

Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 35

European Science and Higher Education Policies: Visions and Critical Assessments

By Susan Wright

Working Papers on University Reform
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**European Science and Higher Education
Policies: Visions and Critical Assessments**

SUSAN WRIGHT

**Aarhus University
Danish School of Education
Campus Emdrup
Tuborgvej 164, 2400 København NV
Denmark**

Title: European Science and Higher Education Policies: Visions and Critical Assessments

Author: Susan WRIGHT

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Underlying assumptions

An official history (European Commission 2006) refers to European cooperation in education and training as an example of 'Europe in the making'. The Europe that was being made was a world region that needed to catch up with the United States and would act as a model for other world regions in a global competition for dominance in a 'knowledge economy'. These assumptions are now called into question in a fast changing world order. The 'Europe of Knowledge' that was being created depended on universities for two of its main components: research that could be translated into innovative products and new ways of organising production; and education to produce highly skilled labour. Both were seen to require a programme of 'modernising' the governance and management of universities. The European Union, however, had quite different remits for research and for education and although its actions on these two components were rarely coordinated, the Lisbon Strategy aligned their underlying assumptions. The conception of 'Europe' in this 'modernising' agenda was based on an assumption that economic competition could be successfully combined with social cohesion and that this combination gave Europe a distinctive advantage as a world region. The difficulty of combining them was particularly experienced by universities but over time the economic agenda came to dominate in European policy on both research and higher education, whilst the social agenda has been downplayed. In the last five years, in the context of a series of European and global crises, calls have been made for a re-balancing and renewal of the role of universities in shaping European society and democracy in a changing world order.

This paper first reviews how research and higher education have quite different statuses within the EU, affording different ways of working on these topics. The assumptions underlying the Lisbon Strategy are then analysed, as the Strategy set in train crucially important reforms to research, higher education and university organisation that have tightly steered universities towards a narrow economic focus. The paper ends (in a section which can be read as a stand-alone summary) by questioning whether these reforms limit universities' ability to respond to current calls to widen their mandate again and to help tackle new challenges facing Europe in a changing global context.

EU Research Remit and Activities

The EU's research policy is as old as the European project itself, as both the treaties for coal and steel (ECSC) and nuclear energy (Euratom) included provision for research (André 2007: 9) and a chapter in the Single European Act (1987) gave research a legal status. Although all focused on priority areas for economic development, by the early 1980s there was a profusion of research activities. These were brought together under a single 'framework' with a 'programme' and budget covering several years. Fig. 1 shows the increase in Framework Programme (FP) budgets, from FP1 (1984-1990) at ECU 3.2 million, to H2020 (2014-20) at €77 billion. Horizon Europe (2021-27) has a projected budget of €97.6 billion and an extra €2.4 billion for the Euratom nuclear research programme (European Commission 2015, Kelly 2018).

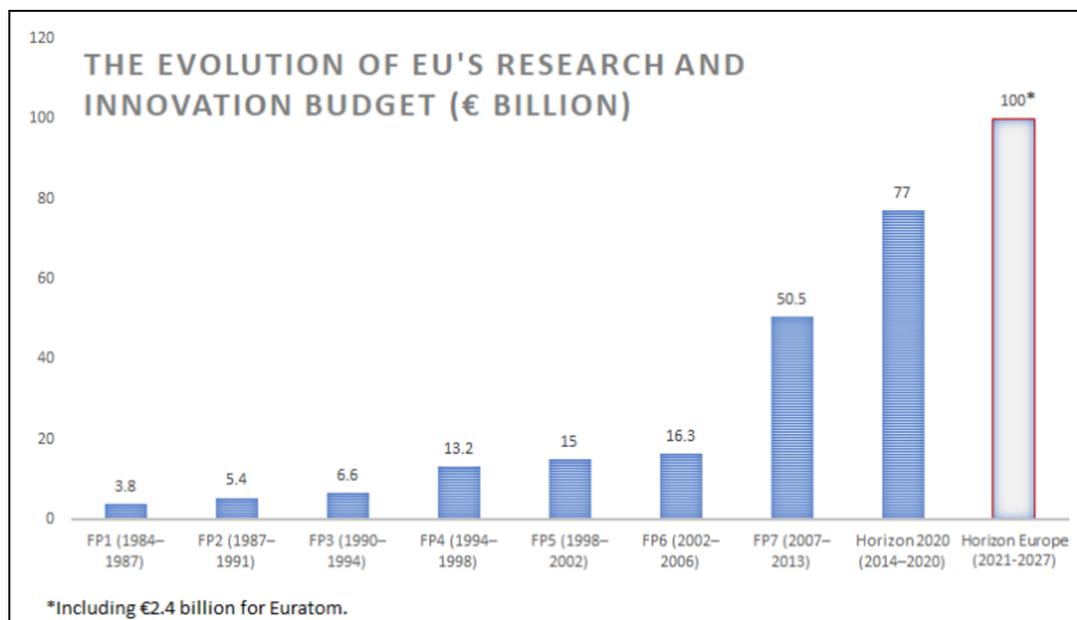


Figure 1: Source: <https://sciencebusiness.net/framework-programmes/news/european-commission-proposes-eu100b-research-programme>

