side lining internal debates about institutional purpose.

Following the introduction of accruals, accounting projects such as KU2005 at the University of Copenhagen introduced systems that could efficiently generate the data for the new accounts. The expectation was that the system would transfer the effort previously put into local administration of budgets and expenditure to a centralized system designed to provide administrators and the governing board with the kind of information needed for them to make strategic decisions (Øbing 2004: 5). Managements could choose to continue loss-producing activities for strategic reasons, or they could use the new centralized budgeting powers to cut costly activities in the name of efficiency.

Whereas successive auditing reports have shown that central oversight over the plethora of locally administered projects typical for universities is, at the very least, complicated (Copenhagen University 2007), a focus on the efficiency of activities has become a strategic tool for the negotiation over funding at all levels in the universities. At one university we saw a transparent embrace of cross financing amid grumbling from the paying departments, while at another university we witnessed academics and local leaders lobbying for a stronger connection between budgeting and income generation regardless of management and government priorities. In one governing board meeting, we even witnessed an attempt to use overall profitability as a measure of the performance of the university. The university auditor present advised the university to focus on liquidity instead, since the profit margin was irrelevant as a measure of university effectiveness as a provider of public goods for public money. Still, a report from the international auditing company PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2009 advised universities to create an equity capital

buffer, which subsequently has led universities to focus on building capital, which in turn has made some measures of profitability relevant to the universities' internal steering (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2009).

Unlike most other countries in Europe, the Danish university reform came amidst promises of increased public funding and investment in universities. One argument during the parliamentary debates over the 2003 University Law was that if universities were to be vehicles of increased investment and responsibility, this called for a need to ensure that society got value for its money. This has meant that since 2003 parliament has attached a growing share of university funding to specific targets, to competitive grants, and to an indicator that seeks to summarize the overall performance of each university (Aagaard 2012: 407). While the basic grants initially were allocated on the basis of earlier budgets privileging the older or traditionally richer universities, from 1997 (*ibid.*: 275) 'new funds' have been allocated according to an algorithm rewarding education outputs, PhD completions, external funding for research, and, since 2010, points derived from a publication indicator (Wright 2014). This performance-based mechanism especially gained significance in the years 2008–2012 when universities' basic research funding expanded significantly following Parliament's 'globalization agreement'.

The algorithm for allocating funding competitively between universities weighed 40% for student throughput, 25% for external financed research, 25% for research publications (based on a bibliometric indicator) and 10% for PhD-completions. The government followed a suggestion from university rectors to apply the competitive scheme only to funding that expanded the universities basic grant (Aagaard 2012: 363), but several actors have argued for applying it to far greater shares of the funds (*ibid.*: 2012: 351–357). However, this may not be needed. For a competitive scheme to achieve maximum effect, even a marginal dependence on performance measures changes the whole of an institution's activities towards maximizing the counted output (Wright 2014: 306). At most universities the bibliometric system has been integrated into the steering and management of academic performance, even though a 2012 evaluation of the system showed the distributive effect of the indicator was miniscule (Sivertsen and Schneider 2012). With the scheme up and running, all parts of universities' budgets were related to performance incentives. Although development contracts did not have funding attached directly to their performance targets, they became the means for coordinating each university's priorities with government policy priorities and with the available competitive or performance-based funding schemes including different non-state funding sources such as the EU or private foundations.

If the self-ownership model enabled the state to increase its steering of university priorities through financial mechanisms, it also gave the university leaders more budgetary freedom. The capacity for financial planning through greater control of money flows at the university and the new understanding of university finances facilitated by accrual accounting enabled university leaders to align their internal steering with the incentive framework to which their universities respond. These changes happening in parallel made it possible for universities to use unspent funds

to build up equity, which could be used to challenge the government's steering through control of liquidity and funding incentives. Even though the 2003 University Law created a model for self-ownership without assets, the build-up of new assets to buffer the tight dependence on the state steering through financial mechanisms played a major role in the negotiation of universities' strategic development.

As the steering assemblage took shape around the concept of self-ownership, there have been recurrent discussions about the possibility and conditions for universities to take over their own buildings. This was forcefully highlighted in 2014 when the University of Copenhagen officially proposed to take over ownership of 'their' buildings, a proposal that was rejected by the ministry. More significantly most universities have focused on building up equity. The resulting accumulation of wealth was criticized in 2013 by the Auditor General (2013), while at the same time government conceded to universities' demand to increase the one-year planning horizon for their budgets to 3 years in order to give them further space for planning.

#### ***5.5.4 Dialogue and Inspection***

The ministry's obligation to supervise the universities developed in parallel with the above transformations. The meaning of state supervision (*tilsyn*) changed with the 2003 University Law in that universities through their self-owning status became external to the ministry and thus not part of the ministry's own reporting and control mechanisms. As legal subjects with full control over their budgets a new necessity arose to verify that universities followed the law and spent their money according to parliament's purpose for funding them. Further, the Auditor General put pressure on the ministry to ensure that universities developed mechanisms to enhance the quality of their activities. In 2007–2008 this situation led to the development of a new conceptualization of '*tilsyn*' or supervision in the ministry. This new auditing system was meant to work in a way that did not infringe on the universities' self-ownership status. Rather, in a draft report envisioning the inspection system, the ministry stated that it was its responsibility to 'help' universities improve their ability to govern themselves (Danish University and Property Agency 2007). This invention to 'improve universities' own abilities' was called proactive audit in the draft report. In contrast, reactive audit involved annual reporting and ad hoc interventions based on suspicion that a university was not conducting its business according to the law. Proactive auditing was to be a continual optimisation of the universities' abilities to deliver efficiently on the government's view of society's expectations. An annual dialogue between the ministry and the university's administration and leadership was meant to follow up on activities related to development contracts and to include problem areas or new initiatives in the contracts when deemed necessary. The legal basis for this activity, according to the ministry, was the ministry's responsibility not only to ensure that universities followed the law in their spending of public money, but also to check that universities spent the money

efficiently and in accordance with the purpose and expectations specified in its allocation.

The development contracts are central to this new audit regime as a means to evaluate and develop a dialogue on universities' core activities and strategy. Where the initial development contracts (as mentioned above) were to provide space for universities to create themselves as unified organizations, the development contracts today have become technologies for the coordination and optimization of university activities *vis à vis* government's targets and interests. Where the core purpose of the initial development contracts in transforming universities into coherent organizations was to make them capable of responding quickly and flexibly to the demands of society in the modern welfare state, the new audit and contract system looks more directly at the universities' performance against government-defined targets.

Both development contracts and the supervision process provided a space for the university's leadership and the state to evaluate and discuss the performance and direction of universities. Combined with the development of internal mechanisms for financial reporting and steering, this audit and contract regime provided a new space for the envisioning, documenting and shaping of the universities as organizations. As Danish universities have grown and in some cases consolidated into very large organizations (compared with the pre-2003 years) the steering of their strategic direction is in no way a question of directly translating government priorities through the steering assemblage into university practices. It is rather a very intense relationship of coordination and negotiation.

## 5.6 Partial Visions in the Space of University Reform

The 2003 University Law empowered a new group of university leaders and ministry officials to articulate the steering assemblage. While these 'activists' all engaged in the same project of rearticulating the capabilities of the universities to fit a growing concern over Denmark's competitiveness in the 'global knowledge economy', they had different views and all actively sought to align elements of the steering assemblage with their own particular strategies and priorities. At times, some activists partially resisted reform, even if they were also co-producing the overall process of transformation. We argue that the repeated articulation of the steering assemblage to effect ongoing reform in the university sector was contingent on such activists' partial understandings of the universities and the space of reform. This lends an element of indeterminacy to the process of transformation, even if it does not fundamentally challenge the 'new' Danish university that was so forcibly enunciated in the 2003 University Law.

In interviews with university leaders and governing board members we were told that we should not understand the ongoing reform of universities as a coherent political project. One interviewee even suggested that the frequent amendments to the university law were merely an effect of the minister's need to produce news of reforms or large initiatives in his area of government roughly once a year. Another

university leader, who was broadly in sympathy with the government's reforms said that no one had a 'helicopter eye view' of how elements in the steering assemblage were put together or how it would, or should, work.

In the following, we aim to understand this perceived lack of overview in the steering assemblage by examining the activists' positioned views on the ongoing university reform. When we interviewed university leaders and ministry officials who were part of the new group of reform activists ushered in by the 2003 University Law, we found the articulation of the self-owning university by the University Law and subsequent reforms to be in a constant process of negotiation and development. Even within government, we found a diversity of perspectives on reform and senior civil servants in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation each had their own view of what was the most important component of the 2003 reforms. Each of the new governing board members was to enact the self-ownership concept, and expected to influence universities in particular ways, and the new university managers also desired to develop the capabilities of the university in their own way.

While one university leader used his agency to draw on knowledge of developments in international research and to re-structure a research area at his university, another latched on to the rise in importance of city regions and sought out relevant partners for his university in that context, rather than focusing solely on the nation state. Such moves may be consistent with government visions and policies for the university sector, but they are not predictable from, or a direct product of, government planning. They highlight how the trajectories of elements that came together in the 2003 University Law could articulate with other elements in the steering assemblage and thereby transform each other (see also Featherstone 2011: 141–2) in partial and positioned articulations of the university (Strathern 1991).

Our interviewees demonstrated clearly how they were involved in a constant negotiation over particular intentions and projects all articulated from within partial perspectives of the overall university steering assemblage; and in the process they were transforming this assemblage. This understanding of the field makes it possible to discern why reform can have a transformative capacity and also why sometimes it does not. As interviewees sought to articulate their versions of the university from different positions in the course of reform, some actors and positions were more powerful or capable of projecting their visions on to universities than others, but as the continuous move of university reform testified, no one project was able to define the university sector once and for all.

A university manager interviewed while the 2003 University Law was under way described how she was struggling to turn her university's critical stance to reform into ways that furthered the university's interests. A leader at another university did this by using the merger process to redefine research areas and fulfil his desire to turn an old sector-specific agricultural university into a life science hub. Thereby he completed a move to secure the future of the university's research more firmly within the wider food and health research and development area. The reform was an instantiation of the rector's reading of the global development of the university's

key research areas, rather than being an implementation of government's or industry's plans for agricultural research and development. By taking advantage of the initiative granted to universities in the merger process, this university and its merger partner, while still complying with the government's impetus to merge, reinvented both its field and its relevance to industry and society at large.

Another university leader interviewed for this project saw herself as heavily engaged in using the power of the new university management to transform the role of the university in the regional economy. Through a busy networking schedule, she set up new relations between her university and the regional political powers, enhanced its participation in global discussion and collaboration, and reached out to industry in order to get more companies to involve themselves directly with the university. She said she came to her job with this kind of activity in mind, and that her idea was that, as a leader, she should 'tear down the walls' of the university. However, the way the government articulated self-ownership with new specific directives for university operations left doubt over whether the government and the university 'saw eye to eye' on how to achieve this. As examples, she quoted the government's directives specifying how universities should provide guidance to students and setting the maximum length of Masters students' thesis-writing processes. She said that, while she agreed with the government's overall intentions, she wanted a free hand for the university to come up with ways to solve problems with student dropout and late completions. Like a Gulliver, universities were held back in their efforts to use their strategizing power by the multiple strings attached to them by government, she suggested.

When leaders make decisions for their organizations or enter into relationships with partners outside the university they are recognized as important actors in the shaping of their institutions and of universities' role in the society and economy. In this sense, they are in a process of putting into use the capabilities created for their positions in the university reforms, and they are often putting into effect instruments for steering their institutions set out in law. The stated 'lack of overview' however suggests that both university leaders and civil servants are formulating particular projects within their own positioned understandings of the wider reform project and the emerging context of the university. They rearticulate the university and its relationship to the state in a way partial to their position and situation yet they project this as a vision of the emerging sector as a whole.

Civil servants in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation did not think their interventions held back universities: On the contrary, they emphasized that the aim was to make universities active in transforming their position in society. One senior official concerned with the economic administration of universities thought the 2003 University Law had made little change: to him, universities had been self-owning since 1994 when they were first given budgetary freedom. As he saw it, the financial steering system and incentives had a sense of trust at their core. The 2003 University Law entrusted the university with more freedom translated into an enhanced ability to administer their funding. However, as he said, this freedom



was conditioned upon universities' delivering on politicians' priorities. To this end, the 2003 University Law had established governing boards with external majorities to make the universities more accountable. If they failed to deliver on political priorities, as he put it, the state applied its levers – whips in various forms of direct intervention and carrots in form of financial incentives.

Another senior civil servant expressed a similar view that the universities were to fulfil the government's vision by 'saving' Denmark in a competitive globalizing economy where the emerging economies of China and India loomed on the horizon. However, he saw the 2003 University Law as 'unleashing the power' of universities to do so and thereby recreating society's trust in the institutions. He thought the government's Globalization Council's report (2006) proved the law had been successful in achieving that trust. From his perspective, the central tool in steering universities was not financial levers but the development contracts. They were the means to raise the universities' level of ambition and to empower the university leadership to enhance the performance of their institutions. From his perspective, by setting up strategic priorities to be agreed with universities, the ministry empowered them to be responsive to the needs of society and to enhance Denmark's competitiveness.

These civil servants shared an assumption that the government needed to intervene through shifting the way different elements of the steering assemblage were articulated together in order to raise the ambition and performance of universities. However, some external members of the newly appointed governing boards and university leaders said the government's increased intervention in university affairs impeded their ability to achieve the government's aims for the sector and diminished rather than enhanced their freedom. One board member thought the only important element in the 2003 University Law was the establishment of a more workable top-down governance structure, but he found that the government did not allow the governing boards to achieve their full potential and secure the university's independence and strategic development. To him, the self-ownership of universities was weak to the point of irrelevance. He thought the tension in the university-government relationship was due to the ministry's lack of willingness to realize the reform's potential. Many other governing board members publicly stressed the difficulty of fulfilling their role and planning the university's strategic development when they could not predict the budget a year ahead and they continually had to implement new government initiatives and steering incentives (Øllgaard 2007). Some governing board members had pressed ahead with their own agendas and tried to ignore government delays and red tape. For example, some governing board members appointed senior leaders so as to get on with the reform without waiting for the long drawn out process of government setting up a proper legal framework to define the conditions of their appointments. Others initially saw these issues as teething problems and hoped that a more balanced relationship with government would be achieved in time. However, complaints persisted about excessive interventions and about how detailed steering impeded the capability of governing boards to achieve their universities' potential.

## 5.7 Conclusion – The Hymnbook

The introduction of self-ownership into universities neither spelled the end of the age-old institutions nor their complete renewal. It set up a dynamic framework for government to continually rework the way universities were steered and for university leaders to expand the capabilities of their universities as organizations. The effectiveness of the university reform relied on its continued re-articulation at different moments and in relation to shifting contexts. This opened up the room for manoeuvre for institutions to develop their own capacity to act – in EU terms – through The Open Method of Coordination. The reform empowered government ministers, ministry officials and university leaders who formed an ‘epistemic community’ with a shared idea of the importance of universities in what they perceived to be a fast-approaching future global knowledge economy. In Hall’s terms, a new social force emerged around this loosely shared articulation of the university and its context or world. As described in Chap. 3, they were local activist singing their own hymns, but all singing from the same hymn book – a hymn book which did not challenge the government-university relationship as the driving force behind change at the university. Even so, there was a continual tension between the university’s capacity to act and the government’s steering of that capacity in directions it tried to determine.

Self-ownership established the central dynamic of the steering assemblage for universities, which has developed continuously since 2003. Whereas the universities were self-owning by law it was very much up to each actor involved in the development of universities to articulate the meaning of this in their own practices. They combined elements of the steering system to promote their own visions for a future university, aligning with or contesting the projects of other possibly more powerful actors.

While the designation of universities as self-owning institutions was meant to recreate them as centres for the transformation of the Danish society in the growing knowledge economy and as capable of enacting an agency that transcended the imagination of the Danish state, ever tighter relations between universities and government agencies seemed to sediment in the university steering assemblage. University leaders aimed to carve out their institutions’ space for manoeuvre e.g. through seeking alliances outside the state or by defying the state’s restrictions and delays. Some were bolstering their equity (Wright and Boden 2011; Wright 2011) in order to lessen their dependence on the state for liquidity and, in effect, strengthen their ability to enact the strategizing central leadership envisioned in the 2003 University Law. Both governments and university leaderships have been activists in this development and have been instrumental in focusing the university’s steering and policy making on the university’s top leadership and its relationship to the state.

The merger process was an example of the successful use of the self-ownership model to bring about desired change in the university sector and it also showed how government projects were resisted and reinvented by university leaders, who used the opportunity to install their own projects and visions for their specific institutions

or research areas. In this sense the university's agency may be responding to more contexts at once, for example, uniting a response to government's merger plans with their own readings of the international developments within a research field. Regardless of the power balance between the university leadership, the ministry and government, the merger process proved the capability of positioned activists in key relationships in the transformed steering assemblage to enact dramatic change in the university sector.

We have argued that the reforms set up a tension between using the steering mechanisms to enhance state controls and to develop the universities' own strategic and transformative capacity. As a result, the relationship between the state control and university leadership was the subject of continuous negotiation and even contestation. In this process, positioned actors both at universities and in the ministry were trying to engage and rearrange the steering assemblage in such a way as to promote their own partial understanding of what the university should become. In some cases government initiatives and university agendas corresponded and articulated together in a transformative process in which ministry officials and university leaders both recognized their own projects. In other cases ministry officials saw their projects hindered by the universities' non-cooperation and they simply felt they could not trust the universities to enact the kind of agency intended for them. As they struggled to work out how the steering assemblage of the university sector was to be coupled together they all formed part of the continued and contingent transformation of both the university sector and that very assemblage.

In subsequent chapters we move away from the leadership-government relationship privileged in the 2003 University Law to explore how the government's and the university leaders' projects of articulating a 'new' notion of the university connected with managers, academics and students who were increasingly distant from this 'epistemic community'. How did they understand, try to use, negotiate over and contest aspects of this steering assemblage and the universities' 'capacities to shape Danish society? What universities and what worlds did they think they were bringing about?

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**Part III**  
**University Governance and Management**

# Chapter 6

## Governing the Post-Bureaucratic University



Stephen Carney 

### 6.1 Introduction

Governance systems in Danish universities have been thoroughly transformed in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> From decision-making processes often described as consensual and democratic, the nation's universities have come to terms with new models of executive and 'expert' management ostensibly to align them more closely with global 'best practice' and to deliver 'world class' outcomes. The University Law of 2003 not only outlined a vision for dynamic, efficient and economically relevant institutions, but also provided their architecture. If it was possible to consider Danish higher education institutions as 'independent' of direct state control (*uafhængig*: as celebrated in Fig. 1.1, Chap. 1) – a sentiment held by many academic staff and their unions in particular – such narratives were deeply challenged by the passage of the new legislation.

Framed by a rhetoric of 'international competition for knowledge, talent and resources' (Growth Forum 2011: 3), the Law of 2003 aimed to enhance the capacity of universities to respond to external demands and challenges via a number of deep-cutting policy interventions: the reconstitution of governance procedures; the appointment of leaders with executive functions at the central, faculty and departmental level; and the steering of actual institutional performance via detailed and prescriptive 'development' contracts and through a shift towards competitive funding systems. These reforms were unheralded in modern Danish university history.

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Whilst secured by a broad (but not unanimous) cross-party political agreement, they spoke to the worst fears of a major portion of the academic community, most of who viewed the coming changes with various measures of hostility, scepticism or ambivalence. The scene was thus set for a period of contest and conflict, and the enthralling drama of policy enactment.

An interest in the actual *experience* of education reform provides the main impetus for researching Danish universities at a time of radical change. It is an orientation lacking in many of the major approaches to analysing education policy. Whilst neo-institutionalists attempt to show intensifying processes of convergence towards shared (liberal) goals and identity displays, and explain these as part of ‘the triumph of the West’ in the twentieth century (Ramirez 2003: 246), they do so via longitudinal, macro-level investigations that draw primarily upon policy documents and statistics. In contrast, another influential group of policy scholars, usually working within a loosely Marxist or ‘critical’ tradition, highlight the role of bureaucracies and business interests in undermining the role of the state in education (Apple 2001; Bourdieu 2003) and adopt a similarly broad lens for analyses of the transformation of capital and labour. A third group, inspired in particular by an unease with macro-oriented generalization, have documented the ways in which actors, usually defined in terms of national or cultural types, practice locality by responding to external demands in ways that maintain internal coherence and legitimacy (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006). In much of this work, however, we see purposive actors attempting to secure their interests whilst managing collective outcomes.

The approach taken in this chapter on Danish university governing bodies, and the subsequent one focusing on university leadership, takes account of these traditions in education policy research but is far less neat and tidy. Rather than adopt, a priori, a particular political position with which to enter the complex, contested and contentious field of university reform – one where higher education researchers are themselves deeply compromised as they ‘construct the “professional”’ who more often than not emerges as the ‘alter ego of the author’ (Stronach 2010: 67) – I focus on the ‘friction’ between these imagined worlds where ‘heterogeneous and unequal encounters’ shape ‘new arrangements of culture and power’ (Tsing 2005: 5). Such frictions represent ‘the productive moment’ where ‘universals and particulars come together to create the forms of capitalism with which we live’ (Tsing 2005: 4). Here, there are ‘awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection’ (Tsing 2005: 4) that create new ‘meanings and genealogies’ of universities and their roles in society. But they are not necessarily coherent. In contrast to much writing about university reform, I seek out processes of misunderstanding and confusion in contexts where there is little agreement about what, in fact, the ‘global knowledge economy’ means in practice and what, if at all, this has to do with the daily practice of managing a Danish university. I attempt to explore what Tsing (2005: 5) calls regimes of ‘liberal sovereignty and biopower’ but also the diverse and disruptive movements that complicate them, always suspicious of normative claims that global educational reform projects are ‘bad’, that teachers and students within higher education are ‘victims’, or that actors of all types have the capacity to survey such complex fields of action and perform in ways that conform to the well-rehearsed scripts of theorists.

An awareness of the ‘misunderstandings’ built into reform projects (Tsing 2005) has informed a research strategy where I have tried to remain attuned to the attempts of actors in Danish higher education to create the ‘authentic copy’ of apparently desirable global practices (Ferguson 2006: 20) from partially transmitted, hybrid policy concepts made less decipherable by the multitude of political, economic and cultural forces they embody. This position acknowledges that a good deal of education reform is incoherent and that this lack of meaning requires that we develop an ‘analytic of noise’ (Ferguson 1999: 210) capable of capturing the ‘details and decorations’ of entangled experiences (MacLure 2006: 731).

The desire to celebrate entanglement in ethnographic work is further challenged by the focus on elite actors and institutions where access to the field, key events and informants is often limited (Shore and Nugent 2002) and compromised by varying cocktails of anger, anxiety, fear and self-interest. More often than not, senior managers and governing board members were prepared to ‘talk’ but such discussions were often framed by an understandable reluctance to speak ‘on the record’ or openly about micro-political events and processes. Governing board leaders spoke from their positions *as* board leaders, usually refusing to discuss institutional processes in ways that might affect the good name of the university. Suspicion of our motives in undertaking the research appeared to run deep and required that considerable energy be devoted to managing relationships. The tendency to speak to a ‘script’ was possibly increased because of our desire to tape and transcribe the discussions, which clearly distracted some senior actors. In other cases, though, respondents were eager not only to provide their insights and experiences but also to identify areas and concerns within the practice of university governance that they felt were undermining their institutions.

Formal discussions with elites were buttressed by an extensive program of observation, much of it where we were deliberately *seen to be* present, and thus positioned by our gatekeepers and respondents as knowledgeable about the events being discussed. Attendance at university governing board meetings and gatherings of academic councils and select working groups within each institution, as well as much ‘loitering around’ the central administration, were essential elements in a strategy aimed not only at following particular policies as they unfolded (Shore and Wright 1997) but in remaining open to the mundane and unknown, as well as questioning the accounts that we were being given.

Finally, as the topic of university reform was so intense during the period of the study, it was possible to read very many interviews and commentaries in broadsheet newspapers, ‘trade’ (academic union) magazines and web blogs from social networks of university academics and students. Often these were polemic, occasionally blatantly political and always rich with the passions and emotions one could expect from marginalized academic ‘workers’ and newly empowered ‘leaders’. These provide not only ‘data’ but also enormous insight into what was at stake in a field turned upside down by a government agenda framed not only by generic neo-liberal ideology but also by the rhetoric of national interest. What follows is necessarily incomplete and partial; one situated attempt to explain what occurred in Denmark at this time.

## 6.2 The Danish Disease: ‘World Class’ Universities by Edict

The initial impetus to establish university governing boards with external members and university managers appointed rather than elected by the university can be traced to 1998 and debates ‘fuelled’ by the Danish Academy of Technical Sciences (ATV) and the Danish Confederation of Professional Associations (AC) (Brink 2006: 8). For ATV the trope ‘knowledge-management’ was deployed; for AC it was ‘quality’ in both teaching and research. The Social Democrat Minister for Science (Jan Trøjborg) responded by suggesting that universities should commit themselves to establishing a capacity for systematic comparison with other universities, developing strategic planning, and deepening partnerships with public and private institutions. The idea of development contracts was first proposed here and offered to universities on a voluntary basis in return for greater autonomy in goal setting and governance. Much protest followed. In 1999, the Danish Council for Research Policy responded with a publication entitled ‘Leadership in Danish Universities’ (Danish Council for Research Policy 1999), reformulating this debate to focus on the management structure of universities. A statutory advisory body under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Danish Council for Research Policy consisted of senior academics from Danish universities and leaders from the private sector. It had hoped to inspire reforms aimed at creating more efficient decision-making processes to encourage flexibility, innovation and fitness for the challenges of the ‘knowledge society’ but in a context of *greater* university freedom. Policy makers jumped at the first part of this agenda and experiments with the Danish University of Technology and the Danish University of Education became early models for the 2003 legislation. As also discussed in Chap. 4, whilst it was a right of centre coalition that created the 2003 legal framework, it was a left of centre coalition that initiated the process some years earlier as part of a broader experiment in public sector ‘management by contract’.

The 2003 reforms, as they relate to university governance and management, abolished the earlier elected decision-making organs and replaced them with governing boards consisting of a majority of members external to the university, including an appointed chairperson.<sup>2</sup> These bodies, reflecting a radical shift in Danish

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<sup>2</sup>Prior to 2003 most Danish universities were governed by a *konsistorium*: the university’s highest executive committee, chaired by the rector and consisting of 14 members: 5 representatives of the management (including the rector and deans who were themselves directly elected by all employees and students), 2 elected representatives of academic staff, 2 elected representatives of administrative staff, 3 elected representatives of students, and 2 external members appointed by the Danish Council for Research Policy and the chair of education councils. For practical purposes the *konsistorium* combined the functions of the Council and the Senate found in many other university systems. Decision-making and institutional oversight were functions internal to the university with final recourse to the Minister in cases of deep disagreement, academic misconduct or students’ complaints. In the 2003 reformed system, a new governing board (*bestyrelsen*) took on the functions of a Council, and there was no Senate. They were accountable to the minister and were responsible for the statutes, strategy, approving the budget, and appointing the rector, and they took over from the rector responsibility for the development contract, although the rector’s powers over

educational culture, are described in the 2003 University Law as the ‘superior authority of the university’ and are responsible for establishing the university’s articles of association or internal regulations (*vedtægter*), appointing its rector (vice-chancellor) and writing a detailed development contract with the minister (Danish Parliament 2003). These new organs were to be responsible for approving the university’s budget and for providing a framework for the rector’s day-to-day management of the institution. In an attempt to maintain some continuity with the earlier system of elected leadership in Danish universities, the 2003 University Law included provision for an ‘academic council’ with a mandate to *advise* the rector and governing board on academic matters; most explicitly defined in terms of providing guidance on ‘strategic research questions and educational issues’, recommendations on the composition of academic committees, and responsibility for the award of PhD and higher degrees. For most institutions, notably the larger and more complex ones, such advisory organs were faculty-based. It was less usual for this organ to be centrally placed, and thus was not in a position to represent overall university visions, interests and concerns. The new arrangements for university leadership involved similarly dramatic breaks with the past. Now, rectors were to be appointed by the governing board, rather than elected by the university itself. In turn, rectors would be responsible for appointing deans and department heads, leading to what policy makers hoped would be a ‘professional administration’ unencumbered by parochial interests. Similarly, university development contracts were intended to ‘lay down clear objectives and success criteria as well as describe and render visible the vision and target areas of the individual university within the university’s main tasks’ (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002). In order that appointed governing boards and managers could exercise greater autonomy and independence from the ministry, as discussed in Chap. 5, the 2003 University Law also introduced the notion of ‘institutional self-ownership’ (*selvejerskab*). This changed the status of universities to that of ‘special administrative entities’ within the framework of public administration in Denmark (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002). Rules related to staff appointments, salary structures and capital accumulation were to be loosened or removed, although salaries remained tied to state-level agreements. Significantly, recourse to the minister in the case of internal disputes was ended, with the notable exceptions of student protests or legal issues. All of these changes were intended to ‘achieve more homogenous rules of governance for all Danish universities’ (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002).

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internal management were also strengthened (Ørberg 2007). The new governing boards consisted of a majority of external members, thus significantly limiting internal representation by academic and support staff and students. One governing board comprised 13 members (with seven externals); five other governing boards had 11 members (with six externals); two had 9 members (with 5 externals); one was undecided, and three other universities did not previously have a *konsistorium*, so were unchanged. External governing board members were nominated by the universities (often by the out-going *konsistorium*) and formally appointed by the Minister (Rasmussen 2004: 4).

When the Prime Minister of the time, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, explained that universities needed to ‘open themselves more towards business’, ensure that students could ‘use what they have learnt’ and ‘develop concrete goals for knowledge dissemination, for example in terms of how many patents they sell, or in terms of their collaboration with private businesses’ (Rasmussen 2006), few believed that the 2003 reform agenda could be embedded so quickly or deeply. By 2011, with a new prime minister and in the context of an impending general election, the government was able to cite a comprehensive ‘range of pronounced changes’ to the framework of universities (Growth Forum 2011: 3). In 2007, only 4 years after the 2003 University Law took force, the government oversaw in the fusion of the smaller, specialist universities and 9 of the 13 government research institutes into the country’s larger universities. Between 2003–2010 the number of PhD places was doubled, with a sizable number of these defined as ‘business-PhD’s’ (*erhvervs-phder*). Since 2006 the government increased research funding to the sector by some 35%. For the future (2010–2015), more than 6 billion kroner would be allocated to infrastructure budgets, mainly to improve aging laboratory facilities. More significantly, plans were being drawn up to alter radically the basic funding model for universities, to reorganise the research council system and to introduce an accreditation system for university courses that would ensure ‘quality and societal relevance’ (*kvalitet og samfundsrelevans*). These initiatives are referred to ominously as ‘incentive-oriented economic steering instruments (*incitamentsorienterede økonomiske styringsinstrumenter*) and aimed at delivering national competitiveness (Growth Forum 2011: 3). What had started in the 1990s as debates about the readiness of Danish universities to face the challenges of the emerging global economy had solidified into a particular architecture of governance, something closer to a business model than the familiar Humboldt ideal that governing board members had experienced and embodied as students, and, in some cases, as university academics themselves.

As outlined in Chap. 1, the Danish reforms were not isolated from similar processes taking place in other OECD contexts. The analysis of the Danish engagement with the OECD after the passage of the 2003 University Law (Chap. 3) suggests that the policy development process described here must be seen in terms of the greater European ‘project’ of educational harmonization within a common ‘European Higher Education Area’ which has led to increasing standardization of degree structures, course credit and evaluation systems. Some view this as part of a more fundamental embracing of the idea of the ‘enterprise university’ (Marginson and Considine 2000) characterised by governance structures that apply principles and ideas from the private firm and in which institutional missions and outcomes are oriented towards income-generation and greater self-reliance (Burtscher et al. 2006). Whilst many national governments embraced neo-liberal models of management throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the European Commission was itself busily integrating business interests into its reform agenda. Here, the intent has been to reshape higher education to support advanced knowledge production and compe-

tion across the continent. Some view this as a serious challenge to the very future of the university in Europe:

The Bologna Process, led in reality by the EU and with the full commitment of its member states, renders university reform a matter of policy networks, dominated by major business actors and transnational bureaucracies, which define the agenda and monitor and evaluate its implementation across Europe...management-based governance is dissolving the academic community by turning scholars into ‘human resources’ with no say for the affairs of their institution... Moreover, management is exposing academic staff to market relations: it involves business agents in governance, it removes employment security from academics, and it forces them to make their interests and knowledge available for purchase by any potential buyer (Moutsios 2013: 35–36).

Much higher education research views the European policy shift as part of a global neo-liberal ‘revolution’ that has transformed the public sector in most economically-advanced countries (Olssen and Peters 2005: 315). Whilst linked to traditional notions of classic liberalism with its focus on freedom *beyond* the state, neo-liberal transformations involve a radically-different focus; positioning the state as an *enabling force* for the creation of entrepreneurial subjectivities. Whilst the classic liberal state would be concerned with freeing actors so that they may manoeuvre unencumbered around markets based on some idealised notion of unrestricted choice, the neo-liberal project inscribes such action in terms of techno-efficient control processes:

...the end goals of freedom, choice, consumer sovereignty, competition and individual initiative, as well as those of compliance and obedience, must be constructions of the state acting now in its positive role through the development of the techniques of *auditing, accounting and management* (Olssen and Peters 2005: 315, original emphasis).

As such, neoliberalism in education should be understood ‘less [as] a retreat from governmental “intervention” than a re-inscription of the techniques and forms of expertise required for the exercise of government’ (Barry et al. 1996 quoted in Olssen and Peters 2005: 315). This application of Foucauldian governmentality theory to higher education reform provides one useful frame through which to explore changing academic subjectivities. Others explore the same tension between autonomy and control via earlier classical social theory. For example, Maroy (2012) examines the consequences of this re-inscription in relation to the new modes of regulation within European school systems. Here, national educational policies are understood as being shaped by two dominant models of governance: the quasi-market model and its evaluator-state counterpart. Common to both models is a system of ‘post-bureaucratic’ regulation. Here, the ‘modes of coordination and control’ typical of the Weberian bureaucratic model which ‘linked a form of legitimisation of state domination to a foundation in reason and the law’ (Maroy 2012: 69–70) is severely compromised as multiple, often conflicting normative orders emerge out of legislation, rules and pragmatic engagement in a field weighed down by the diverse tropes and demands for ‘efficiency’, ‘standardisation’, ‘participation’ and ‘relevance’ which are further complicated by those pertaining to ‘performance’, ‘excellence’,

'innovation' and 'quality'. The range of value rationalities (and here Maroy draws upon the Weberian understanding related to different spheres of value) create a complex, perhaps chaotic institutional context where the forces of institutional isomorphism/convergence and path dependency meet national and supra-national legislative (bureaucratic) frameworks, leading ultimately to unpredictable processes of translation and hybridisation.

This picture mirrors the tenor of much higher education research where we see a tension between the traditional mission of the university as an autonomous institution serving broad societal goals and the demands imposed by a range of new performativity measures. For example, we can read about the new and restrictive regulatory frameworks in Austria (Meister-Scheytt and Scott 2009); reduced collegial decision-making in the Netherlands (Huisman et al. 2006) and the Nordic countries (Gornitzka and Maassen 2011); 'corporate-style' governance in Australia (Baird 1997); and tightened funding and audit regimes in England (Kim 2008). Such work suggests that neo-liberal governmentality in higher education 'systematically deconstructs the space' in which academic work is envisaged and enacted (Olssen and Peters 2005: 325). From this perspective, relations previously characterized by trust, autonomy and delegation are now formalized via hierarchies of control. Notions of professional autonomy are recalibrated to take account of the growing specification and evaluation of tasks related to research and teaching. Understandings of the institution itself are radically altered as the discipline of 'market reputation' and internal demand for 'corporate loyalty' stifles dissent (Olssen and Peters 2005: 327).

Without rejecting such positioning, the focus on exploring policy enactments promises a more dynamic portrait of change; one that recognizes the closing spaces for action within higher education but one that is equally attuned to new possibilities, resistances and entanglements. In the following sections I shall provide some insight into actual governing board practices in the wake of the 2003 'policy moment' and consider some of their consequences. First, I illustrate how governing board members came to their roles with a wide range of agendas, both fitting and challenging the understandings of those advocating *and* criticising the reforms. Second, even though there was much diversity across the three case studies, governing boards nonetheless reflected some of the most pervasive elements embedded in the reforms: accountability demands from central authorities came to drive internal decision-making at the expense of developing the internal relations that have, historically, provided upper layers of the governance process with their legitimacy. The resulting lack of dialogue between governing boards and 'the university' (defined as its internal members) was changing fundamentally relations between and amongst university academic and administrative staff. Third, even though universities were seen to be negotiating managerialist systems of steering, the room for manoeuvre at the level of individual institutions remained significant.

## 6.3 On Being Caught in a Quasi-Market by an Evaluator-State: Policy in Practice

### 6.3.1 *Visions and Voices*

In accordance with the 2003 Law, the majority of university governing board members are external to the institution. Many came from senior positions in arts administration, communications and public educational fields. However, the largest group were senior executives from the industrial research, commercial and business sectors. In the case of the three universities studied in depth, governing board chairs were chief executives of mid to large-size industrial firms or public agencies. Two of the three governing board chairs had previous academic careers. Governing board members included directors of the research and development divisions of internationally oriented high technology companies and heads of public institutions such as museums and educational-oriented organisations. Governing boards also included members from outside Denmark. These tended to be senior researchers or institutional leaders, often from Scandinavia where language and context were shared. Finally, internal members included senior academic staff (usually well-regarded research-active professors), students and support staff.<sup>3</sup> Given that governing board members were appointed in a political context where universities were to reorient themselves to the world of work and commercially-oriented knowledge creation, it was unsurprising that during the interviews many external members described the task of the university in the language of business. Universities had to become ‘competitive’, ‘responsive’, ‘dynamic’ and ‘flexible’. They were now part of a ‘global market’ for educational ‘services’ that required new kinds of ‘professional’ practices. For one governing board chairman, universities had much in common with other knowledge creating organisations such as Microsoft (‘that also conducts research, dissemination and teaching’). Common to all such organisations was the centrality of good leadership, strategic planning and resource allocation. It was here that universities could learn from business:

Irrespective of the type of organisation, there needs to be priorities. It is the task of the leadership to get its money’s worth, to ensure that people don’t relax too much, and to find out what the organisation should focus on. I think the university could be better at these things (Chairman, Governing Board 2005).

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<sup>3</sup>An early study of the first generation of 47 external members of the governing boards found that 62 percent were men and 38 percent female. Of these, some 13 percent were non-Danish nationals, although all could communicate and work in Danish. Some two-thirds had research experience and over half had post-graduation experience within the university sector. Whilst slightly more than half now worked in major private firms such as Arla, Novo Nordisk, Grundfos and Mærsk, some 40 percent came from public authorities or other public-funded institutions. Sixty percent of all governing board members from this first generation were either serving CEOs or chairs of boards elsewhere. Between half and 75 percent of Danish university governing board members had some form of earlier affiliation with the university via their own earlier higher education or by virtue of the relation of their firm to the university (Rasmussen 2004).



Some governing board members saw themselves as facing huge ‘challenges’ to ‘reform’ what one – a senior management consultant in private practice – called a ‘stale’ culture of ‘complacency’. She explained the shortcomings of her university’s governing board through the lens of the private sector:

I think the way the board functions now, it is fire-fighting and so-forth, yes, very public sector, I mean in a negative way. It’s a long way from a private business. It’s a long, long way (External member of governing board 2005).

It was common for external members to identify the need for greater ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ in the teaching and research processes of universities. One posited that she was identified as a potential governing board member because of her generic business experience, not least in ‘rationalisation’ and ‘downsizing’ processes. For her, the university was a ‘factory that managed knowledge’. When attempting to define the role of universities in contemporary society, a number of external members referred to the notion of the ‘knowledge organisation’ (*vidensorganisation*). By contrast, those governing board members with university backgrounds themselves (for example, former academics turned industrial researchers) suggested that universities were a particular *type* of knowledge organisation, not least in terms of the inappropriateness of attempting to manage or ‘steer them from above’:

... if you are a knowledge organisation you have to base a lot of what goes on on the people who really do the work...you can’t give an order top down, I mean at least it’s hardly ever successful...you have to listen very carefully ...you have a lot of things coming bottom up in any knowledge organisation and you will have to have that very much at the university. I think you can never top steer the university. I just don’t see how that can be done (External member of governing board 2005).

Governing board members were often observed performing specialised roles. Indeed some were identified because of particular competences. At one university, a senior executive from industry was given the task of leading the drafting of the institution’s articles of association or internal regulations (*vedtægter*) because he had experience of this from the business world. This member was also the Chairman’s ‘right hand’ in relation to budgeting. At another of the case study institutions, an executive search consultant and the head of a post-secondary education institution took responsibility for drafting the job advertisement and particulars for the rector’s post. These two were always most prominent in discussions about the University’s staff relations ‘climate’. In the governing board meetings we observed, external members from outside Denmark were notable by their silence on almost all issues except internationalisation and research strategy. However, differences in orientation were not only based on technical competences.

All three universities devoted considerable time to preparing articles of association with which to formalise governance processes. At one of the universities this process was nearing completion when a final substantive issue was discussed amongst governing board members; the role of department/faculty leaders in devising local-level advisory bodies that would ensure staff and student participation and

involvement in department-level decision making.<sup>4</sup> In the draft document sent to governing board members two main possibilities were presented: department leaders should be given the discretion to create these organs, or the rector should devise an appropriate structure and have this implemented across the university.

These alternatives brought to the surface a range of attitudes and values about how the university ought to be run. Three external members immediately supported the second option. In the words of one, 'it's the rector's job to develop structures and we should not be tying his hands'. Student representatives and one academic member took the side of local stakeholders. Whilst one external member held his ground, it was clear that the others were seeing, perhaps for the first time, the importance attached by academic staff and students to local involvement in decision-making. One external member summarized the main concern:

We are all in agreement that the articles and regulations should ensure that the university has good workplaces. I can see that whilst the rector is responsible for ensuring this happens, it is not his job to dictate a form or a particular approach (External member of governing board 2005).

Finally, the governing board chairperson suggested that the 'signal' sent to departments was important. Here, the University and its rector would not be seen as imposing advisory structures and processes upon the University's academic departments. Heads of academic areas would, themselves, take responsibility for establishing organs appropriate to their context. Commenting later about the personal dynamics on the governing board, one academic staff representative noted:

...it is often the case that the externals are in disagreement. Very often and in great disagreement. They are very, very different people, and those that have been appointed to the board have very different qualities (Internal member of governing board 2005).

The 2003 University Law provides for the representation on Danish university governing boards of students, academic and technical staff and these members of the university, holding an electoral mandate, were, unsurprisingly, most likely to talk about the university as a workplace based on engagement, trust and respect. These members often saw their task as providing a voice for the university's internal constituents rather than stepping out into broader issues of strategy. Many saw themselves as being up against what one internal member of the governing board called 'aggressive and independent leaders'. At two of the three case study institutions, though, the internal members of the governing board represented quite different interests. At one institution, the two academic members were not on speaking terms: one took a position of representing what he called 'the workers who have been marginalised by the new managerialism'; his colleague took the view that 'the old decision-making system had failed' and a new, 'more centralised', leadership was needed. At another of the institutions, the two academic staff members shared a desire for a stronger central leadership but one directed towards different goals. One wanted a 'good dictator' who would maintain the University's distinctive traditions

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<sup>4</sup>It should be noted here that many department leaders failed to create these structures. This was later specified as one of their obligations in the 2011 Amendment to the Law.

for inter-disciplinary scholarship and teaching; the other worked towards more autonomy for the University's departments, a goal seen by many in the University as divisive.

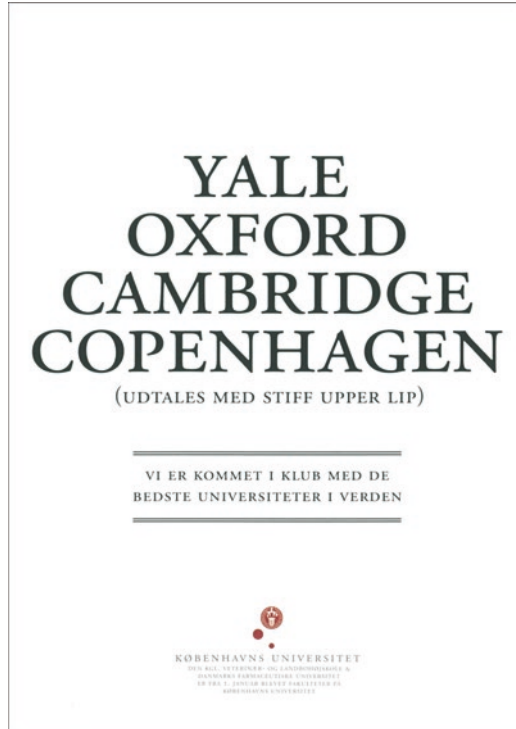
The vision of the university as an institution combining the logic of business with that of social purpose was shaped further by the competitive context in which it was expected to perform. Both the prime minister at the time and the long-serving minister for the sector reiterated consistently the new role of the university in supporting a competitive ethos in higher education. Changes to the financing of universities, the fusion of institutions and a focus on 'quality' via research assessment, accreditation of teaching programs and appeals to relevance, all contributed to reorienting universities to 'markets', 'competitors' and 'customers'. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the area of image management. Here, Copenhagen University, the nation's largest and oldest institution led the charge.

In 2007 full-page advertisements, postcards and street posters attempted to link the university to its own historic past both in terms of famous Danish alumni (Fig. 6.1: play-writer Holberg; philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and Nobel Prize winner Niels Bohr) and to a narrative connecting it more broadly to Western civilisation (Fig. 6.2). In the latter, much criticised example, the University presented itself alongside Yale, Oxford and Cambridge with the caption: 'Pronounced with a stiff upper lip'. The meaning, as far as it existed, was unfathomable to those staff

**Fig. 6.1** Copenhagen University postcard – links to past glories. Translation: 'It was good enough for Holberg, Kierkegaard and Bohr. But is it good enough for you?'



**Fig. 6.2** Copenhagen University postcard – connections to Western civilisation.  
 Translation: ‘Yale, Oxford, Cambridge, Copenhagen (Pronounced with a stiff upper lip). We have joined the club of the best universities in the world’



interviewed. One former lecturer in English was prompted to write in a major newspaper that, given the university’s limited financial resources and excessive meddling by government, the university’s ‘branding-expert well understood that the comparison with Yale, or Oxford could only function with a sense of irony’.

For the Danish University of Technology (DTU), the promise was less abstract as advertisements offered ‘Ph.D.’s without borders’, meaning, apparently, a generic ‘international top class research education’. Even Roskilde University, notoriously wary of such self-promotion, was moved in 2007 to produce a 16-page supplement entitled ‘RUC creates the future’ which was inserted into the leading national conservative and business-oriented broadsheet newspaper and one of two major newspapers provided free on urban public transport.

Evolving alongside the governing boards, newly formed public relations departments were to lead the way to greater visibility and market share. Not only were these ubiquitous at the central level but by 2010 they were appearing at faculty level also. At Copenhagen University, the focus was two-fold. First, there was a rationalisation of its 1.4 million pages of web material where enormous variation in departmental style and content, designed locally, was the norm. This ‘diet’ (*slankekur*) was achieved by the construction of an entry-level ‘jump-board’ to university facts and information, including a blog from the rector and his deputy. Second, uniform templates and pathways were introduced for all departmental pages. For the

University's head of public relations (*Kommunikationschef*) the overall project led to a 'service site with a branding element' maintained by a network of 200 web-editors working across the institution. In 2009 when the Times Higher Education Supplement ranked Copenhagen University 48 in the World (up from position 93 1 year earlier) the university was quick to use its newly designed entry page to advertise its success, noting that its teacher-student ratio was now 'better than the ranking list's top-scorer Harvard!'

The push to self-promotion was equally present at other universities. At a two-day residential meeting of the governing board of the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL)<sup>5</sup> in 2005, a number of strategic items were placed on the agenda. Observations from the dynamics of the meeting provide interesting insights into the new context of higher education in Denmark. After 90 minutes discussing the new university budgeting system, the governing board heard a report from the state auditors (outlining details of the system at the aggregate level) and a glum announcement from the University Director (head of administration) that government estimates for the University's allocation for 2006 were less than had been expected. After several further information notices, by which time two members had opened their computers, appearing to check their e-mail correspondence, the university's new head of public relations commenced a presentation based on (quite old) student application data from 2001, offering a range of terms – 'segments', 'markets', 'target groups' – to emphasize the urgency of not going 'slowly backwards'. Here, the university was 'selling' a 'sympathetic product' that the governing board needed to capitalize upon. In relation to the developing world and the large percentage of students that came from non-Western countries, the Deputy Rector asked: 'How shall we sell the goods?' Ultimately, no decisions were made and no resources were allocated to the public relations unit. Whilst internal members of the governing board grinned and whispered to each other throughout, the chairman and his rector were silent, taking extensive notes but seemingly unable to respond as they had just done in relation to budgets, allocations and liaison with the ministry.

### 6.3.2 *Openness and Democracy*

One didn't need to experience very many '*konsistorium*' meetings before [the 2003 University Law] you would say 'for God's sake! What comes out of this?'" 'There was often just a trench warfare mentality...democracy didn't exist...The '*konsistorium*' operated in the way that the six deans were in agreement that they didn't interfere in each other's relationships, and as such all the real discussion themes were closed (University Director 2005).

The above quote from a University Director was typical of many senior administrators and managers who attempted to explain what the University Law of 2003 meant

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<sup>5</sup>This institution which was founded in 1858 merged into the University of Copenhagen in 2007 as the Faculty of Life Sciences.

for them and their institution. Here, issues of participation were often conflated with abstract references to ‘democracy’, both of which were placed in the context of an (apparently obvious and) urgent need to improve the effectiveness of decision-making processes. Interestingly, it was mainly senior managers (rectors and heads of administration) who spoke in such terms. Internal members of the governing board were more likely to defend the old system as the cornerstone of the collegial university; external board members tended to detour around the issue of legitimate participation, focusing instead on issues of efficiency and effectiveness.

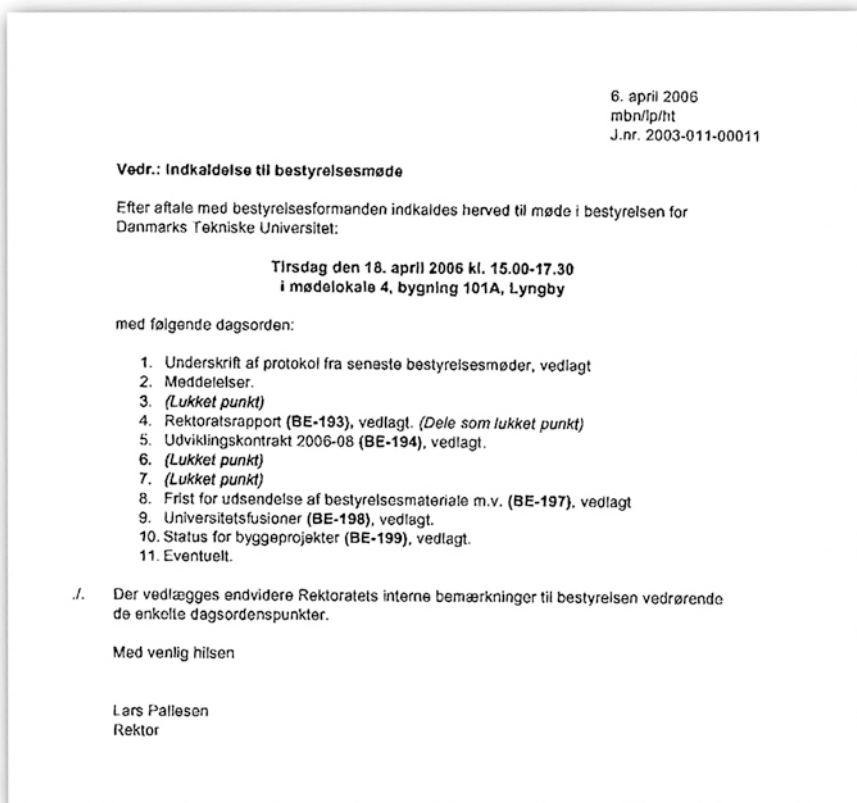
Perhaps the most fundamental point around which early discussions of the new Law centred concerned the question of ‘openness’ of governing board meetings and decision-making processes. Prior to the 2003 University Law, the *konsistorium* in Danish universities was open to observers and in many cases non-elected staff had the right to speak at these meetings. Whilst the Minister, under pressure from opposition parties during hearings leading to the Law, had committed universities to maintaining open procedures, governing board leaders had misgivings, with some being opposed.

One deputy chair of a governing board suggested that meetings were better conducted in private for ‘strategic and competitive’ reasons, especially as they were fighting for their ‘futures’ and ‘market shares’. Another agreed, extending this logic to staff. Many external members of the governing board referred to the practice in their own sectors in order to justify their wish to limit public involvement. In his words, ‘you’d never invite outsiders into a meeting of a major business concern where staffing, budgets and strategy were on the table. These things are confidential until they are decided’. Failure to provide this secure environment was, ironically, seen as inhibiting openness of another type amongst governing board members themselves. One vice-chancellor captured this view aptly in a phrase that was subsequently used by student unions to expose the dangers of adopting competitive business practices: openness, apparently, was ‘best preserved behind closed doors’.

Whilst few governing board members talked explicitly in terms of ‘democracy’, this was never far from the surface in discussions about openness. With few exceptions, internal members viewed ‘openness’ as a pre-requisite to the governing board gaining internal legitimacy. At one university, the entire external membership was opposed to open meetings, with the rector dismissing their concerns by suggesting that meetings of the former *konsistorium* were open but never attended by staff and that this practice had predictably continued under the new arrangements. For him, it was ‘not an issue’. Given the ministerial demand that governing board meetings remain open, he insisted that the governing board found a balance between the perceived need for confidentiality and the university’s history of maintaining open meetings. However, it was rare that university staff attended such meetings, pre- or post the 2003 University Law and governing boards appeared to use this to their advantage, drifting towards less accessible and open processes. At all three case study institutions, a growing amount of business was being labelled ‘closed’. At one institution the agenda usually listed the subjects to be discussed in closed parts of the meetings (for example, ‘meeting with department leaders’, ‘institutional fusions’, ‘proposed new department structure’). At the other two institutions, such

detail was rarely provided and in all three cases, the tradition of posting agendas, background papers and minutes of meetings on the internet in good time was being watered down. In one case, agendas were often posted on the day of the meeting. At another, staff could inspect hard copies of the papers in the rector's office. At the Danish University of Technology one governing board agenda found its way into a leading national higher education magazine critical of the lack of transparency in strategic-level decision-making (Fig. 6.3). Here, and apparently without any sense of awkwardness, items were simply listed as 'closed' (*lukket*) with no further explanation. This practice remained in place even *after* national publication of the document.

During our fieldwork it became clear that the possibility of closing discussions down was something able to be utilized strategically. At one meeting of a governing



**Fig. 6.3** Open but closed. Agenda for meeting of DTU's governing board on 18 April 2006. (Source: *FORSKERforum* 2006: 3).

It shows points 3, 6, and 7 closed with topics unidentified (*lukket punkt*) and point 4, the rector's report, partly closed. 'Open' points for which documents are pre-circulated (*vedlagt*) are 1. Minutes of previous meeting, 2. Announcements, 5. Development contract, 8. Deadline for governing board papers, 9. University mergers, 10. Status of building projects, 11. Other business

board during the data collection, a briefing about finances was interrupted by the newly appointed rector who, sneaking a glance at me as I took notes in the rear corner of the room, suggested that ‘this discussion could be aired further in the closed part of the meeting’. As such, by the end of our fieldwork, items such as ‘research strategies’, ‘student recruitment’ and ‘budgeting’ tended to find their ways to the rear of the agenda which was now transformed from a focus on detailed reports of department activities, staff successes and minor internal events, to being the core of the university’s (now ‘closed’) business. An external member of one governing board, acknowledging the apparent lack of internal interest in its work, suggested that governing board processes would be ‘quite different’ if observers did attend on a regular basis, but that they would find ways to maintain their separateness from the university:

I think if people decided to turn up and the board felt that they had ten or twenty people sitting around the room every time, then the discussions would take on a completely different turn and in fact we would discuss things before the meeting... So if there were things on the agenda that I needed to express my views about I would try to have the thing all done before we started the meeting (External member of governing board 2007).

For internal members of the governing board, the issue of openness took a different slant, as in some universities they were told they were not allowed to discuss governing board matters with the electorate that they represented on the board. In one university, the student representatives objected strongly, and in another university an academic representative put all the papers from the governing board on a website open to all. The issue of ‘openness’ was often constructed with reference to the former senate (*konsistorium*). Here, terms like ‘partnership’, ‘cooperation’, ‘fellowship’ and ‘joint ownership’ were evoked. Even though some internal members acknowledged what one called ‘the dark side’ of the earlier system – the inability of elected members to rise above ‘factional interests’ – all saw the *konsistorium* as the organ that embodied the university and from which decisions had automatic legitimacy. One described the ‘bottom-up’ way in which decisions were reached:

If you step back into the past you would see representatives on the department council, in academic advisory groups and on the ‘*konsistorium*’. So you could easily see that there were people like me at many levels. And because we had a very tight network there was a large forum for discussion when one went about making strategies. One could follow this process from bottom to top (Internal member of governing board 2006).

Reflecting on the new practices, a number of internal members with experience of the previous ‘*konsistorium*’ system felt that the very concept of ‘openness’ itself was an inappropriate term with which to scrutinise the work of governing boards. Here, they noted that the governing board was not concerned with *running* the university (unlike the former *konsistorium*), but, instead, *supporting* the rector in developing strategies and visions, and in representing the university to the ministry. Amongst external members of the governing board, ignorance of institutional debates, local agreements, disputes and tensions was widespread and not problematized. Some admitted to ‘never’ or ‘rarely’ entering university offices or discussing university life with staff or students. Another expressed her annoyance when the



venue for meetings changed because she had ‘no idea’ where ‘anything was’. Nevertheless, there was widespread agreement amongst external members of the governing board that it was not their task to provide detailed advice to the senior management and, indeed, the intent in the Law was that they would be above such things. For one, they were a ‘sounding board’. Another described himself as a ‘resource’ and ‘backstop’. All expressed the view that *trust* was essential to the new system. In the words of one governing board chairperson:

The governing board, like any other board of a company, of course, has as its primary source of information the person in daily charge, and in the university setting that’s the rector... it is a pretty basic thing that as a board....you have to trust the daily management and trust it to bring forward the important information....the rector is the central link between the institution and the board (Governing board chairperson 2005).

As a consequence, the vast majority reiterated the view that the most important – indeed the only independent – decision to be taken by the governing board was the appointment of the rector. As another governing board chairperson explained:

That’s the only real decision where we are on our own in the governing board. All other things should ideally be prepared by the daily management and then discussed and corrected and changed and so on in the board but we should not be the ones bringing the issues up....So the only independent decision and initiative is employing the rector; the managing director in another context (Governing board chairperson 2005).

Even if external members of the governing board had wished that they were better informed, the practice of relatively short and infrequent meetings provided a restricted basis on which to make informed decisions:

I think they (rector and chairman) work closely and they’re in close contact with each other. We only have these governing board meetings four/five times a year but the chairman is there perhaps once a week so nothing really happens that he does not agree on... sometimes you think ‘why does he need a board’? When you don’t meet that often then you don’t really get to decide on major issues. Many things have to be decided between board meetings because they can’t wait for a decision by the board. Once in a while we get an email saying ‘we need to do this or that, would you give us your view points on whether you think that’s ok?’ (External member of governing board 2005).

For this governing board member, the tight connection between the chairperson and rector highlighted the new dynamic in universities where, rather than manifesting the essence of the university in terms of its staff and students, the governing board was a ‘team’, constructed strategically to meet the need for rapid and coordinated change:

...you have somebody (at this university) who has been the rector before and he actually chooses the governing board chairman to some degree. They go round scouting for people and they choose the board. I mean I’m there because (rector) thought it would be a good idea...so you get the board you more or less want. If you look at boards in maybe ten years’ time there will be a different kind of board, that may not reflect to the same extent the rector or the directorate’s wishes for what they want. So there’s a closer connection today than there (has been before), even than there should be (External member of governing board 2005).

### 6.3.3 *Trust and Control*

With the transition to the new Law, each university was required to prepare and have approved a new set of articles of association (*vedtægter*). This offered an early insight into the frustration faced by universities as they dealt with a minister and senior civil servants determined to set the reform agenda. One of the case study universities was the first Danish university to respond to the new requirements, and the out-going *konsistorium* prepared the draft articles. Whilst the requirements of the 2003 University Law formed the basis of the document, the *konsistorium* attempted to include other structures and relations. These clauses referred to the newly conceived academic council, the existing research and education committees and main internal staff liaison committee of the university. But the governing board repeatedly rejected these attempts over the two-years it took to have the articles accepted. This led to a ‘slimming process’ where the detailed structures and guidelines that had served as the university’s administrative framework were removed in order that the articles might be confirmed by the ministry; a prerequisite for beginning the reform work:

Much was removed from the articles, and many things were moved over into our general procedures for operations (*forretningsorden*) instead. Other things were simply removed because the ministry wouldn’t accept them (Internal member of governing board 2005).

The ministry’s desire for conformity to the 2003 University Law created enormous frustration within the university and ignored the long experience of Danish universities in accommodating central directives in ways that gave meaning in different institutional contexts. This frustration ran deep at one of the case study institutions that had deliberately been pro-active in implementing the 2003 University Law, in part, according to the rector, to curry favour with his new masters. One internal member of the governing board explained:

...the ministry should have made it clear just how they wanted the articles to look...they could have just as easily written to us and said: ‘Dear friends, no messing around please. Your articles must mirror the Act. No imagination or individual variation on this theme, please’ (Internal member of governing board 2005).

Even though the ministry determined the shape of each university’s articles of association, institutions were able to establish or re-form previous organs if they so wished. For example, at one of the case study institutions, the research and education committees were central to university decision-making and the main staff liaison committee – a core organ at two of the case study institutions – was able to continue. Nevertheless, their function changed from being an in-built part of an organisation-wide decision-making apparatus to being an advisory body that needed to establish its legitimacy. With the rise of the new governing board and senior management structure, these organs struggled to be heard. Here, central ambitions to control the sector in a uniform manner led to a focus on structures that streamlined decision-making processes and marginalised diverse groups of constituents.

Initial negative experiences with the preparation of the articles of association were perpetuated when universities prepared their ‘Development Contracts’. These required institutions to ‘lay down clear objectives and success criteria as well as describe and render visible the vision and target areas of the individual university within the university’s main tasks’ (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002). Whilst the ‘political technology’ of the university development contract preceded the 2003 University Law, it was recharged here to form an important basis for reform of university governance. Since 2003, universities have negotiated three separate contract exercises framed by a set of performance criteria (see Fig. 6.4). The so-called ‘first generation’ contract was an interim document prepared at different times after 2003 depending on each university’s internal timeframe for adherence to the Law. Here, the ministry assured universities that the focus would be on their own goals and not overly shaped by analysis of progress towards them. ‘Second generation’ contracts were written for the period 2008–2010 and were required to relate to a number of success criteria. These were ‘terminated’ early in 2007 because of the new context arising from the ministry-initiated merger of universities and government research institutions that year. A revised, or ‘third generation’ contract was initiated by the government in June 2007 and created much controversy by insisting that universities relate their plans to a number of specified ‘expected outcomes’ (*resultatkrav* in Danish).<sup>6</sup> Apparently, by articulating these ‘expected outcomes’ universities were ‘offered’ ‘greater scope and flexibility to meet their challenges’ (Danish University and Property Agency 2011).

Structured around four broad categories (‘Research’, ‘Education’, ‘Dissemination of knowledge’ and ‘Commissioned research for public sector services’), the ministry’s guidelines went on to list a host of 16 specific indicators that universities were required to respond to. These ranged from measures of research output, growth in student numbers, completion and dropout rates, to indicators of the university’s success in disseminating its work to the education system, business community and society at large. Whilst these indicators were to be included, universities could add additional ones if desired.

Universities responded to these differently. Roskilde University, for example, ‘decided’ to follow the ministry’s structure (Roskilde University 2008: 5), but presented two additional goals in its ‘development contract’ which, in English, it called the ‘Performance’ contract. At Copenhagen University, where there had been much criticism of the government’s intentions, the presentation of the 16 performance indicators was prefaced by a statement that its Strategic Plan, entitled ‘Destination 2012’, provided a fuller portrait of the directions to be taken in light of the fusion of additional institutions. It goes on to mention that the Contract for 2008–10 contains ‘a range of development areas (*udviklingsområder*) of particular political interest’ that were ‘emphasised (*betonet*) by the ministry and subsequently finalised after negotiations with them’ (Copenhagen University 2007: 2).

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<sup>6</sup>The Ministry’s own website uses the term ‘suggested indicators’ in English as its translation of the Danish term ‘*resultatkrav*’ although this does not capture the essentially imposed nature of the request.

Hovedmålsætning	Nr.	Resultatkrav
Forskning	1	Forskningsproduktion
	2	Internationalisering af forskning
	3	Tiltrækning af eksterne, ikke statslige midler
	4	Ph.d.-aktivitet
Uddannelse	5	Optag
	6	Frafald
	7	Gennemførelsestid
	8	Uddannelser tilpasset samfundets behov
	9	Iværksætter
	10	Internationalisering af uddannelser
	11	Kvalitet i undervisningen
Vidensspredning	12	Samarbejde med professionshøjskolerne
	13	Efter- og videreuddannelse
	14	Deltagelse i den offentlige debat
	15	Samarbejde med erhvervslivet
Forskningsbaseret myndighedsbetjening	16	Forskningsbaseret myndighedsbetjening

**Fig. 6.4** Overview of the Ministry's requirements for university development contracts. (Source: Copenhagen University 2007: 3).

Translation: Four main goals and 16 specific outcomes: Research: 1. Research outputs; 2. Internationalisation of research; 3. Attraction of non-state funding; 4. PhD activity. Education: 5. Enrolments; 6. Dropouts; 7. Average time to completion; 8. Relevance of education programs to society's needs; 9. Entrepreneurship; 10. Internationalisation of education; 11. Quality in teaching. Dissemination: 12. Collaboration with university colleges; 13. Continuing and further education; 14. Participation in public debates; 15. Collaboration with the business community. Commissioned research for public services: 16. Commissioned research

The presentation of aims, indicators, goals and 'mileposts' in Danish development contracts provides much insight into the politics of university-ministry relations. Here, we see universities making clear commitments to specific futures framed by government. For example, in relation to research output (*forskning-sproduktion*), Copenhagen University committed itself to maintaining its current average of 2.2 peer-reviewed articles and 0.1 academic books or monographs per full-time equivalent academic staff member (for Roskilde University the commensurate figures were 1.4 and 0.2 per staff member). By 2009, and in relation to 2006 figures, Copenhagen intended to increase by 6% the number of foreign academic appointments, ostensibly to 'strengthen the internationalisation of research' (for Roskilde the figure was 7%). By 2010, Copenhagen undertook to register *exactly* 863 PhD students and to maintain completion rates of 'at least' 63%. For Roskilde it was a much smaller but nonetheless specific figure. Whilst universities appeared to have acquiesced to what one university head of administration called the ministry's 'fixation' (*været opsat*) with concrete and measurable goals, many governing

board leaders and members made it clear that these documents could not be seen as the university's alone. In the words of one external member of the governing board who had previously been a chairman of a governing board at another university: 'They are not our goals, but we have written them in just as the ministry demands because they sit on the money'.

In other areas the indicators are next to meaningless as instruments with which to measure performance. In relation to Indicator 8, ('Degree programmes adjusted to society's needs'), Copenhagen University undertook to 'discuss and analyse' the 'labour market orientation' of its programs and to consider the 'volume' of its admissions. However, no indicators are offered (or demanded) here and the only 'milepost' is a final 'statement' (*redegørelse*) of what actions are to be planned and implemented. Others are highly symbolic. Indicator 9, for example, deals with 'Entrepreneurship' and whilst Copenhagen University – already positioning itself as *the* premier research-intensive 'knowledge organisation' in the country – agreed to increase from 14 to 16 the number of 'courses' with this as a focus, Roskilde, by contrast, undertook to ensure that by 2010 *all* curricula would have a focus on entrepreneurship equivalent to 7.5 ECTS credits. By 2015, though, this commitment had still not been passed on to subject-level boards of studies for implementation.

'Quality' now finds a comfortable and legitimate home in university policy making as Indicator 11. Here, Copenhagen University restyled the ministry's terminology of 'quality in teaching' to '*documentation* in relation to teaching', but nevertheless extended its range of commitments to include not only a quality assurance system based on 'best practice' from 'international' models but additional physical study places for students, provision of additional supervision for those that have dropped behind in their study programs, provision for 'electronic' exams and a commitment to publishing 75% of course evaluations. At Roskilde, a continuing education program for 'instructors' (meaning academic teaching staff!) would now comprise 'two mandatory courses per year in educational techniques and theory for assistant professors' plus six to eight themed seminars and courses on subjects 'relevant' to all staff. Beginning in 2013 the University began to observe, assess and certify all permanent academic staff to teach in English (*including* mother tongue speakers of English!). In this case, as with many of the smaller and more vulnerable institutions, government enthusiasm for total reform seemed to be matched by the institutions it attempted to transform.

Such self-regulation was not however the preserve of smaller universities. Aarhus University, an enthusiastic contributor to the government's discourse on world class education and self-styled as 'at home amongst the absolute elite of the world's universities', in 2010 presented no less than 40 indicators and felt comfortable enough for its development contract to appear as a prominent link – indeed the only one by a Danish university – on the ministry's homepage. In its preamble, the university even indicated its willingness to reach beyond the tight and prescriptive framework offered by the government:

In mid-2008, once the National Audit Office's (*Rigsrevisionen*) report on the status of the universities' quality assurance systems and the Accreditation Agency's accreditation process and implementation of criteria are known, the university will reformulate its policies and procedures for its quality work in the field of education based on a quality assurance conference. The aim is to create coherence between the university's ambitious strategy for general quality assurance and other national and international quality assurance work (Aarhus University 2010).

Whilst such displays might appear overly compliant, universities were attempting to operate tactically. Whilst Aarhus University appeared to embrace the government's agenda as part of a strategy of repositioning itself beyond its geographical/ regional confines, other institutions did precisely what was required in order to satisfy the desires of policy makers, all the time acknowledging this apparent obedience as political necessity. For one governing board member, the ministry 'had not asked the governing board what they thought was important to include in a development contract' and as a consequence 'the governing board gave them what they wanted, but we were completely clear that this was only a part of the University's own strategic plan that we worked towards'. This approach was exemplified at Copenhagen University where the governing board discussed the possibility of including a 17th goal concerned with making the University an 'attractive workplace for staff'. This was ultimately rejected:

It's not in the University's interest that the ministry presents a 16-point list of demands that has no relation to the University's own strategic plan. It's my view that the University has nothing to gain in achieving a number of externally imposed success criteria that the ministry can later use to control us. It would therefore also be extremely unhelpful if, in the Contract, there was something about personnel and conditions because the ministry could also control that field (Internal member of governing board, Copenhagen University 2005).

This meant, in effect, that universities were duplicating their planning efforts; providing one list of largely short-term, measureable output indicators for the government but devoting most of their time and energy to broader, long-sighted and complex measures of improvement. Whilst many external members of the governing board saw the government's approach as inviting unnecessary bureaucratisation and accounting, a real assessment of the consequences of the development contract would only be possible once the ministry made it clear how it would use the exercise in the course of its assessment of the actual results achieved in each institutional context. In the interim, though, the ministry commissioned an 'independent' evaluation of the sector which determined that the contracts were 'too detailed and process-oriented', much of which had no developmental function (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009: 32). Nevertheless, the focus on research outputs, and their legitimization in signed contract form, has undoubtedly reinforced the ministry's enthusiasm for assessing institutional research capacity against various global norms. It has also provided fuel for the introduction of quality assurance systems and a range of 'internationalization' measures related to student funding. University units for staff training are now common, as is a much heightened awareness of student completion rates. Whilst the driving forces behind such institutional transformations are impossible to trace with certainty, it is clear that Danish higher education was changing markedly.

## 6.4 Conclusion: ‘Forgive Us: We Didn’t Know What We Were Doing’

Measurement and control has gone too far. The national auditor and others demand zealous detailed goal-setting, for example with development contracts, such that it closely resembles meaningless accounting ... this creates a momentum of irritation in daily work, and the worst is that these rules are obstructing university development (Chairman of Governing Board 2005).

The University Law of 2003 must be understood as a volatile cocktail of global managerialist ideas circulating freely amongst Western governments since the 1980s and their particular, partial and provisional interpretation in Denmark, commencing in earnest in the 1990s and resulting in the ‘contract politics’ of the 2001 Fogh Rasmussen Government. It was during this period that the ideas central to the 2003 University Law were incubated and accepted by the majority of the major political parties. In a newspaper debate-piece from 2007 titled ‘Forgive us: we didn’t know what we were doing’ eight former senior officials from the Ministry of Finance admitted that the contemporary lust for regulation in the Danish public sector had started in the early 1990s under a Social Democratic-led coalition government and had been driven by an uncritical acceptance of the rhetoric of ‘contract-steering’ (*kontraktstyringen*) where decentralised units were given more flexibility in setting salaries, budgeting and long-term planning in return for ‘increased productivity and quality’. In their own words:

We preached decentralisation and modern leadership, but maintained central control (I) because we were afraid that we couldn’t control institutions with ‘modern’ methods ... Then came the continuous human movement towards the perfection of the instruments. Contracts began to include more and more goals, indicators, activity numbers and development projects. These became more incomprehensible and disappeared out of the consciousness of the senior leadership except for during the ritual (reporting) dance each year (Gjørup et al. 2007).

This fixation with regulation and central control was now structured by a dangerous new relation between politicians, senior civil servants - who were now on performance contracts themselves - and public, service providing, institutions. Everyone, it seemed, had a share and interest in the madness. This critique was accepted without reservation by the influential Finance Minister of the time, Mogens Lykketoft. Later in opposition, he acknowledged that ‘Many of the initiatives we took then were clearly over-played and ended in caricature’. The Minister for Economy and Business at the time, Marianne Jelved, supported his confession, saying ‘We had hoped that it (contract steering) would strengthen the public sector but it has proved to be the opposite’ (Keiding 2007).

In this regard Denmark has followed if not led other European nations towards a new dominant ‘post-bureaucratic’ model of governance where a system of ‘regulation by results’ is disciplined by the forces of the quasi-market (Maroy 2012). It is ‘post-bureaucratic’ because the ‘modes of coordination and control established for guidance are no longer limited to ensuring that practices *conform* to rules and pro-

cedures, as was typical of the bureaucratic model' (Maroy 2012: 69 own emphasis). Whilst conformity to government edict remains central, Danish higher education is also being shaped by a new competitive ethos where institutions strive to outperform each other relative to international rankings, research funding and student admissions. Some would view the current system as a 'sector' in name only. As a consequence, having witnessed the emergence of an enterprise discourse, we are now living with its consequences as it becomes embedded and taken-for-granted. Along the way, new definitions of the 'common good' (Maroy 2012: 70) and, indeed, the purpose of the university begin to emerge.

In a major review of Danish universities conducted after the University Act of 2003 it was determined that the aim of creating university 'autonomy' had been 'achieved' but via a 'detailed' and 'dense' regulative framework. Recommending a 'high-trust strategy' to end 'unnecessary administration and interfering with strategic university processes' the Report of the International Evaluation concludes that 'the politicians and the implementing authorities should be expected to stick to overall strategic targets and leave (it) to the universities to decide how to reach the targets' (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009: 10). The report has supported an ongoing public critique of threats to university freedom of research and debate, and led to new legislation in 2011, which gave governing boards the possibility to widen the functions of academic councils and was aimed in part at ensuring 'co-determination' between staff and students on university governing boards, academic councils, study boards and PhD-committees. However, the overall framework of the University Act of 2003 remains intact with the governing board at the apex of a system which remains both estranged from the daily life of the institution and oriented towards the external positioning and economic health of universities rather than their internal life with all the diversity that this embodies. The refusal of the ministry to allow other internal organs to have real decision-making capabilities or the right of veto over governing board decisions keeps in place a system radically opposed to the expressed interests of many if not most university academic staff and puts the onus onto executive leaders to think creatively about how to maintain what the Report of the International Evaluation called 'Danish democratic traditions' (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009: 10) – always a problematic signifier – in a system where these are no longer enshrined as sovereign.

In our study of university governance, especially in relation to university governing boards and academic councils, it was clear that the space to be governed was changing. Institutions were no longer their own masters; nor could these masters be found alone in Denmark itself. At one level the new referent was a global discourse of competitiveness, purpose and efficiency and this manifested as text and action between and across what was emerging as a common supra-national educational space. At another level, the 'space' of Danish higher education governance appeared to take form as tight and often tense relations between senior government and ministry officials and the leaders of the universities themselves. Whilst critical of much of the policy agenda, chairs of governing boards and rectors appeared to have much more in common with politicians and bureaucrats than with their own staff and colleagues within the institution. To a large degree, the university 'development con-



tract' became a compact between ministry and university (defined as its executive level) and although its goals were often distributed in a cascade of further performance contracts between the rector and deans, and deans and department leaders, it was distinct from any broader relation to the university. For the ministry, the 'university' has come to mean the 'governing board', primarily its 'chair', and the senior management group. However, institutional variations – in histories, rationales and actual worldly encounters - meant that it is not straightforward to define this space. Notwithstanding this narrowing of what could be discussed and by whom, institutions remained distinctive in their own ways. However, explaining the differences between these institutional visions and practices is far from straightforward. One insight comes from the former chairman of the governing board of KVL, a university integrated into Copenhagen University after the government's merger policy in 2007, at which time he became a regular member of this new governing board. Interviewed at this time in the professional magazine for researchers, *FORSKERforum*, he was immediately able to discern a difference in the two institutions which he described in terms of decision-making processes:

KVL's organisation was faster at taking strategic decisions and implementing the new leadership reforms. Copenhagen University is a much larger institution ... the 'convoy-principle' – that you wait for the last rowboat – has shaped Copenhagen University (Former chairman of governing board, KVL, subsequently ordinary external member of the governing board, Copenhagen University, *FORSKERforum* 2007).

This meant that change processes at Copenhagen University were slower and determined more by institutional context (especially in the faculties) than was the case at KVL where decision-making processes in a smaller, industry-oriented institution resonated well with the vision of politicians. This had its ironic element also: KVL's staff were critical of the lack of engagement and dialogue between senior decision-makers and ordinary academic staff, highlighting the pro-active role of the chairman, rector and senior management group in determining the university's strategic vision and daily priorities. However, as an ordinary governing board member at Copenhagen University, this (former) chairman found himself on the receiving end: marginalised by the continued strong linkages between the rector's office and the faculties, at least as these materialized in the priorities that *continued* to be set at faculty level:

I was never involved... I regretted that we didn't have a general discussion on the governing board about what (priorities) we should focus on (Former chairman of governing board, KVL, subsequently ordinary external member of the governing board, Copenhagen University, *FORSKERforum* 2007).

Institutional roles and functions were also being transformed. Rectors, no longer beholden to their constituents have a different room for manoeuvre and now tend to 'speak to' the university through department heads rather than directly to staff. Governing board chairs, with a mandate to support the rector, rarely engage with staff at all. Senior academic staff are now heard less through their mandate on elected bodies such as academic council and more as a consequence of their capacity to raise external funds and demand institutional backing for their research priori-

ties. Staff continued to struggle to find their voice and in moments of conflict, especially in the period immediately after the introduction of the reforms, took to addressing their leaders through the national media. Students, though, have the limited rhetoric of the ‘consumer’ with which to reposition themselves.

Finally, a range of new subject positions were taking form. Whilst this is dealt with further in the next chapter it is worth noting here that the first generation of university leaders – at least those appointed to the position of rector for the first time - were taking a ‘heroic’ view of their roles; seeing themselves *as* the institution and taking responsibility for institutional health *on behalf of* a wider group of actors. One example of this is the ongoing tendency for universities (meaning governing boards and rectors) to accumulate central ‘strategic’ reserves (Boden and Wright 2011). Often titled the ‘rector’s pool’, these reserves were used for discretionary initiatives that might help in repositioning the institution in a competitive ‘market’ without the need to garner governing board approval. Notwithstanding such executive-level entrepreneurialism, such action usually echoed the agenda set by the ministry and spoke to ‘national’ policy priorities such as the desire to attract leading international staff into the sector or to support priority research areas. For most of the period since the 2003 University Law came into effect universities have balanced the competing imperatives to respond to central demands *and* positioning their institutions in a competitive and unpredictable market place. This balancing act – reported here as a set of policy enactments - led to considerable contest and tension about the role of the new governing boards and their scope of action relevant to other constituents.

Notwithstanding such contest, 10 years of intensive reform appears to have resulted in a number of stable or accepted conditions from which future policy enactments will proceed. First, it was clear that the appointed governing boards were now a legitimate part of the architecture of Danish higher education. The appointment of new governing board members, far from being a rallying point for internal discussion amongst staff and students, goes barely noticed and for the main is discussed only in the semi-meaningful confines of academic council. Few academic staff can name the external members of the governing board responsible for guiding and redefining their institutions. Similarly, the notion of the rector as chief executive officer acting on behalf of the governing board but in the *interests* of the university appeared to be uncontested. In 2008, the rector of one of our case study institutions lost enormous credibility amongst academic staff by demanding staff reductions in the face of a minor budget crisis, something unheard of under the earlier system where budget cuts would be shared evenly across the budget units of the institution. Ultimately, memories of the former ‘*konsistorium*’ process for dealing collectively with such issues shaped a high level of engagement, especially by more senior academic staff not prepared to accept the new ‘rules of the game’ for strategic decision-making. The resulting protest undermined the legitimacy of the rector and was one significant factor in his early resignation (discussed more fully in Chap. 7 on university leaders). In late 2014, facing a similar budget crisis, the current rector of this same university wrote to staff to explain that an adjustment (*tilpasning*) to staffing numbers would be necessary. This was regrettable but necessary because

the governing board now had a policy to only use its accumulated capital reserves for 'strategic initiatives', not to fund operational shortfalls. Rather than the outcome of a broad internal discussion, this governing board decision was conveyed to the university in the rector's very first correspondence to staff on the crisis and was presented as the programmed response to a more general policy parameter set by the governing board. In one department, staff received a Christmas Eve email from their academic head inviting applications for early retirement as one way to accommodate the governing board's decision. What had led to intense internal action 6 years earlier was now received with an ominous combination of resignation and eager managerial compliance. When I asked one of the leaders of the 2008 actions to explain the current subdued tone on campus he remarked: 'of course we could organise, but what if no one showed up?'

A second seemingly fixed point relates to the once contentious issue of openness, especially of governing board meetings and decision-making processes. Governing board meetings remain technically open to all but are in practice unnoticed spectacles. Whilst some universities post meeting papers (agendas, public background documents and minutes) on their internal web pages, the devil remains in the detail with enormous quantities of information not available for broader consultation. For governing board members, especially busy external members, the infrequency of meetings and sheer volume of issues to consider has consolidated the government's original vision that they serve a supporting and advisory role to senior management as it takes responsibility for 'running' the institution. Senior management groups (discussed further in the chapter on university leaders) remain at the opaque core of the new system.

Finally, a new competitive logic is well and truly embedded into Danish universities. One manifestation of this has emerged through international ranking systems; another by the need to generate research income. Here, governing boards are becoming more strategic as they identify external members who may have good connections and linkages to research councils and industry funding. However, whilst industry now has a central seat at the table of university reform, this does not yet appear to have led to the types of symbiotic relations reported in the US context where university research agendas are converging with the interests of industry-based trustees (Mathies and Slaughter 2013). This competitive logic has also shaped internationalisation efforts within many Danish universities, not least as they seek to attract fee-paying students. Once again, though, we have not seen the rush to Asian 'markets' that characterised early internationalisation strategies in the UK or Australasia and on which many institutions in those countries are now financially dependent.

In these ways one can certainly talk about a new landscape for Danish higher education with certain contours emerging as fixed points from which to navigate the future. Nevertheless, the range of institutional histories, contexts and missions in Danish higher education suggest some degree of path dependency. Whilst the aim in this chapter was to explore those pathways through the work of institutionalised structures such as governing boards, the next chapter extends this focus through the study of key subject positions and the individuals who enact them.

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# Chapter 7

## Leading the Post-bureaucratic University



Stephen Carney 

### 7.1 Introduction

What you don't seem to understand is that the rules have changed. It's the rector who decides. I seek advice when I need it but I make my own decisions and they are final. Your time is past (Rector responding to question at a meeting of academic staff, 2002).

The quotation above came from a newly appointed rector of one of the single-faculty universities<sup>1</sup> where a prototype for the 2003 University Law had been applied. At the meeting, the academic staff were invited to discuss the rector's new strategic vision which he outlined in chalk on a blackboard. Seated in rows of desks with many taking notes like eager pupils, staff sketched for themselves this first pictorial elaboration of the rector's thinking. The changes would be wholesale, including a merger of several institutions and a complete restructure of the institutes (or faculties), their disciplinary/subject orientation and administration. After the rector had outlined his model, the room fell silent until one well-respected colleague, a senior professor and former elected member of the outgoing 'konsistorium' of one of the now amalgamated institutions, enquired how this model would be negotiated with the academic staff. The rector's response (above) made it clear that a new balance of power was to be applied and that this was made legitimate by what he called the 'authority vested in me by the ministry'.

This chapter examines the new context of Danish university leadership. Following Maroy (2012), I understand the enactment of university leadership in Denmark as

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<sup>1</sup>Whilst not one of the three case-study institutions chosen for this research (as explained in Chap. 6), this university was nevertheless one we followed closely as it attempted to interpret – and lead – the new political landscape of higher education reform.

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occurring in a space of tension between two dominant models of governance: the ‘quasi-market model’ and its ‘evaluator-state’ counterpart, both of which are shaped by a system of ‘post-bureaucratic regulation’ (Maroy 2012: 67). I argue that the transition in Denmark to a form of entrepreneurial university (Clark 1998) required leaders who could shape their institutions whilst negotiating pervasive systems of ‘*audit(ing)*, *accounting* and *management*’ (Olssen and Peters 2005: 315, original emphasis). Within this space leaders were positioned both as technical experts of organizational complexity, finances and human resources *and* heroic, transformative figures expected to inspire collective commitment to externally imposed change. Echoing the argument developed in Chap. 5, these leaders found themselves in a tension between two dimensions of the reform that envisioned universities as both tightly accountable service deliverers for the state and a new and unpredictable ‘power force’ in society.

In the first section of the chapter I outline some dominant understandings of leadership, especially in relation to knowledge-creation institutions, before considering the ways in which the 2003 University Law envisioned the leadership challenge confronting the sector. Given my starting point at the beginning of this period of transformation, I examine early job advertisements in order to illustrate how universities were interpreting the ministry’s vision for a new type of leadership. I then unfold these by recalling various debates about the fitness of the first generation of university leaders to fulfil these demanding roles. This provides a frame for presenting ethnographic data that explores leadership enactment in Denmark in the wake of the reform.

Researching these issues and relying heavily on data collected in close proximity to elite actors who were negotiating and enacting new roles and relationships was problematic. Whilst some respondents appeared to celebrate the reforms and thus used the opportunity afforded by the research to present the particulars of their case, others appeared to treat the interview and our associated observations of key decision-making bodies with suspicion and reticence. One rector reluctantly agreed to a meeting, only to keep us waiting for 40 min in full view whilst he spoke with his university director, eventually offering 25 min in which to skirt around issues of substance. Another avoided a meeting, delegating the task to the deputy-rector and the university’s media ‘consultant’ who started our sole formal discussion by asking ‘what are you fishing for?’ Like Jones’ study of policy elites in the European Commission, there was:

...an awareness of the ways in which interviewing policy elites could be a fraught and problematic endeavour replete with effects of power and domination as a result of both the political sensitivity of the subject matter, the sophisticated theoretical means which the people studied can bring to bear on attempts to study them and their practice and skill in handling the ethnographic encounter (Jones 2010: 33).