Even though the Framework Programmes have established 'Europe' as a research funding entity and beneficiary, according to a Danish ministry official, 'only 10-15 per cent of total European research spending is in the hands of the Commission and about 80 per cent of the total budget remains with the member states'. There are also European actions that are outside H2020 for example Joint Programming Initiatives (JPIs), where Member States agree on strategic research to address a major societal challenge, ERANETS (European Research Area Networks) involving Member States in selected areas of transnational research and innovation, European Research Infrastructure Consortia

(ERIC), European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) involving Research Ministers in strategic policy-making on research infrastructures and the European Space Agency where member states contribute according to their Gross Domestic Product. Europe's role in research is now unquestionable, with ministers agreeing a budget and programme highlighting collaboration, infrastructure and innovation, and geared to economic development.

The EU has not had such a strong remit to work on education. The 1950s Schuman/Monnet plan was to integrate one economic sector after another and make former enemies so interdependent that war would be unthinkable (European Commission 2006: 52). But education was not such a sector: there was an 'unwritten but decidedly official taboo' on discussions of education as it lay at the 'heartland...of national sovereignty' (ibid.: 54). Rather, the Council of Europe, with its aims to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe, was the hub for cooperation on education and culture until the 1970s. However the Treaty of Rome (1957) included vocational training and a ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Communities in 1985 widened the definition of vocational training to include higher education, viz: 'any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession ... even if the training includes an element of general education' (ibid: 102). Between 1985 and 1990, the European Council adopted three programmes (with objectives, target groups and precise budgets): Comett (university-enterprise cooperation), Tempus (University cooperation with new democracies in central and eastern Europe), and Erasmus (inter-university cooperation programmes, finance for student mobility, and recognition of qualifications and periods of study completed in another state, including the European system for the transfer of academic credits - ECTS) (European Commission: 2006: 109-12, 118-9). 'Education' sometimes referred to developing peace through mutual cultural understanding and European values, identity and democracy, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and sometimes training and skills needed for economic development.

Because the EU lacked a clear remit to develop actions on higher education, it has developed two ways of working through 'soft power'. First, it has worked through the aegis of other organisations, notably the Bologna Process and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Second, as neither the EU nor these

collaborating organisations had any authority or ‘hard powers’ to issue directives on the reform of higher education, they used the Open Method of Coordination to entice countries and institutions to identify shared objectives, engage in peer learning, distil best practice, issue policy guidelines and checklists of actions, and monitor progress toward objectives through measurements (indicators, benchmarks) and league tables that named achievers and shamed dullards. Higher education and research have therefore had very different legal status in the EU, which means they have operated in separate spheres and rarely been brought into conjunction.

Lisbon Strategy

One moment when research and higher education were brought together was in the Lisbon Strategy agreed by the European Council in 2000. This strategy made science and higher education the central drivers of a ‘Europe of Knowledge’. The aim was to create ‘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 and respect for the environment’ by 2010’ (Conclusion of the Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000, point 5). There had been widespread debates about knowledge economies and societies in the 1980s and 1990s, but the OECD was the first to define a ‘global knowledge economy’ and make it measurable. The EU adopted the OECD’s argument that this future ‘global knowledge economy’ was approaching fast and inexorably and rich countries must prepare for it, if they were to sustain their dominance in the world economy. Rich countries needed to deploy the latest knowledge and technologies quickly and effectively to develop ever-new products and methods of organisation. That would enable rich countries to act as the ‘heads’ in a world economy, and offload monotonous, dangerous and polluting work to the ‘hands’ of the global south. (Although the World Bank soon inverted this logic, arguing that the global knowledge economy provided the global south with an opportunity to leapfrog developmental stages and compete with the first world (Wright and Rabo 2010)).

The Lisbon Strategy identified several weaknesses, compared with global competitors, USA and Japan that impeded Europe’s success in a global knowledge economy. To

overcome these, the strategy set up a European Research Area (ERA) and a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Although research and education were still in two separate 'Areas', they became infused with the same assumptions about gearing up for a future global knowledge economy.