It was vital, then, to establish multiple vantage points from which to scrutinize the claims of those at the centre of the research. In addition to analysing policy texts and being immersed in the public debate related to the 2003 University Law, interviews and field observations took place across the senior management level of each of the three case study universities. A number of rectors, their deputies, university directors

(heads of administration) and senior academic staff members of faculties as well as those on university governing boards and academic councils were interviewed. Many of these interviews had as their point of departure extended observations of meetings of the newly constituted governing boards and academic councils. In addition many informal or ad hoc ‘public’ meetings convened by academic staff at all three institutions were observed and were followed-up through the institution’s documents, blogs, newspapers and interviews or informal discussions with participants. It was not possible to observe the meetings of the senior management groups (*direktion* in Danish) that were being formed in each case-study university but interviews and informal discussions with various participants in these groups made it possible to understand something of the agenda and work process. However, what follows is necessarily partial, provisional and dependent on many informants who were ‘close to the action’ but undoubtedly also motivated by diverse interests and concerns.

## 7.2 Conceptualizing Leadership

The contemporary university in advanced Western societies is now thoroughly shaped by forces of ‘massification, marketization and internationalization, commercialisation and privatisation, managerialism and accountability with a focus on quality (research assessment, quality assurance and performance-based funding) and engagement with industry’ (Blackmore 2014: 87). In addition to being engines for ‘creative and technological innovation’, universities are also expected ‘promote social cohesion and inclusion, while making nation-states internationally competitive in global markets’ (ibid: 87). Leadership is viewed as central to realizing this agenda but is enacted within an ‘emerging global “architecture of governance” characterised by international performance rankings, regional frameworks such as Bologna and national quality assurance and qualification regimes’ (ibid: 87). Leadership of universities in Denmark, as elsewhere, must thus be understood as ‘critical to the neoliberal project of corporatisation and networked knowledge production and dissemination’ (ibid: 88).

Writing on university leadership attempts to synthesize this complex agenda into sets of general requirements and prescriptions. From an early focus on traits and dispositions (e.g. Bass 1985; Bass and Avolio 1994), much of which was conflated with the notion of the ‘heroic’ individual (Burns 1978, p. 3), leadership research has broadened to consider the relationship of the leaders to the institutional context (Middlehurst 1999). This may focus on the leadership of teams (Bensimon and Neumann 1993), or on the role of the leader in transforming attitudes and organizational culture (Burns 1978). The notion of distributed leadership is particularly popular in higher education research and used as a way to broaden considerations of ‘who counts as a leader’ (Macfarlane 2014: 1). The democratization of leadership (Andersen 2005) is taken further by those who suggest that each autonomous worker can be empowered to carry out ‘self-guided leadership’ within the overall framework



of (low) hierarchy management (Ernø-Kjølhede et al. 2000). This view was the centrepiece of a presentation given by a renowned professor of leadership at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) during a national conference on leadership at one of the case study institutions shortly after the 2003 University Law came into effect. Arguing for a collective conception of leadership, he attempted to outline three competing models within Danish higher education.

The most prevalent approach, and the one being openly challenged by the 2003 University Law, was the 'bureaucratic' model in which there would normally be a single leader, a governing board to which the leader reported and a workplace comprising many individual and individualized workers. This model remained deeply implanted in the common consciousness of Danish universities, leading academics to accept an implicit contract whereby the appointed (or for that matter elected) leader would deal with administrative and financial demands, external relations and personnel, but leave academic staff to their (individually constituted) teaching and research activities. Academics' decisions about teaching and research would tend to serve the needs of the status quo and on-going collective commitments. A second model or approach could be found in the 'sector-research' institutions that were driven primarily by an 'input-output' mentality where tasks would be received from outside the organization, allocated by leaders to staff, and completed according to agreed specifications, often in teams or research groups. A third approach, something of a hybrid and seen as a desirable objective by the presenter, was described as being about the 'supervision of self-leading' workers where management would 'support and facilitate' colleagues to reach their own goals which were best organized in collectives such as research groups. Relating to his experiences from CBS where this third model had been introduced, he explained how each research group was 'empowered' to create its own strategy and set its own goals under the mantra: 'Everyone is a leader; everyone should be a leader'. This model of collective action, supervision and control was aimed at ensuring both individual commitment and obligation to organizational change processes. Here, 'supervised self-leadership' was a way to marry existing and deep desires amongst academic staff for influence and self-determination but within a context where academic work was conceptualized as a collective commitment to shared goals and outcomes.

Whilst the focus on self-leadership suggests a radical departure from traditional 'heroic' understandings of leadership, the obligation to lead oneself for the benefit of others but in the context of neo-liberal disciplinary policy regimes (Peters et al. 2000: 111) suggests the emergence of a new and more productive form of power (Foucault 1982). O'Reilly and Reed (2010, 2011), refer to this as 'leaderism', an emerging discourse shaping the conduct of public sector governance. Unlike managerialism with its focus on 'rational structures, procedures, and modes of accountability in the pursuit of goals defined by policymakers and senior managers' (Wallace and Pocklington 2002: 68, in O'Reilly and Reed 2010: 962), leaderism is about 'reimagining' the public sector; styling clients and service providers alike as co-producers of mutually-desired outcomes couched as vital to the public good (O'Reilly and Reed 2010: 960). Here the focus shifts away from authoritarian figures that deploy the formal authority needed to press staff into satisfying performance

targets towards, instead, a ‘more charismatic, pro-active and visionary conception of leadership as a generic cultural resource and process to be mobilized by, and diffused through, a multiplicity of stakeholder agents (O’Reilly and Reed 2010: 1090). This is leadership that creates a ‘social bond between government, public services and the public’ as a way to ‘overcome tensions between conflicts of interest’ (O’Reilly and Reed 2011: 968). Championed by persuasive and compelling personalities, such leadership remains ‘heroic’ but is of a radically different type when exercised in policy environments that circumscribe what can be thought and done. The appeal to shared purpose and social value creation was an effective way for senior leaders to co-opt stakeholders into reform projects that might otherwise encounter resistance and was an emerging phenomenon during the study of university leadership. However, as we shall see shortly, early leadership approaches after the 2003 university reform tended to prioritize the heroic individual, pressing staff to comply with the new institutional landscape via key political technologies with the threat of institutional and personal sanctions for non-compliance. Given the general reluctance of academic staff to accept heavy-handed managerialism, this path to institutional transformation was unsurprisingly traumatic for many. Over time, though, and as these political technologies took hold, more subtle forms of self-management and disciplining became apparent. In conceptual terms we might call this ‘heroic leadership mark 2’.

### 7.3 The Legal Frame for Leading

As outlined in the chapter on university governing boards, the 2003 University Law specified that rectors would now be appointed by their governing boards, rather than by election from within the university itself. Deans of faculties would be appointed by the rector, and department heads by the dean. This ‘professional administration’ (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002) was deemed essential if Danish universities were to meet the multiple challenges facing the sector, and represented a significant departure from a system of academic leadership that, in the words of one prominent rector had represented one of the ‘most extensive collegial democratic self-management’ systems in the world (Oddershede 2009: 2) (Fig. 7.1).<sup>2</sup>

The 2003 University Law actually stipulated very little about what this new model of leadership might look like, or how universities might respond to it. Rectors were to undertake the ‘day-to-day management’ of the university within the ‘framework’ laid down by the governing board. The 2003 University Law prescribed that the rector must be ‘an acknowledged researcher within one of the university’s academic fields and have knowledge of the educational sector’. This required experience

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<sup>2</sup>The distinctions between leadership, management and governance have been well-rehearsed elsewhere (Middlehurst 1999). For the purposes of this chapter the focus is on leadership defined in terms of the 2003 University Law which identities specific areas of responsibility for Rectors, deans of faculties and heads of department.



**Fig. 7.1** The ghost of democracy: Roskilde University's ballot box, used in elections to its governing body and rectorate pre-2003. In September 2005 it was on display behind glass in the foyer of the university's central administration building. By July 2015 it was gone. (Photograph: Susan Wright)

as a 'manager and organizer of research environments' and a knowledge of 'a university's activities and relationship with society'. The rector would be responsible for recommending the university budget to the governing board and for recommending the employment and dismissal of the university's executive management. Certain disciplinary matters are delegated to the rector and, as chief executive, the rector 'shall approve all external collaborations with a binding effect on the university'.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, the rector was empowered to dissolve the university's academic council, which he/she chairs and is given power, 'under special circumstances', to assume its tasks (Danish Parliament 2003).

<sup>3</sup>What was envisaged by the term 'external collaboration' was not made clear.

The guidelines laid down for the positions of dean and heads of department were equally broad. According to the University Law, the dean shall ‘ensure ... interaction between research and education and quality of education and teaching, as well as the cross-disciplinary development of the quality of the education and research of the main academic area’. Like their rectors, deans should be ‘acknowledged researcher(s)’ and in line with the new managerial logic of the University Law, they were empowered to ‘employ and dismiss’ their heads of department. Deans are also empowered to establish study boards, ‘appoint and remove’ directors of studies and ‘approve curricula, subject to proposals from the study board’. Heads of department are envisaged as the key managers responsible for the ‘day-to-day management’ of the department, and can ‘allocate specific jobs to specific employees’. In a significant and highly controversial paragraph, the 2003 University Law stated that ‘Members of the academic staff are free to conduct research within the strategic framework laid down by the university for its research activities to the extent they are not requested to address jobs allocated to them by the Head of Department’ (Danish Parliament 2003: Chapter 3 §17 stk 2). For many academic staff this was a sign that the previously fragile settlement in which universities ensured academic freedom within an overall system that was already tightly-controlled by the Ministry was now open to challenge.

## 7.4 Looking for Inspiration: Recruiting Leaders for Higher Education

Even though the 2003 University Law remained vague in relation to the *skills* required for the new executive positions in Danish universities, the first round of job advertisements drawn up by university governing boards appeared to call for leaders who could transform the university. Successful candidates would need to respond both to the bureaucratic frameworks and conventions in which universities had traditionally gained their legitimacy *and* be able to promote strategies of ‘academic capitalism’ (Slaughter and Leslie 1997). This new context made clear what Danish academic leadership was supposed to be and acted as a call for certain types of senior academics to step forward.

For Aarhus University, an institution with a strong strategic ambition to be a leading international university, the rector would be required to ‘set a new agenda’ by utilizing the ‘authority’ or power (*beføjelser*) granted by the University Law. As a university aiming to be ‘one of the most attractive research and teaching environments in Europe’, the rector would be expected to recruit the ‘absolute best staff, students and partners’ and help to reposition both the university and the nation in relation to the emerging global ‘knowledge society’. Nothing less than a ‘visionary’ was demanded; an ‘extrovert’ who would be ‘engaged’ and ‘dynamic’, and someone willing to use their ‘strong media skills’ (*Magisterbladet* 2005a: 33).

Reflecting less hyperbole and a self-understanding as the nation's principal higher education institution, Copenhagen University's much briefer advertisement described the rector's position as 'a central post in Danish society' (*Magisterbladet* 2005b: 45). Apart from a brief statement of the importance of effective collaboration between the rector and 'public authorities, public and private institutions', the call for applications focused on the rector's role in working closely (*snævert* in Danish) with the governing board to drive its ambitious development plan.<sup>4</sup> In announcing the appointment of the new rector, the chairman of the governing board drew upon the government's legislative reforms to signal the importance of senior leadership to the coming organization reform:

A full implementation of the University Law will completely change the leadership structure of Copenhagen University. The appointment of the rector is the first step in the process of appointing leaders at all levels. This will require a considerable focus on the University's leadership and organisation. With his background, (the rector) will be the right one – in conjunction with the governing board – to implement this process (Chairman of the Governing Board, Copenhagen University 2005).

The newer or less-traditional universities signalled leadership orientations that reflected different institutional self-understandings. At Aalborg University, for example, a short statement identifying the need for a 'competent' and 'visionary' individual able to lead a 'modern and development-oriented education and research organisation' appeared to be the preface for a more central demand that the chief executive act as 'sparring partner' and 'inspiration' for the governing board, staff *and* students. In particular, the rector would be expected to develop 'constructive ideas' together with the 'staff' (*medarbejderne*) and to embody 'personal integrity' and a 'will to collaborate'. Unsurprisingly given the university's positioning in Northern Jutland, at great distance from the main population centres, the advertisement also prioritised the university's role in local and regional development (*Magisterbladet* 2005c: 67).

Whilst reflecting seemingly distinct ambitions and orientations to the University Law, all advertisements for the post of rector at Danish universities were dominated by the language of reform. Rectors, like their institutions, were expected to 'move' their universities – increasingly conceptualised as dynamic knowledge organisations – considerably. Advertisements issued between 2005 and 2009 prioritised the need for universities to reach out and connect more effectively to 'society' (which, when defined, appeared to comprise government, the media and industry) and to develop a deeper international orientation (often conceptualised in terms of world rankings, reputation and position). Whilst the University Law specified that rectors should be recognised researchers, Copenhagen University insisted that this research 'competence' should be at the level of full professor. In the three cases introduced here (Aarhus, Aalborg and Copenhagen Universities), the successful applicants were all males, as were *all* appointed rectors during the first 10 years of the reform,

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<sup>4</sup>Academic staff at the University suggested to me that the use of '*snævert*' could also mean a restricted, narrow or intimate alliance; something many were concerned about.

and all had previous careers, usually as professors and then deans of faculties, in the institutions that they would go on to head. Perhaps the least conventional in the entire sector was the newly appointed rector of Aarhus University who, in addition to an early career at the university was returning to Denmark after many years abroad, the majority of which were spent with the World Bank.

If the competence profile for rectors appeared as abstract as the University Law itself, the detail was to be found at the next level in the new model of hierarchical decision-making. Here, deans and heads of department were given a clear mandate to interpret and enact the spirit of the University Law. In 2006 when Copenhagen University advertised for six heads of department for its Faculty of Health Sciences, potential applicants were told in clear terms that the major ‘tasks and challenges’ included ‘implementing the University Law’ and ‘realizing’ the ‘development goals’ that were specified in the ‘Faculties’ and Universities’ contracts and strategic plans’. Heads of department would be responsible for delivering ‘development’ and ensuring ‘high quality’ within research, teaching, dissemination and ‘service’ (administration), all of which were aimed at enhancing institutional ‘competitiveness’ (*Politiken 2006a*).

These line-management posts were accompanied by a less frequent, more variable set of advertisements for university pro-rectors. Here, universities sought appointments that might fill particular gaps reflecting historical organisational forms. For example, one of the case-study institutions has a pro-rector with a wide mandate to deputise for the rector and represent the university to the public; another one had a position focused only upon teaching and learning. Yet a third university, this time outside the case study group, attempted to address newly perceived needs with a position for a pro-rector of ‘knowledge dissemination’. Once again, Copenhagen University drew attention to itself by selecting, for the first time, a relatively young woman as pro-rector direct from a senior position in a major national lobby organisation for Danish employers. Speaking in a national newspaper, the rector suggested that this new appointment would ‘help the university be more modern or up-to-date’ (*tidssvarende*). In the words of the new appointee herself:

I have been both places (industry and the university), and we have a need for that in the university. We live in a flat world. We could once live from national resources and local students. Now we are part of a global research world (*Politiken 2006b*).

In her first interview in the university’s internal newspaper, the new pro-rector, a self-confessed ‘sports-enthusiast’ like the Minister himself, suggested that she felt like a ‘trainer that had just taken over a football team’ but that the expectations surrounding her appointment should be measured: ‘One shouldn’t come with too many bombastic opinions about how the playing style should be changed *before* one has been in the club house and smelt the grass’ (emphasis added). Departing from the imagery of competitive sports, but nonetheless insisting upon the need for change, she offered a more market-oriented analysis of the challenges confronting the university:

Where leadership (of universities) used to be about administration, we now talk about the need to motivate. If Copenhagen University is to be a winner-university and get a slice of

the international market it won't be enough to have a fun workplace; young visionary people need to be able to see where their studies can take them. We can certainly be inspired by some of the efforts around PR (public relations) and competence development that we see beyond the world of universities (*Universitetsavisen* 2006: 2–3).

The notion that leadership must address the competitive context was one further impetus for the extension of public sector performance contracts into the university sector. In 2008, for example, the Danish University of Education became the first institution to voluntarily introduce a form of performance contract for each member of the academic staff. This changed the traditional system of calculating staff financial contributions and costs from a collective one based on averages across the institution to one where individual staff would have to account for their own value. According to the rector, 'No one has asked us to do this. My understanding is that my colleagues agree because the principles mirror the conditions we face'. He explained in relation to institute-level contract steering:

Universities today are exposed to competition and are dependent upon external contributions. It's a condition, that if we want to expand, it will have to occur via external income generation ... if the institutes can't get their budgets to hang together we have a problem either with their performance or the contract (Rector, Copenhagen University, *FORSKERforum* 2008: 6–7).

Whilst the spectre of Danish academics being cut loose with individualised contracts under entrepreneurial conditions was looming, universities were also experiencing an enormous growth in the number of professional leaders and managers that, presumably, was aimed at helping staff reach their new targets. Responding to growing concern amongst academic staff, one professor from Copenhagen University, writing in a major daily newspaper, suggested that his University was now suddenly 'bulging' with new administrative staff:

When I came to Copenhagen University in 1987 there were three staff in the faculty office and it functioned. Today there's between 20 and 30 and the number of academic staff has not changed noticeably ... There's been a bureaucratization. They all need something to do ... a leader should apparently have two deputy leaders so there is automatically exponential growth, and when you are appointed as a middle manager you need a function which has to be found (Professor, Copenhagen University, *Information* 2007a: 12–13).

Whilst acknowledging this growth, the rector suggested that this was a society-wide tendency driven by increasingly detailed steering from government and the demands being set by the competitive field in which the university was now located. Responding to the above charge, he suggested:

If you want to attract and keep the best (staff) they need to be supported, and that costs money in administration. We are now appointing a new vice director for personnel development, which we haven't had before and that was completely antiquated. We just didn't have the necessary capacity to advise and plan personnel development and create recruiting programmes. These things, which they have in the business world, are necessary in order to survive the competition (Rector, Copenhagen University, *Information*, 11 April 2007a: 12–13, emphasis added).

## 7.5 Leading from the Front: Enacting Leadership in Danish Universities

The faith held by some academic staff that a visionary leader could transform the institution was certainly prevalent at Roskilde University (RUC), a small multi-faculty ‘reform’ university located on the western edge of greater Copenhagen. Here, the academic staff was split about how and to what extent they should maintain the mission and structure – the so-called ‘family silver’ – that had served the university well throughout its 30-year history and which had given the institution a strong national identity and recognition amongst students. Whilst many of those committed to the existing structure and mission looked towards the appointment of an external academic leader with dread, hoping instead to preserve the status quo of a predominately teaching-based mission, many others were hopeful of recalibrating the balance towards research. Even those research-focused senior staff with a long history of involvement in and identification with the university’s project method and group approach to learning saw the new leadership model as an opportunity to resolve what one professor called ‘our inability to get beyond institute-level bickering’. For these individuals, it was assumed that an appointed leader would act wisely for the general good. This was summarized in bizarre fashion by a prominent researcher from the natural sciences, and a member of the newly constituted governing board:

... we know that democracy is a terrible system for a country but we know that dictatorships can be much worse but there’s no doubt that a good dictator is better than having a democracy ... it’s the same at university (Interview with internal member of the governing board, 2005).

Using less dramatic imagery, other like-minded staff saw the opportunity for a strengthening of the university’s research profile, a streamlining of its institute structure and a recalibration of its undergraduate educational structure, reducing from two to one year the length of this general educational introduction, with the saved year devoted to subject and post-graduate specialisation. By 2004 many staff were prepared to articulate their preferences in the debate about the university’s future. Perhaps of greatest concern was the shadow of an impending new national research funding system which, it was feared, would disadvantage institutions such as RUC that were, in the words of the long-serving rector, already ‘teaching-heavy’.

It was thus with great anxiety and anticipation that RUC staff and politically engaged students learnt in late 2005 of the appointment by the governing board of an external candidate to the new rector’s post. The new appointee came from a career in the humanities, most recently as the head of a national research council where he had advocated for a greater focus on joint or group-oriented research-project funding. Initial impressions were positive with prominent directors of study programs, student leaders and members of academic council open to the possibilities for change and regeneration. As part of his application to the position, the new incumbent outlined to the governing board a plan to restructure the university. Like



his counterpart at the Danish University of Education cited at the beginning of this chapter, this vision was complete before it was presented to academic staff, and the implementation timetable was to be short: six months.

At an orientation meeting held during his first days as leader, staff voiced their concern about the extent and rapidity of the changes. For one lecturer ‘this was not in the spirit of RUC. You have presented a complete plan and failed to take your starting point in our tradition for discussing what should be done. This is not a RUC way to work’. At this point, the rector rose, smiled, steadied himself and replied:

There is a new University Law that has demolished the collegial steering system and inserted a board that appoints a capable rector to set the course. RUC has a tradition for politicising big and small things. This can blur the focus. Now I’m telling you that this is the way we are going and we are not going to lose ourselves in the detail. That would be a shame for a business like RUC. We need to shift the focus from procedure to product ... we must make an organisation that is better placed to realise its potential. We haven’t got a ‘Chinamen’s’<sup>5</sup> chance of surviving without deep structural changes to how we organise research in particular (Rector at an information meeting, Roskilde University, 2006).

For one academic staff member present, the rector was evoking his legitimacy as appointed leader and there ‘was nothing we can do’. Another thought it disingenuous that he would draw on his time in the public funding system to advocate a wide-ranging structural reform and imply that he knew this was necessary because of his insider’s understanding of the coming research funding agenda of the government. One member of academic council was more direct: ‘Look at that guy! Did you see the suit and silk tie? Everything he said was ‘straight out of the management textbook; at least the ones they write for Toyota or Coca-Cola’. This was the first shot in what became a traumatic dispute at RUC.

It was immediately apparent that the rector’s vision was meeting resistance, not only from a number of heads of department but from the university’s academic council and some governing board members who were nervous for what the acrimonious atmosphere would bring. One external member of the governing board suggested to me in private that ‘It was crazy. There was never a chance of this working whilst it was imposed. Everybody knows you must take the staff with you’. Whilst some institute heads were in favour of amalgamating units to strengthen research activities, most were worried that these changes were complex and being met with ambivalence by academic staff. Matters were brought to a head when the rector and university director (head of administration) jointly presented an ‘Internal Note’ to the governing board that attempted to justify and press for rapid change by blaming the previous leadership for the university’s poor budgeting systems, chaotic administration and an antiquated organisational structure that was ‘neither centralised or decentralised’. This led to enormous internal disputes which spilled over into the national print media, and resulted in the governing board insisting that the Note be

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<sup>5</sup>I was assured by staff present that this was not racist language, only an ‘old-fashioned colloquial Danish way’ of emphasizing a point in dramatic terms. Nevertheless, it was a controversial word choice as it happened just a few months after the previous leadership had been criticized for overcharging foreign students during the so-called ‘Chinese students case’ (Nielsen 2011).

withdrawn. This was viewed by sceptical academic staff groups as a significant defeat for the rector because, in the words of one professor, ‘his entire case is built on the assumption that we are in need of a complete over-haul’. The university director resigned shortly afterwards and for some months it appeared that the rector himself was undertaking both the strategic and administrative leadership of the university.

In December 2007, the governing board of Roskilde University decided that it would insist that the university ran a small financial surplus to counter future unforeseen contingencies and to end a long period of deficit budgeting. It was decided that the rector would prepare a plan to return the accounts to surplus and bring this proposal back to the governing board. The rector explained the situation at the next meeting of the academic council and *insisted* that the governing board had recommended a program of staff reductions. Given the troubled birth of the new legislation at RUC, the academic staff was immediately provoked by what they viewed as an arbitrary decision by the governing board to move towards dismissals rather than a fuller review of costs. There was for once a clear moment around which both academic and administrative staff could now see that the academic council had become irrelevant to university’s decision-processes. A dispute ensued about what had actually transpired at the governing board meeting and whether or not it had insisted upon staff cuts. This only intensified when an internal member of the governing board provided the following response to a direct request to clarify what had happened at the meeting:

Unfortunately the budget points on the agenda were ‘closed’. That was agreed by the governing board after protest from myself. I’m not allowed to discuss the debate there. I can only refer you to the board’s official minutes from this meeting point (Interview with an internal member of governing board, Roskilde University, 2008).

The confusion over what was actually discussed in this closed meeting, and how the resultant decision to dismiss between 20 and 30 staff was reached became a focus for protest against the University Law and its manifestation in the chair of the governing board and the rector at RUC. It was clear to staff – even to supporters of the new rector – that grave errors of judgement had occurred between the governing board and its executive managers. This produced both resignation and ecstasy amongst academic staff and students. Many older less research-active staff were especially nervous and some institute heads held immediate information meetings to dispel fear of retrenchments. In two other institutes staff were assured that cuts could be made to other areas of the budget. At least one institute leader – a supporter of the rector’s reforms – moved quickly and unilaterally to make staff cuts, in one instance to a colleague who was on research leave. However, some of those already engaged in contesting the reforms at RUC saw the ensuing chaos as a rare opportunity:

Six months ago we were crushed. All hope was gone at RUC. Now, we can smell a chance, a chance to reverse a decision, to remove a rector and maybe to become a symbol of resistance to the 2003 University Law (Interview with internal member of academic council, 2008).

The disputes about how these decisions were reached dragged on for many months. Internal staff groups fought their way into the budgeting process, used the case as an example of the wider dangers of non-representative decision-making processes and even succeeded in having the rector defend his position at a general staff meeting where he was repeatedly heckled and belittled, especially after he struggled to explain why the university's staff workplace satisfaction survey identified that at least 30% of academic staff were preparing to leave the institution. As debate intensified, a blog spot that was posted on the university's internal web pages, provided disgruntled staff further opportunity to vent their frustration, often in crude language. One particularly literary post-doctoral member of the staff, returning after his PhD studies elsewhere, reflected the flavour of this debate with the observation that 'all future possibilities (at the university) had been squashed in a pulsating hell of short-sighted leadership'.

Ultimately, academic council found a voice in the budget process and it was with considerable surprise that the revised budgeting exercise resulted in a healthy and seemingly painless surplus. By early 2008 the rector's position was tenuous, and by the middle of the year the university learnt that he had secured a senior position at a prestigious north-European university, thus reducing the considerable tension between the governing board, academic council and the academic staff. Many staff breathed a sigh of relief. As one member of the academic council told me: 'maybe now we can get back to running and developing a university'. Another was 'disappointed that it had come to this' because the 'ambition to improve basic and applied research was not only important but central to the university's chances for survival'. In November, the chairman of the governing board wrote to staff and students to explain that 18 applications had been received for the vacant post of rector but that the governing board had decided unanimously to begin the search process anew. It seemed that no appropriately qualified external candidate was prepared to enter the cauldron and 'lead' the university in the spirit of the 2003 University Law. In the interim, the university's 'imminent comprehensive development work', including the reform of its educational structure would continue under 'temporary' management led by the acting rector, who had been one of the original founding staff members of the university in the 1970s and his internally-appointed deputy. After a traumatic period where considerable faith had been placed in salvation from beyond, the university attempted to move forward from within, as it had done since its inception. Reflecting on this period of turmoil, one academic member of the governing board suggested to me that we

...simply invested too much faith in his capacity to overturn 30 years of what now looks like highly successful development. We should have thought much more deeply about what this role was for, how we could have utilized his experiences and skills and how these could have been used to collaborate with staff and students, not fight them (Academic member of governing board, 2008)

Those few senior staff still prepared to defend and justify the rector's period of leadership focused on the structural reform of institutes, claiming that this would

have been impossible to achieve under the old system of collective governance. However, when I put this view to one member of academic council he remarked:

Of course it would have been impossible. The former democratic governance structure was aimed at consensual change that was justified in relation to the actual needs of teaching and research work. Yes, we made mistakes. Yes we were slow. We are not Mærsk or Novo Nordisk (Danish industrial giants). We are a community of scholars learning from one another. Not a business led by an executive who needs to show results to justify his position. Let's hope that phase is over, or we are closed down before we experience it again! (Interview with member of academic council, 2008)

In December, the former rector, now at some distance from the institution he lead briefly and with such controversy, was awarded the 'Knight's Cross of the First Grade of the Order of the Dannebrog' by Queen Margrethe II. The Head of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Palace explained to bemused higher education reporters that 'To be a Knight one must have performed with distinction for Denmark' (*FORSKERforum* 2009a: 32). The recommendation leading to the award was prepared by the chair of the governing board who, by the time of the award, had also left the university in the wake of the 2008 'budget case'. She cited his 'legendary' capacity for hard work (*FORSKERforum* 2009b: 31).

Heavy-handed approaches to demarcating the distinctions between executive authority and internal engagement were widespread across the sector. At the Danish University of Technology, staff dissatisfaction with the management approach of the upper leadership spilled over as a highly emotive and public dispute over staff redundancies and a case of bullying. At Copenhagen University, the rector was embroiled in a case of academic fraud which, it was claimed by a leading group of senior research leaders, he had not done enough to investigate for fear of alienating private investors and embarrassing the university in the eyes of the research councils. This followed a particularly crude budget adjustment at Copenhagen University in late 2009 in which a dean dismissed at least 100 staff in the natural and applied sciences. Speaking publicly, one of the most distinguished external members of the governing board and a former chief executive of one of Denmark's most successful high technology companies explained:

Dismissals cost a knowledge-organisation where there is a need for security in order to create dynamism. This will weaken trust amongst the University's staff, as it's hard to see why it was necessary. I'm convinced that the budget could have been devised in a way that made dismissals unnecessary (External member of governing board, Copenhagen University, *Magisterbladet* 2010: 10).

Staff dismissals, once rare in the sector, were becoming commonplace. At the Danish University of Education, the decision by the rector (now styled 'Dean' after the institution's immersion into a Aarhus University) to sack academic staff in subject areas that he viewed as low priority to its changing teaching profile became a protracted public spectacle that led to the involvement of the national ombudsman's office to investigate the legality of the decision. Such attempts to exercise executive authority were more often than not met by concerted resistance from academic staff, students and their allies in the public media. For example, staff at DTU acknowledged that their rector, still in place after a turbulent initial period, was now more

ready to consult, even if he remained ‘completely unconcerned’ about ‘democracy’ or ‘collegial influence’ (*FORSKERforum* 2006). At Copenhagen University, the rector had been criticised for a failure of leadership during a high-profile case of academic fraud and was stung further by staff complaints of poorly-conceived cost-cutting and amalgamation policies; by 2010 he appeared as a tarnished and much reduced figure from an earlier incarnation as the University’s long-awaited post-2003 saviour. As we have seen, the senior leadership of RUC disappeared in the wake of the scandal around the ‘Internal Note’ to the governing board and ‘2008 budget’ proposals.

In this sense, the new legislative framework gave room for drastic and hierarchical decision making but the histories, norms and forms of engagement on which each institution was based tended to soften the most crude and blatantly political interventions. It would thus be easy to conclude that ‘global’ or external reforms taken up by elites across and within particular national contexts were countered and largely undone by what some educational anthropologists and policy scholars persistently refer to as ‘local culture’ (Anderson-Levitt 2003; Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe 2006). However, the constellations of technologies deployed by contemporary management reforms contain a degree of resilience that, whilst open to modification and manipulation, make them difficult to counter (Carney 2010, 2012). As I have elaborated in the chapter on university governing boards, the introduction of development contracts has been one particular effective and explicit strategy for governmental steering at a distance. The demands of competitive research funding present another. In the spirit of the reforms, but seemingly under their radar, was another highly effective strategy of executive control: senior management groups.

## 7.6 Leading from the Shadows: The Emergence of Senior Management Groups

Less publicised was the rapid rise of another form of executive decision-making; one that was encouraged by university governing boards wishing to empower the senior leadership for daily decision making but one largely developed and practiced out of sight of the broader university community: senior management groups (*direktion* in Danish). These bodies – not envisaged in the Law and therefore not defined – were connected weakly both to the appointed governing board ‘above’ and the elected bodies ‘below’ such as the academic council and boards of study. At all three of the case-study universities there were serious concerns raised by academic staff about the marginalisation of the academic council; the senior advisory body in which academic staff had the possibility to contribute to university strategy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The academic council was created to provide a context where staff within universities could ensure academic quality and could continue to inform university strategy, albeit in an advisory capacity. Most are faculty-based (for example at Copenhagen University, Aarhus University, Aalborg University and the University of Southern Denmark), meaning that there is no body like a

Typically, the critique was framed in terms of the trope of ‘democracy’. As one internal member of the governing board observed:

The leadership team (*direktion*) has daily responsibility for the university’s economy. They appoint certain leaders ... in reality it is the rector that appoints the heads of department. He ensures that things function the way he wants them. As such, he convenes them occasionally in order to pass on information about how things should proceed. One knows that it is the leadership team that makes the decisions but this group consists only of the rector, the two deputies and the chief administrative officer (*universitetsdirektør*). There is not much democracy in that! (Interview with internal member of governing board, 2005)

This governing board member was in no doubt about the pivotal role of the rector who had the final word both over the leaders of academic units and the senior leadership group. He went on to explain with some cynicism that ‘if an organ like the senior leadership group opened its meetings up, there would be a much greater risk that observers would attend than is the case with the governing board’. As far as he was aware, there had ‘never been a discussion of whether or not *their* meetings should be open or closed’! Drawing on his own institutional memory prior to the 2003 University Law, he explained that the university had always operated a form of ‘senior management-oriented decision-making’ but that this used to involve student representation, fortnightly meetings with heads of departments and the opportunity to involve ‘other interested groups depending on the issues’.

At one of the case-study institutions, members of the academic council were particularly disenchanted by the inability of the governing board to take seriously the voices of academic staff. One acknowledged that the academic council was ‘central’ when dealing with matters related to the award of research degrees and professorships and the establishment of ‘assessment parameters’ for academic positions that were to be filled. However, he thought that there was a ‘clear understanding’ within the university that the strategic plan and development contract would be drafted and discussed by the academic council. In reality, though, drafts of the University’s Plan came to the academic council ‘too late’ and with a clear message that it was being ‘tabled as a courtesy’. The senior management group had prepared the initial draft which was rejected by the governing board. Rather than ‘coming to

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senate at the centre of the organisation to ensure that strong academic deliberations have to be taken into account by the governing board. In smaller universities the academic council is institution-wide (for example at Roskilde University, the then Danish University of Education, the then LIFE sciences university, and the Danish Technical University). The 2003 Law defined the academic council as having a number of advisory ‘tasks’. It should ‘make statements’ (*‘at udtale sig’* in Danish) to the rector regarding the internal distribution of funds. It should also *advise* the rector on ‘central strategic research questions and educational issues and plans for knowledge exchange’. The academic council is also empowered to ‘make recommendations to the rector’ on the composition of academic appointment committees, to ‘assess’ applicants for such positions and to award PhD and doctoral degrees. The Law also states that the academic council has a duty to discuss scientific issues presented to them by the rector and ‘*may* make statements on *all* scientific issues of substantial relevance to the activities of the university’ (emphasis added), but the law does not require the rector to respond. In response to a critical international evaluation of the 2003 University Law, an amendment to the University Law in 2011 authorised governing boards to widen the powers and functions of academic councils.

us who are actually in a position to contribute the needed detail to such a plan', the rector returned the document to the senior management group for further drafting. For this member it was 'breath-taking that we were ignored' but still unclear if the leadership was 'grabbing' central power or just 'filling a vacuum' left by the absence of the earlier 'democratic bodies'.

These tensions, indeed misunderstandings, became very obvious at one meeting of academic council at this university where the rector himself was unable to attend and where council members appeared to be more active and confrontational as a result. As the deputy rector and the administrative head – the university director – attempted to lead the meeting, a number of shortcomings in the new architecture became apparent. When discussing the merger of applied research agencies into the university – a policy that was initiated by the Government in 2007 – the university director explained that he could not offer much information because little detail had been provided by the Ministry itself. This led one irritated member to ask: 'where is the boundary for what academic council can know? How should the council relate to strategic matters when we don't get information from the senior management group?' This prompted the deputy rector to look towards the university director, during which a long awkward silence ensued. Finally, the council member answered his own question: 'No, I know too well, but it is necessary that academic council is better informed if we are to provide advice'.

Once again, these issues need to be unfolded in the context of the particular institutions being studied. At one of the three case study institutions, a large multi-faculty university, there was a perception amongst two of the three internal members of the governing board and within the central administration that the newly appointed rector was seeking to centralise what had traditionally been a complex and unwieldy set of internal (faculty-based) institutions. According to the deputy rector, the university was already underway with a significant 'streamlining' program and the 2003 University Law 'made it easier' to initiate change. For the university director, there was a 'need for a professional administration' and a leader who could 'drive' reforms but that it would be 'hopeless' to insist on a single academic council for such a large and diverse institution. This university director thought finding a 'balance' between the need for 'coordination' and preserving academic 'freedom' was likely to be a long process. As such, academic councils within each faculty maintained considerable control over the setting of academic priorities and their integration into overall university strategic planning. That model or approach was very much truncated at the other two, smaller, case study institutions where a single academic council served the entire institution but was being largely side-stepped by an assertive senior management group. Notwithstanding these specific incidences, the potential of academic council to inform university strategy – something made *possible* by the Law – seemed a distant dream. By 2007, *FORSKERforum* reported that only two of 16 academic councils in Danish universities were consulted by their university leadership as part of the their university's submission to inform an amendment to the Law, and in one of those cases this was only *after* the university had sent its submission to the Ministry (*FORSKERforum* 2007).

The spate of rapid requests and directions from the ministry appeared to limit further the lines of communication between senior managers and their advisory bodies. During the merging of sector research institutions (discussed in Chap. 5), the senior management at one of the case study institutions claimed that they were given 4 days to explore a particular potential partner in the ‘fusion puzzle’. For the university director, once again observed at a meeting of the academic council, ‘there’s no dialogue (internally), there’s no space to discuss the possibilities with the governing board at (the other institution) and with (us). The Chairman is involved’. Later in the same meeting, an academic council member requested that an agenda item related to the university’s development contract be discussed as a substantive item and not an ‘announcement’ (*meddelelser* in Danish). The university director explained that the academic council would be involved early in the new-year once the governing board itself had written more. To this, one member asked: ‘Don’t you expect something from the academic council?’ In response, the university director said ‘Yes, but nothing is written yet and we are waiting for the Ministry’. The academic council was clearly expected to respond to a draft development contract rather than play a proactive or initiating role.

The rector at this university recognised the growing concerns of academic council members but, rather than considering his own possibilities for engaging more fully with internal advisory organs, he explained during an interview that the problem was grounded in the lack of formal regulation and guidance given by the ministry:

How does the governing board know what the university director, rector and deputy-rectors are doing? What is their operation? Is that an open way of leadership? That is actually much more important than if the board meetings are open ... there is no stipulation in the University Law that the leadership, in the daily running of the university, must be open (Interview with Rector, 2005).

Whilst academic council members seemed frustrated by their apparent marginalisation within the university, governing board members took comfort in the clear distinction articulated in the 2003 University Law between strategy and operations. Here, the preponderance of individuals shaped by private sector and commercial management experiences, tended to mean that the logic of business decision-making and accountability was being transferred without question to universities. For such governing board members, it was not seen as problematic that they had limited, if no role, on campus, little contact to staff or students and, in some cases, very limited understanding of the university’s activities, processes and history. This distance from the organisation they were serving meant that trust was not only desirable but also essential. For some members of the governing boards, though, the danger was that the ‘university’ would in practice become a duumvirate of the rector and chairperson of the governing board. For one governing board member, the ‘democratic deficit’ built into the governance process made it ‘difficult to live up to my intentions to use my work on the governing board to create dialogue and connections between the daily work of the university and the governing board’. She explained:



... in many ways the board's work is defined as distantly from the 'engine room' as is possible. There is an external majority (of members) and the work is based on general or overall (*overordnede*) budgets, strategies, appointment of senior leaders, development plans and so on. These are themes that can seem distant from daily life at the university... (Former external member of governing board, Aalborg University, *FORSKERForum* 2012a: 20).

This 'distance' to the action was built into the institution's articles of association or internal regulations (*vedtægter*), the guidelines for the work of governing boards, and these guidelines anticipated (without stipulating) that appointed leaders would find ways to maintain the dialogue considered appropriate to the particular institutional context. However, one former external member of the governing board, this time from the business world, saw a contradiction between the demands in the 2003 University Law for pro-active and specialised leadership and the prevailing structure of universities:

Individual leaders in a university often have a very large number of staff that they are responsible for. Many more than in the knowledge-organisations that I know. Maybe it's hard, therefore, to build the staff/leader trust relationship that is a condition for good leadership (Former external member of governing board, Copenhagen University, *FORSKERForum* 2012b: 20).

One might argue, as some rectors and university directors attempted to do, that the rise of the senior management group as a key decision-making body was a practical attempt to involve as many voices as was feasible given the urgency and complexity of the government's reform agenda. This was only further complicated by the demands of an intensely competitive market context. Whilst this position was not shared by academic staff or students, these groups in particular did little to problematise or protest against the rise of senior management groups. The inaccessibility, indeed invisibility, of senior management groups made such criticism difficult to muster. In this sense, executive leadership – albeit of what one governing board chairman called a 'sensible kind' – appeared to have been accepted if not legitimated across the sector.

## 7.7 Conclusion

One could be forgiven for reaching the conclusion that Danish universities were simply plagued by a number of naive and incompetent senior staff that illustrated in ghastly detail the dangers of organising complex organisations around the whim and personality of a few powerful individuals. Whilst the heroic approach to leadership was much more likely to be found amongst those first generation rectors who were brought in from outside the university with the specific mandate to enact significant change, there were also more sober examples – particularly at Aalborg University and the University of Southern Denmark – where locally-recognized figures took charge and adopted less polarizing approaches to leading from the front. Nevertheless, public discussion of leadership in Danish higher education centred upon the dangers of ambitious individuals perceived to be centralizing power and

resources. Writing in the press, one leadership researcher suggested: ‘Once upon a time it took many idiots for things to go wrong. Now you only need one’ (*FORSKERforum* 2006). Another observed: ‘... top-steering is a mess when the top doesn’t function’ (*Information* 2007b). Taking a broader view, one governing board chairman suggested that governmental policy visions had simply raced ahead of the managerial competences within the sector. He suggested that ‘we clearly don’t have a sufficient pool of competent senior leaders and it was a ‘five to ten year job to grow enough good department heads and institute leaders who could eventually apply for rector positions and therefore deliver the experienced and professional leadership the system assumes we have’.

Such views, like much leadership theory, tend to focus upon the characteristics, motivations and, even ethics, of the individual agent, thus ‘help(ing) to make the realities they describe’ (Law and Urry 2004: 396). Of course there are certain organizational positions designated as ‘leader’ both in the 2003 University Law and in the institutions we explored. Nevertheless, the conception of leadership employed in the study views individual subjects as enacting their roles in specific discursive contexts. One long-term external examiner at Aarhus University, writing in frustration after a reform of the library system that included the removal of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* from the main shelves on the grounds of space limitations, captured the sense of leadership as located in particular policy space:

The new structure (of Danish university governance) in practice attracts types that thrive on exercising power from above and who are not restricted by (their) knowledge. As in all totalitarian regimes the evil lurks in the *structure* (External examiner at Aarhus University, *Weekendavisen* 2012: 6, emphasis added).

In many respects, the vagueness of the vision of university leadership outlined in the 2003 University Law enabled the first generation of leaders, on which this chapter has mainly focused, to deploy the formal steering tools and the authority granted them by the law in pursuit of a heroic vision and style of leadership. When protests and in some cases, evidence of incompetence, brought that style of leadership into disrepute and exposed its ineffectiveness, a second generation has used the same provisions in the law to encourage a nascent ‘leaderism’ (O’Reilly and Reed 2011). Whilst the law assigned formal leadership functions to key position holders, the goals of the reform and its political technologies – both those imposed such as development contracts and those made possible such as individualized performance targets – made ‘leading’ a mode of governance expected of all academic and administrative staff. Leaders retain the same powers under the law, and are still capable of top-down decision making and heavy-handed managerialism, but rather than simply impose their mandate, they have begun to appeal to ‘colleagues’ and their sense of decency, ‘professionalism’ and commitment to generate a new discursive frame within which leading universities has to be understood. This is legitimised not only by the legal framework for universities but also by a growing disengagement from political activism by academic staff. Some universities appear to be embracing the full potential of the 2003 University Law as it resonates with on-going internal

changes, to create something akin to government's roughly sketched vision of a different *type* of knowledge-creating institution.

Over ten years after the implementation of the 2003 University Law it has been noticeable that university leaders have appealed increasingly to the common good in order to effect change. Reform was for students; it was to maintain Denmark's position in a competitive international environment; and, finally catching up with former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's policy objective; it was to serve society. For example, at Copenhagen University, activities aimed at improving the quality of student experience served to position the new leadership team as supporting individual, institutional and societal goals. Student study places and facilities, support for completing thesis work (and improving the university's low completion rates), attractive campus locations, research-based teaching and research serving social ends all morphed into one compelling program of change aimed at creating a university that might better serve some emerging notion of the common good. At Roskilde University, as we have seen, the first appointed rector demanded change based on his analysis of the future opportunities and threats facing the sector. By 2015 a new rector was able to email staff with an update on the strategic agenda for the coming period, explaining the collective ambition for how 'we' as a university will 'help to inform the development of society by means of relevant analysis of issues in relation to, inter alia, the environment, inequality, democracy, health and cultural coexistence'. This mail followed closely after an earlier one outlining budget and staff cuts. One prominent academic staff member active in the dispute against the first appointed rector explained to me that this was a far more difficult approach to counter:

... previously, rectors would develop policies and initiatives and take these through various internal organs and committees, modifying the final package to reflect the debates encountered along the way. That's long gone. The new rector is systematically able to cut us out of the discussions by calling upon a commitment to students, their learning and pressing social problems in society that we are apparently committed to addressing together. It's hard to argue against such things when they're presented as our collective interest (Former member of academic council, 2014).

This is where we see the 'brilliant ambiguity' of leaderism that:

... simultaneously provides underlying justification for innovative managerial practices and organisational mechanisms that prioritize 'user choice' and 'competitive collaboration' but also places professional practitioners in new subject positions and identities as inspiring visionaries for and leaders of service organizations in the 'new public governance' (O'Reilly and Reed 2010: 971).

Thus, whilst the study identifies certain first generation university leaders as having over-zealously applied a discredited managerialist discourse to 2003 University Law, certain others appeared to grasp its more radical intent. Now, however, the spread of 'leaderism' – the leader as orchestrating self-leading and responsabilised academics – in Danish universities appears widespread, harbouring a thorough transformation of universities and academic work in the service of new societal goals.

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**Part IV**  
**Academics' Strategic Space for Manoeuvre**

# Chapter 8

## Changing University Discourses, Changing Spaces for Academics – Reconfiguring External Conditions for Being an Academic Subject



John Benedicto Krejsler 

### 8.1 Introduction

Relentless university reform has reconfigured what it means to be a university in Denmark today. The strategic spaces for manoeuvre within which academic subjects can construct subjectivities have changed as well. This chapter is dedicated to mapping, at a general discursive level, the genealogy of changes in external conditions for thinking and structuring what it means to be an academic subject within a changing university. Capturing a crucial moment in time, i.e. the period between 2005 and 2007, I will trace the key trajectories that carry these developments back to the late 1960s. Although these changes at the general, discursive level clearly point in a specific direction, my empirical findings show that they have not necessarily meant that academic subjects and the meaning of academic work in local university contexts have moved in the same direction in any uniform and deterministic sense. Chapter 9 will map how academic subjects were embedded in the particularities of different local university contexts and consequently responded differently to emerging closures and openings. Changing external demands interacted with particular local histories, cultures and structures at different universities, faculties and departments, with surprisingly different results.

This chapter highlights how being an academic subject at a Danish university was highly dependent on dominant discourses about the university and its purposes. This became particularly apparent in times of thorough reform, when a change of paradigms challenged the basic assumptions about the relevant functions of academic subjects. This chapter elucidates such changes in external conditions for academic work by identifying the transition from what I will label a receding ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse’ to an emerging ‘knowledge

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economy university discourse'. Seen from the point of view of academic subjects, these processes became visible through a host of new signifiers and political technologies that coded the meanings of the university and its academic subjects in new ways. Universities were thus being turned into organisations with 'self-ownership' (see Chap. 5 in this book), which allegedly increased their 'freedom' of operation in the research and education 'market'. On the other hand, universities came under increased pressure to satisfy government demands, often to an unprecedented level of detail.

As established in previous chapters of this book, the Danish university reform was part of a greater international reform wave. Universities had undergone significant reforms, beginning in the 1980s in New Zealand, Australia and England among others, and in the 1990s in Denmark and other continental European countries. These reforms were strongly influenced by new dominant discourses in society hailing the emerging 'knowledge economy', the 'market' and a certain vision of 'globalisation' (e.g. Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Clark 2001; Peters et al. 2000; Hardt and Negri 2002; Krejsler 2006, 2013). This thoroughly changed the strategic space within which the academic subject was perceived and legitimate academic subjectivities could be constructed. Individual academic subjects felt challenged, and many expressed the need to build contesting discourses to counter or balance what was perceived as a pre-eminent market tendency in the perception of the university, academics, research and education. In 2007, *FORSKERforum*,<sup>1</sup> the journal of Danish researchers' unions, published an academic freedom index that placed Denmark in a very low position in comparison with other EU university systems after recent university reforms (*FORSKERforum* 2007b). In 2003, a critical issue of *Magisterbladet*, the monthly member journal of Dansk Magisterforening, the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs, highlighted objections against attempts to include public education in the GATS treaty, with the prospect of education becoming a service commodity in the international marketplace and losing its status as a public good (*Magisterbladet* 2003a).

In Denmark, these changes in how an academic subject was perceived could be observed as a transition from a university discourse that focused on democracy, professional autonomy and public good to one that emphasised an emerging global knowledge economy and neo-liberal conceptions of the marketplace (Fink et al. 2003; Gregersen 2006; Jensen 2004; Krejsler 2006; Carney 2006). The signifier 'freedom', as specified under the 1970/1973 Act on the Governance of Higher Education Institutions as opposed to the 2003 University Act, here serves as an exemplary illustration of the considerable difference between these two discourses.

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<sup>1</sup>I make frequent references to the journals *Magisterbladet* and *FORSKERforum* in Chaps. 8 and 9, as these are the main forums for public debate about the working conditions, union issues, professional development, etc. of academic subjects. This does not mean that they are necessarily representative of the opinions of Danish academics. *Magisterbladet* is the journal for Dansk Magisterforening, the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs, distributed regularly to all members; *FORSKERforum* is a journal for six unions of academic researchers, distributed to all research members.

The former primarily espoused ‘freedom’ as ‘academic freedom’, defined as an individual right and duty of the researcher within the framework of a particular academic discipline and an overarching social contract with society. The latter referred to ‘freedom’ – or more specifically ‘research freedom’ – as an entity that was subject to the strategic key areas of each university, which had been negotiated in the form of a ‘development contract’ between university management and the national ministry (Wright and Ørberg 2008; Ørberg 2006). An enquiry made by Dansk Magisterforening, one of the academic unions, subsequently showed that approximately one out of four academic subjects believed that the University Act of 2003 made it more difficult for them to express themselves without constraints and that self-censorship was a phenomenon on the rise (*FORSKERforum* 2006: 14–16; *Magisterbladet* 2007: 32–34). A themed issue of *Magisterbladet* dealt solely with the freedom of speech of its members, a key feature of which was the increased interplay between universities and commercial private interests (*Magisterbladet* 2005).

## 8.2 Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach to this chapter, as well as Chap. 9, draws mainly on the work of Michel Foucault. It makes sense of the social world by seeking to identify the dominant discourses that define the key premises for how individuals can think and talk about themselves within particular social fields at a given conjuncture in history, such as, in this case, the university in the early twenty-first century. A discourse signifies a regime of knowledge and power that encompasses a number of key dogmas and subject positions, rules of inclusion and exclusion, and particular procedures that determine the strategic scope within which one can legitimately think and act as a subject, if one wants to retain one’s position as a subject within the discourse (e.g. Foucault 1971; Popkewitz and Brennan 1998).

As a concept, *dominant discourse* is thus an analytical tool to identify the strategic space for talking and acting within a particular social field that the dominant subject positions in relation to that social field claim as the legitimate order. What is meant by dominant discourse is related to Foucault’s definition of power as ‘the name that is given to a complex strategic situation in a ‘society’ (Foucault 1978: 93). This means that the conditions for the emergence of a dominant discourse must be seen in relation to the general configuration of dominant forces in society, which is a complex game of inclusion and exclusion in relation to economic, social and cultural practices that are articulated in the agenda-setting dominant discourses.

This does not mean that there is not a host of other discourses, which individuals employ in seeking to contest what is currently dominant. Even though I identify a receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse and an emerging knowledge economy discourse as the dominant discourses in defining academic subjects and universities, obviously plenty of other discourses have been at play, such as the professions discourse, gender equity discourse, family discourse and so forth. Within this theo-

retical perspective, the point is that individuals become subjects by subjecting themselves to available subject positions within the regimes of truth defined by each individual discourse – some being more powerful than others. According to Foucault, it is by subjecting oneself to the regime of a particular discourse that one gains access to the constraints as well as the potential practices of freedom it defines. Given that an individual necessarily occupies subject positions in a large number of discourses that continuously confront each other, there is potentially considerable room for practices of freedom in the exploitation of the breaks and inconsistencies that occur as actualised discourses confront each other.

I employ the notion *space for manoeuvre* to operationalise the phenomenon that given discourses allow particular individuals to occupy more or less specified subject positions within certain regimes of truth. In short, I talk about the production of regulated spaces within which individuals can manoeuvre more or less freely as legitimate subjects. As Foucault stated in his inaugural speech to the Collège de France, with reference to the principle of ‘authorship’, nobody can say whatever they want within any discursive regime, and the right of speech is not dealt out freely to whoever wants it (Foucault 1971). Detailed rules of specification apply, which imply inclusion for some and exclusion for others.

I find the notion ‘space for manoeuvre’ fruitful, as it allows me to keep my attention focused on delimiting the discursive spaces within which subjects may talk and act, rather than on particular individuals as such. This, however, entails a particular approach to my empirical data. Legal texts, formal structures, public debate, statements from subjects within particular discursive regimes, as well as a diversity of other discursive fragments, all serve as elements that must be put together in order to capture the spaces within which particular subject positions become possible and can unfold. As will be clear, it is not possible to deduce the subject positions that are available to particular academics in their day-to-day work from an overarching dominant political discourse on universities. Identifying the space for manoeuvre in daily life requires painstakingly detailed attention to the particular configuration of discourses that are at stake at the particular university, faculty and department in question. Inversely, an overarching dominant political discourse certainly defines rules, but they get shaped in particular contexts in peculiar ways, according to logics of distribution that cannot be ignored without consequences. It is these spaces at their many different levels that I intend to identify: at a general level in this chapter, and in the context of particular and very different departmental settings in Chap. 9.

Within the scope of this theoretical framework, I will employ two key analytical concepts that are closely associated with a discourse analysis approach (Krejsler and Carney 2009). One is the concept of *the floating signifier*, which refers to words that are not fixed by any particular meaning initially (Laclau 1993). Floating signifiers are words that can migrate across different discursive regimes, and by doing so can be employed to give meaning – albeit of very different kinds – within different discourses. The meaning that a floating signifier acquires depends on the actual negotiations between different position-holders within the dominant discursive regimes that apply to each particular context. This concept is particularly suited to capture features of many current policy signifiers such as democracy, quality, excel-

lence and efficiency. Such signifiers are characterised by their initial openness to meaning everything or nothing, depending on the discourses they enter and how they are filled with meaning. ‘Quality’ as a floating signifier is a thing that nobody can object to in a general sense. When someone specifies how quality is to be understood in a particular context, however, it usually becomes the object of heated debate and struggle. Quality within an economy discourse, for example, takes on a different meaning from quality within a humanities university discourse. As such, the floating signifier must always be observed according to the codings and content it acquires in the empirical struggles that gradually determine its reach and direction.

The other analytical tool is that of *political technologies*. Within a Foucauldian framework, political technologies signify procedures that ‘advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science’ (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 196). A timely example of political technology in this sense would be ‘the development contracts’ that Danish universities enter into with the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (see Chap. 5 in this book). On the one hand, the development contract is where the university legitimises how it intends to go about attaining the highest level of excellence, quality and efficiency in the following 2–3 years, as defined through dialogue with the ministry. On the other hand, the development contract is a forum for highly charged political battles in an often asymmetrical relation between a ministry, which often has strong and detailed agendas for what it wants the university to pursue, and a university, which typically needs the approval of the ministry (e.g. Chap. 4 in this book; Andersen 2003; Wright and Ørberg 2008).

Political technologies as well as floating signifiers are fruitful analytical tools, as they frame how meanings of key ideas are transformed by the particularities of the discursive regimes within which they serve to produce meaning and subsequently make or restrict room for manoeuvre in various ways.

### 8.3 A Brief Genealogy of the University and Its Academic Subjects

The meaning of ‘university’ has never been stable. In consequence, the meaning of being an academic subject at a university<sup>2</sup> is equally volatile (e.g. Kristensen et al. 2007). Any given university regime constitutes a space for manoeuvre with particular dominant signifiers and political technologies within which the academic subject can make up him- or herself as a professional self (Krejsler 2013).

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<sup>2</sup>The term academic should be used with caution, as the titles and character traits of individuals who have worked within the institutions we call universities have had very different meanings and names throughout history. The point to be made is first and foremost that the subject positions to be held within knowledge conserving or producing institutions are equally as plastic as these institutions themselves.

The genealogy of the university is also the narrative about an institution that has always been caught in the crossfire between prevailing dominant discourses in the society for which it was supposed to speak the truth (Haskins 1972; Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003). Regarding academic subjects' privilege to speak authoritatively on the truths about heaven and earth, the purpose and structure of life and society obviously ensures that universities become intricately embroiled in the on-going needs of the power-holders of society to reproduce legitimacy (Foucault 1971, 1977, 1978, 2002). State, church and societal hierarchy need narratives of legitimacy in order not to stand out as mere usurpers that would continuously have to resort to violence in order to protect vested interests and social order. This has been the case ever since this peculiar institution gradually evolved from European monasteries and cathedral schools into universities from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries and throughout the centuries to the developments of recent times.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, academic subjects at the university in Paris developed an extended space for manoeuvre in the crossfire between papal authority and the authority of the French crown. Among other incidents, this produced breaks among conflicting dominant discourses that allowed some measure of autonomy to academic subjects in digesting and adapting the newly acquired bodies of Aristotelian thought to the accepted dogma of Catholic Christian truths about the world. The universities founded in Germanic areas from the late fourteenth century onwards were founded by princes and the Holy Roman Emperor in a period when papal authority was on the wane, which shaped different spaces for academic subjects' manoeuvre, as they were more tied to allegiances to and dependence upon their immediate founders (e.g. Haskins 1972; Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003). Academic subjects served the purpose of conveying the right interpretation of God, the Church Fathers and the scriptures of Greek and Roman Antiquity, and ensuring that the clerical hierarchy was reproduced and properly trained in the right discourse on truth. In 1479, the University of Copenhagen was created for that purpose (e.g. Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003; Nielsen and Bricet 2007).

Like many other universities in Northern Europe, the University of Copenhagen was fundamentally restructured in the wake of the protestant Reformation (University of Copenhagen 2014). In 1536, a new regime of truth made the king head of the church in the kingdom of Denmark and made all subjects obliged to attend church regularly in order to learn the right Lutheran doctrines for conducting a good Christian life and respecting one's natural superiors, i.e. the king and his representatives in society, and the father at home. The academic subjects of the University of Copenhagen were thus turned into dogmatic propagators of a unitary, royally dominated Lutheran faith. Their main purpose was to produce protestant priests for the new regime.

Universities remained, more or less, a theological faculty, as the new knowledge regimes of the natural sciences gradually gained momentum from the seventeenth century onwards. The natural sciences and their academic subjects first built up their competing regimes of truth in royal societies and the like. During the nineteenth century, in the wake of the French Revolution and the Prussian, so-called Humboldtian university reforms, academic subjects, however, were largely trans-

formed by a regime of truth that seriously downplayed God's kingdom in favour of a scientific regime in order to make the still more pervasive bio-politics of the nation-state function more smoothly (Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003; Pritchard 2004). This new regime of truth reflected the modern episteme where the discourses of capitalism, nationalism and secularism were espoused by ruling subjects of the new dominant discourses of the modern nation state, industry and bourgeoisie. In Denmark, the natural sciences acquired an independent faculty at the university and a polytechnic was established in the mid-nineteenth century. Academics, however, remained a minuscule elite caste, as most subjects of the early modern nation state still managed to achieve the knowledge they needed in order to become legitimate subjects at home, in church and in an educational system that focused on basic literacy and numeracy, religious dogma and glorification of national history and its rulers. Until 1928, Denmark only had one institution called a university, even though polytechnics and other institutions of higher learning had been established.

As discussed in Chap. 4, from the 1960s onwards, universities in Denmark as well as in most of the western world gradually became mass institutions as the need for educated labour intensified due to industry and a rapidly growing public sector. This led to an increase in the number of universities in Denmark as well as a massive increase in the number of academic subjects. Democracy and equity discourses gained momentum. It became increasingly difficult to defend the elitist university governed by a small number of professors. These developments were expressed by the Act on the Governance of Higher Education Institutions of 1970 as revised in 1973, which inaugurated the coupling of the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourses into the particular university discourse that dominated until the mid-1980s. From then on, it was gradually replaced by neo-liberal and New Public Management discourses, culminating in the equally radical University Act of 2003. As will be argued, this led to considerable changes in what an academic subject can be.

This brief overview highlights the elasticity of possible meanings of the academic subject and university, and the close relations between such meanings and dominant knowledge regimes that prevail in society at any given time in history. It underscores the futility of debating the academic subject and their autonomy without considering the context of power-knowledge relations surrounding the university that make this subject appear legitimate.

#### **8.4 'The Democratic and Humboldtian University' – A Receding Discourse**

I will now move on to identifying the currently two most dominant discourses, which Danish academic subjects cannot avoid subjecting themselves to when constructing legitimate academic subjectivities. I will argue that a transition from what I have chosen to label a receding 'democratic and *Humboldtian*' to an emerging 'knowledge economy university discourse' has taken place. I identify these dis-

courses by referring to a number of floating signifiers and political technologies as these are expressed in the form of university laws (the 1970/1973 Act on the Governance of Higher Education Institutions and the 2003 University Act), key words, procedures and technologies, political movements, pressure from external stakeholders, dominant social and economic practices, etc.

The 1970/1973 University Governance Act, which was the key symbolic document of what I call the ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse’, represented the codification of a prolonged struggle in Danish society throughout the late 1960s. From the 1960s onwards, universities in Denmark, as well as in most of the western world, gradually became mass institutions as the needs of industry and a rapidly growing public sector for educated labour intensified. In 1960, 6000 students (6–7% of the age group) achieved high school (Gymnasium) diplomas in Denmark, which constituted the formal requirement for achieving admission to university. In 2000, 33,000 (more than 50% of the age group) achieved high school diplomas (University of Copenhagen 2014: <http://universitetshistorie.ku.dk/overblik/1900-2000/intro/> [retrieved 30 June 2015]).

As ‘democracy’ and ‘equity’ became key floating signifiers within the welfare state discourse – which had gradually become more dominant as a result, among other things, of the Social Democratic dominance in politics since the 1930s, women entering the labour market, and students from more varied social groups entering the education system – it became increasingly difficult to defend the elitist university, which was governed by a small number of professors. The elitist meritocratic and democratic discourses clashed in the emblematic events of the Youth Rebellion, the Student Rebellion and feminist struggles of the late 1960s and, interestingly, in 1970 a Centre-Right government enacted the University Act (revised and expanded in 1973) that largely met the demands of radical students (e.g. Jensen 2004; Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003; Olsen 1986).

The widespread democratisation of society and the fact that the university was becoming a mass institution led, among various other circumstances, to its radical reformulation. In the new university discourse, ‘democracy’ became a floating signifier that was frequently employed in order to discursively reformulate the meaning of the university and its subjects. The small number of professors who had hitherto governed universities unilaterally within the elitist meritocratic discourse was challenged. In accordance with the general discursive onslaught on authorities, the rebellious students cried out in the wording of the new discourse: ‘Abolish professorial rule!’ (*Afskaf professorvældet!*).

In the law text that codified this changing strategic space, ‘democracy’ became a dominant signifier in relation to which academic subjects had to legitimise their subjectivities. Subsequently, political technologies that reconfigured the key decision-making bodies were inaugurated. These were democratised in the sense that the posts of rector, dean and head of department were to be filled through election by all professors as well as permanently appointed associate professors at each university. Concerning the governing collegial bodies (i.e. the senate, and the faculty and department councils), academic staff, students and technical/administrative staff were all represented according to a 50%, 25%, 25% distribution. Study boards,

however, consisted of an equal number of elected students and academic staff. A parliamentary political discourse entered the university in the sense that proportional representation was made mandatory and through the fact that political factions emerged among academic staff as well as students.

This supported the proliferation of discourse entailing the floating signifiers of ‘autonomy/freedom’, ‘democracy’ and ‘participation’, which reached a peak at the two so-called reform universities that were established in the 1970s in Aalborg and, in particular, Roskilde (Hansen 1997). Here, the new university discourse was translated into a number of political technologies that heavily influenced how one could construct oneself as an academic and student in a legitimate way. Problem-based project work became the icon of Roskilde University and served as an illustrative example of how the new discourse informed new practices (e.g. Berthelsen et al. 1977; Fried-Booth 1986; Gartenschlaeger and Hinzen 2001). Altogether, problem-based project work at these so-called reform universities was connected to the very vocal and widespread socialist, democratic and participative discourses at the time. In line with the dominant signifiers of the time, these discourses demanded ‘student influence’ and the ‘relevance’ of research and teaching ‘for people and society’.

The new university discourse, however, was no simple or one-sided discourse. It was shaped in a continuous process drawing on many sources that were often hard to reconcile. Talk about autonomy/freedom and participation did not only draw from democratic discourses. The elitist character of the university was thus sustained in many ways by the persistence and transformation of a long-lived strain of argument, which I call the *Humboldtian* discourse, and which is still very strong among academic subjects.

In 1809–1810, as director of the educational administration under the enlightened monarchy of Prussia, Wilhelm von Humboldt was the pivotal figure in developing the concept of the University of Berlin in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. He argued that the state would profit from an obligation to fund a university that was based on extensive autonomy and little state interference. Personality development through education (*Bildung*) as an individualistic, self-motivated and non-utilitarian pursuit is, according to Humboldtian ethos, an important precondition for the development of citizens and civil servants in the rational unfolding of modern society and its institutions. Therefore, the state is expected to defend academic freedom in its own best interest. This freedom rests on the recognition of the three unities: (1) the *unity of teachers and learners* [*Einheit von Lehrer und Studierenden*] regards professors and their students as equal in the pursuit of knowledge as a process and form of thinking; (2) the *unity of research and teaching* [*Einheit von Forschung und Lehre*]; (3) the *unity of knowledge* [*Einheit des Wissens*], in which all branches of knowledge are regarded as consisting of only one unified spirit bound together by reason (Pritchard 2004: 510).

When I use the term *Humboldtian* discourse, I want to stress that among academic subjects, Humboldt represents a floating signifier that gathers the frequent, albeit diverse, claims and arguments that seek to defend academic workers’ autonomy/freedom in relation to research and teaching. The genealogy of references to Humboldt is complex and full of contradictions. It includes mixtures of references



to Humboldt himself, practices that claim to be Humboldtian, and uses of the term relating to autonomy in ways that may or may not be aware of Wilhelm von Humboldt and the University of Berlin of the early nineteenth century. For a period, *Humboldtian* discourse resonated well with and reinforced arguments regarding the contract between science and society that was hammered out in the aftermath of World War 2, most explicitly in the so-called Vannevar Bush doctrine in the USA. This was based, among other things, on the argument that research autonomy often led to unexpected scientific breakthroughs, as was the case with the theoretical foundations for the building of the nuclear bomb, implying that strict control of academic work is potentially counterproductive (Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003: 126).

The point is that the *Humboldtian* signifier became a major part of the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse in defending the claim that academic subjects must be free to pursue and teach truth and knowledge as they see it, and that students must be free to learn independently and be co-producers of research without being spoon-fed (Ash 2006; Pritchard 2004: 510; Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003). In the interviews that I have conducted, academic subjects often refer – implicitly or explicitly – to a *Humboldtian* discourse in order to make their claims for autonomy legitimate, often inspired by arguments from collegial debates or the journal *FORSKERforum* (see footnote 1). As will be seen in Chap. 9, the ambiguities within the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse would be negotiated differently by academic subjects: the traditional multi-faculty universities would represent a significant inclination towards the elitist *Humboldtian* aspect of this discourse,<sup>3</sup> whereas the reform universities would incline significantly more towards the ‘democratic’ aspect. The discourse would thus allow ample nuances to be negotiated within complex spaces for manoeuvre represented by different university and department contexts.

## 8.5 Towards ‘A Knowledge Economy University Discourse’ – An Emerging Discourse

The constellation of dominant discourses in Danish society changed during the 1980s, and in relation to universities and their academic subjects, new dominant discourses gained strong momentum during the 1990s and early 2000s. This was part of a strong international movement, largely arriving from the Anglo-American world via transnational agencies (OECD, WTO/GATS), EU, Bologna process) in the garb of neo-liberal and New Public Management signifiers: globalisation, marketisation, freedom of choice, and restructuring of the public sector (see Chap. 4 of

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<sup>3</sup>Elitist in the sense that since the early nineteenth century, it has been an ideal for the university to be an institution for the selected very few; and elitist in the sense that it privileges the search for knowledge as an end in itself (klassische Bildung), which is hardly affordable for many more than a tiny elite.

this book, Rizvi and Lingard 2010; Henry et al. 2001; Krejsler et al. 2014). As detailed in Chap. 4, it led centre, right and social democratic policy makers in Denmark to launch and sustain the so-called modernisation of the public sector (Ministry of Finance 2003; Hjort 2001; Sahlin-Andersson 2000). They argued that the public sector must be reformed and positioned in a market-like way in order to secure rational use of limited public resources. ‘Competition’, ‘decentralisation’ and ‘accountability’ became dominant floating signifiers that were given direction by an array of new political technologies. Further, they referred to the global knowledge economy discourse and its argument that nations must become more competitive in the field of knowledge production as information and communication technologies proliferate. ‘Life-long and life-encompassing learning’ and more ‘targeted use of knowledge’ became important floating signifiers to give direction to policy visions and priorities.

Being knowledge producing institutions par excellence, this obviously drew universities and academic subjects into a new strategic situation. Fuelled by OECD reports, EU and national concerns of getting an edge in a more competitive global economy, universities and research became detached from the strong democratic discourse and increasingly influenced by economic and management discourses, whose main foci were economic growth and more efficient use of limited public resources, which were marshalled into signifiers like ‘efficiency’, ‘accountability’ and ‘excellence’ (see Chap. 3 for an exposition of the interplay between transnational and national policy in relation to Danish university reform).

This reconfiguration of dominant discourses in Danish society profoundly changed the criteria of legitimacy that the university and its academic subjects had to comply with in order to retain their role as the main truth-telling institution in society.

In Denmark, a law was enacted in 1992 (with some corrective elaborations in 1993) that tightened leadership at universities, enhancing the power of rectors and faculty deans at the expense of academic subjects (see Chap. 4). As one of the first in a cascade of ‘accountability’ measures described in Chap. 5, the ministry introduced the political technology of the taximeter system in order to enhance ‘efficiency’ by tightening control of funding in relation to number of students (Hansen 2005, Wright and Ørberg 2009). The taximeter is a calculation technique that made a considerable part of state financial subsidies to universities dependent upon student completion rates. According to several interviews that I conducted with Danish academics, the taximeter system has been the single most important political technology in changing universities at department level over the last two decades. It has become the most important parameter for distribution of money within the university, and has thus directed considerable attention at department level towards accepting more students and making sure that they complete their studies. It has increased students’ bargaining power and made academic subjects more orientated towards students’ demands. An associate professor said it like this: ‘The level of service [aimed at students] has increased considerably. Nowadays, teaching undoubtedly occupies the minds of academics considerably more’ (Associate professor, humanities, multi-faculty university, 2005).

The Social Democratic party had long argued that universities had failed to contribute to more equity and were not of sufficient utility to society. In 1998, after criticism of ‘slack’ leadership and inefficient use of resources at universities, the Social Democratic government and Minister of Science Jan Trøjborg used the opportunity to introduce another ‘accountability’ measure, namely that universities would enter into development contracts with the ministry (Andersen 2003). As discussed in Chap. 5 of this book, the development contract is a political technology according to which the university legitimises how it intends to go about attaining the highest level of excellence, quality and efficiency over the coming 2–3 years. This is done in dialogue with the ministry. This technology started as a rather loose requirement, which has gradually been tightened.

This process was radicalised as a Liberal-Conservative government took office in 2001 and envisaged the turnaround of what it means to be a university and an academic subject, which culminated in the 2003 University Act (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002a). Here, the ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse’ met with a frontal attack from a more neo-liberally inspired version of the emerging ‘knowledge economy university discourse’, which argued that university management had to be tightened, universities had to set prioritised targets in order to achieve ‘excellence’, universities were not sensitive enough to the demands of a knowledge-based economy, and universities had to open up to partnerships with stakeholders in society (mainly businesses). The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation Helge Sander summed it up in the dictum that the process from idea to invoice had to become shorter (Sander 2005). The ministry remoulded the research council system in a way that prioritised subsidies to the natural sciences, information technology, health science and other areas that, in their view, were of most immediate utility to growth in Danish society.

These developments had considerable effects in the sense that more state research subsidies were strategically targeted at areas that the government found fit, and the university governance discourse and structure were moulded in the language of the private sector. The 2003 Act on Universities replaced democratically elected leaders and governing bodies at universities with a comprehensive political technology that has a governing board at the top with a majority of external members who carry with them experience from private business life and other fields that are believed to be of great value to a modern university (Chaps. 1 and 4, and Ørberg 2007). The external members are appointed in their own capacity. This governing board appoints the vice chancellor, who in turn appoints deans, heads of departments, etc. Academic subjects’ main venue of influence is now in the academic council, which only has consulting power in relation to the management (*FORSKERforum* 2005: 14–15). Academic expertise was thus discursively transformed into an expertise that the manager, i.e. the rector, and the governing board could acquire when they needed it in order to make decisions that concerned the vision, targets and priorities of the university. The university was conceived in the image of a corporation (for an elaborate discussion on the managerial aspects of Danish university reform see Chap. 6 in this book). The pervasive references to the floating signifier of freedom mainly refer to the corporation’s freedom to operate more freely on a market and as an

organisation, and less to academic freedom of individual researchers (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2002b; Ørberg 2006; Wright 2014). There has been considerable critique claiming that the majority of external stakeholders on governing boards favours business interests excessively (*FORSKERforum* 2006a: 10–11).

In this process, university was discursively dislodged from being an autonomous institution within the framework of state tutelage to being an organisation with self-ownership that had to be attentive to stakeholders' and consumers' demands on what was discursively conceived as market-like conditions (for an elaborate introduction to the issue of self-ownership in the Danish context see Chap. 5 and Ørberg 2006, and as sources to the views of academic stakeholder, see *Magisterbladet* 2003b; *Magisterbladet* 2004a). The new discourse produced an array of political technologies in order to standardise and make research and education internally comparable: league tables, benchmarking, development contracts, university and department mergers (to increase output and minimise costs) and other instruments that claimed to draw inspiration from private business corporations. The ensuing discursive logic made it possible for policy makers to prioritise what they saw as the most productive universities. The drive to incentivise universities and academic subjects to become more competitive can be exemplified among other actions by the fact that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation demanded that from 2009 a larger share of public research funding shall be made competitive and distributed according to the floating signifier of 'quality objectives'.

Summing up, the emerging knowledge economy discourse has changed radically how university and its academic subjects can be discursively enacted and has largely dislodged the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse. The knowledge economy discourse frames the legitimate position for the academic subject in a discursively constructed 'market' where they must prove to be productive, efficient and competitive in order to be of sufficient utility to what has been called the workfare or the competition state. The taximeter principle and the bibliometric research indicator (see description below) are technologies among others aimed at giving academic subjects incentives to behave accordingly.

All this does not mean, however, that universities have become markets and academic subjects entrepreneurs, much in the same way that the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse was not necessarily very democratic (younger and women academic subjects often complained that the democratic organs at department level were seized by informal networks of older academic subjects as exemplified in Chap. 9). By and large the state still owns and controls universities and is by far the biggest funder. Furthermore, it is broadly disputed that university governing boards have acquired the kind of prerogatives and freedoms that boards have in private companies (Lotz 2002). In the wake of the ministry-instigated mergers in 2007 of 21 universities and government research institutes to a mere 3 large, 4 medium and 1 small universities, further critique has been raised against the ministry's detailed management of universities and what is considered by many to be a de facto overruling of the new governing boards (see Chap. 6 in this book as well as illustrative sources like *FORSKERforum* 2007a: 3–6; *FORSKERforum* 2006c: 3). In his scru-

tiny of the pathways used to create entrepreneurial universities, Burton R. Clark points out that many states seek to develop entrepreneurial universities in pursuit of an economic rationality and by means of efficiency and accountability under centralised management. He warns that such strategies are often modelled on simplistic conceptions of what businesses are like (Clark 2001: 21).

Nonetheless, universities must align with the new conditions of the knowledge economy discourse and pay more attention to externally defined demands in order to secure their own long-term survival in an environment that has been made competitive in a new sense. It is important to notice the notion of ‘competition’ as a floating signifier that changed meaning from a ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse’, where competition referred to collegial and peer scrutiny, to a ‘knowledge economy discourse’, where competition puts more emphasis on efficiency and utility in relation to what is discursively conceived as a global competitive knowledge economy. Therefore, academic staff productivity in this particular sense has come under closer scrutiny (Ball 2003; Krejsler 2005; Shore and Wright 2000).

## 8.6 Impact on Conditions for Academic Subjects – At a General Level

I have mapped a gradual transition in the dominant discourses about universities and their academic subjects. In doing so, I have highlighted how the overarching discursive framework for constructing academic subjectivities has been altered. I have argued that this process should be seen as a transition from what I label a receding ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse’ to an emerging ‘knowledge economy university discourse’. The impact of these changes on the daily conditions for academic subjects and their teaching and research has some common features across universities. Increasing pressure on universities to reform and adapt to the emerging ‘knowledge economy university discourse’ has thus gradually led universities into a situation where they are held accountable for an increasing number of political technologies that can be summed up in the term ‘accountability regime’ (Shore and Wright 2000; Krejsler 2007, 2013).

The key discursive technologies that turned universities and academic subjects into players in a discursively constructed marketplace mirror a particular management of vastly increased output control and a number of political technologies that limit how output can be perceived and implemented. University managements entered into a particular kind of dialogue with the ministry in order to produce triennial development contracts with particular targeted areas, which they were held accountable for honouring at the end of the contract period (Wright and Ørberg 2008; Andersen 2003; Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2000). The template for these development contracts was increasingly standardised and connected to floating signifiers like ‘strategy’, ‘milestones’ and the formulation of targets in result terms. The resources for carrying out the agreed production in the form

of research, teaching, knowledge transfer, etc. were increasingly tied to what was discursively staged as (quasi) market competitive instruments. Concerning the annual government subsidies to the operation of universities, the ministry aimed at increasing the proportion of research subsidies that were ‘won’ in ‘free’ competition among the universities from 33 percent to 50 percent, to be phased in from 2009. Concerning education, universities were already paid according to a so-called taximeter for each student that passed a study unit or completed the bachelor and graduate degrees. This taximeter per student has decreased over the last decade, aiming to give universities an incentive to attract more students and make sure they pass exams.

This new regime has obviously forced universities to pay considerably more attention to continuously monitoring whether the right mix of staff is available, and whether this staff is up to date on knowledge and skills that match the new demands. In order to make faculties and departments sensitive to this competitive turn, financial means within universities were increasingly distributed according to the number of students particular departments manage to attract and get through the system, and according to the amount of external funding for research that departments manage to attract. An increasing number of mergers have taken place between departments that would otherwise not be able to survive, and, as will be explored in ethnographic detail in Chap. 9, departments increasingly passed on their obligation by seeking to sensitise individual academic subjects to the new competitive demands. This was done by putting academic staff under increased pressure to raise income equivalent to their salary in that they must attract sufficient external funding, teach enough students who passed, etc. Academic subjects were obliged continuously to document that they were able to maintain and develop a competency profile that matched demands under rapid change. It is even possible to talk of a performativity regime that many claim puts more emphasis on second-order activities such as documenting research and teaching than on the first-order activities of research and teaching (Ball 2003; Krejsler 2013; Power 1997).

As will be further detailed in Chap. 9, academic subjects were increasingly conceived of discursively as private entrepreneurs who made contracts with their department and university within a system that was still largely a state monopoly within a Danish context. This kind of contracting was implemented through political technologies such as the appraisal interview (Krejsler 2007). It was supported by technologies for documenting productivity such as the bibliometric research indicator, which required academic subjects to list continuously their production in the form of publications (differentiated into categories). On the university website, academic subjects were furthermore required/encouraged to display their teaching merits, activities in public debate and so forth within a standardised format. This was a mandatory technology through which the academic subject presented an accountable self to colleagues, managers and, in principle, the public at large. This served as the starting point for evaluating each individual academic subject at appraisal interviews and other staff assessment measures.

The gradual transition from a democratic and *Humboldtian* to a knowledge economy discourse has thus had great impact on the conditions for how academic sub-

jects go about constructing and reproducing their identities as researchers and teachers. The change in dominant discourses has changed the language and political technologies that academic subjects must employ in order to appear as legitimate subjects to department and university leadership, as well as the public and themselves.

## 8.7 Impact on Conditions for Academic Subjects – Contextualized

The above-mentioned changes in overarching and general conditions for constructing academic subjectivities did not mean, however, that academic subjects necessarily lost space for manoeuvre or that conditions were uniformly imposed upon all university contexts. As will be demonstrated in Chap. 9, conditions for such spaces for manoeuvre varied considerably depending on the contexts and histories of particular universities, faculties and departments. This is why we chose, within the framework of this research project, to carry out pilot studies at most Danish universities and subsequently focus on a limited number that represented very different contexts. Consequently, I will conclude this chapter by briefly presenting three different Danish universities and their very different ways of relating to the general transition from a receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse to an emerging knowledge economy discourse. This transition has taken place at all three universities, albeit in very different ways. The three universities, which will be explored further in Chap. 9, represent a well-established, large traditional multi-faculty university, a so-called reform university established in the early 1970s and a mono-faculty specialist university. At each of these universities, two departments that represented maximum difference within the university were chosen.

At the large, traditional multi-faculty university, which has a centuries' old history and had around 33,000 students and 5500 employees (full-time equivalents) in 2005, reforms have been cumbersome and difficult to envision and implement. The university used to have a tradition for being governed at faculty and department level. Deans negotiated directly with the ministry, whereas the rector had much less power in shaping the daily life and conditions of the university. Among a variety of other reasons, this resulted in a very uneven and opaque organisation. As a nationally well-known humanities professor stated, until recently it was impossible for the central university management to create an overview of what happened at department level, to the extent that central strategic planning and uniform implementation of particular political technologies were almost impossible (Professor, humanities, multi-faculty university, 2004). And if departments did not approve of central initiatives, they could do a lot to hinder their implementation, as they had the expertise about what was going on at a local level. This led to a high level of autonomy at department and individual academic levels, although there was a maze of differences in such a big and opaque organisation. For instance, the distribution of finan-

cial means at the humanities faculty had been centralised at faculty level, whereas it had been decentralised considerably more to department level at the natural sciences faculty. There had generally been highly individualised cultures among academic subjects, who were often more directed towards external networks of research colleagues than colleagues at their own department, with some departments being so centrifugal that they could hardly be said to have a collective identity. This again varied from the humanities, where this seemed to be more the case, to the natural sciences, where researchers collaborated more around laboratories and expensive equipment and there was a more widespread tradition for publishing collectively.

Within such a diverse organisation, it had obviously been a long-lasting and cumbersome process to make the knowledge economy university discourse and its signifiers and technologies felt in their breadth all the way from policy makers to individual academic subjects. In Chap. 9, I will pursue how individual academic subjects sensed and dealt with gradually changing strategic spaces. At a general level, though, it can be stated that academic subjects in the humanities generally seemed more fearful of and resistant to the recent reforms than natural sciences academic subjects. As academic subjects within the natural sciences said, this might be due to the fact that their fields were generally prioritised by current government policies. Furthermore, many natural and health sciences academic subjects had a long-standing tradition for collaborating with private businesses, whereas that was more rarely seen in the humanities. Academic subjects in the natural and health sciences did not view the increased demands to publish in international, peer-reviewed journals as a threat, as they have already long been accustomed to doing that. This was not the case among a majority of humanities academic subjects, who had by tradition – and maybe also by the nature of their field – been predominantly orientated towards national research topics and were furthermore predominantly financed by regular means from the state.

Since the technology of the new governance structure, with appointed rector, deans and heads of department, was fully implemented in 2006, and the new management's collaboration with the governing board in formulating strategies for the university came underway, reforms changed life, even at the old traditional multi-faculty university, albeit with more delay than at other universities.

The considerably smaller *mono-faculty specialist university* (2930 students and 1635 employees in full-time equivalents in 2005) offered, for a variety of reasons, a very different strategic space within which to manoeuvre for an academic subject. As a consequence of being smaller and mono-faculty, it offered a more homogeneous environment, where it was easier for central management to create an overview. From the outset, this university had embraced the government's agenda of university reform and made a point of appearing to be at the forefront of introducing its signifiers and technologies as well as implementing them. It represented an area that was highly valued and prioritised in the knowledge economy discourse, as far as the key issue of utility in relation to economy was concerned. There was a long-standing tradition for working with private medical, agricultural and nutrition businesses. The university had large amounts of external funding and was a leading institution for commercial patents. Here, academic subjects' room for manoeuvre



was constricted by a central management that intended to streamline the organisation according to a specific method of strategic planning. A unified set of strategic goals and performance indicators at quite a detailed level of specification was pretty much implemented, and appeared to give the central management the instruments to increase the distribution of resources to departments according to compliance with the university's strategic goals and performance. The environment seemed to be very competitive, and academic subjects appeared to be largely responsible for financing their own positions. Academic subjects seemed to be aware that job security was highly dependent upon their immediate performance. Even within this regime, however, noticeable differences could be found. These differences appeared to be strongest between the original departments at the mono-faculty university and the government research centres that had been merged into the university a few years previously. The centres had been more closely connected to particular ministries and their demands and concerns, and had even had ministry representatives as key members of their independent boards. Academic subjects in the original departments apparently had more of a university identity than those at the centres. The latter took pride in being better able to deal with the external stakeholders and of being realistic and pragmatic. At one large centre it was claimed by several employees, from management to academic subjects and administrative staff, that they would be better at honouring the demands of the 2003 University Law to attract external funding, and be visible and active in relation to the general public, as they had always been in a situation that had forced them to develop and exhibit these virtues.

Interestingly, in 2006 and 2007, the ministry forced through a merger of many smaller universities into a few large universities, and in this process, the mono-faculty specialist university was merged into an old, large multi-faculty university, where for a time it achieved faculty status.

*The reform university* is the third case study university, i.e. a university that was established in the wake of the reforms of the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse in the early 1970s. It was a medium-sized multi-faculty university that had enjoyed a high profile and politically chequered existence as a progressive university. It had over 9000 students and 1200 employees (full-time equivalents) in autumn 2005. Within its discursive regime, academic subjects had traditionally prided themselves on the particular signifiers and technologies of project work and collaborative work in relation to their educational courses and, to some extent, the organisation of research as well. They had prided themselves on a strong tradition for collaboration with external stakeholders as well as a high level of societal relevance of their research (Hansen 1997). Since the 1980s, the project-orientated approach surprisingly made this university a darling of the advanced creative and hi-tech areas of business life, and it was lauded by an OECD report in 2004 (*Magisterbladet* 2004b; *FORSKERforum* 2004: 13). With its strong tradition for a collective and participatory spirit, many academic manager and student subjects endeavoured to preserve as long as possible the particular features of this university in the face of what they saw as the onslaught of the demands of the reforms. Many departments had an outspoken collective identity, and some had even developed strategies for parallel struc-

tures to deal with intolerable structures imposed on them from outside. This university regime had obviously bred particular ways of constructing academic subjectivities, which they attempted to preserve even with the enactment of the 2003 University Law.