For the European Research Area, the first problem was that Europe spent much less on research and development than the USA, yet had 14 times more 'research active' universities (2000 universities) so 'there were many more actors seeking a slice of the cake' (EurActiv 2007, quoted in Dale 2016: 37). To increase and diversify research funding, European Council in March 2002 urged Member States to spend at least 3 per cent of GDP on research and development (1% public funding and 2% from the private sector) (CEC 2002). Second, the 2005 Salzburg Declaration (Bologna Process 2005) referred to a 'systematic gap' (also called the 'knowledge paradox') as European universities produced high levels of knowledge but this was not translated into commercial innovation. This required a more instrumental approach to knowledge and a strengthening of the 'knowledge triangle' between research, education and innovation (alternatively referred to as the 'triple helix' between government, industry and university). As Dale says (2014: 19-20), the ERA's 'fundamental purpose and *raison d'être* ... appears to be enabling and ensuring the means of production and distribution of commercially-valorisable knowledge, in multiple competitive contexts'. A third problem was that European researchers were predominantly (36%) employed in universities, compared to around 14.7 per cent in the U.S. and 25.5 per cent in Japan (Dale 2014:35). The EC deemed that by 2010 Europe would need 700,000 additional PhD-holding researchers but of the 'right kind' who would produce knowledge that contributed directly to commercial innovation, would work in industry, and be mobile between sectors and across Europe. Competition and mobility were the keywords and the European Commissioner for science and research, Janez Potočnik, advanced the idea of Europe's 5th Freedom, the free circulation of researchers, knowledge and technology (Potočnik 2007).

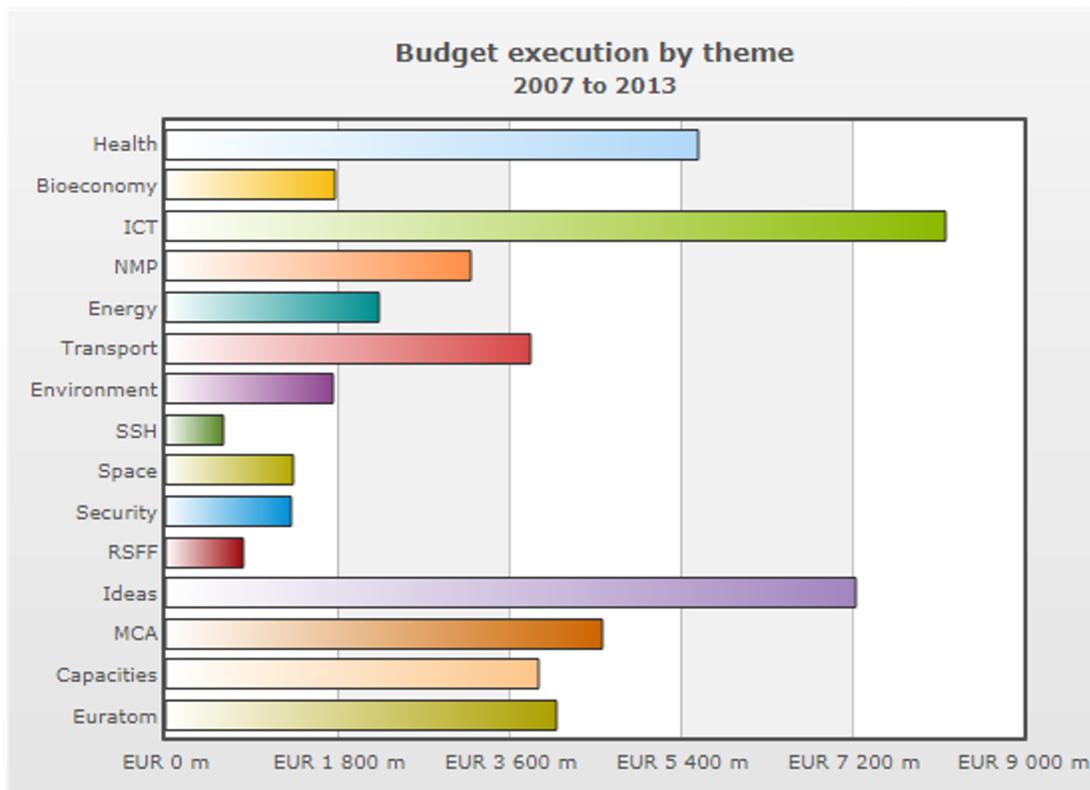


Figure 2: FP7 Budget by theme http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/index_en.cfm?pg=budget