In 2006, this relatively small university of collective spirit was heavily impacted by sudden change as a newly appointed rector took office (*FORSKERforum* 2006f; *FORSKERforum* 2006b: 14–15; *FORSKERforum* 2006d). A swift reform and reduction of departments took place, which seriously affected both the departments that we researched. The department dealing with educational research merged with another department and seemed to be able to retain many of its self-reliant features, whereas the ramparts of the science department with a focus on mathematics and physics seemed to be more jeopardised by its assimilation into a larger department with a focus on science, systems and models.

## 8.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have identified the dominant overarching discourses, signifiers and political technologies that made up the strategic spaces for manoeuvre that emerged for academic subjects at Danish universities leading up to the crucial period between 2005 and 2007 studied in this chapter and Chap. 9. The plasticity of the subject position of the academic has been illustrated by the swift changes in dominant university discourses that took place in Denmark during the period from the late 1960s until around 2007, from what I have labelled ‘a democratic *Humboldtian* university discourse’ to ‘a knowledge economy university discourse’. The rapid proliferation of the latter discourse, its signifiers and political technologies pointed to considerable changes in how it was possible to legitimately think and talk about an academic subject.

A brief genealogy of the university and its academic subjects posed the argument, however, that this privileged truth-telling institution was always an unstable entity that echoed the on-going struggles between changing dominant discourses in society (Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003). Being an academic subject within the space for manoeuvre that a particular university allows is, unsurprisingly, equally volatile.

The emerging dominant knowledge-economy discourse about the university defined a number of conditions in the form of floating signifiers, which had to be complied with, such as accountability, efficiency and excellence, as well as political technologies, such as development contracts, the taximeter system and the bibliometric research indicator. These changes were certainly important at a general level. How they shaped the space for manoeuvre for the individual academic subject could not, however, be ascertained more specifically without first considering the individual universities, faculties and departments where the academics became legitimate subjects. As shown by means of the sketches of three different Danish universities and hints at their different faculties and/or departments, it was evident

that they constituted very different contexts for becoming legitimate academic subjects. The dominant signifiers and political technologies were negotiated in very different ways. In the context of the mono-faculty university, the political technology of performance indicators was implemented by a unified strategic management in ways that thoroughly occupied the academic subjects' attention and shaped their spaces for manoeuvre. In contrast, at the traditional multi-faculty university, such technologies were introduced at a much slower pace and in less predictable ways. The balance of power between the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse on the one hand and the knowledge-economy discourse on the other hand varied significantly between the mono-faculty specialist university and the other two universities. Further, the traditional multi-faculty university further inclined towards the elitist rather than the democratic aspects of the *Humboldtian* discourse, whereas the reform university inclined more towards the democratic aspects of the same discourse.

In Chap. 9, I will pursue in ethnographic detail how particular academic subjects – captured at a particular moment in time – struggled with the particular blends of discourses, signifiers and political technologies that their particular universities, faculties and departments made possible within the overarching conditions that framed them all.

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# Chapter 9

## Academic Subjectivities at Stake – Different University Contexts, Different Responses to Reform



John Benedicto Krejsler 

### 9.1 Introduction

In Chap. 8, I delineated the interdependence as well as the plasticity of entities like universities and academic subjects. The meaning of the university has always been part of fierce strategic battles between dominant discourses in society and subject to relations of power within which it only occupies a relative and lesser position (Bourdieu 1988; Kjærgaard and Kristensen 2003). Likewise, the position of the academic subject is no free-floating entity. It is largely determined by the position and purpose of that subject within dominant university discourses at any given time. In Chap. 8, the plasticity of the subject position of the academic was illustrated with reference to the long historical developments of the meaning of university, as well as the swift changes in dominant university discourses that took place in Denmark from the late 1960s until the early 2000s – from what I label ‘a democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse’ towards ‘a knowledge economy discourse’.

This does not mean, however, that the subject position of the academic is confined to the mere straitjacket of a single rigid discourse that rules at any given time and leaves no space for manoeuvre. As outlined in Chap. 8, each university represented its own strategic space for any dominant external discourse to be fitted into. As will be developed further in this chapter, this created at each university particular spaces for manoeuvre in the form of different academic styles and university, faculty and department profiles. The breaks between the new dominant knowledge economy discourse, the receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse and other active discourses at each particular university setting can thus be exploited and opened up to contesting discourses that may impact the conditions for balancing the self-construction of an academic subject.

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This chapter captures a key moment of transition from 2005 to 2007, when Danish universities were preparing to embrace the emblematic 2003 University Law and its new signifiers and political technologies. I will follow in ethnographic detail how academic subjects dealt with the constraints and possibilities of new signifiers and political technologies as these were embedded and negotiated in particular university and departmental contexts. In doing so, I draw on qualitative research interviews, various documents, and observations from two departments at each of three universities chosen for this study<sup>1</sup>: one multifaculty university, one specialist university and a ‘reform’ university. This material was mainly gathered between late spring 2005 and late spring 2006. It was supported by previous pilot studies at most Danish universities and analyses of documents and literature that shed light on the reform of Danish universities at local, national as well as international levels.

Theoretically, this chapter is conceived within the same Foucault-inspired framework as outlined in Chap. 8 (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1971; Simola et al. 1998). The chapter applies this framework to more close-up studies of how academic subjects within particular university settings were coming to grips with new conditions for shaping academic subjectivities. Here, academics are conceived of as individuals who become academic subjects by making use of and negotiating the spaces for manoeuvre available within the different university discourses – the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse and the knowledge economy discourse in particular. The concepts of floating signifiers and political technologies embedded in a discourse analysis framework are employed to conceive of how the relations between knowledge, power and subjectivity emerge in non-deterministic ways as a new dominant knowledge-economy discourse dislodges the previous dominance of a democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse.

This approach serves as a lens to map academic subjects’ spaces for manoeuvre and their changing subjectivities in ways that are loyal to the complexities of these processes (Krejsler and Carney 2009; Krejsler 2006, 2013). This chapter suggests that such spaces emerge as strategic spaces of potential openings and closures when new discursive regimes interact with older regimes that represent the memory, culture and history of each particular university setting. The elements of contesting discursive regimes may be partially silenced, but as will be clear from this chapter, data show that such context specific knowledge and practices still work within the emerging dominant regimes in struggles to give meaning to floating signifiers (e.g. ‘excellence’ or ‘quality’) and struggles to implement, in ways that make sense on the local level, the practices suggested by particular political technologies (e.g. the development contract or the bibliometric research indicator). The processes of change introduced by the knowledge economy discourse certainly reconfigured and gave direction to the daily struggles that academic, manager and student subjects

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. 8 for a more general context regarding how the three universities referred to in this chapter have responded to the transition from the receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse to the knowledge economy discourse, and Chap. 1 for a general introduction to all the case study universities in the context of university reform.

were obliged to engage in. They did not, however, make the outcomes of these struggles predictable in any deterministic sense.

## 9.2 Changing Conditions for Academic Subjects and Their Spaces for Discursive Positioning

The new regime, which was ushered in by the rise of the knowledge economy discourse, had forced universities to pay considerably more attention to continuously monitoring whether the right mix of academic staff was available. This included monitoring whether academic staff were up to date with the knowledge and skills that matched the demands of the imagined marketplace, which the knowledge economy discourse brought into existence.<sup>2</sup> Leaders at all levels, from rector to dean and head of department, were delegated enlarged powers to ensure that this turn-around would take place. Heads of department were now encouraged more explicitly to ensure that the academic subjects did their research in prioritised core areas within department strategies, be they more or less tightly organised (*FORSKERforum* 2005b: 10–11). This should be seen in a context where leaders were now appointed from the level above, as opposed to previously being elected by constituencies of academic and technical staff from below; i.e. leaders' loyalties had formally shifted from being part of the staff to being part of a leadership team. As will be seen, this was handled very differently by different heads of department at different universities.

In order to make faculties and departments sensitive to this competitive turn, financial resources within universities were increasingly distributed according to the logics of political technologies like the taximeter system, which served to allocate funding to and within the university according to the number of students that particular departments managed to attract and get through the system, or the competitive instruments of external research funding that departments and their academic subjects must attract in order not to be reduced to largely teaching universities. An increasing number of mergers took place between departments that would otherwise not be able to survive according to the market logic constructed by the knowledge economy discourse.

Here, humanities departments were particularly vulnerable (*FORSKERforum* 2004: 12–15). They did not fit the government's new criteria for strategic research areas (mainly nanoscience, medical and technical sciences) and they did not have the immediate appeal to those external sponsors from the industries and other stake-

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<sup>2</sup>As argued in Chap. 8, this constructed marketplace was hardly more than a quasi-market – or a market in name only – as universities are by and large still owned and controlled by the state. The state is also by far the biggest funder of universities. Furthermore, it can be disputed whether university governing boards are more than boards in name only, as the government and the ministry's civil servants are constantly criticised for interfering in university affairs, often in great detail (see Chap. 6 in this book).

holders who were looking for a clear prospect of utility. The threat of job cuts at humanities departments around the country was thus imminent, and unsurprisingly, my interviews demonstrated that humanities academics were more hostile and fearful towards recent university reforms than academic subjects within fields like natural, food and health science. The latter had more entrenched traditions of dealing and collaborating with businesses, seeking patents, thinking in terms of utility and so forth. Several academic subjects in humanities mentioned that they did not have the same tradition for publishing in international, peer reviewed journals as did the natural and health sciences. Many humanities disciplines dealt with issues that were closely linked to national or regional culture, and consequently often of marginal interest to international journals that were largely Anglo-American.

In order to sensitise each individual academic subject to the emerging knowledge economy discourse and its signifiers and political technologies, departments increasingly put academic staff under pressure to generate income equivalent to their salary in the sense that they must publish internationally, attract sufficient external funding, teach enough students who passed, etc. My material, however, shows great variation in how this was done in different places.

### 9.3 The Traditional University Between Resilience and Ominous Expectation

*At the old, traditional multi-faculty university*, the new demands had only seeped down to individual academic subjects very slowly. From the inception of the 2003 University Law until early 2007, the academic staff at natural science departments as well as at the humanities departments that I researched did not seem very aware of university reform, with the notable exceptions of heads of department and other staff in management positions. The latter were required to deal with policy signals from the university management. Everybody had seen changes in the sense that they had experienced mergers of smaller departments into bigger ones; however, departmental leaders found it hard to gather academic staff for meetings about policy changes, as academic staff felt that concrete changes were far-off. The humanities department seemed so centrifugal that it was hard to determine whether departmental governance meant very much beyond teaching requirements. As one assistant professor stated, he identified more with his discipline than with his department:

Well, I do not think it means that much where you are placed ... Having vibrant contact with a network of researchers from mainly the US and England, it is less important whether I am placed in Copenhagen, Aarhus, Edinburgh or somewhere else. No matter what, I would still have these contacts. There is hardly any institution in the world that can offer an academically fully satisfactory environment. It is one's own obligation as a researcher to establish a network, or that is what I feel. To me it was mostly a question of which country and which institution could offer working traditions that I could relate to, and simultaneously offered financial conditions to enable the kind of research that I find ideal. And altogether this university comes out quite well, because of the academic tradition at my department and because of the opportunities to travel and maintain contacts, by way of

participating in and convening conferences. (Assistant professor, humanities, multi-faculty university, 2005)

To this assistant professor, the signifier of ‘academic freedom’, which occupied such an important space within the democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse, still seemed to offer considerable potential for resistance at this university. In 2005, a renowned professor attributed this resilience to the fact that this university was among the largest in the country, boasted centuries-old traditions and had long been governed bottom-up. This complexity had made it very difficult to govern from the level of the rector, so the dean and department levels had been dominant. According to this academic subject, it thus remained to be seen what kind of impact the new dominant university discourse would have. The point was that the political technologies, which aimed at making academic subjects accountable upwards, were still very weak at department level. The introduction of the political technology of appraisal interviews was still in the preparatory phase. A research monitoring system hardly existed. As it was said by the head of department at the humanities department, as long as you do your teaching and do not publish less than an average of two articles a year over a two-year period, you should not experience any trouble. The dark side of this seemingly large space for manoeuvre for the individual academic subject seemed to be the isolation and exclusion that some felt or feared. This was especially the case for young academic subjects, PhD students in particular, who were outside the informal networks of old-time established academic staff (*Magisterbladet* 2003a, b, c).

Changes as a result of reforms in the wake of the knowledge-economy discourse had been seeping in, though, and reactions were gradually building up. The subject positions of the ‘democratic and *Humboldtian* university regime’ were gradually being dislodged by those of the ‘knowledge-economy regime’: elected rectors, deans and heads of departments had been replaced by appointed ones, the senate by a governing board, a number of accountability-inspired political technologies were being introduced, and so forth. In the spring of 2007, however, a publicly noticeable response erupted at the humanities faculty, when the newly appointed dean announced the introduction of a political technology aimed at measuring research productivity (*FORSKERforum* 2007b: 16–17). Academic subjects’ outputs were to be differentiated into categories, each category meriting a particular number of comparable points. A doctoral thesis was to be made comparable to a certain number of peer reviewed journal articles; a monograph should equal three articles (Wright 2014). This was the beginning of what was later to be implemented as the political technology of the bibliometric research indicator. At the time, this led to a heated debate in the internal faculty newsletter, and ultimately to a highly publicised petition signed by a large number of academic subjects. The petition criticised this political technology for quantifying and making academic productions comparable in ways that unjustly twisted what academic work in the humanities was all about. The dean apparently softened her line, saying that she had been misunderstood, that the whole thing was mainly about signalling that a debate was needed about how

humanities would deal with increasing demands, and that productivity must be made more visible and comparable.

This reaction seemed to have been forestalled when the head of a humanities department expressed his fears in interviews in 2005 and 2006. He complained that academic staff had very little information about the reforms that were then on their way. Most academic staff never attended meetings that were relevant to the department's future; they just went on with business as usual. This head of department predicted that the kind of change that could really make a difference in relation to the working conditions of department and academic subjects would be decisions that increasingly introduced the political technology of result contracts, which specified how many students needed to pass, how many articles must be published, how much money must be raised from external sources, etc. From his experience with university administration, he reckoned that the logic of such policy changes would be that the rector would impose such demands upon the deans, who would pass it on to the heads of department, who would be forced to pass the obligation on to the academic subjects:

How else should such demands be accomplished? ... Hitherto, however, the development contracts have not had any significant effect on the way that the academic workers think. Most hardly know what a development contract means (Head of department, humanities, multi-faculty university, 2005)

This head of department had felt it a rather lonely task to build up some kind of strategy of response to what he knew would come sooner or later and, he thought, take most of the remainder of the academic subjects at the department by surprise. His work with the department's development plan 2006–2009 reflected his attempt to prepare his department for the political technologies that he saw were on their way. He foresaw the increasing pressure to appear productive and accountable in the sense of the knowledge-economy discourse, which was a justified and timely concern given that in 2007 the new dean attempted to introduce a technology for measuring research productivity. Most of the department's 2006–2009 development plan dealt with issues like formulating the department's core fields and priority areas for the years to come. His strategy for coming to terms with the floating signifier of accountability and the political technologies in its wake gravitated around four main issues: publication strategy, other indicators, research management/leadership and recruiting policy. The head of department aimed at conducting annual appraisal interviews with each permanently employed academic subject in order to come to a shared understanding of work assignments, career potential and competency development.

This head of department's space for manoeuvre was clearly confined by the context of a department hampered by centrifugal tendencies. Even the constituent units from two previous mergers pretty much kept themselves to themselves along pre-merger and disciplinary lines. Academic staff seemed to orientate themselves more towards their external networks than networks within the department. It could be argued that this departmental context was infused with an autonomy discourse that secured individual space for manoeuvre or, at least, made room for a high level of

detachment from constricting demands from organisational visions, milestones, targets and the like. To be sure, the floating signifiers of ‘academic freedom’ and other so-called *Humboldtian* terms were often hinted at.

Such a departmental context served as a brake on a knowledge-economy discourse that was not perceived to appreciate the particular features of many humanities disciplines. Nonetheless, it could be argued with equal justification that the lack of a coherent and explicit strategy backed by academic subjects proved to become highly dangerous when demands from the knowledge-economy discourse moved from the board and university management onwards into the capillary veins of the university. The above-mentioned 2007 incident showed a capacity for contestation. However, it seemed to lack – at least for the time being – a coherent response that could be formulated as a contesting interpretation of the dominant floating signifiers of ‘efficiency’ and ‘accountability’. Therefore, further external demands and political technologies linked to funding and resources could certainly be expected.

There were, nonetheless, a few conspicuous attempts on the part of this department to enter into strategies that appeared more directly compatible with the demands of the knowledge-economy discourse. A course in business humanities was being developed. According to the head of department, this course had been established as a response to the fact that many graduates from the department had gone to Copenhagen Business School and elsewhere to take supplementary courses in order to enhance their opportunities to get a job:

We made an enquiry, where we asked our students and graduates what they missed in particular in our courses. Our intention was that we might as well offer courses on such issues ourselves ... Consequently, we elaborated a draft within some areas that were in particularly high demand: organisation, communication, Human Resource Development and so forth. We then contacted potential employers for our graduates to hear their opinions about our ideas; not the Confederation of Danish Industry [the employers’ association representing major industries in Denmark], but rather major companies themselves such as Maersk [a major world-wide shipping company], Nordea [a major Nordic banking business] and others. We are now in dialogue with the ministry in order to have the course authorised. We will probably not get full acceptance. This is an example of the increased attention to servicing students. And the funding was also obtained from particular ministerial funding resources aimed at furthering just that kind of specific purposes (Head of department, humanities, multi-faculty university, 2006).

This example showed how the government’s signals that universities should focus more on their students’ future employability could be furthered by setting aside funding resources for particular purposes. This indirect technology for steering universities simultaneously stimulated the applicants to adapt to the knowledge economy discourse and gave them a feeling of at least some autonomy.

The resistance to the knowledge-economy regime and its ensuing political technologies was, however, far from universal and univocal at this university. Contrary to many of their older colleagues, the earlier mentioned humanities assistant professor as well as another assistant professor at a natural science department did not lament the vanishing democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse. They claimed that the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse had fostered an opaque power structure at department level. According to them, informal networks of old-time associate pro-

fessors and professors, who were all employed within a short period of time some decades ago, had hogged the democratic old structure to an extent that these younger colleagues felt excluded and under-informed. The assistant professor at the natural science department thus said: ‘Well, somehow I think it [the current situation] has a lot to do with the fact that, here and elsewhere, a heap of staff were employed over a relatively short period of time some thirty to forty years ago’.

Both assistant professors saw the potential benefits of having an appointed instead of an elected leadership. The assistant professor at the natural science department thus added:

Personally, I am not afraid of the new law or appointed leaders. It can only become better than what I have experienced during my 10 years at this place ... I simply find it a mess that colleagues lead colleagues, who then get replaced in four years at the next election and so forth ... I realised that when some years ago there were a number of colleagues who were to be dismissed. That process was handled in an extremely amateurish way ... That made me aware that it simply does not work that a person on these corridors, who will be your peer in two years’ time, is to decide who is going to get the sack because he is incidentally elected head of department right now ... I simply prefer a professional who knows how to administrate, how to save money and who simply knows how to get things done more professionally (Assistant professor, life sciences, multi-faculty university, 2005).

This conflict of interest between assistant and associate/full professors was obviously exacerbated by the fact that only every second assistant professor in Denmark subsequently acquired permanent employment in an associate professorship (*FORSKERforum* 2005a: 6–7, *Magisterbladet* 2003b, c). In Denmark although there is no tenure, a postdoctoral employee may initially aspire to an assistant professorship, which may or may not lead to an associate professorship. The associate professorship is still widely regarded as a permanent position, even though this is currently being challenged as the knowledge-economy discourse increasingly brings in the argument that academic subjects’ employment should be assessed continuously in terms of their record for external funding, publication and/or teaching.

#### **9.4 The Hard Science University – The Willing ‘Fronrunner’ of Reform**

At the *mono-faculty specialist university* (see footnote 1), a considerably smaller university within the life sciences, the new dominant discourse had affected lives of individual academic subjects considerably more directly. Here, the management had made a point of being ‘frontrunners’ in implementing the 2003 University Law. They had strengthened the already existing top-down management and worked on implementing political technologies in the form of standardised quality assurance measures and performance indicators across the university in order to make all units comparable and generate detailed information about each unit as a background for making strategic decisions and allocating resources.

The effects of this approach on academic subjects could be seen in action at a *department of science related to food* that was chosen as a pilot case for implementing this governance regime. Here, a very systematic structure was created from the head of department down through a number of research sections to each individual academic subject. Political technologies in the form of regular group appraisal interviews with the sections, as well as individual appraisal interviews, were implemented in order to generate a high level of information about the department's priorities down through the organisation and produce a high level of information about details of implementation and additional knowledge about productivity up through the system. Heads of sections interviewed individual academic staff and the head of department interviewed heads of section. This system was linked to performance indicators at individual as well as section level in order to generate performance indicators at department level, which served as background material for the regular negotiations with the university management about future priorities and the allocation of resources. These performance indicators were formulated in result terms, and basically required each academic subject to annually raise 1½ million DKK (approximately 200,000 Euros) of external funding, publish two articles each year in international peer-reviewed journals, teach a certain amount of hours and be active in the media. The interviews clearly showed that these demands were felt as a heavy burden. As the head of a research section within the department, who was himself a professor, said:

Well, heads of research sections are being evaluated differently than before. We now have these performance indicators to comply with. That means that the section I lead will have to deliver a certain quota of teaching, which is measured according to a standardised annual student growth unit [cf. the taximeter calculus described earlier], and we need to gather a certain amount of externally financed research projects, which are simply measures in kroner and øre [Danish currency]. And evidently I, being the head of a research section, am obliged to look closely into what each individual academic worker in my research section may achieve. And they are told that if they do not perform up to standard, if they cannot deliver externally financed project money in sufficient amounts ... Well, then they find themselves in an unpleasant situation. And well, there you can say that you lose some of your autonomy as a researcher, because you are forced to go for money that you would not normally go for, because you consider it to be slightly outside your field (Head of research section, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005).

Even long-time associate professors did not feel any safer in their employment. The academic subjects knew that failure to comply with these performance indicators would very quickly bring unpleasant attention to them individually and might eventually jeopardise their position. A long-time associate professor noted:

We are subject to considerable pressure to be visible and to finance our own positions ... Whether you dare speak your opinions out loud depends, I would say, upon who you are ... For, as you know, one's position has to be renegotiated continually (Associate professor, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2006).

Some space for manoeuvre was available, however, even within such a tightly managed performance regime. At section level, for instance, the head might recalibrate these demands to some extent by allowing a star researcher to research more



and teach less, and a star teacher to teach more and research less. Also, the individual performance data were aggregated at department level before they were sent off to the central university authorities, which ultimately gave heads of sections as well as the head of department some space for taking into account individual considerations where it was found to be justified in a long-term perspective. At this department, which again differed from other departments at the same university, academic subjects were required to continuously document that they were able to maintain a level of productivity and develop a competency profile that matched the changing demands imposed on the department. Several authors have referred to such governance as performativity regimes that risk putting more emphasis on second-order activities, such as documenting research and teaching, than on the first-order activities themselves, i.e. research and teaching (Ball 2003; Dean 1999; Power 1997). Here, the academic subject was, to a relatively large extent, vested with the insignia of the private entrepreneur to make contract-like agreements with their department and university within a quasi-market system, which, paradoxically, was still largely a state monopoly within a Danish context. The head of a research section within this department elaborated with clarity how this entrepreneurial ethic was increasingly making its way into the minds of academic subjects:

Within your local research environment you increasingly become responsible for your own job security. This becomes particularly visible through the performance indicators. Permanent employment is gradually being turned into an illusion ... Within a private enterprise the manager is responsible for bringing home assignments to the company. At the university, however, things are more mixed up, as academic workers are also responsible for procuring assignments ... But funding of research is complicated, as it is very competitive. If you are dealing with a hot issue, then you easily get two to three researchers competing about who should be allowed to make the bid for the funding in question. Here, it may even be an advantage to let several researchers make the bid for the same funding ... It obviously becomes very prevalent within such an environment that researchers keep their cards very close to their chest. Some work on it in smaller groups (Head of research section, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005).

At this department, research freedom had been severely curtailed as strategic management was implemented. The idea of having steady employment eroded more and more, as the introduction of political technologies of the accountability kind made employment increasingly dependent upon whether you could finance yourself, be visible and match the priorities of the department/university. Dissemination of research to the wider public was upgraded to count on an equal level with scientific publication at this department, even though scientific publication demanded much greater preparatory effort. At the time, the department was not able to attract sufficient numbers of qualified students, which squeezed the department's economy, given that a standard payment per student who passed their exams was one of the key criteria for the allocation of government funding. As a consequence, pretty much all who applied to take the department's education courses had to be accepted for enrolment, which meant a lowering of quality. The pressure to show how research had an immediate relevance to business life might push the balance between basic research and applied research in a negative direction in the

longer term, according to several interviewees. It had also become more difficult to strike a coherent balance between professional and private life.

Another department staged a different and apparently more self-confident space for manoeuvre in relation to the emerging knowledge economy university discourse. This was *a centre that dealt with issues related to forestry and landscape*, the result of a merger a few years earlier between parts of a previous mono-faculty specialist university department and a considerably larger government research institute (*sektorforskningsinstitut*).<sup>3</sup> The centre manager described the approach of the centre by referring to a number of floating signifiers that evoked the modern, business-like flat structure approach that was so hailed by the emerging dominant knowledge-economy discourse, which he contrasted to the so-called traditional hierarchies of the university. He emphasised the ‘front personnel’, i.e. the academic as well as administrative personnel that established, maintained and nurtured contacts with external partners on a day to day level. The centre furthermore had its own ‘board’, like a business, where three ministries were represented (the ministries of environmental affairs, foreign affairs and education). This meant that they put money into the centre as well. The centre manager found it very fruitful to have this independent board, as it represented a venue where the ministries could make sure that their interests were taken care of. The manager evoked floating signifiers as he expressed his concern with protecting the more ‘flexible’ and ‘efficient’ centre. He considered that ‘the university culture is very bureaucratic and insensitive to the demands of the surrounding world and its stakeholders’. He criticised this

‘more closed, inward-looking approach, where administration is rather looking to satisfying their own demand for documentation than solving the problems and tasks in interaction with the stakeholders out there in the real world (Centre manager, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005).

In contrast, he described the centre as often ‘much more sensitive to external demands’. The centre’s approach, according to him, opened another dynamic for the academic subjects to develop ideas and go out and try to find interested external partners. According to the manager, ‘the centre is more flexible, and the administration is there to nurture the needs and good ideas of academic workers’. He thus yearned for more professional administration, and not for the professional autonomy that was felt threatened by many in most of the other university contexts. This discourse regarding the centre as a unit that was already conditioned to be flexible

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<sup>3</sup>A *sektorforskningsinstitut* is a research institution that is closely connected with a particular ministry. It solves research, advisory, educative and other issues for that ministry, and typically has a board where members from the ministry play key roles. An integral part of the large process of mergers of universities, which was put on track by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in 2006, consisted in merging the large number of government research institutes into the existing regular universities. According to the union representatives of academic workers, this entailed a risk of blurring the distinction between autonomous research and commissioned research (*FORSKERforum*, 2006 (theme on university vs. sector research); *FORSKERforum* 2007b: 4–5; *Magisterbladet* 2007).

and fit to collaborate with external stakeholders was sustained by the academic subjects we interviewed there.

This positive discursive rhetoric about the space for manoeuvre for the centre and its subjects did not mean that demands in the form of political technologies, such as performance indicators, seemed less prevalent than at the other department mentioned. The centre had success criteria that its academic subjects must comply with, which included publishing a certain number of internationally peer-reviewed articles each year, public visibility, etc. Nonetheless, the rhetoric and, maybe, the attitudes towards the more business-like way of conceiving of the university and the academic subject appeared very different. The centre manager stated in a rather affirmative way that the increased demand for public institutions within the last 5 years to document their results and the value of their activities was not particular to this institution; it applied to public employees almost everywhere. Phrased within the scope of the floating signifier of ‘flexibility’, he added: ‘The centre is very flexible as to where an academic worker performs, as long as he performs well’. This resonated well with a professor in charge of research at the same centre, who supported a similar attitude but with a more elitist and *Humboldtian* kind of wording, namely that research is an elite endeavour that is not a 9–5 job, and should consequently comply – as it does – with high external demands for quality. Being in agreement on performance at a general level, there nonetheless appeared to be a noteworthy discrepancy between the manager’s more business-like discourse and the professor’s discourse on high quality standards. The professor in charge of research expressed his worry that increased demands for external funding might constitute a threat to research autonomy, as externally funded research required co-funding and this tended to swallow up the university’s means for free research (*FORSKERforum* 2007a). Even this professor was very result-oriented in a business-like way though, when he stressed that it was important for the department’s academic subjects to pay careful attention to the dynamics of the current regime and its tougher demands for securing external funding. In an elitist jargon he added: ‘If you hired the right researchers, they will also find their way to the funding and get it!’ (Professor, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005).

Taking a closer look at the centre’s Action plan, the most explicit document listing the political technologies governing the centre, it was very obvious that high performance was demanded among other things in the long array of explicit milestones. The centre benchmarked itself against renowned international counterparts in order to increase performance. The business-like approach that permeated the life of the centre was stressed by the secretary, who mentioned explicitly several times during a visit that we were welcome to hire their conference room in case we needed it for conferences or the like. The centre operated a political technology that conceptualised academic subjects’ workloads in meticulous detail. Each year’s work was 1680 h and academic staff had to administer themselves to fill these hours with commissioned research, teaching, etc. – a feature that governmentality studies has documented as a keystone in modern governance (Dean 1999; Rose 1999). Typically, the academic subjects had to fill out worksheets on a day-to-day basis and enter them into the electronic system on a monthly basis. The management kept track of

individual academic subjects and their different categories of work in percentages of their total. This was commented on by the centre manager in an ironic manner: ‘They cannot do it in terms of hours as most researchers work well beyond the 37½ hours a week’ (Centre manager, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005). According to a low-ranking academic subject, a PhD student and project employee, this plotting in of time had to be done according to the project numbers available. According to her, this had the advantage that academic subjects’ work became visible and easy to document, but the disadvantage that there was always some 10–20% of the work that was hard to plot in, as it did not seem to fit any of the project numbers.

Somehow, the objective space for manoeuvre at the two departments researched at this university, in terms of political technologies and other demands applied, did not seem that different from each other. Discursively, however, they represented rather different environments for thinking about the core of academic work and its purpose. The department of science related to food appeared to have been led into an efficiency regime that was – in many ways – perceived by its academic subjects to be detrimental to a good research climate, whereas at the centre in the other department, the new regime was perceived as being rather consistent with the demands they had been subjected to – and subjected themselves to – for years as a government research institute.

Maybe the previously mentioned PhD student and project employee at the centre hit a key difference between the department and the centre, which signified a key difference between ‘the democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse’ and ‘the knowledge economy discourse’, when she evoked the floating signifiers of ‘democracy’ and ‘efficiency’ and made them into a dichotomy:

At the centre, we are probably more worried about efficiency and flexibility being hampered; in case that resulted in less flexibility and more talk [which she associates with the democracy discourse at the traditional university]’ (PhD-student/Project employee, life sciences, mono-faculty specialist university, 2005).

As an indicator of the fast pace of university reform and of the changing conditions for being an academic subject, this mono-faculty specialist university was merged into a large, old multi-faculty university in 2006 with the status of a faculty for the time being. This merged faculty represented areas that were highly esteemed by the business, technology and innovation orientated government that espoused the knowledge-economy discourse, which was so dominant in these years. The rhetoric, as well as the political technologies and the rigour with which the knowledge-economy discourse and associated practices had been implemented at the previous mono-faculty specialist university, seemed very distant from the universe of the earlier mentioned humanities department at the traditional multi-faculty university. The merger of this small university that was oriented towards business, technology and innovation into the traditional larger university points to the friction that would grow internally at universities between the receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse and the emerging knowledge economy discourse.

## 9.5 The Reform University Battered by Reform

At *the reform university* (see footnote 1), I observed a third kind of university context in an institution that was established in the early 1970s in the wake of the triumph of the democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse. It established itself as a ‘progressive’ university with the particular brand of social technologies like cross-disciplinary studies, project work and group-organised studies. This university, after initially hailing itself as a socialist-oriented bastion for research for the people had become the darling of advanced creative business with its focus on project work and partnerships with public and private entrepreneurs. Here, I observed a third way of dealing with the demands of the knowledge economy discourse.

Both departments that I researched at this university were deeply influenced by floating signifiers like ‘democracy’ and ‘participation’. This had made an impact on the constitution of very collectively orientated departments in terms of the democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourses. The increasingly visible knowledge economy discourse and the ensuing reform pressure were mainly experienced as negative processes – albeit to different extents. Consequently, the collective spirit at both departments led to a build-up of structures by the academic subjects to protect the existing departmental cultures and their influence in case of future attempts to dislodge them. They had strong departmental boards. And there was an expectation in both departments that future appointed heads of department would hear them and give them a substantial say. In case an appointed leader would not listen to them, they claimed to have parallel structures based on the existing strong informal culture that could potentially make life difficult for a non-cooperative head.

One department had a turbulent history that was embedded in its current structure. In spite of a ministry decision in 1975 that the reform university should not have a department of educational science, the academic staff instead reorganised themselves into what in 1986 became a vocational and adult education group, an independent research centre within the university, which developed the capacity to survive on external funding; i.e. it adapted to central elements of a knowledge-economy discourse long before this discourse came to dominate the university. This vocational and adult education group with a focus on education research survived as a substantial unit of about 27 full-time academic subjects and a secretariat and was finally established as a regular department in 2000. The vocational and adult education group had acquired the capacity to accumulate external funding and built up sufficient funds to enable them to sustain a considerable number of full time academic staff. This made it possible for the department to maintain a larger number of academic positions than it would otherwise have been entitled to. It also meant that they were under pressure to fund, to a large extent, their own positions. The very collective spirit in the department meant that there was a sustained will to help one another out. The pressure to perform for the collective unit seemed to be deeply felt among its members.

The department was highly self-reflexive, which was evident on their very comprehensive and informative website. At this department, academic subjects seemed

very self-confident and did not fear in 2005 and 2006 the expected onslaught of new political technologies, increasing demands to fund their own positions and having to deal more with external stakeholders. They had already done this for decades, albeit in different ways than the idea of entrepreneurship in the knowledge-economy discourse would point to. They did not doubt that they would be able to continue their work pretty much along the same lines as before. One of the key academic subjects at the department, a professor, summed up their strategy in the following way:

The strategy has been to build up long-term and in mutually interconnected projects ... We have had a high rate of investment in activities that have often been under-financed, i.e. by maintaining contacts with a variety of external stakeholders, by building networks, and by profiling ourselves in order to make it visible who we are and what we represent (Professor, humanities, reform university, 2005).

This quote illustrates how the individual academic subject's space for manoeuvre at this department had hitherto been bought at the price of a very labour-intensive strategy that thrived on each individual academic subject's commitment to the department's collective strategy: that all agreed to throw in whatever overtime work might be needed to accomplish strategies and projects; that academic subjects helped each other out; and that they agreed to some common frameworks regarding which research themes and theoretical frameworks were employed.

As mentioned, this department built up a parallel structure in order to survive and make their influence felt in case a new management would seek to impose non-acceptable demands upon them. The above-mentioned professor was highly aware, though, that the knowledge-economy discourse and its focus on intensifying productivity as well as more top-down management would bring with it a number of dangers to such a strategy:

To the extent that we ask for or let top-down management take over, we will end up in a situation that, at best, leaves us with a more defensive status quo governance, where we can refer to what we are used to doing, i.e. an unproblematised reference to the cultural reproduction of the department ... The second major undermining factor has been the long-term decreasing allotment of resources to universities ... More power is delegated to the strong leader, which contributes to decreasing dynamics as academic workers' ownership of activities at the department is consequently lessened. This leads to a more employee-like mentality, where the retention of work becomes an important individual instrument for maintaining one's sense of fair working conditions (Professor, humanities, reform university, 2005).

This danger became imminent as this department was merged with another department and a new head of department was appointed by the rector within the new top-down hierarchy of the 2003 University Law.

Another case was a natural sciences department that was strongly engaged in the study, application and dissemination of mathematics and physics research in society and education. This natural sciences department was small enough for each of its two constituent sections to have a tightly knit disciplinary identity backed up by strong social coherence. The two groups had developed strong informal structures; they met separately on a weekly basis for a meal and socialising, and annually they met at the rural Swedish homestead of one of the academic subjects in order to develop strategies and socialise among themselves as well as with students. Through

participation in these social events, as well as the intimate interaction between students and staff in the everyday life of the department, students were socialised into this department and its particular culture.

This department was very collective in spirit, albeit in a more vulnerable way than the department with a focus on education research. This feeling of vulnerability was expressed lucidly by a long-time and central associate professor:

From 1975–1978 [the reform university] was put under administration by a management that was externally appointed by the ministry ... And when you are under external occupation, you are also motivated to build up contesting parallel structures, even in your leisure time ... Today, however, it is very difficult to harmonise the variety of different cultures ... people withdraw ... Maybe what we need is an acute experience of being in a state of emergency (Associate professor, natural sciences, reform university, 2005).

This associate professor mentioned that his department was currently considering establishing such parallel structures: ‘However, such parallel structures only function when they are unanimously adhered to, which again demands a certain amount of social pressure ... When such parallel structures function, no management can ignore them’.

The department’s academic subjects were worried about university reforms. They were aware that they were a small department with a relatively low number of students and externally funded projects. Academic subjects at the department feared a merger with another sciences department, which might jeopardise the well-liked culture of a smaller department with plenty of solidarity. During most of the reform period, it was believed that they could ward off a lot of the external pressure and, if necessary, put up a parallel structure that would secure good odds for keeping their old identity. This had proved problematic, however. Firstly, the introduction of the political technology of the bibliometric university research database, which should be compatible with the databases of other universities, required standardisation and individualisation of what counted as productivity. This was felt as a restriction of the room for manoeuvre by some, as part of the academic work they considered useful for the department and university did not fit into the database. Subsequently, the collective identity of the department was dealt what was considered a final blow by many with the sudden merger into a considerably bigger department and regrouping into more diverse disciplines.

The onslaught of the knowledge-economy discourse thus presented the reform university with fierce challenges. The collective spirit was challenged by a more individualistic and business-inspired mode of governance. The key signifiers of ‘democratic organs’, ‘participation’ and ‘group work’ were hard to fit into the new conditions. Even the signifier ‘project work’ met with serious challenges as the Bologna Process and standardised comparability among universities gained a stronger foothold. Referring to the floating signifiers of being a ‘progressive’ and ‘participatory’ university would become considerably harder to defend, as these signifiers were closely connected to the receding democratic and *Humboldtian* discourse, which altogether was the discourse that constituted the intellectual environment that – in the early 1970s – made possible the establishment of the reform university.

## 9.6 Conclusion

These three case studies demonstrate that there were considerable differences between the particular university contexts investigated and, as it has been shown, in the room for manoeuvre available to particular academic subjects. Consequently, it would be inaccurate to say that the knowledge-economy discourse and its associated signifiers and political technologies lead to uniformity and standardisation. Here, it is important to keep in mind the double meaning of the subject in the Foucauldian sense, i.e. being the subject of a particular regime of truth on the one hand, and, on the other, being the subject of one's actions in the sense that practices of freedom are always possible within and among discursive regimes that continuously confront each other. This is to say that recent reforms have certainly had considerable implications for academic subjects in the form of new dominant regimes, but it appears equally evident that the challenges the knowledge economy discourse posed to the above-mentioned university contexts led to different venues for response, i.e. various potentials for practices of freedom for academic subjects, albeit in highly different ways. Consequently, it would probably be a strategic and tactical blunder to disregard the significance of the particularities, inertia and powers of contestation that have been amassed over time at different universities, faculties and departments in terms of different cultures, traditions and styles.

The traditional humanities discipline at the large university thus represented one kind of context. It seemed to have allies in long-standing traditions of networking that went beyond departments, universities and nations. This appeared to inhibit the formation of strong departments in the sense of modern organisations. Simultaneously, such a department appeared to be under imminent danger of being unable to mount sufficient collective responses to the challenges of the knowledge-economy discourse. The *raison d'être* of the department appeared to be too much at odds with knowledge economy demands for immediate utility that were convertible into patents, technological gadgets, etc.

At the other end of the spectrum, departments of health, food, medicine and the like seemed to be better able to respond to such demands of utility. They seemed to be in for better times as far as funding and expansion were concerned, by matching the demands from policy makers to secure in measurable terms the competitiveness of the Danish nation in a so-called global, competitive knowledge economy. Furthermore, the departments at the mono-faculty specialist university seemed easier to fit into a unitary organisational design, which could be standardised and made comparable across departments and universities through benchmarking and similar measures. This, however, did not mean that academic subjects here did not feel the yoke of performance indicators, albeit this was perceived differently at different departments.

Reform universities were born from the democratic and *Humboldtian* university discourse and seemed to face particular predicaments in adapting their old profiles to new times and new demands of the knowledge economy discourse. Arguably they were among the best suited to work closely with surrounding society and produce



'useful' research and graduates, but their previously dominant floating signifiers had to be adapted to and/or exchanged with new signifiers that were compatible with new demands in the form of new governance structures and new political technologies. As shown with the example of the department with a focus on educational research at the reform university, this was not necessarily an insurmountable task as this kind of university was permeated by strong values of producing relevant research and being responsive to the interests of external stake-holders. It remained to be seen whether business values would take over excessively or a balance could be struck with remaining values that satisfied more interests at the reform universities. It should not be forgotten that these universities had been lauded by stakeholders from which excessive admiration was hardly to be expected, such as the advanced hi-tech business life and the OECD.

It seems apt to close this chapter with the opening definition of power that Foucault stated in *The Will to Knowledge*, 'power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society' (Foucault 1978; Chap. 4). In relation to university reform and the status of academic subjects, this 'complex strategic situation' comes about when a diversity of forces and counter-forces interact and make possible the social processes that shape the fabric of a given society.

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**Part V**  
**Enactment of Students**

# Chapter 10

## Capitalism, Political Participation and the Student as a Revolutionary Figure



Gritt Bykærholm Nielsen 

### 10.1 Introduction

‘Participation – tell me, what the hell are you talking about!’ Loudly and with some aggression in his voice a student abruptly took the floor in the old Ceremonial Hall of the University of Copenhagen. It was 29 April 2008 and the University was holding a public ‘debate meeting’ to mark the 40th anniversary of the student revolts in 1968. To catch the eye, posters and websites advertising the event contained the famous words from a banner used during a major Danish student demonstration in 1968 ‘The demand is co-determination’. The student, who had abruptly taken the floor, complained that the University of Copenhagen was not using the 40 year jubilee to discuss the *current* conditions for university democracy and student participation. Instead, he argued, it was using the student revolt as an ‘exciting curiosity...to brand itself as a business enterprise and as an attractive player on the market of education’. Reading from a pamphlet, signed with a ‘Reboot 68’ logo and circulated among the participants, he said:

To us, it is paradoxical to attend an event about the student revolt, especially under the heading ‘co-determination’, when at the same time we witness the most massive democratisation in the 500 year long history of the university. ... The leadership that now tries to use the students’ revolt to brand their university has been installed by [the Minister of Science] to abolish employee participation and direct the focus of research and education towards the corporate world’s narrow-minded needs....We won’t stand for that. We demand a university which contributes to a better society and which does not accelerate towards an increasingly brutal marketization. A revolt is needed far more now than 40 years ago. We could start today (Reboot 68 student 2008).

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The original version of this chapter was revised: Fig. 10.3 caption has been updated. The correction to this chapter is available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1921-4\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1921-4_13)

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The Reboot 68 student made a clear and intentional reference to an iconic incident at the University of Copenhagen's annual celebration in 1968 when a young Danish psychology student, unexpectedly took over the rostrum from the Rector in the Ceremonial Hall. In front of the royal family and leading figures from Danish society and the university he had announced that the power of the bourgeoisie was to be demolished and the suppression of the working class ended. In 2008, when the jubilee participants entered the same Ceremonial Hall, they were met with music and pictures from 1968, including the street fights in Paris, occupations at the University of Copenhagen and the above mentioned psychology student's conquest of the rostrum (Fig. 10.1).

The Reboot 68 student's mimicry of the earlier incident must have been evident to most of us – not least when the pro-rector, who had jokingly tried to say something to the student to begin with, explicitly stated to him after he had finished his speech, that if only he had listened to her, she would have invited him to take the rostrum and would have given him not just 3 min (as the 1968 rector gave the psychology student) but 5 min of speaking time.

With their mimetic reference to the 1968 student revolts, the Reboot 68 students' happening is a reminder about the potential power of 'the student' as a revolutionary figure in society as well as an influential one in the shaping of the university. The



**Fig. 10.1** The University of Copenhagen's annual celebration in 1968.

In 2008, to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1968 student revolts, the rectorate of the University of Copenhagen invited among others Petr Pithart to reflect on the 1968 Prague spring and his own participation in it. On big screens at each side of the room, photos were shown of 1968 student revolts in different countries, including when the Danish psychology student, Finn Ejnar Madsen conquered the rostrum from the rector in 1968. (Photograph: Ritzau Scanpix)

pro-rector's final comments – a possible attempt to appropriate or co-opt the student activists' protest by offering them speaking time and even outbidding the time given to students who revolted in 1968 – point to the fact that in addition to the *content* of a student voice or protest, the *form* it takes plays a central role in the way different student figures are conjured up and contested. The incident, therefore, is also a testament to students' shifting room for decision-making within the university; to their various fights over the past decades, spanning from university politics to class struggle, and to how students have negotiated and made use of both activist and parliamentary approaches in order to influence the development of the university and of larger society.

## 10.2 Contested Student Figures in University and Society

This chapter explores how students' political activities and their participatory role within the university and society have changed over centuries past.<sup>1</sup> It takes its starting point in student political activities and organisations related to the University of Copenhagen, since this university was the only one in Denmark from 1479 to 1928. Following a brief account of how 'the student' for the first time began to appear in the nineteenth century as a potentially powerful figure in society, the chapter's main focus is on students' shifting forms of political participation and protest in the 1960s/1970s and in the new millennium, with the Reboot '68 students mentioned above as one central example. Combining historical sources with ethnographic fieldwork material produced in 2005–2008, the chapter asks the following: how have university students influenced and been encouraged to participate in the shaping of the university and larger society? What has happened to their formal room for decision-making and their modes of participation and protest? How have they perceived of the relation between students and other (categories of) people in society and the university? And what kinds of (contested) student figures are thereby conjured up, transformed or dissolved?

My strategy for exploring the emergence and dis/appearance of different student figures is to pay attention to the dynamics and processes of 'friction' (Tsing 2005) within the student body and between students and other people or phenomena that they see as their main target of critique and protests (e.g. professors, capitalism, specific laws, the bourgeoisie etc.). Following Tsing, friction can be understood as the vicissitudes and contingent aspects of encounters, including situations where the same word is attributed different meanings by different people or when people with opposing views encounter each other (in political fights, demonstrations, happenings etc.). In this way, by focusing on 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference' (ibid.: 4), the notion of friction

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<sup>1</sup> See Nielsen 2015: 80–113 for a more elaborated discussion of the history of student participation in Denmark.

emphasises a *generative* element – the production of something in and through these encounters. In this chapter, I take friction to mark a process of vibrating differentiation and figuration through which diverse ‘figures’ emerge and are given form as part of and/or in response to specific university reforms or more general social transformations. As we shall see, growing quests for ‘efficiency’ in the university system and in society writ large have been a central point of friction around which students have organised and conceptualised their political participation.

In the chapter, I use and develop the notion of ‘figure’ heuristically (see Nielsen 2015: 14–23 for an elaborate discussion of ‘figure/figuration’). In some ways, as discussed by Barker et al. (2013, 2014), the notion of ‘figure’ seems similar to, for example, a ‘social type’ or ‘character’ in that they all address a relation between the practices, self-understanding and desires of certain persons and the more general organization and transformation of a society. In Engels’ authorship, for example, accounts of particular impoverished individuals worked as what Barker et al. (2013, 161) call ‘metonyms of the new class of proletarian urban poor’. By iconizing certain ‘types’ as products of large-scale societal transformations Engels ([1844] 1943) presented a strong critique of the social inequality established with the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, Simmel ([1908] 1950) identified ‘the stranger’ and Benjamin ([1969] 1997), ‘the flâneur’ and ‘the sandwich man’ – as somehow emblematic of the social and economic developments, which they experienced as increasingly urbanised and consumerised societies.

Such analyses of ‘social types’, however, have typically involved a different (non-ethnographic, more literary or deductive) engagement with empirical material than will be promoted here with the notion of ‘figure’. To different degrees, all of the above mentioned authors tended to see the social type as a mere product or instantiation of socio-economic changes and they did not convey much of a sense of the ways in which people who seem to embody these ‘types’ experienced, contested or influenced the social developments. In contrast, like Barker et al., I take figures to be ‘both producing and produced by the ... ground against which they stand out’ (2013: 164). They are, so speak, both models of and models for societal development. And rather than pointing out one iconic or representative figure of societal change, I take an interest in how, during periods of societal transformation and extensive university reforms, different and conflicting figures are enacted and conjured up in and through the frictional actions and words of different people. I therefore agree with Barker, Harms and Lindquist when they argue:

It is not a question of finding figures that are somehow representative of a social group or place, but rather of understanding particular figures as evocative nodes that reveal relationships and forms of mediation between individual lives and wider social processes. A figure is both real and symbolic, individual and social, an agent imbricated in social structures and processes. (2013: 166)

The figures explored in this and the following chapter are not just ‘mere abstractions’ – they are indeed *also* real persons. However, they are always both more and less than any individual. We all live our lives with images and figures – conceptual, ideal and material – about proper and desirable conduct, and the benefits of the

notion of 'figure' as used here is precisely that: at one and the same time, it may connote something 'real', tangible and representative (figurative), as well as something 'ideal' or emblematic (figural). Like Barker, Harms and Lindquist, and inspired by Haraway (1997: 2), I take the figure to transcend the classical division of imagined/real, physical or abstract and argue that, rather than attempting to discern what is 'real' from what is 'ideal' in any absolute way, it seems of greater interest to explore which figures give people their grips for engagements, as well as when, how and with what consequences.

At particular times and places, some figures become more powerful than others. Haraway (1991, 1992, 1997), for example, has pointed out how the force and amplitude of a figure – like her trans-boundary 'cyborg' – depends on its ability to embody some kind of collective yearning. People, she says, inhabit and are inhabited by figures that embody contestable worlds of knowledge, practice and power. A figure, Haraway argues, can 'collect up' (1997: 113) the people and reflect back their hopes; it can embody 'shared meanings in stories that inhabit their audiences' (1997: 23) and may thereby give a sense of possibility, fulfilment or damnation.

In a similar vein, Anna Tsing (2006, 2009) has argued that some figures may work as what she calls 'exemplary figures'. These figures, Tsing states, are protagonists that can help both people and the social analyst understand the principles of social collectivity and the subjugations and future possibilities of a larger political or economic system – in Tsing's case, the workings of global capitalism in terms of supply chains and subcontracting (Tsing 2005, 2009, 2011). 'The industrial (male) worker', she notes, could be seen as an exemplary figure of the left in the nineteenth century in that he conveyed an image of both exploitation and revolution. 'The industrial worker' experienced and embodied the dark side of capitalism, but by evoking a growing class consciousness, as a figure he could and should lead people into a new and better future by opening their eyes to the signs of exploitation in society. Indeed, he became both a model of and model for societal transformation. 'The worker', in this way, was meant to 'collect up' the people, as Haraway puts it, give them a sense of possibility, and embody and articulate certain stories about the current and possible future state of society.

One could argue that, during the 1960s and 1970s, 'the student' was elicited as a New Leftist exemplary figure of revolution and prosperity, not least by the Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1964, 1968). Due to the transformation from heavy industrial work in a bourgeois society to what Marcuse called a one-dimensional consumer society, 'the worker' seemed to have lost his revolutionary force. However, Marcuse argued, this force could be found in student movements across the world. He said:

I regard the student opposition of today as one of the most crucial factors in the world [...] which maybe someday can become a revolutionary force. To establish connections between student oppositions in different countries is therefore one of the most important strategic demands of our time (Marcuse in Hansen and Jacobsen 1968: 27).

The student became an exemplary figure of fearless and morally superior resistance to what, in Marcuse's view, was the devastating power of capitalism. The



student became a figure of subversion, prosperity and salvation – a figure that should ‘collect up’ the people. And indeed, the story embodied in the student about the contemporary political and economic world for a time successfully ‘inhabited’ large numbers of people.

In light of this discussion about the amplitude of a figure and Marcuse’s vision of students as a revolutionary force in society, an intriguing issue, to which I return in the last part of the chapter, is whether the politically active students today (aim to) elicit a student figure which can ‘collect up’ (a/the) people and embody ‘shared meanings in stories that inhabit their audiences’, to use Haraway’s phrase. Or put differently, are students’ various political activities today promoting a new kind of ‘exemplary (student) figure’ showing the pitfalls, exploitation and ailments of contemporary (capitalist) society?

Whereas Haraway uses the notion of figure/figuration as a way of pointing to alternative visions of subjectivity – exceeding modern dualisms – my approach here is empirically informed in a different way. It relates the notion of figure to concrete processes of friction and explores (historically and ethnographically) how particular figures emerge and are negotiated by particular people at particular times and in particular locations. In this way I emphasise that different individuals and groups of people in their everyday life also, even if sometimes in subtle ways, engage in critical generative and potentially subversive figuration work.

### 10.3 Students as a Social Class: Distantly Elevated or Socially Engaged?

Throughout history, the position of the student as on the one hand a member of a university community and on the other of a larger society has been a key point of discussion both within the student body and in larger academic and political spheres. For the first centuries of its existence, the University of Copenhagen primarily aimed at educating future priests (Nielsen and Brichet 2007). Since both students and professors were to dedicate themselves to the Church’s teaching or, from the eighteenth century when Enlightenment ideas gained a footing, to the common pursuit of ‘true knowledge’ and ‘science’, it seemed unthinkable that students might have their own particular *interests*, which were independent of or in opposition to the professors.

In the early nineteenth century, however, students’ self-understandings and their claim for a particular position in society started to change. A new kind of student self-consciousness emerged and students began to perceive of themselves as a more unified, elevated and important group in society than formerly. According to the historians Helleesen and Tuxen (1993), many students argued that the student body was central because it ‘provided society with public officers, because all scientific thoughts emanated from it and because it guided morality’ (ibid.: 182). A gap between academic man and ordinary man was promoted and discussions took place

about whether students could or should act as a 'social class' (*stand*) in society (Andersen 1970; Koch-Olsen and Stybe 1970). Many professors argued that students should concentrate on their studies and not spoil this by too much social or political activity. They also argued that only after ending their studies, that is, joining the life of work, could students be said to belong to a social class (Helleesen and Tuxen 1993: 176f), and, one might add, have a 'voice' of their own.

Throughout the nineteenth century, internal frictions in the student body mainly revolved around whether the role of students in society should be that of *elevated* and *morally superior* persons who study to fulfil particular jobs in society, or that of *critical, socially and politically engaged* persons who see it as an important value to build bridges between academics and workers and, to some extent, also to question existing traditions and power regimes. The former view-point was upheld by the relatively conservative Students' Association (*Studenteforeningen*) – the first student organisation, established in 1820 as a social and officially non-political club. The latter view gained power and popularity among some students for shorter periods, first with the establishment of the so-called Student Society (*Studentersamfundet*), which existed in the 1840s and was re-established in the 1880–1890s (Winther 1970a, b). Arguing that without political and cultural affiliation the academic could not make a proper contribution to society, students in The Student Society organised political speeches and discussions and reached out to the non-academic population, in some periods by offering evening classes and legal aid to workers. They accused the Student Association of intellectual arrogance, conservatism and of merely being the professors' aide-de-camps. Instead they aimed to gather the students as an *interest group* vis-à-vis the university and the state (Winther 1970a, b).

Of these two conflicting student figures, which we could call the conservative, pragmatic student and the critical, socially engaged student, the former continued to take a dominant role. Even though a Student Council was established at the University of Copenhagen in 1912 with the legitimacy to 'recommend' initiatives to the professors (who at the time governed the university through a so-called Teachers' Assembly), the students in the Student Council over the following decades by and large remained the professors' aide-de-camps. Also, it seemed to be the university's worrying financial situation, rather than a democratic wish to include students in the governance of the university, that led the rector to agree to the students' suggestion of a Student Council in the first place. He argued that a 'representative' student voice would give added weight to the professors' attempts to put pressure on the state for better financial conditions (Sørensen 1962; Erslev 1910; Larsen 1993).

The students' and professors' common fight for better funding reached hitherto unseen dimensions when in 1951, in the financial decline following World War II, they joined forces in a public demonstration where seven to ten thousand students and academics, with six rectors in front, walked from the University to the Parliament (Thomsen 1986: 236; Gade-Rasmussen 1975; Sørensen 1962: 91). The incident shows students and professors as a united population with common interests, lead and represented by the rectors, who were the only ones invited inside the Parliament to talk to the politicians. It also testifies to the fact that university politics was now

gradually moving out into a larger *public* space as universities were increasingly valued as important and dynamic generators of wealth and growth.

#### 10.4 Democratization of the University: Emergence of the Revolutionary Student

In the 1960s, the government adopted a policy of expanding student numbers with the expectation that higher education would promote social wealth and growth. In only ten years student numbers at the University of Copenhagen tripled from 7000 in 1958 to 21,000 in 1968. From 1963, the University was once again confronted with the vast and growing problem of poor finances and shortages of space and teachers (Thomsen 1986: 4f). It was in this atmosphere of financial and educational despair that students for the first time in earnest began to go against the professors – against ‘professorial rule’, as they called it – and, in doing so, they made use of new forms of *public political activism* which over time proved to be extremely efficient in ‘collecting up’ other students both in terms of what Klandermans (in Mikkelsen 2002: 24) calls ‘activity mobilisation’ (i.e. mobilisation of people to participate directly in particular activities) and ‘consensus mobilisation’ (i.e. the creation of supporters and sympathy from a group of people). The critical and socially engaged student figure of previous times which organised debates and built bridges to the non-academic population now seemed to develop in a new direction and a more *activist* and *revolutionary* student figure, which eventually identified with ‘the people’, began to take form.

The protests were started by psychology students, who, in line with the democratic spirit of the time, had been fighting for several years for more formal student participation and student-led teaching. They wanted to get rid of what they saw as obsolete teaching methods, dogmatic scientific approaches and inefficient study planning. Even though several teachers had agreed to the psychology students’ initial proposal for a student ‘spokesperson arrangement’, in 1966 this was denied any formal status by the professorial leaders of the psychology laboratory – with the argument that it would be a potential attack on the professors’ academic freedom (Jensen and Jørgensen 2001: 440). In opposition to the professors’ remarks about academic freedom, the students put up slogans like ‘Academic Freedom also for the Students’, ‘Democracy in the Workplace’ and ‘Demolish Professorial Rule – Co-determination NOW’. Their demand for democracy was clearly inspired by and in line with the general demands for workplace democracy in society, which were put forward especially by ‘LO’, the central organisation of workers’ unions. A draft for a study board arrangement was made. But the students were not satisfied and a month later they occupied the psychology laboratory. Soon, their fight for formal rights to student participation spread to other university departments and further education institutions. By the autumn of 1968 the Copenhagen Student Council – which until then had been vividly criticised by the revolting students for being

apparatchiks (*pampere*) and complying too much with the professors – joined forces with the protesting students. Now, students were ‘collected up’ in and through action meetings, debate weeks, student strikes, demonstrations and occupations that occurred across Danish universities and a more general student revolt and activist movement started to emerge (Jensen and Jørgensen 1999).

Due to the general and growing belief in the benefits of better educational planning, many politicians, members of the public, non-professorial teachers, and some professors and rectors too (see e.g. Fog 1968), were sympathetic to the democratisation and reform of university governance and teaching. The inclusion of a student voice, the common argument was, would make the university more ‘efficient’. Many students and politicians were frustrated at high student drop-out rates, cancelled or ill-planned classes and what they perceived as time being wasted during the course of studies. A new but complicated alignment between the students and contemporary politicians therefore emerged in their quests for better educational planning and more so-called efficient studies (Hansen 2005, 2008). As the historian Else Hansen (2005) shows, the students’ and politicians’ respective notions of ‘efficiency’ were not in complete accord: the political notion of ‘efficiency’ was grounded in a wish for the universities to contribute to the economic growth of the nation, that is, efficiently educate students for relevant jobs and the functions needed in society. In contrast, the students’ notion of ‘efficiency’ referred to a quest for better study planning, more realistic time frames for the different courses of study, a screening out of what they conceived of as outdated parts of the curriculum, more socially relevant studies and more modern and participatory teaching methods to replace what they saw as ‘pacifying’ lectures (see also Jensen and Jørgensen 2001, 2008: 93f).

The friction in the understanding of efficiency was at this point relatively tacit but, as we shall see in later sections, gradually became more explicit and evident with the university reforms in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1970, in the name of democratisation and in the search for more ‘efficient’ universities, a new Law on Governance was proposed that removed responsibility for the educational programmes from the professors to so-called study boards with parity in the representation of students and staff. The former teachers’ assembly was abolished, all full-time employed teachers were included as a single group in the decision-making structure and students were given one third of the seats in the senate and the faculty council. Whereas earlier legislation had assumed that students would have the same interests as the governing professors, the new law – and the later 1973 Law which included the technical and administrative staff in some of the governing bodies – clearly established the university as a community of different structurally defined interest groups, a kind of assembly of estates (see also Ministry of Education 1985). The different categories were assumed to have conflicting and sectional interests and therefore each should be given a ‘voice’ of their own.

Even though, with this law, Danish students obtained more formal decision-making power than students in other Western countries, they had protested and been extremely critical of the draft law. Throughout the process they fought to obtain *half* of the seats for students on *all* governing bodies (not just the study boards as proposed in the law) and they also felt that the Ministry of Education attempted to

play off different student groupings against each other and reduce the unique position of the Student Councils (Busk 1971; St.bl. 1971). During the law negotiations, the Copenhagen Student Council, which in 1968 had been a moderately leftist organisation, took a more extreme and confrontational approach, directed against the politics of the government and no longer just the professors. In March 1970, after 6000 students had demonstrated against the draft law, more than 1000 students raided – or in their words ‘liberated’ – the University of Copenhagen and occupied the administration and the rector’s office (Fig. 10.2).

The students answered external phone calls with words like ‘this is the liberated university’ or ‘the people’s university’ and their slogan ‘our university’ not only testified to their quest for university democracy but also to the fact that a new social whole was enacted for the student figure to be identified with: inspired by Marx, the student was promoted as part of ‘the people’, in opposition to the professors. Any gap between ‘academic man’ and ‘ordinary man’ that might have been explicit previously was now thoroughly criticised.

In the end, the radicalism of the politically active students in the Student Council had made them increasingly unpopular not only with politicians and the wider population, but also with a growing number of students. The Ministry was therefore convinced that student minorities should be legally protected (see e.g. Olsen 1975)



**Fig. 10.2** Students’ occupation of Copenhagen University rector’s office. On 9 March 1970, around 6000 students demonstrated in front the University of Copenhagen, protesting against a new draft law on university governance. About 1000 of them occupied the university administration, including the rector’s office where they smoked his cigars and, as shown on this photo, drank his sherry. The students left the building after 20 hours. (Photograph: Lars Hansen and Polfoto)

and the former privilege of the Student Council in representing all the students on the governing bodies was abolished in the final version of the Law. The students at the University of Copenhagen were no longer assumed – or encouraged – to act as one body with one single voice. No single and uniform student figure was (to be) conjured up and at the University of Copenhagen a new so-called ‘moderate’ student faction was organised in competition with the more radical Student Council.

## 10.5 The Little and the Big Revolt: From University Politics to Class Struggle

Even though the Student Council felt they had lost the battle over the 1970 University Law, many things had changed in favour of greater student participation in the university. Students played a central role in designing and establishing a new university centre in Roskilde with extensive student participation as its core idea. Here, as we shall see in the next chapter, the student was explicitly conceptualised as a kind of ‘co-owner’ of the university. Equality and workplace collaboration seemed to be key notions of the (ideal) student-professor relationship in these years and the distance between them became less and less. Rectors increasingly described the university as a *common workplace* for students and staff, and acknowledged the students’ criticism of ‘traditional’ hierarchies and norms (see Bak 1972, 1973; Pihl 1970; Fog 1971). In this spirit of workplace democracy, the different student organisations were for the first time invited to speak at the Copenhagen University’s matriculation event and here new visions of students’ political participation in the shaping of the university and the wider society – or more specifically of what it means to *revolt* – were being passed on to the next generation of students.

A revolt, the Copenhagen Student Council representatives argued in 1970 (Gregersen and Klemmensen 1970), is not just about activities that make headlines in the media. That is the ‘external side’ of the revolt or ‘the revolt with big letters’, they said. ‘The little revolt’ is even more important, they argued and defined ‘the little revolt’ as a *fundamental attitude* in which nothing is taken for granted – all statements or assessments must be questioned and explored. In this form, the revolt takes place in everyday life, by constantly questioning and reflecting about one’s own situation: ‘it is out of the discussions and subsequent suggestions of the little revolt that another and more just university shall emerge [...] the revolt is therefore *permanent*’ (ibid.), they argued.

Along similar lines of thinking, a central idea arose that a revolution in *society* could be achieved by influencing the *institutions* from within. The German student leader Rudi Dutschke, with an overt reference to Mao, called this approach ‘the long march through the institutions’ (Larsen 2007: 121; Jauert 2007). Now changes in the university were explicitly connected to changes in a larger social whole – with the student as the central figure of change. This student movement believed in the transformation of society and that they, along with the workers, could be the motive

power overthrowing capitalism and revolutionising society as Herbert Marcuse had suggested (1964, 1968).

The so-called ‘subject criticism’ (*fagkritik*) became the key strategy for instigating little revolts to promote social change (see e.g. Larsen 1978, Jensen and Jørgensen 2008: 280ff). ‘Subject’, here, refers to a ‘discipline’. Subject criticism took two directions. First, ‘internal subject criticism’ concentrated on the content of study programmes, subject area discussions and the Marxist critique of science. Second, ‘external subject criticism’ focused on the use of science in society and practical explorations of different social conditions. In contrast to the ‘revolts with big letters’ in terms of event-based mobilisation to participate in demonstrations, happenings or occupations that had characterised the earlier youth and student revolt, subject criticism – as a form of ‘little revolt’ – engaged students in their *everyday* environment through study groups and debates and linked the critical effort in everyday life with wider social changes. In this vein, students’ main struggles centred around more *socially relevant studies* and research, such as ‘studies in the interests of the working class’ and ‘research for the people, not for profit’, in the words of two of their slogans (Gottschau 1987: 94). A series of student-produced reports in Denmark was meant to reveal the exploitation and poor working conditions of different workers (e.g. the Painter Report of 1972), and in this spirit of Marxism, students on some programmes (e.g. sociology) even tried to get workers hired as associate professors (Høst-Madsen 1974).

Rather than the division between students and professors that had been the main focus in 1968, *class struggle* was now the key issue in the students’ political fight. Not in the sense of the nineteenth century where some wanted students to become a ‘social class’ of its own, but rather in the sense of students identifying with the working class against the bourgeois authorities. In their political activities, the students had thus increasingly moved from what is sometimes called a ‘student-as-such’ approach – that is, a focus on clearly university/student related issues – to what one, in response, could call a ‘student-as-citizen’ approach, that is, a focus on social and political issues in larger society. In this period, through critical thinking and actions, the student-cum-worker/citizen aimed to revolutionise and change larger society and not only the university. A new kind of socially engaged revolutionary student figure had emerged – a figure which should ‘collect up’ *the* people and initiate larger changes in society.

## 10.6 Parliamentary Pragmatism and the Student as ‘User’

As early as 1973, however, the chairmen of the student councils in Aarhus and Copenhagen announced that Marcuse’s theory of the students as the ‘avant-garde of the class struggle’ had been proved wrong and that ‘the student councils are not and cannot be a revolutionary party’ (Høst-Madsen 1973). The student councils increasingly prioritised parliamentary methods and a more union-like and student-as-such profile which was not compatible with a radical and general mission to transform

society. The big revolt in the form of demonstrations, happenings, occupations and collective and public manifestations gradually lost the support and involvement of the wider student body (Sørensen 2007; Fransen and Harnow 1996: 232f) and by the late 1980s, the Marxist-inspired little revolt of subject criticism had also ebbed away. Some argued that the student organisations' more technocratic profile was the reason why Student Councils found the number of active students decreasing through the 1980s and 1990s. Another explanation of the decrease in the number of politically active students, often given by the student organisations themselves (see e.g. Jørgensen 1994), was that the students were exposed to growing time pressures and therefore were encouraged to concentrate more narrowly on their studies and not to engage in political activities. In this vein, in state policies and reports from the 1980s onwards (see e.g. Ministry of Education 1985), students were increasingly conceptualised as 'users' of a public service, namely university teaching, rather than for example equal members of or participants in a common university community.

Once again, demands for *efficiency* – now in the sense of students' fast completion of their studies and choosing studies of relevance to the job market – were at the top of the political agenda and the 'extended workplace democracy' and collegial governance introduced with the 1970/3 laws was increasingly criticised for being inefficient by leaving the leaders inactive. Aiming to introduce so-called strong and strategic leadership, the 1992 law allotted more power to the leaders and included members from outside the university on the senate and gradually put a stronger emphasis on students' freedom of choice. The 2003 University Law took this rationale a step further: the democratically elected senate was replaced by Governing Boards with a majority of members from outside the university, leaders were now to be appointed in a top down process from rector to head of department and no longer elected, and students lost their vote in electing the rector, as well as their seats on the now abolished department boards. However, to secure relevant student participation in decision-making, the government argued, the study boards on which students had half of the seats were retained and students were granted a minimum of two seats on the new governing boards (as against a minimum of one seat each for the academic and administrative staff respectively). Furthermore, stronger emphasis was put on complaint procedures, students' course evaluations and their freedom to choose between modules.

## 10.7 Flexible Participation: A New Generation of Active Students

In contrast to the 1960s, students were not supportive of the political quest for efficiency through the 1990s and 2000s. Indeed, students criticised both the 1992 law and the 2003 law for de-democratising the university. They argued that the university had been turned into a 'sausage factory' where students were no longer *a part of* the university community (with democratic rights and duties) but stood *outside* it



as ‘consumers’ allotted the right to complain and to vote with their feet (see e.g. Daugbjerg 2008; Jensen 1992).

In their attempts to critique and influence the reform processes starting with the 2003 University Law, a constant balancing and friction in the student body between pursuing activist/extra-parliamentary approaches or more parliamentary ones has taken place. During negotiations over the draft of the 2003 University Law, The National Union of Students (Danske Studerendes Fællesråd, DSF) which organises higher education students at the national level, attempted to promote and organise themselves as a ‘professional interest organisation’. This was opposed to what one of the then central DSF students described to me as the ‘more leftist’ and ‘more grassroots-like organisation’ which the DSF, in her view, had been before. For the first time, the DSF lobbied *all* political parties, not just the most left-wing ones, and were invited to regular meetings in the Ministry of Science. Many DSF students felt that it was thanks to a pragmatic strategy and well-coordinated parliamentary work and lobbying that the government had in the end agreed to write into the 2003 University Law the provision that students should have a minimum of two seats on the new governing boards. Another interpretation could of course be that the government, in its attempt to create more ‘efficient’ universities, had more confidence in the students as innovative, creative and job-oriented agents than in the staff which was often described as conservative and reluctant to change.

In contrast to the DSF’s pragmatic and parliamentary student-as-such approach, in the new millennium a seemingly growing number of students were mobilised in various student networks through more activist-oriented activities. Indeed, many politically active university students argued to me that around 2005–2006 a shift took place – a shift which some of them described as the emergence of a ‘new generation of more active students’. In line with the general shift from collective to more individualised forms of participation and the growth in single-issue involvement and single-issue organisations described by the comprehensive Danish Democracy and Power Study (*Magtudredningen*) (Andersen 2002; Togeby et al. 2003) this ‘new generation of active students’ seemed to be attracted by and ‘collected up’ through ad hoc and single-issue oriented forms of participation. Mediated through internet group rooms, these networks offered new and *flexible* participatory possibilities: students could sign up and login whenever it suited them, establish new groups or activities themselves or pick and choose between the activities that others had planned and announced.

Even if this use of single-issue organisation and campaigning can be seen as a more general tendency in political participation, the Danish university reforms in the new millennium seem to have also contributed to opening up this space for students’ political activities. On the one hand, opportunities for student participation in various governing bodies and through university elections were reduced, and, on the other, universities were made subject to growing competition to attract students who enjoyed greater freedom of choice and a stronger voice through course evaluations and complaints. With these conditions, it made sense for students to use public campaigns and activities that hit the headlines and put pressure on the university’s policy. Bad publicity might be devastating for universities and departments that

were dependent on funding from the government based on the number of students who pass exams (see chap. 5).

Eventually, in response to the growth of flexible and more activist-oriented participation, the Copenhagen Student Council and the DSF reformed their organisational structures and placed a growing emphasis on campaigns, outward reaching actions and extra-parliamentary work. Their aim was to make it easier and more legitimate for students to involve themselves in only the particular aspects or issues in the organisation's work that interested them. Hans, a former Copenhagen student politician of the 1990s who had worked for many years with the university and Student Council administration, described the shift in students' participation in his university's Student Council as follows:

The expectations about being active are very different now. In more leftist 1970-ish organisations you go through the door and say 'I want to be active'. And then you start engaging yourself and serving the organisation in whatever presents itself. [...] Today what they give the organisation is more measured. They want something particular. They want to obtain something. Obtain some tangible results. [...] They are very hard-working and goal-oriented. [...] They make campaigns, actions and send around emails and text messages, and then suddenly you have 200 people there. You wouldn't think they could do that. We couldn't ten years ago. But they can. We should not expect those people to turn up again tomorrow – they have had an offer to participate in this action where we are dressed like this and do this and this, and it's going to be fun and it starts at 10 AM and ends at 5 PM. And then you have not committed yourself to doing anything else. Then people show up. And in great numbers too. But these many people do not turn up the day after [...] they make a campaign, and it goes from here to there and when it's done they turn to something else – to their studies or something completely different. They don't just hang around and do whatever is needed. It has to be eventful. They want something out of it. They want to be able to say 'I did that' (Hans 2008, former student politician in the 1990s).

Measured, goal-oriented, eventful and transient – that is how Hans describes the tendencies in students' political engagement around 2008. This description seems to still fit their participation today. A smaller group of more full-time dedicated student politicians who find a strong identity and sense of belonging in the student organisations still exist, and probably always will. However, many students take no interest in participating in meetings of governing bodies and student organisations – they often find them technocratic and boring. Furthermore, they seem to fear being 'caught in a web of obligations', as one student phrased it. Not only do these students want to be able to shift their attention between different areas of interest, they also want the flexibility to participate in activities when, where and how it suits them.

Now, if the figure of the 'consumer', as argued by Clarke et al. (2007), is understood as embodying a certain kind of 'possessive individualism' in which one is 'free to choose', is self-directed, pursues one's own interests and has 'the capacity to dispose of one's own property as one wishes' (ibid.: 2), then the growth in the pick-and-choose flexible participation described above can indeed potentially be seen to work within a logic of self-directed consumer conduct – even as these students protest against what they see as a growing consumerisation of the student. In order to explore this issue further and return to the question posed in the beginning of the chapter – that is, if students' various political activities today can be seen to

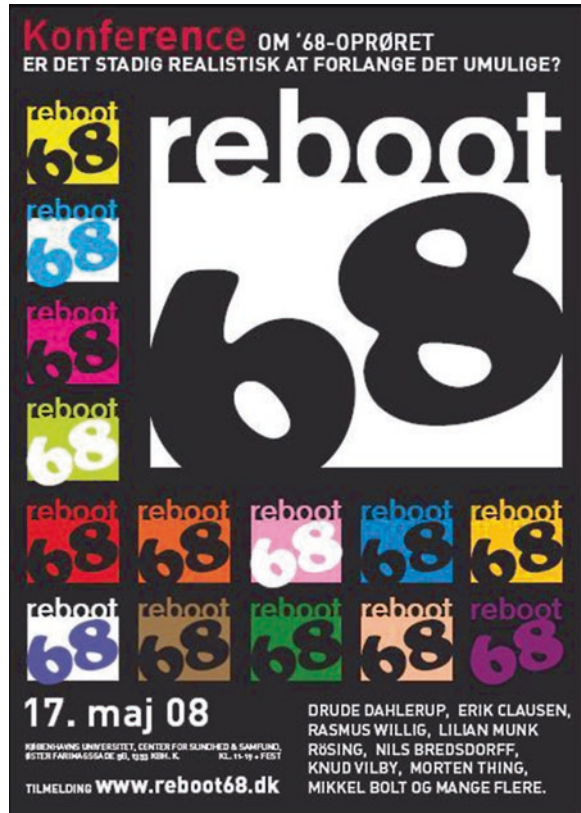
promote a new kind of ‘exemplary (student) figure’ showing the pitfalls, exploitation and ailments of contemporary (capitalist) society – I shall now turn to the Reboot 68 students, whom we met in the chapter’s introduction, and discuss a conference they held in 2008.

## 10.8 Conjuring up a Student Body with One Voice...?

The aim with the Reboot 68 conference was, the organisers said, to explore the possibilities of conducting critique today. Reflecting upon the 1968 revolt slogan, ‘Be realistic: demand the impossible’, they asked the 250 or so conference participants if today it was still realistic to fight for what those in power are likely to deem impossible (Fig. 10.3).

Through a panel debate – with five young people (mainly students) including a Greenpeace activist, an asylum activist, a student activist/student council member and a young bricklayer engaged in union politics – and a series of workshops they debated among other things global justice, student politics, capitalism critique, fem-

**Fig. 10.3** Poster for the reboot ‘68 conference about the ‘68 revolt held on 17 May 2008 at the faculty of social sciences, the University of Copenhagen. In the subtitle, the organisers ask, ‘Is it still realistic to demand the impossible?’



inism and counter culture. They wanted to explore the common revolutionary potential of their generation and, as set out in the Reboot 68 programme, be ‘the first generation in many years who become critical adult citizens and not just overgrown consumer children and stressed manpower’.

In the workshop on student politics it became apparent how the Copenhagen Student Council, or at least their vice-president at the time, found that students’ political activities today would be more efficient if students’ flexible and activist oriented participation were directed or moulded together into a new ‘movement’. This should be done, he argued, through focusing on students’ *particular* interests (i.e. a student-as-such approach) and not, as some other students suggested, by including in their endeavours larger political issues like the Iraq war (i.e. what I above called a student-as-citizen approach):

I do believe in the student as a driving and transforming force in society, but it is as *students* that we are taken seriously and have legitimacy [...] In the seventies they had a stronger idea about how things should be. We really need that to create a strong student movement today. We need some kind of core, a kind of student ideology [...] a common project or narrative, around which to build up our movement (Vice-president, Student Council 2008).

He then argued that this project or narrative should be based on oppositional thinking. At the workshop his predecessor, the student council vice-president from 1968, had advised current students to focus more on ‘subject criticism’, on students’ everyday lives, and the promotion of a *general* attitude and space of curious and critical debate. However, in response to this comment, the 2008 vice-president argued:

We can’t mobilise students with a campaign for critical thinking. ‘Think – god dammit, think’; such a slogan won’t work. We have to be better at thinking in oppositions. ‘The law’ or ‘the Ministry’, and maybe also some of ‘the leaders’ are our enemies. But not the teachers. They are against the law as well (Vice-president, Student Council 2008).

From his position as a Student Council vice-president, his hope seemed to be to move students to identify as an interest group and class-for-itself – to create one common ‘representative’ student narrative of critique that can ‘collect up’ and ‘inhabit/be inhabited by’ students *as such* to form a strong ‘movement’. In accord with the growing interest in flexible, activist and single-issue oriented student participation, his focus seemed to be on the opportunity to mobilise students to public activities through campaigns, catchy slogans and the struggle over interests, not through the ‘little revolt’ of generating spaces for critical thinking and debate. And in line with the union-like, student-as-such approach of the established Student Councils and the National Union of Students (DSF), which promotes itself as ‘the voice of the students’, he argued that the shaping of a *common student identity* – that is, a visible and audible student body with one unified voice – is the most effective way to conduct criticism and promote change in the universities (and, as a secondary ambition, in the wider society).

The organisers of the Reboot ‘68 conference, however, proposed a quite different path for generating criticism and change and for putting to work *ad hoc*, transient and flexible forms of student participation in a different kind of figuration process. Inspired by thinkers like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michael Hardt and

Antonio Negri, Jacques Rancière, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello they did not aim to promote *'the student'* as a distinct, uniform and strong figure in society, as proposed by amongst others Marcuse and as hoped for by the vice-president above. Rather, as we shall see in the following, by emphasising the need for critical and experimental activities in their everyday lives they worked to conjure up a more amorphous figure of resistance – a figure which could 'collect up' a diversity of people and promote social change through practices resembling what students in the 1970s called 'little revolts'.

## 10.9 ...or Moving Towards an Amorphous Revolutionary 'Body Without Organs'?

The word 'reboot' means to reset a computer and cause the operating system to reload. The Reboot students, however, made it very clear that they did not want to 'reboot' 68 in the sense of *copying* the student revolts of 1968. They did not want to repeat what they saw as the errors of their revolting predecessors, namely their dogmatism and (Marxist) rigidity in thought. They wanted to explore the revolutionary potential of their generation and 'capitalism' and/or 'neo-liberalism' seemed to be a common target in their various critiques which, amongst others, included university politics, general welfare discussions, and climate and environmental politics. Instead of focusing on '68' as a particular historical moment, they drew on Deleuze's vitalistic philosophy (see e.g. Deleuze 1995: 152f, 176; Deleuze and Guattari 1984; Deleuze and Parnet 2002) and wanted to explore '68' as a 'revolutionary becoming, a creation of something new', as one of them said. They wanted to explore it as a field of potentiality, intensity and creativity – a field which they seemed to hope to re-actualize or 'reboot' in new ways in the present by providing the multiple criticisms of their generation with a stronger *voice* – and moving away from being heard as what one of the Reboot '68 organisers in the closing speech of the conference called *noise*:

'68 was and is not about someone taking power. It is about someone beginning to speak so that they are heard. That is what we want to bring with us from '68: the experience of creating a space for critique and revolt – a revolt which is already a reality but which today is not heard as anything but noise (Closing speech, Reboot '68 conference 17 May 2008).

Their self-defined task seemed to be to make the different critiques of contemporary (capitalist/neo-liberal) society somehow speak together, so that it could be heard and acknowledged by other people as something else and more than incomprehensible 'noise' – a notion of noise which resonates with the philosopher Rancière's (1999) concept. However, unlike the student council representative, they did not strive to be heard and perceived as a singular student-body-voice conjured up through political mobilisation and a representative democracy. Rather, in line with 'the little revolt' approach identified by the two student speakers at the matriculation event in 1970, these students focused on *critical thinking* and *everyday life* and

argued for a particular notion of democracy and the need to go beyond the boundaries of what those in power deemed possible:

Democracy is not about representativeness but about the possibilities for influencing the creation of one's own life, body and fantasy. Democracy is a daily practice, which is about being able to call into question the society we live in. It's about the possibility for practising impossible life styles. It's about conflict and differences and the zest for change (Closing speech, Reboot '68 conference 17 May 2008).

In a way, these Reboot participants refused to be reduced to just being 'students' – who are seen as nothing but their study activity and only see the world through that prism. It seems like they tried to move beyond established interest groups or class identities and conjure up a common identity as a young generation. At the conference, the participants vividly discussed how to reconcile their different struggles – how to find 'the common rhythm' of their generation, as one student put it. During the panel discussion with, among others, the student activist and the young union-engaged bricklayer, one student argued – in the spirit of the 1960s and 1970s – for an alliance between 'workers' and 'students' since the reforms of the university are similar to the reforms of other public institutions (e.g. facing cutbacks and new public management). But the bricklayer saw no obvious alliance between students and workers. No students today, he said, write reports to help the workers as in the 1970s. Rather, academics in his view are those who make him bend his back even more times each day. His focus on particular group interests and class struggle seemed stronger than the vision of a common generational struggle. In the end, another panel member argued that, since they now were a good-sized group of people who all wanted to make a difference and change the existing society, the best way to make their diverse protests powerful was simply to become *examples* for others to follow by showing them new and different forms of social participation.

Even though some of the students thereby found it desirable to promote a kind of 'exemplary figure' which could inspire people, it remained unresolved whether or to what extent these students, as participatory 'examples', could and should embody any one particular vision of a new society and university. Therefore, if 'the worker' was a figure of social resistance in Marx's thinking, and if 'the student' played a similar role in Marcuse's ideas, these Reboot students seemed to be advocating a slightly different and more amorphous figure of resistance. This amorphous figure, in which many different people act in a kind of networked concert with no single leader, representative or narrowly defined agenda, resembles what Hardt and Negri (2004) – by whom the Reboot students were also greatly inspired – have described as the 'multitude'. Or, staying with the vocabulary of 'voices' and 'bodies', it resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'Body without Organs' (1987, 2004), in that such a 'body' is directed towards the dismantling of ordinary habits and traits. It has no 'representatives', no hierarchical structure and no single organising agent. It is characterised by a certain lack of *organ*-isation and is permeated by ever shifting flows, intensities and unformed transient concerns.

In contrast to the 2008 Vice-president's hope of creating one student figure of *identity*, that is one student body with one voice, the Reboot students' idea of a fig-

ure of criticism does not seem to rely on the production of a single account that can ‘collect up’ *the* people (as in ‘68) or *a* people understood as a uniform (student) body. Rather, it seems, they hope to collect up many *different* people without reducing or eclipsing ‘the multitude’s’ internal differences.

## 10.10 Conclusion: A Student Figure to ‘Collect Up’ People?

Over the past two hundred years, the form and content of student political activities have changed drastically as they have influenced and been influenced by more general developments in the university and larger society. Spanning from parliamentary work in governing bodies and lobbying politicians and other interest groups in society, to more activist-oriented extra-parliamentary methods like demonstrations, happenings or university occupations, and the belief in the revolting potential of critical thinking and exemplary unsettling practices in everyday life, different students have at different times used, prioritised and been offered different *forms* of participation to influence the development of the university and sometimes also larger society. Accordingly, the *content* of students’ political activities has constantly balanced between what I have called student-as-such and student-as-citizen approaches – that is a narrow focus on student and education political issues or the inclusion of a broader focus on general political issues in larger society.

Already in the nineteenth century frictions appeared in the student body about the political role of students and their relations to other groups of people, especially the professors and the non-academic population. It was up for discussion if they as a group should engage in political life, offer help and assistance to the non-academic population and organise themselves as an ‘interest group’ vis-a-vis the professors and the King/state or perceive themselves as elevated and morally superior persons, concentrate on their studies, prepare themselves to fulfil particular jobs in society and stay out of the more general and public political realm. In other words, in the central political frictions one can detect two student figures, the pragmatic and conservative student and the more critical and socially engaged student which aimed to dismantle existing hierarchies of power and knowledge. Since then, it has been an ongoing debate amongst the politically active students if students in their political activities should pursue a student-as-such approach which has often led to a prioritisation of parliamentary work on governing bodies, or whether they should engage in wider societal debates and, accordingly, make more use of activist participatory forms. Whereas the first approach works within given socio-political structures and therefore often takes the form of what one could call preserving participation, the latter sometimes takes the form of transformative or even subversive participation, aiming to revolt and transform society and existing power relations. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was the growing dissatisfaction with an impoverished university system, a general critique of existing authorities and widespread quests for workplace democracy that provided the basis for the emergence of a revolutionary student figure – a strong figure, which in Haraway’s words, was capable of ‘col-

lecting up' people. The student protests developed from a critique of 'professorial rule' to a more general 'class struggle' aiming at changing larger society, not just the university, through critical thinking and activism in *everyday* life.