The dominant idea of ‘knowledge’ in the Lisbon Strategy was very instrumental, focused on policy-makers’ priority areas and used to drive innovation and economic competitiveness. This concept of knowledge was reflected in the vastly expanded 7th Framework programme. As indicated in Fig. 2, the majority of FP7 funding was devoted to policy makers’ priority areas for the knowledge economy (health, bioeconomy, ICT, energy, transport, environment, space, security). The EU’s ‘added value’ continued to be transnational collaboration in projects and networks on these priority areas. Applicants included researchers in industry as well as in universities and special funds were allocated to Joint Technology Initiatives for research and innovation involving Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). To create the mobile knowledge workers envisaged by the Lisbon Strategy, Marie Skłodowska Curie actions supported research projects for the education and career development of doctoral fellows, post docs and mid-career researchers. MSC fellows were required to move to another European country, and often their projects involved interdisciplinarity and working in both public and private sectors (Walakira and Wright 2018).

European Research Council

FP7 also included a very different concept of knowledge, embedded in a new institution, the European Research Council (ERC). This concept and initiative resulted, not from the usual policy-making channels, but from a mobilisation of academics across Europe. A number of academics had become excited by the opportunity offered by the Lisbon Strategy, which made science a central driver of a Europe of Knowledge. However, they argued, the Framework Programmes were inefficient and mainly dedicated to industrial development, with scientists constrained to a passive role as project evaluators (Celis and Gago 2014: 456). Instead, an instrument to support basic research across Europe that was generated by researchers themselves and selected exclusively on grounds of the highest scientific quality was needed to achieve the ERA goals.

Scientists, and especially the heads of well-funded research centres who had experience of interacting with governments, began acting collectively and across disciplinary and national boundaries to achieve a better science policy for Europe (ibid.: 447). In May 2000, the Federation of European Biochemical Societies with 40,000 members from 36 constituent societies throughout Europe met with three similar organisations. They set up a European Life Sciences Forum to take a more active role in strategic and science-policy issues and to establish a European Research Council (ERC). In October 2002, they held a conference about the need for the ERC under the auspices of the Danish Presidency of the EU that was attended by science policymakers, administrators and ministries, research councils and large foundations. The conference report was sent to the EU ministers for science and was supported by Philippe Busquin, the then European Commissioner for Research. As a result, the former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, was appointed to head a high profile group exploring ideas about the autonomy, funding, accountability and governance of an ERC.

Scientists meanwhile worked to coordinate the scientific as well as political support, so as to make the ERC an “object of desire” (ibid.: 450). In particular, they wanted to engage the whole scientific community in the ERC project. At a meeting in Dublin in 2003, representatives of the life sciences, physics, mathematics, social sciences and humanities set out agreed principles for the ERC and established the Initiative for Science in Europe (ISE). The ISE was launched at a meeting of 35 European scientific

organizations in Paris in 2004, which appointed Mariano Gago (particle physicist and former Portuguese Minister of Science and Technology) as ISE chair. The momentum spread to include national research councils, European scientific organisations¹, and included all disciplines. The ISE developed a blueprint for the ERC and through a well-planned series of meetings at Brussels and UNESCO, and lobbying letters to all EU Ministers of Research, they gained its acceptance in Europe among politicians, including Commissioner Busquin and Mariano Gago (who had been reappointed as Portuguese Minister of Science and Technology), and ultimately EC officials.

The European Council formally approved the budget for the ERC in 2006 in the context of FP7 and the ERC was officially launched in 2007. At first the ERC had a small budget (€7.5 billion for 2007-13), which was increased to €13.1 billion, or 17% of the overall Horizon 2020 budget (2014-2020). This budget is used to award highly competitive grants to early stage and senior researchers to conduct fundamental research on subjects of their choice, covering all fields of knowledge, including the social sciences and humanities. The establishment of the ERC importantly gave cognisance to the principles that decisions should be science-driven not policy-driven and based only on excellence as determined by peer review within the academic community (ibid.: 451).

The establishment of the ERC is a case study in how to mobilise a European community of scientists and how to engage successfully in shaping science policy issues. Unfortunately, after that success, the cross-disciplinary ‘European scientific community movement’ (ibid.: 453) dissipated. This has meant that the further aim for the ERC to fund bottom-up collaborative research in basic science has not been achieved (ibid.: 452). However, the biomedical community has continued to organise. For example, it has brought scientists and all other stakeholders together in policy committees on e.g.