In the new millennium there has been a transition to a looser, more flexible and networked form of student activism, which different student organisations and student activist networks make use of and try to tap into in quite different ways. In this regard, the chapter points to one intriguing question: should the transition to flexible participation be seen as a creative new form of anti-capitalism, as argued by for example Hardt and Negri (2000) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987); or as an adaptation to a new form of capitalism which has itself become flexible and networked – an argument which resonates with Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005) analysis of the third spirit of capitalism in which the 1968 anti-authoritarian quest for creativity and self-realisation became transformed into central features of contemporary capitalist work-life.

When Anna Tsing (2005) introduced the notion of 'friction', she did so in response to liberal imaginaries of a global era in which the perfectly efficient, smooth and 'friction-free' market would emerge. She showed that such a scenario is not feasible since encounters and interaction necessarily involve 'sticky' engagements, vicissitudes and contingencies – that is, they involve friction. Whereas the student body in itself has always been characterised by frictional divisions – each working to conjure up different student figures – it is worth noticing that today friction seems to have become the very defining element of the new amorphous figure of critique against (capitalist/neo-liberal) efficiency that the Reboot 68 students championed. Indeed, friction is a defining element of the 'exemplary student figure' promoted by some of the Reboot 68 students. Friction, in other words, is here within the figure – it is intrinsic to the figure itself, not a marker of the boundaries between a figure and its 'outside' or 'other' (the professors, politicians, the law etc.). It is yet to be seen to what extent a conjuring up of such an amorphous figure through 'exemplary' participation and conduct can 'collect up' people and generate larger transformations in society and at the university.

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# Chapter 11

## Students at the Centre – As Co-Owners, Consumers, Investors?



Gritt Bykærholm Nielsen 

### 11.1 Introduction

Over the past decades it has been a strong political ambition in Denmark to create more so-called ‘efficient’ universities. In the 1960s and 1970s, as shown in the previous chapter, students and politicians agreed upon the necessity of promoting more efficient universities and entered into an awkward alliance against so-called ‘professorial rule’ (Hansen 2008). It was awkward and frictional in the sense that students and politicians attributed different meanings to the notion of ‘efficiency’. Whereas students emphasized the need for more up to date teaching methods and better planned and more socially relevant education programmes, politicians were increasingly concerned with efficiency in terms of cost-effectiveness, the relevance of study programmes to the job market and the national economy, reduction of dropout rates and increase of the pace of study. Over the past three decades, in the name of efficiency, Danish politicians have reduced democratic governance in favour of appointed leaders and emphasized the need for students to finish their studies at a faster pace.

These various notions of efficiency have all been linked to a central ambition, aired in both political and pedagogical debates, to put ‘the student at the centre’ of the education system and of their own learning. Indeed, in the late 1960s, in a debate over the introduction of 2- or 3-year ‘basic education’ (see Hansen 1997: 42), two alternative ways of placing the student more ‘at the centre’ of the education system were each proposed as a solution to the problem then identified as the *inefficiency* of university education. On the one hand, in 1970 the Planning Council for Higher Education (*Planlægningsrådet for de Højere Uddannelser*), which was established in 1964 and had advisory status to the ministry of education, aired an idea of a 2- to

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3-year 'basic education', with discipline-grounded *modules*, which the students could combine in new ways that were more relevant for the job market. Such flexible programmes, it was argued, would reduce drop-out rates, enable easier shifts between long- and medium-cycle higher education and gradually lead to specialisation in which students gained a broad knowledge of a main general area before choosing a discipline in the last two or 3 years of their 5-year university education (the Candidate degree was later split into a 3-year BA and a 2-year MA but most students still complete both) (Hansen 1997: 33f). On the other hand, a group of 'progressive' students in the National Union of Students (DSF) who had become influential after the student revolts of the late 1960s criticised the proposal for being too 'technocratic', for upholding what they perceived to be an authoritarian, teacher-led and competitive education tradition, and for focusing too narrowly on economic calculation (Jensen 1971; Olesen 1971; Wivel 1971). They too were in favour of introducing some years of broad 'basic education' but wanted it to be based on problem-orientation rather than disciplinary and teacher-led modules. In their version, student participation, independent project work in groups and the development of (Marxist-inspired) critical consciousness should be the educational cornerstones in a process of making universities more efficient and socially relevant.

As in many other countries, the number of university students in Denmark grew tremendously in the 1960s. Plans were made to establish more universities which could help satisfy the growing demand for university education as well as develop particular regions in Denmark. After extensive political debate about where to establish the new universities in 1972 a new university opened in Roskilde and 2 years later another one opened in Aalborg. Like other 'reform' universities from this period (e.g. Bielefeld in Germany and Santa Cruz in U.S.A.) the universities in Aalborg and Roskilde put emphasis on the unity of teaching and research, and promoted 'progressive' pedagogy, including problem-based and cross-disciplinary education. At Roskilde University (RUC) in particular, the above mentioned 'progressive' students from the National Union of Students played a central role and many of their ideas about problem-based and project-oriented learning were realised and turned into practice in refined versions (Hansen 1997: 42f). With the 1992 and 2003 university laws, however, the (alternative) focus on *modularisation* and students' *freedom of choice* gained more impetus and, as the following quote from the 2006 Minister of Science shows, this became pivotal to the goal of moving the 'student to the centre':

It is the aim of the government to bring the individual student more to the centre of the education system. It is the student who is a customer in the education shop. For it is the government's view that greater freedom and more flexibility in everyday life gives better study experiences and encourages a faster completion of the study. This is of benefit for the individual student and for society as a whole (Sander 2006).

The notion of 'bringing the student to the centre' is here increasingly linked to the promotion of market democracy and a quest for students to finish their studies at a faster pace. The minister's conceptualisation of the student as a customer is not linked to the charging of tuition fees (in Denmark university education is free for all

domestic students and those from EU and EEA member countries). Rather, he perceives increased freedom of choice and flexibility to combine modules across disciplines and universities as a necessary and important means to meet the individual's needs and desires and drive up efficiency in university education. Through exercising choice, students are expected to put together a course of education of relevance to the labour market and complete it within the prescribed time frame. In line with the Bologna Process' promotion of a European Higher Education Area ([www.ehea.info](http://www.ehea.info)) where students and staff more easily can move across national and institutional borders, university education in Denmark is becoming increasingly modularised, with so-called ECTS points (European Credit Transfer System) and competence descriptions providing transferable measures for the course workload and the competences students obtain from particular modules.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork material from three different Danish universities between 2005 and 2008, this chapter sets out to explore how the two interconnected ways of 'bringing the student to the centre' – that is, through increased *modularisation* and *freedom of choice* as well as *student-centred teaching and learning* approaches – have been negotiated and put into play in recent university reforms and with what consequences for students' perception of their role at university and in their learning processes. The main part of the ethnographic material concerns third year students in the natural sciences because, at the time of the field work, the natural science programmes at two of the three universities that I studied were undergoing a large reform which, among other things, introduced a new modularised programme structure and new more 'activating' and 'student-centred' teaching methods.

In line with the methodological approach and concepts outlined in Chap. 10, I pay attention to friction and how, in these frictions, the student comes to *figure* within the university and larger society in conflicting ways. Intrigued by the various ambitions of bringing the 'student to the centre' and the continuing negotiation over different student figures, especially the 'co-owner' and the 'costumer/consumer', the chapter focuses on students' shifting forms of participation, what kind of *ownership* students were encouraged to take over their course of education and the shaping of their university, and what *efficiency* in university education came to mean. The university laws in 1992 and 2003 promoted a so-called 'modernisation' of the Danish universities, which perceived the student as a 'user', a 'consumer' or 'customer' who – as exemplified with the above quote from the Minister of Science – can influence and make more 'efficient' the educational provision through the exercise of choice. In contrast, and in line with the 'democratisation' reforms in the 1970s (see Chap. 10), 'reform' universities, like Roskilde University, still had as their ideal the student as a 'co-owner' rather than a 'user' or 'consumer'.

Because Roskilde University has been a strong proponent of the 1960s and 1970s' progressive student-centred education, which was being rethought and to some extent challenged by new forms of modularised education, I focus the first part of the chapter on Roskilde University. I discuss what some RUC staff and students conceived of as *internal* and *external* pressures that encouraged students to shift from a certain kind of collective 'co-ownership' towards new forms of private

investor ownership. I point to the fact that this shift was related to a growing emphasis on ‘freedom of choice’ and a particular understanding of ‘efficiency’ in education. The notion of ‘efficiency’, so central to contemporary university reform, is then explored in more detail using as the prism an extensive reform of the natural science programmes at the University of Copenhagen (KU) and the former Danish Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL) (now a part of the University of Copenhagen). These reforms are telling in the sense that they emphasised and combined increased modularisation with the introduction of particular versions of student-centred learning approaches. I argue that these reform processes, which aimed to ‘bring the student to the centre’ through a combination of increased modularisation and student-centred teaching, promoted a new kind of acquisitive learner – where students’ creativity and independence was mainly linked to the question of choice and to a lesser extent to developing the skills to become an independent, critical and explorative thinker.

## 11.2 Student Co-Ownership: Under Threat by External and Internal Pressures?

Almost four decades after its establishment in 1972, Roskilde University still presented itself as a different university which had made new educational standards by ‘breaking with traditional university practice and embracing student involvement’.<sup>1</sup> This ‘break with traditional university practice’ was mainly conceived in terms of inter-disciplinarity, problem-orientation, group based project work, 2 years of broad ‘basic studies’ (within either the humanities, the natural or the social sciences) followed by specialisation in a selection of subjects, and finally the so-called ‘house structure’ which mixed students, academics and administrative staff in smaller democratically run communities physically located in separate ‘houses’. When faced with the draft proposal for the 2003 University Law, these features were pointed out as the cornerstones or ‘family silver’, as the Senate jokingly called it (Brichet 2009), that RUC should fight to hang on to in the midst of the changes. As a working group under the Senate argued:

It is our thesis that these pedagogical and organisational principles create the particular RUC identity because they institutionalise a feeling of *ownership* in the people who in their daily life associate with them (Thomsen quoted in Brichet 2009, my emphasis).

In a similar participatory vein, on the university website, the 2005 freshers were told that:

As a student you are not a customer in the shop, not a consumer of teaching – rather you are a participant in the production of new knowledge which can only succeed if you yourself make an effort and take responsibility. ‘University’ originally means a community of

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<sup>1</sup>RUC’s website. [http://www.ruc.dk/ruc\\_en/studying/RUC/](http://www.ruc.dk/ruc_en/studying/RUC/). Accessed 1 September 2008.

professors and students. The basic studies are a suggestion for what such a community could be today.

At RUC, an integrative aspect of student participation was clearly emphasised. Students were to perceive of themselves as ‘participants’ – or what was often referred to as ‘co-owners’ or ‘partners’ of the university – and engage in and take responsibility for the shaping of everything from the educational programmes, the democratically run houses and the larger university priorities. The student was to be an active part of a larger community of knowledge, and not just a ‘client’, ‘customer’, ‘consumer’ or a receiver of a predefined education product. In terms of students’ learning process, the academic staff members were mainly to function as ‘advisers’ or ‘tutors’ (*vejledere*), and they were explicitly called this, rather than ‘instructors’ (*undervisere*) which, alongside the more school-like ‘teacher’ (*lærer*), is the prevalent term used by students at most other Danish universities. In line with the student slogan ‘our university’ from the late 1960s and 1970s (see Chap. 10), the university here was ideally seen to ‘belong’ to the student and staff co-owners.

Many of the most dedicated and self-identified ‘co-owner’ students and staff, however, perceived the co-ownership tradition to be under growing pressure from *internal* as well as *external* developments. They saw the Bologna Process, the 2003 Danish University Law and related regulations like the 2004 Ministerial Regulation on Education as powerful ‘external forces’ that in various ways attempted to force RUC to re-organise against their ideals. The 2003 law with its emphasis on strong strategic leadership was seen as a threat to the RUC tradition of extensive workplace democracy. The 2003 Law and the 2004 Ministerial Regulation on Education, in line with the Bologna process, aimed at harmonising education programmes to introduce a sharper distinction between the 3 year Bachelor and a 2 year Master’s degree which did not fit well with RUC’s traditional 2 + 3 structure (2 years of broad basic studies followed by 3 years of cross-disciplinary specialisation between two subjects). The government’s imposition of a mandatory and single-disciplinary bachelor essay by the end of the third year threatened RUC’s traditional cross-disciplinary focus. Also, critics at RUC complained that their flexible structure (where students could combine two subjects equally over the last 3 years) was threatened by what they variously called a ‘traditionalisation’, ‘normalisation’ and ‘standardisation’ of their programmes. They felt RUC was being pushed to become more like the ‘traditional’ single-disciplinary programmes at the older universities in Copenhagen and Aarhus.

However, many students and staff pointed to the fact that these developments were also promoted by *internal* forces at RUC. Already in 2000, in a RUC newspaper one staff member identified two opposite groupings at RUC – the ‘conservatives’ and the ‘reactionaries’ (Jensen 2000/2001). He described the ‘conservatives’ as the ones who believed in maintaining the traditional RUC ideals of interdisciplinarity, problem-oriented project work and the unique 2 + 3 study structure. In contrast, he argued, the ‘reactionaries’ believed that the pedagogical efforts and the study programmes were prioritised too highly and at the expense of research. They were ‘reactionary’ in the sense that they wanted to transform RUC into a more



'classic' single-disciplinary and research oriented university. As one student politician said, '[the reactionaries] criticise RUC for being "old-fashioned"', but what they want is an "old-old-fashioned" university'. In his view, this meant a return to the university shaped by the professors and their research interests of before '68 and the 1970 law, which introduced vast student participation in the governing bodies (see the previous chapter).

This 'reactionary' tendency was perhaps most clearly materialised in the architecture of one of the newer department buildings. Here, the traditional house structure with a mix of students' group rooms, class rooms and staff offices had been abolished so that the new building only housed staff members who were organised according to research areas. That department also included some of the main proponents for replacing the traditional 2 + 3 combination structure at RUC with a structure of principal and subsidiary subjects or of single-subject Bachelor and Master's degrees. In RUC's early years each house had extensive autonomy and teachers and students were expected jointly to decide on different themes for their collaborative project work. Over the years, however, the houses gradually lost their autonomy, disciplinary departments were established, and more formalised programmes and teacher-defined courses were introduced. In the new millennium the balance between students' independent project work in groups and their following of more teacher-led courses has shifted towards a fifty-fifty balance.

### 11.3 From Co-Owner to Consumer?

A student, Morten, who as a self-identified 'co-owner' had chosen RUC because of its participatory co-ownership thinking, pointed to another tendency which – in addition to the more teacher-led character of the programmes – threatened the traditional RUC student co-ownership:

On principle I support an education model which, when I talk to people, seems to be outdated. Why do you take an education? I think you do it because it gives you something as a person to participate in a society. When people ask me what I shall become (*blive til*), I feel like answering them, well, I'll become a better citizen. I'll become capable of acting in a democracy in a harmonious way (...). But if I say this, they look at me and say 'unemployed'. This is a good description of the schism between an internal understanding of education and [the education rationale that] is increasingly gaining a footing (Interview with Morten, student politician, RUC 2005).

Morten, who from his first year had been very active in student politics, considered the democratic co-owner ideal at RUC as increasingly being accompanied or replaced by a more instrumental one grounded in a particular notion of 'employability'. What he defined as an 'internal' understanding of education, however, seemed to be the group of staff and students who act and conceive of themselves as 'co-owners' of the institution. He complained that a growing proportion of his fellow-students did not care about anything other than themselves and their own education – as such, it seems, they became 'external' to what he perceived as the

desirable university community. Morten found that students were typically heavily engaged in their own project groups, but that fewer and fewer participated in the house meetings. They were rarely on campus, but worked with their groups at home and did not care to participate in creating a common study environment. When they did come to campus, he said, they often did not clean up after themselves in the houses.

To Morten and other self-identified co-owner students, the indifference towards the house as a place and community and the self-centred focus on one's own projects and nothing else were most often seen as signs of a process of 'customerisation' or 'consumerisation' of the student. As Irene, another politically engaged student said to me 'active students feel ownership. Non-active students feel the same ownership of the university as when they go to Føtex [a supermarket]'. By 'active', Irene is here referring to active involvement in the house community, in the running of RUC, in classes and just generally in creating a common study environment. While the customer in the supermarket may feel s/he has *individual property ownership* of the products s/he buys, s/he does not convey the same notion of *belonging* to the place or to a particular community as evoked by the term 'co-owner'. Morten argued that, rather than thinking of themselves in terms of citizens of a university and a larger society, a growing proportion of his fellow-students behaved and thought of themselves as small enterprises – as 'me as student Inc.', he called it – where they sought to 'brand themselves as individuals with a *unique* educational path'. Morten thereby contrasted the co-owner with two other and to some extent overlapping student figures, namely the 'customer' and the 'student incorporated' figure. To the first figure he attached the components of selfishness and indifference to the community and the physical place. In the 'student incorporated' figure these components were accompanied by a view of education as a strategic individual *investment* to become 'employable'.

## 11.4 Ownership as Subject-Object Relation and Part-Whole Relation

The participatory conflict described here by Morten, as an example of the 'internal' and 'external' pressures on the ideal of co-ownership, can be seen as a friction between two different notions and forms of educational *ownership*. Indeed, as Marilyn Strathern has noted, '[o]wnership is powerful because of its double-effect as simultaneously a matter of belonging and of property' (1996: 531) and it seems to be a particular version of this double-ness that has taken centre stage in the debates about appropriate student participation at RUC in the new millennium.

As co-owners, RUC students are to conceive of themselves as *part* of collective *wholes* such as the 'house' and the 'universitas' of RUC. They are to take responsibility not only for their own and others' learning but also for the running of the houses and the governing of the university. And beyond this, as critically reflexive

citizens, they are to contribute to the development of larger society. This kind of ownership resembles what Davina Cooper (2007) has characterised as ‘part-whole’ ownership, that is, ownership which has a non-instrumental and non-severable quality and is based on *norms, appropriateness, communal identity* and social relations of *belonging*. Part-whole ownership, Cooper says, can be seen ‘as characteristic of a larger entity that [is] authoritatively recognized and that produce[s] external as well as internal effects’ (ibid.: 628). In other words, this kind of ownership forms a *constitutive* relationship between part and whole which works by pointing to the core attributes of what RUC *is* – that is, ‘the family silver’, as the RUC Senate called it or ‘the internal understanding’ as Morten called it. Accordingly, questions of inclusion, membership, belonging and loyalty to this institutional ‘whole’ become essential.

In contrast, the notions of ‘the customer’ and ‘the student Inc.’ seem to address the kind of ownership relation which Cooper (2007), describes as a ‘subject-object’ relationship. Subject-object ownership revolves around a person’s or group’s mastery of a thing and implies that the thing owned can be separated – legally, physically, emotionally – from the one who possesses it. It is based on notions of *rights, (il)legal* conduct and questions of possessing *belongings*. The severable subject-object relation provides ‘the standard legal definition of ownership or property, centred on fungibility, mastery, and commodification’ (2007: 629). Or, as Clarke et al. (2007) have emphasised, the notion of the consumer is typically related to a certain kind of ‘possessive individualism’ in which one is *free to choose*, is self-directed, pursues one’s own interests and has ‘the capacity to dispose of one’s own property as one wishes’ (ibid.: 2). Whereas Morten’s and Irene’s notion of the customer/consumer indeed emphasises a subject-object relation in that the student becomes a ‘chooser’ (of a product in an educational supermarket), the ‘Student Inc.’ figure involves the student becoming a strategic ‘investor’. Here, choice cannot just be hedonistic or a means to self-development: it has to be strategically measured on the parameters of *employability*.

## 11.5 A New Form of Human Capital?

While exceedingly aware of the growing political pressure for employability, most of the third year students from RUC and the other two universities I talked to were not (yet?) much focused on it. They just studied what they found interesting and were confident that, after finishing the 2-year candidate (master’s) degree, they would find a way to make use of their education. The attitude of two third year natural science students at RUC, Allan and Carsten, was symptomatic: they argued that education should be driven by the student’s own desire and curiosity which also meant that the state or the university should not regulate or decide what students should choose, based on an uncertain prognosis about the future needs of the job market. Rather, Allan argued, providing students with free university education is an

‘investment in the future (...) we get an education which will be of benefit to society afterwards, when we start working’.

This understanding of university education as a *common good* and *social investment* was conveyed by many of the students I talked to, including Allan and Carsten. This view has strong roots in the post-war period and what Henry et al. (2001: 30) have called a ‘macro-economically focussed human capital theory’. That is, public investment in education was meant to provide the nation with a strong workforce and accordingly with economic growth. The student became important *human capital* for the state to *invest* in through widened access and increased educational expenditure. Whereas Allan and Carsten articulate this ‘macro-economic’ human capital thinking, Morten’s description of the emergence of a ‘Student Incorporated’ who seeks to strategically brand him or herself as an individual embodying a *unique* educational path to become employable seems to emphasise a different property argument, namely the kind of post-Keynesian and neo-liberal revival of ‘new’ human capital theory described by Henry et al. as ‘micro-economic’ rather than as purely ‘macro-economic’:

The new consensus in educational policy that accompanies globalisation, of which the OECD has been a major advocate, is held together by a micro-economic focussed human capital theory that is unlike earlier forms of macro human capital theory. While the latter argued rather crudely for a supposed link between levels of educational expenditure (inputs) and economic growth and competitiveness (outputs), the new micro approach in contrast emphasises the specific skills of individuals thought necessary to participate effectively in a knowledge-based global economy. From a policy perspective, education and the provision of multi-skilled individuals who are flexible and adaptive to rapid change and uncertainty have become central elements of economic policy in all OECD countries (Henry et al. 2001: 99).

The reforms of Danish universities in the new millennium, aiming to bring the student to the centre of their own education, seem to be partly in accordance with Henry et al.’s description of the shift in educational thinking. In the 2000s, the characteristics of ‘micro-economic human capital theory’ were pinpointed as central to the formation of a new generation of knowledge workers in Denmark. Through the provision of freedom of choice and the introduction of student-centred learning approaches, students were to become entrepreneurial, independent and self-directed as well as creative and critical thinkers. Students needed to be able and willing to adapt to shifting circumstances and therefore acquire the competences to constantly develop their knowledge, the government argued. They needed to ‘learn how to learn’ (Ministry of Education 2002, 2007; Ministry of Finance 1997, 2005, 2006). University education in this way was intended to produce knowledge workers who, through their individual skills, could improve the competitiveness of the nation. From this standpoint, education – as human and intellectual capital – is to be seen as the personal property of the flexible, calculating and self-responsible life-long learner.

So let us take a closer look at how students who, unlike Morten and Irene, are not politically involved. Did the reforms in the new millennium somehow contribute to

promoting a particular kind of educational ownership and particular understandings of efficiency in university education?

## 11.6 Flexibility and Empowerment Through Freedom of Choice

Allan and Carsten, the two RUC students, would probably be the kind of students that Morten would consider conveyed a ‘customer-attitude’ of indifference to RUC as both a physical place and a social community. Like most students I talked to at the three universities where I did fieldwork, they took no particular interest in student politics. They found it important that students were represented in the governing bodies, but did not want to do the work themselves – mostly because they felt it was too time-consuming or tiresome but also because, as many said, this kind of work mainly benefits the next generation of students, not themselves. Allan and Carsten had not chosen RUC for its pedagogical and student participatory principles, but because the courses on offer and the combinations of subjects suited them well. They seldom came to the house meetings, and often ended up writing projects with each other while sometimes, they told me, keeping their ideas secret from other group members. In the classes I attended with them they rarely said anything, and Allan explicitly explained to me that, as long as he had a good answer to the assignments himself, he saw no reason to speak up and engage in the class discussions.

Although they did not seem to embody a strong sense of part-whole ownership towards RUC and conveyed the features of ‘self-centredness’ and ‘communal indifference’ which Morten had characterised as ‘customer attributes’, neither of them identified with the notion of the student as a consumer or customer. As Allan said, they were not personally paying to study and, just as importantly, they had to put work into their studies to get something out of them. It was not just a ready-made commodity one could acquire, Allan explained. During my field work, I found this view to be held widely and I met no Danish students who identified with the notion of student as consumer or customer. The only exception was when a group of foreign fee-paying students complained to the Minister of Science about what they perceived as low quality of their programme (Nielsen 2011a, b). When I asked Allan and Carsten if they felt ‘ownership’ for RUC and perceived it as ‘their university’ (like Morten and Irene had told me they did), Allan dryly responded:

Allan: Well, it’s not our university. It’s just a place where we study.

Gritt: *Whose is it then?*

Allan: The state’s and the citizens’. We just get skills through education.

Gritt: *Mmm – but many students have told me that to them the house democracy has been essential to giving them a sense of ownership...*

Allan: Hmpf, but it was only a small percentage who attended [the house meetings in the ‘basic-education houses’]. Everybody else sees this as a place that offers courses. There are certain offers and one chooses what one wants, and if you don’t

get it here you go somewhere else. I have thought about shifting to Copenhagen. They have other course offers. So I don't feel ownership of the university. It is only a small active core who has that feeling of co-ownership. We pick and choose in terms of what kind of education we want, and people have different reasons for choosing RUC and for choosing to go elsewhere.

Carsten: Yeah, we have both considered going elsewhere to study.

Rather than 'owners', students are here seen as 'choosers'. Since the state and the tax-payers fund Danish university education, these are the true 'owners' of the university, Allan argues. Ownership, accordingly, is thought of in terms of a legal relationship grounded in monetary exchange rather than in being part of a larger community of knowledge in which one invests time and energy. The universities provide services and offers, which the student puts together in a particular course of education as s/he prefers.

The majority of the students I talked to saw freedom of choice as the single most important and efficient means of student influence. Henrik, for example, a third-year RUC student, compared the influence he could gain through engaging in democratic governing bodies and said, 'freedom of choice gives more influence per amount of invested effort' (*'giver mere indflydelse pr. ydelse'*). He felt it much easier just to go elsewhere if he was dissatisfied rather than engage in what he perceived as tedious work on boards and councils. Also choice had a different and more instantaneous effect. As he said:

I have done more to explore if this was the right place (for me to be) than I have done to change it (...) the way I have done something actively has been by moving myself rather than, uhm ... you know it's going to have an impact when you move yourself to another place (...) it's maximal influence, on your own life, here and now (Interview with Henrik, third year student, RUC 2006).

Rather than expressing a sense of belonging to an institutional whole, student participation is here very measured and purely a question of the individual's influence on his or her own course of education. To Henrik, freedom of choice is an efficient – that is, quick and less demanding – way of exercising influence and creating their own course of education according to their own desires and aspirations.

However, choice was not always experienced as easy and sufficient, as we shall see in the following sections, where I address the education reform processes in the natural sciences at the University of Copenhagen (KU) and the former Danish Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL). Even though modularization efforts in many places have been combined with more student-centred teaching approaches, a particular logic of measurement, of speed and quantity in the learning process, seemed to be prevalent amongst many students. This kind of 'efficiency' thinking, I argue, does not seem to support or be in alignment with either political or academic ideals about educating students to become independent, creative or flexible.

## 11.7 Modularization and the Efficient Student

As noted, a key aspect of the reforms in the early 2000s was to put emphasis on students' freedom of choice. This was in line with the Danish government's general 'modernisation programme' for the public sector, which advocated putting 'citizens at the wheel' (Ministry of Finance 2002a) and placed a growing emphasis on the citizens' freedom of choice. Choice was seen as a means of empowerment, a solution to the problem of paternalism and powerlessness which, in the government's view, citizens at times experienced when confronted with the public sector (Ministry of Finance 2002b). The 'user' of public services was to be given freedom of choice in a market of competing public providers, and choice was to empower the citizens – and especially those with a 'weak voice' – against the 'professional' employees of the public sector. In this vein, Danish universities were to become more flexible and responsive to 'empowered' students' wishes and choices, which, through a growing emphasis on 'employability', were to be related to the demands of the job market.

In conformity with this political emphasis on freedom of choice, the Bologna Process' general goals of harmonising degrees across the European Higher Education Area and promoting flexibility and mobility for students, the education reforms at KU and KVL introduced a new standardised 'block and module structure'. Instead of two semesters, the year was now split up into four blocks of 9 weeks each. In order to help the students combine modules in a relevant manner, a series of subject packages or subject lines were outlined. The courses were then placed in a standardised schedule of A, B and C modules so that courses which belonged in the same 'subject package' did not clash on the timetable.

In line with the 2003 University Law and the 2004 Ministerial Regulation on Education (BFUG 2003; Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2004: §67, 2005) the reforms included a shift from content descriptions to competence descriptions of each module and programme. The reform thus followed the widespread move from a so-called *teaching-based* system to a *learning-based* system (Hermann and Kristensen 2004; Hutter and Mogensen 2006). Now the student's learning *outcomes* – i.e. how a course or programme will provide the student with the relevant *competences* to think and act – were to be at the centre, rather than the tutor's teaching *input* (syllabus, content descriptions). Accordingly, to promote greater student participation in class and in their own learning, teachers were encouraged to replace lectures with more '*activating*' teaching methods like group and project work and to introduce more problem-based learning and differentiated forms of examination (e.g. continuous assessment instead of one single four-hour written test, which had previously been the dominant examination form).

A clear intention of the reforms was to make students more active in their course of study. Indeed, the ideal student evoked by the reforms seemed to be a kind of 'incessantly active student'. This figure includes and combines several notions of activity in that the shorter blocks and more '*activating*' teaching forms should: (1) make students more active and participating in class, (2) make them more active in

and responsible for their own learning, and (3) increase their ‘active participation’ in choosing relevant courses and passing exams within the prescribed period of study. I concentrate on the last point here and return to the first two aspects of ‘activating’ students in a later section.

Most of the third year students I talked to described their course of study as accidental in the sense that they had only had a vague idea about what areas to specialise in when they started – and those who had had a firm idea of what they wanted at the start had often been inspired by something else during their first year and had gone off in a different direction than planned. Even though the new subject packages made the narrowing down of choices easier, the act of choosing was quite a challenge for many of them. Betina, a third year student, described it as follows:

It’s very exciting that we can all end up with something different, and I think it’s an advantage in relation to later job possibilities that we have different profiles. But it is incredibly time-consuming to find out which optional subjects to choose in order to [...] make it fit together. It takes time and strengths. It can be a bit rough. Especially now, I’ve found, where we have to choose four times a year [...] it can be rather confusing. The list is huge. You need to explore all modules, what pre-qualifications you need and where they can lead. [...] it’s a jigsaw puzzle which takes time (Interview with Betina, third year student, KVL 2006).

Betina acknowledged the benefits of being able to construct her own unique course of education. However, at the time, she was not pre-occupied with her job prospects. Obviously, her metaphor of university education as a jigsaw puzzle alludes to the idea that each module is a well-defined ‘piece’ which works to slice up the students’ course trajectory into segments and intervals. In this way, the student’s passage through a subject area is rendered capable of new forms of measurement – as quantity and speed – and the student’s task is not only to make the pieces fit together and assemble them in what they hope to be a relevant order but also to do this within the given time frame.

Like most of her fellow students Betina was very much against the growing political pressure on students to increase their pace of study. Interestingly, she used the notions of ‘flexibility’ and ‘individual freedom’ – so crucial to the government’s efficiency rationale – as an argument against the political preoccupation with educational speed:

I think it’s dangerous to attempt to push people so quickly through the system, because it’s not very flexible, or it reduces the flexibility of the university studies. And the flexibility, that’s really one of the advantages about the university. [...] that people can adapt [their study] to their own tempo [...] I think it’s a great thing about university that you don’t have a class to follow but that you’re responsible yourself for making things work and organising your time according to your own needs. [...] That thing about ‘prescribed time’ (*normeret tid*), well that’s something someone else has determined, it’s not set individually (*individuel*). And I think it’s more important that you, as I say, feel ‘fully educated’ (*færdiguddannet*) and feel that you are in control (*har styr på tingene*), that you understand and have energy [in your everyday life]. [...] That kind of individual aspect, in relation to the prescribed time, I think that’s important (Interview with Betina, third-year student, KVL 2006).

To Betina, flexibility is not just, as the Government emphasises, a question of ‘freedom of choice’ in order to become employable, but also of having the flexibility to adapt the course of study to one’s own individual needs. Betina advocates freedom



from time pressure and emphasises the qualitative and individual sense of ‘feeling fully educated’ rather than a quantitative measure of pursuing an education within a fixed time frame. In this way, what she advocates is the opportunity to take ownership over her own process of study so that it becomes intrinsic to her personality and individual study rhythm rather than defined and outlined through what she perceives as being external measures (for extended analyses of conflicting temporalities in education, see Nielsen 2011a, b). However, as we shall see, one of the main challenges with the new block and module structure was that the students felt there was less time to take *ownership* over their learning process in the sense of immersing or absorbing themselves in a subject area in an independent and self-directed manner.

## 11.8 Student-Centred Teaching and Learning: Between Independence and Efficiency

When asked what is a good university education, a good student or a good teacher, both teachers and students most often pointed to the core issues of making students into independent and critical thinkers, rather than being efficient with their time and finishing within the prescribed time frame. Betina, whom we met above, argued that the good student is someone who critically engages him- or herself in the subject and in the place of study, someone who not only prepares for and is active in class but is generally curious about and interested in seeking knowledge related to the subject of study. Likewise, her fellow student Thomas in describing how one teacher’s enthusiasm and positive attitude was catching, argued that the ‘good teacher’ was someone who ‘allows for...a kind of open relation, or that curiosity, one could say, to blossom’. However, some students pointed to how, with the new block and module structure, their efforts necessarily became more *strategically* directed towards the examinations:

Pia        The teachers just get annoyed when you ask, you know, ‘What’s this to be used for?’ Because we have these short periods, you become more exam-minded, all the time you think ‘OK, is this relevant? Do I need it for the exam?’ [...] we have to know what we have to do at the exam so we know how to run this race, right? You have to plan according to the exams and not really according to the teaching because it’s so compressed that you have to know what’s necessary to know and what’s not.  
Stine      Yeah, and they really want, you know, you should just become absorbed in this, and in that (*gå op i det her og det her*), and ‘This is sooo interesting for you’. But it’s just like, hey, I have an exam in three weeks (Pia and Stine laugh).

Even though they are encouraged by the teachers to be explorative and they themselves also long to absorb themselves in different subject areas, Stine and Pia, two third year students from KU, felt they needed to manage and plan their time and efforts strictly and strategically according to what was expected of them at the examination. These students seem to want their precise destination to be pinpointed,

their examination requirements fixed and to be given a good guide of how to get there – and not least get there *in time*. To Pia, her course of education therefore becomes a question of ‘planning and running a race’. Indeed it seemed like the students increasingly came to see their learning process as a question of minimising the risk of spending time going in ‘useless’ directions in terms of what is tested at the exam.

Similarly, when asked about their experiences and views of the new student-centred learning approaches, in particular the forms of *project work in groups* that was used in the new modular courses, students’ concern to ‘get something out of it’ seemed to reflect a delicate balancing between learning to become *self-directed* and *independent* thinkers and engaging in what they described as *efficient* learning. The feeling of getting something out of it is highly subjective, and many students found it difficult to explain what they meant in greater depth when I asked them about it. Others, like Morten, the self-identified RUC co-owner, were quite explicit about it. To Morten, ‘getting something out of it’ meant learning to take ownership and participate in a democracy, learning to reflect critically on his own situation and the society he lives in, and simply becoming what he called a better citizen. To him, independent project work was therefore a positive thing and it was the very *process* of doing independent work in groups, not so much the particular *product* in terms of the results and grades that came out of it that was important.

Evoking an often used metaphor for the process of learning and knowing, namely that of an independent *journey* and *voyage* (see Gustavsson 1998; Ingold 2000a; Salmond 1982), Kathrine, a third year KVL student, described the process of independent project work in more ambiguous terms. On the one hand she emphasised the learning benefits of having to ‘consider which paths to choose and which direction to go in’ when the students had to define their own projects. She vividly complained how, due to the shorter and more pressed modules, her group on a particular course, contrary to their expectations, had been forced to choose ‘a readymade package’, pre-prepared by the teachers. On the other hand, she felt that being given a predefined project plan is ‘good because we get through a whole lot of stuff, we can see why it’s important and we know that we get something out of it. We get some results to analyse’. The end point and the product – the ‘stuff’ they acquire through the process – here becomes central. In a similar vein, the RUC student Henrik, when reflecting about his experiences with independent project work in groups, argued that:

... with project work, you don’t always feel that you get as efficient learning, or, how should I put it, I mean if you look at it syllabus-wise ... you can spend an incredibly long time on discussions where you can’t really measure whether you are getting something out of it (Interview with Henrik, third year student, RUC 2006).

Kathrine and Henrik’s notions of efficient learning and ‘getting something out of it’ were linked to ideals of *quantification* and *measurability* (syllabus, number of pages, a product), as well as to a particular temporality, namely time parcelled out in periods. In this manner the students had adopted a notion of efficiency clearly related to what Tim Ingold (2000b) has described as *mechanical* and *standardised*

*clock time*. Emerging as a crucial management technology in the industrialised world, standardised clock time identifies both *quantity* and *temporal* measures against which labour can be controlled in the name of ‘efficiency’ and ‘productivity’ (see also Thompson 1967).

Crucially, the very notion of a syllabus, evoked by Henrik and many other students as a measure of efficiency, is a device precisely designed to link together spatial and temporal measures. It outlines a certain quantity of pages to read and content to be acquired within a given time period. Likewise, *pensum*, the Danish word for syllabus or examination requirements, means ‘to weigh’ and in its original Latin sense referred to the daily quantity of wool an enslaved person should produce. Only by identifying learning through both spatially and temporally quantifiable outputs does it make sense to argue – as Henrik did when I asked him what he meant by ‘getting something out of it’ – that the time spent on reading something which you do not use directly in the project paper becomes ‘wasted time’. Conscious about his time, Henrik, in a way, took ownership over his course of education by advocating the kind of teaching and learning which he himself found most efficient and this made him, along with many of his fellow students, favour more teacher-led project work.

## 11.9 Conclusion: Ownership, Efficiency and Independence

This chapter has discussed how two interconnected efforts of ‘bringing the student to the centre’ – that is, through increased modularisation and freedom of choice as well as student-centred teaching and learning approaches – have been negotiated, re-developed and put in play in recent university reforms in Denmark. The chapter has explored a series of conflicting ways that students aim to and are incentivized to participate – or *figure* – in different pedagogical and political processes at university. In particular I have shown how the figures of the co-owner, consumer and private investor are central to the ongoing debates about what a good student is and should be in Denmark. The elements that are articulated or assembled in these figures can broadly be understood as conflicting ways of *spatialising* and *temporalizing* students’ participation in their own education, in university life and in larger society. Different figures articulate different temporalities: students may for example pursue short- or long-lasting commitments (see the discussion on flexible participation, Chap. 10); they may experience (a lack of) time for independent ‘absorption’ in a subject area; or desire to follow the officially outlined pace of study. Likewise, the chapter has shown how different social spaces are conjured up for students to participate in and see themselves as part of (e.g. ‘the programme/discipline’, ‘the university’, ‘a common student body’, ‘the nation-state’, and ‘the global knowledge economy’). Some kinds of participation can be characterized as *integrative* (e.g. some RUC co-owner students’ participation in and sense of belonging to a university community), whereas other kinds take a more *aggregative* form (e.g. voting with the feet or at elections, filing a complaint). While integrative

participation hinges on to notions of participatory democracy, the latter could be understood in relation to new forms of market democracy.

The conflicting notions of *ownership*, to which I have paid attention in this chapter, clearly show how particular kinds of ‘efficiency’ in university education work to spatialize and temporalize students’ participation in certain ways. In Davina Cooper’s terminology educational ownership has shifted more towards a subject-object relationship of possessive individualism – often related to the notion of the consumer or customer – at the expense of part-whole co-ownership and a sense of belonging to the academic community, heralded at for example Roskilde University. As in the case of Pia and Stine above, who focused on the next exams, modularisation and a focus on students’ pace of study and active participation in class have worked to direct many students’ activity towards a particular notion of ‘efficiency’, namely efficiency in the sense of fast movement in a pre-defined curriculum, for which following a ‘safe’ path is necessary, rather than independent, flexible and explorative risk-taking. Philip Brown (2003, 2006) has called this learning strategy ‘acquisitive learning’. In contrast to inquisitive learning, where students are ‘driven by an interest in knowledge and learning for its own sake’ (Brown 2006: 392), acquisitive learning is characterised by a focus on what is necessary to pass examinations; education primarily becomes a utilitarian and strategic *means* and a question of *products* (degrees, diplomas and grades) which the student needs and is expected to *acquire*. In this sense, Brown argues, *acquisitive learning* becomes a token of a general tendency whereby people increasingly spend time, money and effort on what they perceive to be *necessary* rather than on what they perceive to have some kind of intrinsic value.

As this chapter has shown, a student’s learning process increasingly becomes entangled with political wishes for a more so-called efficient university. In 2013 and 2014, the long string of political efforts to speed up students’ pace of study and increase their employability was followed by yet two more political initiatives. In 2013, with a so-called ‘propulsion reform’ (*fremdriftsreform*), the Danish government introduced a series of new regulations related to students’ pace of study, especially financial punishment of the university and the student if he or she was delayed and exceeded the prescribed time frame for the course of study (see Ministry of Higher Education and Science 2013). Shortly after, in 2014, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (Ministry of Higher Education and Science 2014) launched a so-called ‘sizing plan’ (*dimensioneringsplan*), a central regulation which caps and limits enrolment in certain education programmes (primarily among the humanities) based on unemployment figures from the past decade. University education is to be even more efficient in producing students with a profile of expected relevance to the labour market and within the prescribed time frame. Reaching beneficial balances between efficiency, in terms of study speed and labour market relevance, and educational ownership, understood as a room for independent, innovative and creative thinking, may turn out to be one of the hardest and most central tasks for future students and education systems to achieve.

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# **Part VI**

## **Conclusion**

# Chapter 12

## Conclusion: Enactment and Transformation of the University



Susan Wright 

### 12.1 Introduction

The 2003 University Law and further amendments over more than a decade have enacted, in the sense of passed into law, a new legal framework between the state and the university in Denmark. They have also assembled a repertoire of steering technologies through which to manage that relationship. This book has studied these reforms as Denmark's particular experience of the moves towards agencified autonomy, performance measurement and accountability that have been widely referred to as neo-liberalism and New Public Management in the international literature on higher education. This book has focused not just on the passing of laws, but also on the second meaning of enactment, that is, the ways students, academics and managers in their daily working lives were involved in shaping the university through their own initiatives and their reactions to top-down changes. By holding these two ideas of enactment in tension, we opened up an analytical space in which to study the iterative process by which changes to the university came about, or, in other words, how universities were not just reformed, but transformed. This analytical space allowed the book to show how extensively and quickly Danish universities have been transformed, but without the changes seeming predetermined or inevitable. It also meant the newly dominant discourses could be held at sufficient distance to examine how they emerged, to expose their normative assumptions, and show how they were translated into institutional processes.

This chapter draws together the analysis developed over the preceding chapters to make conclusions about the transformation process and the shape of the university that emerged. In doing so, it highlights the repertoire of theoretical concepts that have not only been developed for this ethnographic analysis but also contribute

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to higher education studies and to the ethnography or anthropology of policy. The first section draws together material from across Chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 to highlight how processes of contestation over concepts and practices set out in law – openness, autonomy and freedom – have involved numerous actors in many sites. This section shows how at ‘moments of enactment’ a certain meaning of a keyword was established as dominant, translated into practice and planted like a ‘stake in the ground’ around which everyday academic life revolved for a while. A succession of ‘moments of enactment’ have gradually but extensively transformed the governance of the university. The second section shows how, under a shared ethnographic umbrella, the book has developed a rich array of concepts for theorising how policy makers, managers, academics and students were actively engaged in enacting the university. Key concepts are ‘articulation and partial wholes’, ‘heroic individuals’, ‘strategic spaces for manoeuvre’ and ‘figures in friction’. The third section positions the researchers within the ethnography, and explains how their reflexive politics was also involved in enacting the university. The final section takes the concept of ‘reflexive epistemic politics’ further to consider how the mobilisation of an ‘epistemic community’ that prompted university reforms (analysed in Chaps. 3 and 4) was based not only on a roughly shared vision of the future university but also its new context – a fast approaching global knowledge economy. Just when there are cases of that vision of the university, with a hierarchy of leaders under tight ministerial control, being enacted in practice, optimism about globalisation and the knowledge economy are beginning to fade. Persistent problems related to increasing inequality, massive population movements and radicalised identity politics are joined by the threat of climate collapse, demanding that universities reconsider their roles in processes of social, political and economic change. To meet these challenges, the university arguably needs to be a more open system, organised in a way responsive to the expertise of its academics and students and the ideas generated by their widespread involvement in the surrounding society. The chapter ends by pointing to the reflexive politics that policy makers, managers, academics and students are beginning to engage in to reconceptualise universities in such a world.

## 12.2 Transformation

By taking a dual approach to the legal and everyday enactment of the university, the study engaged with a challenge: how, ethnographically, to describe a university as both multiple ‘congeries of small acts’ (Weiss 1986: 222) whilst also seeing new shapes and patterns emerging. As we put it in Chap. 2, this issue is akin to that facing the analysis of contemporary capitalism: how to avoid treating it either as an elite plot, or so distributed that no systematic relations can be identified? Just as we treated policy as a space of contestation involving not just policy makers but myriad other actors all engaged in shaping a process of organisational change, so we treated the university not as an *a priori* entity with fixed rules and regulations and a clear boundary against the outside world, but as a process of continually organising

around contested concepts, negotiable procedures and unstable boundaries. This meant that we avoided producing a totalising picture of the reform process with a tick list of how its characteristics have been changing. We did not construct categories of people each with different interests, and nor did we treat individuals as the source of generalisations or try to add up all their perspectives to make a university 'whole'. Our aim was to convey the way everyone we met or interviewed was co-producing the university in a multitude of daily activities, so the university is a fluid organisation, in continual change. Yet there were what Tsing (2005, 2006) calls 'momentary enactments' – both momentous and temporary – when a way of acting stabilised, even though such enactments did not cohere into a stable whole.

At such moments of enactment, it was as if a stake was being planted in the ground, and processes of contestation and daily activities thereafter navigated around that stake, treating it as a fixed point for the organisation. Or, at least, it was fixed for a while, as there was always the possibility that it would be loosened, just as there was always the possibility of disrupting hegemonic positions. Sachs (2016), discussing a much bigger European canvas, refers to 'hinge moments' as 'decisive points of history on which subsequent events turn'. Hall (1996: 141–3) refers to 'grooves'. He uses the concept of articulation to explain how an emergent alliance of social groups reorganises cultural practices into a new formation that can become one of the 'grooves' along which social life runs. Hall argues that some articulations of discursive, cultural, and political elements are so entrenched historically that they are powerful 'lines of tendential force' that are difficult to disrupt; yet by calling such a formation an articulation, he emphasised that, however deep the social groove, its elements *can* be disconnected and transformed. The elements of discourses, organisational practices or steering mechanisms are not free-floating; but neither are they connected together in some 'intrinsic, trans-historical belongingness' (1996: 142).

We identified several 'hinge moments' when the envisioning of the university and its world changed and started to turn around new stakes and run along new grooves. For example, Chaps. 6 and 7 show how a number of stakes were planted in the ground around which the activities of the new governing boards and the appointed university management began to establish grooves. Three are of note. The first was the contest over the meaning of 'openness'. To appease academics, the wording of the law clearly stated 'To the greatest possible extent, the Board shall be open about its activities' (Parliament 2003a Part 3 §10: 2). The new governing boards were established in January 2004 and within a few months the previously open access to the agendas, minutes and meetings of senate had been converted into board meetings where we researchers were often the only non-board members present – a status which often felt very uncomfortable. Agendas were circulated at the last minute, items were increasingly 'closed' and minutes were terse and attachments hard to come by. The appointed members treated the meetings like those of an industrial board, concerned with commercial confidentiality. Some elected members of the board, the students and academics, were even told they could not report back to their constituencies. The Minister intervened and shifted the emphasis in the law text from the phrase 'shall be open' to 'open wherever possible'. The public

debate died down. For several years, one academic board member at Copenhagen University maintained a personal website, making all the board's documents and discussions easily accessible. But by the time of writing, the closedness of boards had become a 'groove' along which university life runs. Academics and students pay little or no attention to the board and its deliberations. It is clearly no longer 'their' board in the way that the earlier university senate used to be; it is an outside force, only felt when it imposes cuts on staff or departments. Then there are brief, if vociferous, protests by a clearly disenfranchised university membership, before the university continues to run along its now-established, closed groove.

The second 'stake' in the ground concerned the meaning of an autonomous (*selvejende*) university. This new legal status meant the government could only ask universities to do something voluntarily or through a parliamentary decision. But universities were not allowed to own any assets, so it was unclear in what sense universities could be autonomous if they were dependent on the ministry for their liquidity. As Chap. 5 shows, universities' new legal status came with the adoption of business cost-accounting systems and the new boards struggled to relate these calculations to the concept of a university. External members at one board meeting focused on profit margins, only to be advised by their auditor that profit was not relevant to a university. Universities began to be talked about as 'corporations' with 'products' and 'markets' (Wright 2011, 2012). For example in 2006, an advertisement for a new university director started:

Copenhagen University, with 7,000 employees and 35,000 students and a turnover (*omsætning*) of 4 billion kroner, is Denmark's biggest knowledge corporation (*vidensvirksomhed*) and plays a central role in Danish society. (*Universitetsavisen* 2006a: 10).

One academic objected strongly that the university was not a commercial firm but a higher education institution (*højere læreanstalt*), where the main activities are teaching and research and the money that costs is called a 'budget' not turnover. The rector boldly rejected the criticism saying that in administrative circles and in the ministry it was quite normal to refer to universities as knowledge corporations (*Universitetsavisen* 2006b: 13).<sup>1</sup> This language was often contested and did not become as normal as, for example, in the UK. Partly this was because, whereas UK reforms from 2004 to 2010 aimed to marketise public institutions (Wright 2004a, 2016a), in Denmark universities clearly continued to be part of the public sector. The Danish reforms were to establish politicians' trust in university leadership so they could increase universities' public funding, confident that the universities would produce raw materials (knowledge and graduates) to be harvested by knowledge industries. However, the cost-accounting system did mean that for the first time the university's management had a financial overview of the university as an organisation and could see whether cost centres (aka departments) were paying their way. They could also see how precarious was the university's financial planning. Budgets were allocated by government only one year at a time and often they were announced a month before the start of the financial year and included

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Sniff Anderen Nexø for this example. Personal communication 8 January 2019.

substantial cuts or changes in priority. Audit companies advised the governing boards to build up equity (*egenkapital*) both to fund new developments and to mitigate risk, as a buffer against sudden political decisions to change the universities' funding. One ministry interviewee argued, on the contrary, that universities should not hoard money given to them to fund the current year's core activities because, as state-funded institutions, they would never go bankrupt.

Even though universities built up equity, they did not tend to use this buffer in times of need, and cuts in government funding were met by firing rounds based on economic, not academic criteria. For example, Copenhagen University had fired 500 academics by 2017 (*FORSKERforum* 2017a: 27). In an attempt to assert a little more independence, in 2012–2016, Copenhagen University used a clause in the law to request the university be given ownership of its own buildings. The ministry roundly rejected this request as it would have expanded the university's ability to buy, mortgage and rebuild without going through the ministry's buildings agency. This was a stake that the ministry firmly planted in the ground. Instead of enabling universities to extent their 'self-ownership' in terms of assets, the ministry continued to make ever more detailed use of funding levers to steer the universities.<sup>2</sup> Following a government requirement in 2013 for universities to expand education programmes and take in 'the biggest cohort of students', in 2014 a new minister suddenly announced a down-scaling (*dimensionering*) by reducing funding for certain education programmes deemed irrelevant to the labour market. This roused strong protests from the university boards and rectors, to little avail, and within a year 2000 student places were lost, with humanities hardest hit. Attempts to align education provision ever-closer to industrial labour-market needs are continuing, with humanities under continual threat (Matthews 2018). Starting in 2016 and extending to 2021, the ministry's 're-prioritisation' of universities' activities cut education budgets 2% each year. For Copenhagen University this was predicted to mean a loss of 930 million kroner over the period (*Universitetsavisen* 2017, 2018). The universities' governing boards and senior management have found no effective way of resisting this sequence of stakes that increased political control of the university's operations. Indeed in the new form of governance, government set the parameters for change and outsourced to universities the responsibility for planning and performing them. Far from universities becoming the independent 'power force' some predicted, the ministry used firm control of the levers of university funding to tightly steer these increasingly accountable but so-called autonomous institutions.

A third stake concerns the meaning of the political adage, 'setting universities free'. Academics thought politicians were referring to research freedom, which they considered needed their participation in management of the university. In contrast, the minister meant releasing leaders from the trammels of 'university democracy' and giving them freedom to manage the organisation in ways needed to deliver the performance outputs set by politicians. At the meeting at the Royal Academy, dis-

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<sup>2</sup>As a consequence of Copenhagen University's request to own its buildings, according to the rector, 90 million kroner was deducted from its budget without reason and at the stroke of a pen (quoted in *FORSKERforum* 2017b: 26).

cussed in Chap. 2, this contestation over the meaning of freedom came to a head and the minister left triumphant, having made his meaning dominant. This was one stake in the ground. The contestation continued over the translation of this concept into management practices. Weick had famously called universities ‘loosely coupled systems’, meaning that leaders at each level acted as a buffer between top-down decisions and bottom-up aspirations. The Danish reforms removed this buffering by establishing a hierarchy of appointed leaders, linked together in a cascade of performance contracts, with each leader accountable for his or her unit’s performance to the leader above. The only remaining buffering function resided in the governing board, which was charged with protecting the freedom and ethics of the university. Often, however, the governing board and university leaders acted as if they were agents of the Ministry, rather than guiding ‘free’ universities to move beyond government steering and be a new powerforce in society. Soon after the boards were established, the Minister referred to one of our board-member interviewees as his ‘friend’ in the university, whereas the interviewee considered the board was meant to protect the university’s independence. Ten years later, this issue became a point of open conflict. When the university boards and rectors protested against the Minister’s ‘down-scaling’ plans, they were accused of being ‘on the side of the university’ (*universitetspartiet*) even though that was their legal role (*FORSKERforum* 2017b: 26). According to one governing board chair, when some university leaders protested, the Minister was dissatisfied that they ‘did not loyally fall in line’ and suggested she would appoint board members or chairs in future. The governing board chair concluded: ‘Here was a signal that the minister as ‘owner’ [of the universities] considered that the governing boards – as some kind of civil servants – must not go against the ‘owner’ (*FORSKERforum* 2016: 16).

A new minister brought about a law change in 2017. Whereas university boards had formerly appointed new members themselves in a system that maintained the technical autonomy of the university from both internal and external interests, the change to the law brought about a system in which the minister ‘indirectly’ controlled the appointment of the external members and the chair of the governing boards (Parliament 2017). The governing board has to set up a nominations committee, including a representative from the ministry, and the selection is made by a further committee consisting of a chair who must be approved by the minister, 5–7 people from outside of the university world, and only one external member, one academic and one student from the governing board. This system of ‘indirect appointment’ by the minister gave a clear message to universities that they should fill these positions with people of whom the minister would approve (*FORSKERforum* 2017d: 7). At the same time, the development contract between the minister and the chair of the board was changed into a results contract, with precise goals defined by the ministry. The chair of the governing board was also given more power at the expense of the board and the rector, and was called to regular meetings with the minister. Whereas critics complained that this broke the ‘arms-length principle’ (*FORSKERforum* 2017a) the ministry explained that this was to create a better dialogue between the political system and university leadership. One former university director thought that by appointing loyal chairs of governing boards:

The minister has therefore got a ‘bridge builder’ and the minister and finance ministry can discipline the university to keep in line with diktats – and not with what is in the university’s interests and best professional convictions. That is not just about the economy but also the content of research, curriculum and course regulations. (Peter Plenge, former director of Aalborg University, quoted in *FORSKERforum* 2017d: 6. Author’s translation).

In the 2017 law reform, the last buffering between the ministry and the ‘freedom’ of the university was removed and the ‘arms-length principle’ was turned into a long ministerial arm stretching into the decision making of the university. Both university leaders and critics referred to the resulting ‘tightly-coupled’ system as ‘kommandovej steering’ – meaning that commands from the ministry pass unchanged all the way down the hierarchy of leaders to be implemented unchallenged.<sup>3</sup> The rector of Copenhagen University reflected on the ministry officials’ ‘bitterness’ that rectors did not ‘click our heels together when there came an order from above’. He continued:

I believe the actual law proposal about more ministerial steering via the chair of the governing board and result contracts is a direct consequence of that bitterness. They want more steering through ‘commando ways’ (*kommandovejene*) from the political system to the universities’ leadership’ (*FORSKERforum* 2017b: 26)

This came into full and visible operation in 2018 when the Danish People’s Party, on whose support the government depended, declared that Danish taxes were not to be used to educate Romanians,<sup>4</sup> and the ministry accordingly announced that funding for ‘English speaking’ students would be reduced. In November, the ministry gave each university a target number of places on ‘international’ courses to cut from the next intake. These political targets passed down through the hierarchy of leaders and were implemented as cuts to courses with little or no discussion with the academics concerned or consideration of their effects on international strategies

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<sup>3</sup>The term ‘*kommandovej*’ entered university discourse quite suddenly in 2017–18. When discussing the law change, Peter Lotz from Copenhagen Business School referred critically to politicians and civil servants who treat universities as subsidiaries of their parent-company ministry and ‘find it completely logical to introduce a clear ‘commando structure’ (*kommandostruktur*)’ in universities (*FORSKERforum* 2017c: 24). This term was popularised in business circles by former Royal Marine, Damian McKinney (2012), but his *Commando Way* refers to a trust-based system of small teams with a clear mission acting with initiative and agility in an uncertain world. In contrast, the image used by both Lotz and the rector of Copenhagen University, quoted below, is of government’s tightly controlled chain of command over universities, which in the words of the rector, wants university leaders to click their heels together when receiving an order from above. This image is drawing on the dictatorial aspects of an earlier military meaning of ‘Kommandovej’ in the Second World War as the organisation of slave labour in German concentration camps (although it presumably is not trying to suggest such atrocity) <https://www.definitions.net/definition/kommando>. I am grateful to Cris Shore for the latter observation.

<sup>4</sup>‘The problem is that we have a provision here that they don’t get in Romania...so they look up here to take their education, we need first and foremost to ensure that our tax kroner go to educating Danish young people’ [Problemet er, at vi har en ydelse her, som man ikke får i Rumænien, så det er klart, at de kigger herop for at tage en uddannelse, men vi er nødt til først og fremmest at sørge for, at vores skattemidler går til at uddanne danske unge] Jens Henrik Thulesen Dahl. Danish People’s Party.

pursued by particular disciplines. This was clearly a ‘momentous enactment’, when debates and tussles over university ‘freedom’ were ended, even the ‘freedom to manage’ was reduced, and the university boards, leaders and academics were made demonstrably upwardly accountable to the minister.

These are three ethnographic examples of the ways core concepts of the university – openness, autonomy and freedom – were contested, sometimes over long periods of time, until a moment of enactment meant a new meaning was made dominant, translated into new institutional practices and staked in the ground. They also show how the articulation of secretive decision making, tight financial control and top-down steering came about in ways that were contingent. Each stake in the ground was backed by institutional and state power, and although the dominant meaning of these key concepts may have become normative among some leaders, at the time of writing they are still not naturalised or hegemonic. For the most part, multiple and often contradictory images of the university were kept in play, not just in conversations between academics and students, but also in the public branding of the university. For example, in Fig. 12.1 Copenhagen University invites students to join its brand focused on the future but the poster contains two contradictory images of the organisation. One invites students to aim beyond the visible horizon and test



**Fig. 12.1** Contradictory images of Danish Higher Education. (Source: Copenhagen University’s Natural Science Faculty’s recruitment advertisement in public transport).

Translation: Headline text says: ‘Natural science is like an elite sport: find your physical limits and overcome them’. Text above the organogram says: ‘Be engulfed!’

and stretch themselves against the fluid sea of continual change; the organogram on the other hand confines students to an educational structure of bounded units in a strictly hierarchical structure. Through focusing on contested concepts of the university and the dual meanings of enactment, this book depicts an institution under continual reflexive scrutiny about its nature, organisation and role in society.

## 12.3 Enactment

The term ‘enactment’ does not denote one single theoretical frame; rather it heralds a family of similar theoretical approaches. This section brings to the fore the authors’ theorisation of the ways policy makers, managers, academics and students have engaged in enacting the university, developing concepts of ‘assemblage and partial wholes’, ‘heroic leadership’, ‘strategic spaces for manoeuvre’ and ‘figures in friction’. It makes explicit the affordances of this repertoire and its value for reflexive critical analysis.

### 12.3.1 *Assemblage and Partial Wholes*

Whereas policies are often anonymous or attributed to ‘governments’ and disembodied ‘interests’ (Shore and Wright 1995), Chaps. 3, 4 and 5 take an approach to policy making that seeks to identify ethnographically who were the key players and how were they engaged in processes of contestation over the purpose of the university, its priorities and organisation. This approach draws on theories of hegemony from cultural studies (notably Hall drawing on Gramsci (Hall 1996)). Chapter 3 identified how a relatively small ‘epistemic community’ emerged around the OECD and how their view that the future lay in a global knowledge economy took hold. Chapter 4 followed links between Danish members of the international epistemic community and others in the national policy network and their lobbying for university reform in the 1990s. The analysis showed how opposed political parties, diverse unions and industrial interests coalesced into an alliance – a new historic bloc – and how they asserted, gained dominance for, and inscribed in law a roughly agreed discourse about the instrumental, economic purpose of the university and its role in a future global knowledge economy. Chapter 5 followed this discourse and actor-oriented approach and showed how, after the 2003 University Law was enacted by parliament, its assemblage of provisions and steering technologies immediately became debateable and contestable, even among the policy activists who were engaged in putting them into practice. Our study shows how different activists among the politicians, civil servants and university leaders who were ‘implementing’ the new law articulated this assemblage in different ways. The concept of articulation is an important bridge between the two meanings of ‘enactment’, as it combines the act of expressing a roughly shared, top-down vision for the university



with that of each activist putting together the elements of the steering assemblage in particular ways.

While each activist articulates the assemblage of steering technologies in their own way, this is not the same as Law and Urry's (2004) or Mol's (1999) 'ontological politics' in which each individual performs a different version of an institution in their own 'world', resulting in multiple ontologies. Rather, Ørberg and Wright (Chap. 5) draw on Strathern (1991) to suggest that, while each individual is acting from a partial perspective (in the dual sense of incomplete and not disinterested), they think they are acting on the whole university. We call this 'partial wholes' to suggest that each actor is not just enacting their own world but the whole institution, including the imagined or assumed worlds of others. This understanding allows for a notion of collectivity: the university leaders, civil servants and politicians are contesting over an idea of the whole university and its future, not individualised worlds.

### ***12.3.2 Heroic Leaders***

Chapters 6 and 7 show how a new cohort of appointed university leaders was meant to bring about extensive and sudden organisational change heralded by the 2003 University Law. Rectors in particular were highlighted as individuals and positioned as 'heroic' figures of university management. Governing boards at several universities appointed leaders with radical proposals for disrupting the internal organisation of research, teaching, administration and personnel management at the universities. These leaders then quickly implemented their reforms, top-down. The wholesale reorganisation of academic units and administration at two universities in particular provoked strong and sustained resistance from academics and students. At several universities, these strategic leaders eventually left or were removed by the governing boards and leaders who were better at working with academics and less eager to please government were appointed. The second cohort of leaders was not presented as heroic but have used some aspects of their predecessors' reforms, not least the build up of a centralised administration, and the style of university management has changed. For example, when the government made substantial cuts to university budgets in 2015 (referred to above), one university's leader immediately sent a newsletter to staff assuring them that the management team was quickly assessing the economic consequences and would soon be able to inform them of the number of redundancies required. The mail had a tone of matter-of-fact inevitability: university decisions were based predominantly on economic not academic considerations, with a cut affecting liquidity spelling dismissals. Major redundancies have become commonplace, offering the chance for leaders to restructure research teams and education programmes in the process. With just a handful of exceptions, there is now hardly any effective resistance from academic staff, even where a department loses its internationally famous professor or the pedagogy of education programmes is substantially changed in the name of efficiency. There is a clear separation between the leaders who, if now less than heroic, do form a new 'line of tendential

force' (Hall 1996) and academics who are now openly referred to as employees. Not only is the 'economic' rationale not publicly contested, but accountability is upwards and the power of leaders to make 'strategic' decisions whilst only minimally informing staff is now commonplace.

### *12.3.3 Strategic Space for Manoeuvre*

Whereas Wright and Ørberg are concerned with identifying the people and processes that create emergent discourses and bring them to dominance, and Carney explores how specific people enacted the 'heroic leader', Krejsler takes a Foucauldian approach to governmentality in which discourses constitute strategic spaces for manoeuvre with more or less rigid subject positions that academics can operate within (Dean 1999; Krejsler and Carney 2009). He identifies two competing discourses about the university and focuses on academics' 'space for manoeuvre' between them. One discourse is described as the receding Humboldtian principles of freedom of research and freedom of learning combined with the 1970s ideas of Danish workplace democracy; the other is the emerging 'knowledge economy' discourse. In each department he studied, Krejsler gives painstaking attention to how these two discourses intersect with each other, with the history of the institution and with the assemblage of steering technologies like performance measures and appraisals. Between these is academics' space for manoeuvre, which he visualises as forever changing like a kaleidoscope. Krejsler's approach provides strong theoretical parameters for understanding the great variety of conditions in departments in different universities, and the wide range of ways his interviewees described their possibilities for agency. Academics also do not have a stable subject position. In any configuration of that space, academics find agency by subjecting themselves to a discourse and exploiting the practice of freedom that that discourse allows. For example, while a governing board member felt their space for manoeuvre was very narrow, a junior academic felt that if meritocratic performance measures replaced senior (often male) academics' buddying if not bullying, her possibilities for agency had expanded. In contrast, two male interviewees exercised their agency within the knowledge economy discourse as members of a 'managed workforce' by explicitly limiting their ambition: they would meet the required performance indicators but not try to achieve breakthrough science that would have an impact on the world. For Krejsler, the enactment of the university is the co-production of the ever-changing conditions of possibility and agents' continual process of finding ways to play the space for manoeuvre.

### 12.3.4 *Figures and Worlds*

Nielsen provides a further way of theorising relations between people, policies and worlds, and contestations or frictions between different visions of the university. Her approach to enactment draws on theories of figuration (Haraway 1997; Tsing 2005, 2006). She identifies contrasting figures of the student as learner, as member of the university, and as force in society. Each figure conjures up an image of the student but is enacted as part of something larger than itself and in relation to other figures. As Strathern (1992) puts it, anthropology uses the figure to explain how the ground works – and in the process, describes both. In Chap. 10, through a historical study, Nielsen traced two contrasting figurations of the student in society: one was of a conservative educated elite with secure and professional positions in society, whereas a contrasting figuration was of a critical and politically engaged force for social change. Key to the tension between these two figurations are the contested concepts of efficiency and democracy and Nielsen shows how they have been reworked over the decades, with continual friction between them. They also act as exemplary figures that ‘collect up’ people in movements for change and at the time of her fieldwork, the critical student figure stood against austerity and neoliberal efficiency. Chap. 11 takes us into educational politics where one figure of the student is a co-owner and shaper of a ‘universitas’ and of its educational programmes. This figure draws on government policies of the 1970s, one version of the architecture and organisation of a university, and the current arguments and behaviour of some students who participate in educational and organisational activities. This is in friction with another figure of the student as consumer or investor who picks and chooses among educational offerings and treats education as a private good. This figure is found in more recent government policies, is implied in the design of recent university buildings and is referred to by students themselves. This is a difference Nielsen also depicts as between the inquisitive and acquisitive learner. Morten, as an inquisitive learner, holds to the idea of students as co-owners not just of their education but of the university itself and combines a ‘deep’ idea of learning with ‘deep’ democratic involvement in shaping his own context. Henrik considers exercising choice, especially ‘voting with your feet’ if dissatisfied with one university’s education and finding a better offer elsewhere, as an active way of relating to the university. For Henrik, as a concerned citizen, exercising choice is both a way of making institutions more efficient and being democratic in a ‘neoliberal’ version of society.<sup>5</sup> As an acquisitive learner, he is enacting not only a different version of education, but also of democracy. The two contest over a subset of terms, such as being ‘active’ students or learners in a ‘democratic’ society, and the terms are attributed a different meaning in each figuration.

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<sup>5</sup>Indeed, Henrik’s images echo much of former Minister of Education, Bertel Haarder’s Grundvigian ‘new liberalism’ referred to in Chaps. 3 and 4.

## 12.4 Political Reflexivity

The word enactment not only carries a theoretical load; it also has an implicit politics. The focus on ‘enactment’ has several implications for the story we tell, how we construct it, and our position within it. As Haraway makes clear, no social research is ‘innocent’ (Haraway 1991). As researchers we were part of the account we constructed, and our account maybe had consequences, especially when we were invited to intervene in public debates about the very processes of university reform we were researching. As researchers, we were sometimes asked to comment in public meetings or in the media<sup>6</sup> about university reform: such instances brought home to us very clearly how we were participants in the object of our own research. All the researchers for this study were insiders, some studying their own country, all employed in Danish universities. (Although Carney also had experience of studying and administration in universities in Australia and UK, and Wright came from critical studies of policy and audit culture and work as a lecturer and in educational development in the UK). For the anthropologists amongst us, ‘participant observation’ was stock in trade, but this study required a kind of ‘political reflexivity’ that involved taking a critical stance towards both our world and our positioning within it in order to analyse the knowledge of society that was generated by participant-observing. Reflexivity can be defined as

Understanding critically the way individuals, [including the researcher] as social persons, are positioned within systems of governance and how concepts, categories, boundaries, hierarchies and processes of subjectification are experienced and culturally reproduced (Shore and Wright 1999: 572).

If in anthropological studies of distant places, reflexivity has been used to work out how to minimise the researcher’s impact on the field, in our own societies, such analysis can be used to think carefully about interventions for change (Wright 2004b). This was especially important in Denmark where the 2003 University Law required researchers to ‘exchange knowledge’ with ‘surrounding society’. We were invited to join several public debates about university reform. For example, in a keynote speech at a meeting about proposed amendments to the University law that the academic union, Dansk Magisterforening,<sup>7</sup> organised in Parliament in 2006, Wright and Ørberg raised questions about the meaning of universities being ‘self-owning institutions’. If the university was now a ‘free agent’ in society, open to demands for research and teaching from stakeholders on all sides, how would the university negotiate its relations and boundaries with these economic, political and social interests? Who was the university in this case? Was it the governing board, the appointed leaders, academics in their departments, or was it individual academics who had responsibility for ‘protecting the university’s freedom and ethics’? If so, how? The governing boards and university leaders have often acted as if they are

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<sup>6</sup>For example Nielsen co-authored a column in a national newspaper.

<sup>7</sup>The Danish Association of Masters and PhDs.

agents of the Ministry, rather than guiding ‘free’ universities to move beyond government steering and be a new powerforce in society. The meaning of ‘self-ownership’ and the role of board members in protecting the university’s independence still remain unclear and universities seem not to have established institutional procedures for navigating their way through the opportunities and shoals of contrary interests that their new ‘autonomy’ presents.

We have made other small and more direct contributions to the debate. At Dansk Magisterforening’s 2006 conference we also pointed out that a draft law amendment changed the purpose of the university. Instead of promoting ‘the growth, welfare and development of society’ (Parliament 2003a) the purpose was now ‘to contribute substantially to Denmark’s competitiveness, growth and prosperity’ (Parliament 2006) – a strong sign of the dominance of the instrumental argument that the purpose of universities was to drive Denmark’s competitiveness in the knowledge economy. In the subsequent panel discussion, a rector took note of this, and presumably as a result of rectors’ lobbying, this change to the wording of the 2003 law was dropped. Another contribution was to help Dansk Magisterforening write a complaint to UNESCO (DM 2008) that the Danish law contravened international standards of academic freedom as set out in UNESCO’s 1997 ‘Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel’, of which Denmark is a signatory. UNESCO’s Recommendation emphasises that a prerequisite for academic freedom is institutional autonomy, an essential component of which is ‘collegiality’, defined as shared responsibility and participation of all concerned in decision making structures and practices (UNESCO 1997: sections V.B. and VI.B). Dansk Magisterforening’s complaint was, *inter alia*, that the 2003 University Law precluded this level of shared governance, that it was unclear who within the university was responsible for protecting academic freedom, that development contracts gave ministers too much influence over the university, staff and students were weakly represented on the governing board and the Academic Councils had a very weak role, academics had to fit their research within the university’s strategy and their time for free research was not protected, and employees in the government research institutes that had been merged with universities experienced difficulties in exercising their freedoms of research and speech if they were at odds with government policy. Although UNESCO accepted the government’s response and rejected the complaint, these are all issues that were raised by an international review of the university law, have been subsequently amended, or in the latter case, continue to resurface in highly politically charged cases.

Dansk Industri<sup>8</sup> also invited us to present our research results, as the law was not working as they expected. One of the officers explained that, to him, the 2003 law signalled the eventual success of the long historical battle for leaders to assert the ‘right to manage’ (*ledelsesretten*) and overcome workplace democracy that traces back to the expansion of the universities in the 1960s (Meeting at Dansk Industri, 14 May 2009). But the continuing uproar at universities suggested to them that all was

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<sup>8</sup>The Confederation of Danish Industry.

not well. According to our analysis, the (few) interviewees who applauded the changes were ‘star researchers’ and ‘project barons’ who had won competitive grants and external funding to establish their own research centres largely independent of the new line management system. Also, some women junior researchers felt that the move to competitive funding meant criteria for permanent positions would be more transparent. But for the majority of interviewees, the strict hierarchy of appointed leaders set up by the law, each accountable only upwards to the leader that appointed them, meant they had no accountability to the people they managed. This was exacerbated by a ‘loyalty obligation’ (*loyalitetsspligt*), which was not in the University Law but was widely enforced in the universities and meant that leaders were not allowed to divulge to employees or students what was being discussed among the leaders. We offered two anecdotes from fieldwork to convey the picture. One head of department said at a departmental meeting that he had an obligation to discuss an issue with employees, but he was subject to a ‘loyalty obligation’ which meant he could not tell them what the issue was. Another senior professor summed up academics’ views when he said he felt he was ‘being set outside the door of his own house’. Dansk Industri was grateful for these insights but the promised follow up meetings did not materialise.

When we were invited to contribute to the International Review of the 2007 mergers and the legal framework within which they were implemented, we pointed out to the evaluation panel that a system for involving employees in decision making at department level was not usually in place at the universities, even though it was part of the directions for interpreting the university law given by Parliament (2003b). This became a major finding of the International Panel’s report (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2009), leading to an amendment of the law, saying that ‘The Board ensures the codetermination and involvement of staff and students in material decisions’ (Parliament 2011: Part 3 10: 6). However, subsequent research commissioned by the Minister showed clearly that ‘employees’ involvement’ continued to be unsatisfactory (EPINION 2014).

We were clearly participating in discussing the ‘object’ that we were studying. Indeed, the research has informed the ways the authors have subsequently engaged with the university as researchers, teachers, participants in shared governance, leaders and policy practitioners. As Law and Urry (2004: 397) say, social science is performative and productive, in that methods of social investigation and ways of conceptualising, analysing and critiquing features of society can help to bring new social worlds into being. But an important difference between our situation and Law and Urry’s examples of performative research is that in the latter, social scientists were working with government and, in their words, ‘collud[ing] in the enactment of dominant realities’ (2004: 399). We were writing from a different subject position, more closely aligned with our ‘everyday’ meaning of enactment. We were subject to the the system of governance we were describing. Our positions as employees of the university also meant our reflexive politics could be stopped. For example, when the rectors and the ministry disliked the results of an analysis of how the universities were using their increased government funding (Boden and Wright 2010), Wright’s rector denounced this research in public and when the union’s journalist asked him

how he protected Wright's research freedom, he replied 'The researcher behind the report has absolutely no problem with her employment as a result of this case' (*FORSKERforum* 2010: 21). At this time there was a number of cases where individualised and isolated senior professors (all women) were in conflict with management about the principles underpinning the university – protection of research freedom, freedom to teach, and freedom to enter into public debate (Wright 2016b). In those cases, even where a union successfully defended the academics concerned, most resigned and even left the country. One head of department imposed a public silence on the threatened professor and her colleagues, and this tactic protected her successfully. Wright learnt from this, and from the comments of journalists who said they were no longer contacting her as she had been 'put in a difficult position'. After 5 years of self-imposed silence on Danish university affairs, and changes in university leadership and the ministry, it seemed possible to resume some kind of 'normal' academic life.<sup>9</sup> Law and Urry are maybe too optimistic when they argue that because social research is performative, then its interventions can, in some measure, enact the 'worlds it wants to *help* make' (2004: 2).

## 12.5 Universities and Worlds

The focus on contestations over the meanings of keywords and narratives and frictions between different figures of the active student, performing academic and heroic manager reveal not just the emerging contours of the university but also wider political and historical transformations of the world in which it is located. This can be seen by following recurrent references in the chapters to the changing meanings and conjunctions of the keywords 'efficiency' and 'democracy'. Between the 1960s and the present, these keywords have been repeatedly reworked and brought into new relationships. As Nielsen shows, 'efficiency' became the most important word in debates in the 1960s between some students, academics and the Ministry that concerned breaking the power of the professors and creating a new pedagogy. This was linked to debates about universities being in the vanguard of workplace democracy and students having a role in shaping democracy in society. A further shift is seen in the Ministry of Finance's Aim and Frame reforms of the 1990s that were intended to make not just universities but the whole public sector more efficient in responding to the Minister's priorities and delivering required services (Chap. 4). This explicitly meant weakening the power of professionals in

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<sup>9</sup>In those 5 years, Wright turned her attention to leading international projects with EU funding: an FP7 Marie Curie IRSES project, 'University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation (URGE)' from 2010 to 2013 involved knowledge exchange between Aarhus, Bristol and Auckland universities; and an FP7 Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN) 'Universities in the Knowledge Economy' (UNIKE) in 2013 to 2016 involved a programme of training for 12 PhDs and 3 Post Docs with research projects, placements, workshops and summer schools comparing universities and their ecology in Europe and Asia-Pacific Rim.

running public services and doing so by appealing to citizens to exercise their consumer power in a reframed notion of democracy. The 2003 university reform abolished the allegedly inefficient system of shared governance between elected leaders, academics, support staff and students that was often called ‘university democracy’ or that Krejsler refers to as the democratic and Humboldtian university discourse (Chap. 8). Instead, the university was to be made more ‘efficient’ by establishing a tightly organised hierarchy of executive leaders with the ‘right to manage’ (Chap. 7). Chapter 11 shows how study reforms have heralded yet a further meaning of efficiency. Education was made modular, with a new notion of curricular time and more surface learning focused on assessments. Now students were to complete their studies by using their time more efficiently – and they were financially penalised for not finishing on time and moving quickly into the labour market.

These examples show how the everyday language and practices of students and academics speak not only to major formations in their institutions, but in the wider society. Following these debates and contestations creates a critical awareness of how the conceptualisation of the university is part of a bigger debate about the transformation of organising concepts and governing discourses of society (Wright and Ørberg 2017). More than this, the contests over the meaning of keywords, ‘figures in friction’ or academics’ exercising agency within ‘room for manoeuvre’ are not only framed by, but are part of the production of wider historical and political contexts. As Nielsen (2015) puts it, figures produce worlds.

This analytical approach we call epistemological and political reflexivity (Wright and Reinhold 2011: 102; Wright 2004b). It is reflexive because it involves making both a person’s world and their positioning within it objects of ‘active regard’ (Bacchi 2011: 34). This reflexive epistemic politics involves actors making an analysis of how they are positioned within an institution, especially by seeing how current contests over different meanings of keywords, narratives and discourses speak to wider shifts in governing discourses, so as to work out what they want their words and actions to mean and thereby help shape the institution and its political context. This is an approach which we invite readers to take not only when reading this book but in the analysis of how to understand and act upon their own worlds.

This approach is similar to the ‘little revolt’ that Nielsen describes in Chap. 10 – seeing politics in everyday actions of learning and being in the university. Both ‘little politics’ and ‘epistemic politics’ beg the question of how to ‘collect up’ political action. Some of the activist students in Nielsen’s study drew on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) for their ideas. Instead of envisaging political organisation as a tree with all branches and growth points coming from a common trunk with a common ideology, Deleuze and Guattari imagined political activism as a cloud forever bringing together different constituencies for political action, then dissolving and morphing into something new (Tampio 2009). Deleuze and Guattari’s churning cloud acts without any overarching organising agent and with different aims and tactics that will never magically cohere. Nielsen’s study shows some students, notably in the student union, taking a ‘tree-trunk approach’ and trying to establish a common position which student leaders negotiate with government. This was very successful during the detailed negotiations over the 2003 law text, but less so after the law was



passed. For other students who adopted an avowedly Deleuzian approach, activism takes the form of sporadic actions, one-off ‘happenings’ and flash tactics focused on local and specific struggles that attract a different gathering of people and interests over time.

Where, as Reich (1991) argues, the driving force of capitalism is no longer industrial labour but intellectual and symbolic labour, the university is positioned as an important presence in Deleuze and Guattari’s politics. Indeed, Deleuze’s image of a political environment that nurtures disagreement and diversity chimes with some ideas of the university itself. In these terms, academics and students can be seen as a churning cloud, without an overall plan or vanguard leadership, moving and morphing through various assemblages to find the looseness in the steering system and locations which offer opportunities to experiment with ways to tip the university in alternative directions. But in the cases Nielsen studied, the students’ actions tended to be reactive to particular steering mechanisms or management decisions, rather than moving in a new direction, however vaguely shared. While Deleuze and Guattari argue strongly against trying to coordinate action around a coherent counter-hegemonic strategy, they do point out that the greatest challenge is for the cloud to envision different landscapes, characters, and behaviour – to imagine another world (Tampio 2009: 385).

Arguably, the epistemic community that formed around particular global institutions and linked into national interest networks also acted as a cloud. Although this community became a dominant force in the 1990s and quickly brought about great discursive shifts, they did not have an organisation, a name, a website or a blog through which to establish a collective social presence. They came together through a roughly shared discourse, made up of contestable keywords, which they could all endorse from their different perspectives on the university and the world they were trying to create – or their ‘partial wholes’. They were organised like a tumbling cloud around OECD, EU and World Bank meetings, seminars, data gathering and searches for ‘best practices’, report writing and conferences. Yet their roughly shared neoliberal ideology, their connections to global agencies and their positions in national institutions enabled these activists to motivate the formation of alliances with other, diverse interests. As this Danish study shows, they were able to promote narratives that redefine ‘the problem’ of universities, contest the meanings of key words and make dominant a discourse that conveyed their roughly shared image of the future university in an inexorably approaching future world. They were also able to achieve ‘moments’ when there was a sufficiently strong alliance or historic bloc to enact this discourse into law and to follow through and institute versions of this discourse in the universities.

The hegemony of that discourse about the need to reform universities to drive a global knowledge economy, which emerged in the 1990s and became dominant in the turn of the century, has been a ‘stake in the ground’ until very recently. For a moment after the 2008 financial crash, it seemed the wider framing of neo-liberalism might just begin to be challenged by an emergent epistemic community of economists and policy makers. Fragments of this emerging group had long been making various arguments that neoliberal economics was flawed; that the knowledge

economy was not as inevitable or as all-pervasive as predicted; that people were not just individuals making rational choices and seeking competitive advantage; and that refocusing institutions like universities on instrumental and economic outputs impoverished society. The arguments advanced by nobel prize winners like Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz in the World Economic Forum for a short while seemed to begin to disrupt the hegemony of the global knowledge economy.

The EU's Lisbon Strategy had been a major impetus for the reform of universities to meet, or make, that new world. Kok's (European Commission 2004) mid-term evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy had already indicated that it would not achieve the aim of making Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' and the 2008 financial crash meant it missed its targets (Krcsek 2013; European Union 2014). In the revised Europe 2020 strategy, the ambition for the European Research Area (ERA) was no longer framed predominantly in terms of a global knowledge economy; the societal challenges that Europe was facing also came under the spotlight. The communiqué of the 2015 meeting of Education Ministers at Yerevan also stated that the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) faced serious economic and social challenges, demographic changes, new migration patterns, and conflicts within and between countries, marginalization, extremism and radicalization. Its renewed vision and priorities were to

support higher education institutions in enhancing their efforts to promote intercultural understanding, critical thinking, political and religious tolerance, gender equality, and democratic and civic values, in order to strengthen European and global citizenship and lay the foundations for inclusive societies (EHEA 2015).

While such statements point to a need to rethink the purpose of universities so as to foster equality of opportunities and to imagine alternative possible futures, there are few signs of a new global epistemic community forming that could produce landmark documents like those of the OECD, the EU and the World Bank that established a world order around the global knowledge economy.

Nor are there figures yet emerging that can 'collect up' the various fragmented groups of academics and students that are seeking a less instrumental university and are exercising a critical and reflexive politics aimed at creating a more 'liveable' institution in a more equitable, collaborative and sustainable world. These are often local movements, only occasionally connecting with each other on a larger scale. For example, individual academics have made great efforts to decolonialise the curriculum (e.g. Kennedy 2017), whilst student activism, evident in Australia, UK, Denmark, UK and elsewhere, has argued for widening the range of theories covered in economics courses (not just neo-classical economics) and changing agriculture and land management courses to focus on sustainability.<sup>10</sup> Students and academics

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<sup>10</sup>Students at Sydney University have inspired an international network, 'Rethinking Economics' that is arguing for curriculum reform <http://www.rethinkeconomics.org/about/our-story/>. At Manchester University, economics students have established the Post-Crash Economics Society with similar aims [http://www.post-crasheconomics.com/about\\_us/](http://www.post-crasheconomics.com/about_us/). Agriculture students in Denmark have established the Green Student Movement and are arguing for their curriculum to focus on climate-friendly agriculture (Andersen et al. 2019).

have also campaigned for green campuses, to widen accessibility to universities and remove symbols of colonial and oppressive regimes.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile there are numerous initiatives to set up ‘alternative’ universities both in terms of their education and their organisation, whether ‘free’ universities, cooperatives in Spain and UK, or controlled by indigenous people and based on their definitions of the education needed for their own self-advancement (Thompsett 2019; Wright and Greenwood 2019; Wright et al. 2011; Neary and Winn 2017). These movements are beginning to make contact with each other, on a European or global scale. It remains to be seen whether they will try to form a historic bloc with other social forces, for example, by linking up with the public intellectuals mentioned above who have been trying to dislodge the hegemony of the epistemic community’s neoliberalism, new public management and the global knowledge economy, or with the ephemeral grass roots activism of ‘occupy’ and others seeking social equality and participatory democracy. So far they have not coalesced into an emerging cloud with a roughly shared ideology that would attempt to contest the weakened but still hegemonic discourse of the global knowledge economy.

Similarly, it is unknown whether this book’s ways of conceptualising policy as a space of contestation, organisations as fluid processes of continuous organising, or enactment as a duality – both top down and everyday – that somehow get articulated in processes of transformation will have any resonance among policy makers, let alone reframe ways of thinking among academics, students and the wider public. Through our focus on enactments, we have avoided a totalising picture of the reform process. Instead, by seeing universities as politically contested spaces, continually re-enacted by a range of agents, it is clear that no single image of the university will triumph. Rather – and this is the message of the book – all actors can seek out their specific reflexive space, their room for exercising reflexive epistemic politics and help create the university of the future.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca, Mexico. <http://unitierraoax.org/english/> Accessed 17 March 2019.

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# Correction to: Capitalism, Political Participation and the Student as a Revolutionary Figure



Gritt Bykærholm Nielsen 

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The original version of the book was inadvertently published without updating the correct figure caption for Figure 10.3. The caption and the list of figures on page XVI has now been corrected and approved by the author.

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The updated version of this chapter can be found at  
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