¹ European Science Foundation, (ESF), Euroscience, the European Research Advisory Board (EURAB), the Academia Europaea, the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, the EUROHORCs, the European University Association (EUA), the All European Academies (ALLEA), the European governmental scientific research organisations (EIROforum).

oncology, diabetes, and cardiology. The European biomedical community also formed a Scientific Panel for Health to develop a strategic action plan for health research in Horizon 2020 and to advise the EC on science input into the Societal Challenge for Health, Demographic Change and Wellbeing. However, other disciplines have been less successful in cracking open the mysterious ways academics are meant to contribute to FP priority setting so as to infuse science into science policy making. Lessons learnt from the mobilisation that led to the ERC and these new ways of asserting academic autonomy need to be recreated and built upon, along with ways to engage with stakeholders and the public on the immense importance of science and its policy choices.

European Higher Education Area

When the Lisbon Strategy pronounced the creation of a European Higher Education Area, this meant education would no longer be a peripheral concern of the EU. The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 had expanded the competences of the EU to include education, but it was still a ‘complementary competence’² (like culture or health) where the principle of subsidiarity prevailed. The Lisbon Strategy codified the Open Method of Coordination (described above) as the way the EU would work with Member States towards common objectives.

One of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy was to make European education and training systems ‘a world quality reference by 2010’ so that Europe would be the most favoured destination of students, scholars and researchers from other world regions. The ‘Europe of Knowledge’ was intended to become a dynamic and credible alternative to the United States, which was seen as the major competitor in what can be called the global trade in international students. To this end, the EU established the Erasmus Mundus programme as the European Fulbright, to attract masters’ students from throughout the world onto flagship programmes by consortia of European universities (Henckel and Wright 2008). However Europe’s higher education was also seen to

² In contrast to exclusive competences of the Community like agriculture or competition policy

require ‘modernisation’ to make it a benchmark and a beacon for higher education governance and practice for other world regions to copy, not least through ‘Tuning’ projects in Africa and Latin America, Russia and China (European Commission n.d.) and through Europe-Asia ASEM meetings (Dang 2013). There is an assumption that the global knowledge economy will take the form of competition between world regions and Europe wants to set the pace and provide the dominant model.

A second, linked objective was to ensure that higher education created the human capital needed for Europe’s competitiveness in the global knowledge economy whilst also modernising the European social model. The EC had already started in 1999 to work with the Bologna Process in which Ministers of Education had signed a non-binding intergovernmental agreement, the Bologna Declaration, to place their different national arrangements in a comparable system of degrees with 2 (later 3) cycles; to have a system of transferable credits; and to cooperate on quality assurance. The European Commission worked through the Bologna Process to achieve the Lisbon objectives of reforming higher education and increasing students’ mobility and employability. The EC helped prepare for the original Bologna meeting (Henckel and Wright 2008: 2) and funded preparatory work for the biennial ministerial conferences that pushed the process along. The Bologna Process also drew on previous work by the EU. The Erasmus programme was a very successful way of encouraging mobility of students and staff, and its credit transfer system (ECTS) was used as a credit system in domestic courses. The Bologna Process led to coordination of systems of quality assurance and was translated into national policy in ways that often enabled governments to more tightly control higher education and focus it instrumentally on the assumed needs of the labour market.

Gornitzka et al. (2007: 160) point out that the Lisbon Agenda confronted education with a triangle of ‘employment, growth and social cohesion’. But the debate about how to combine the instrumental demands on education for employment with the social enhancement of cohesion and solidarity seem not to have been addressed head-on in EU reports on how to develop the EHEA (CEC 2003, CEC 2005). The Lisbon Strategy referred to ‘modernising the European social model’ predominantly as aspects of employment:

- Adapt education and training systems to the knowledge society
- Provide more and better jobs
- Modernise social protection
- Promote social inclusion

Although EC documents insisted that education and training ‘are more than instruments for employability’ and are primarily concerned with Europeans’ personal development and active citizenship, intercultural understanding and social skills (European Commission 2006: 211), these statements are reminders of a remainder. In what I have called a ‘double shuffle’ strategy, they work rhetorically as subordinate partners to the dominant discourse of employability, and become weaker and less visible as the dance progresses through documents and over time (Wright and Ørberg 2011). Similarly, the Bologna Process Prague communique (2001) emphasised the social dimension of EHEA and education as a public good, and the Berlin communique (2003) states in the prologue:

Ministers reaffirm the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level. In that context, Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. They emphasise that in international academic cooperation and exchanges, academic values should prevail (Bologna Process 2003).

But then the communique does not mention the social dimension again, let alone how it would be integrated with the progress on quality assurance, degree structure, mobility, system of credits, institutional reforms etc. in the rest of the document. The mid-way review of progress towards the Lisbon Agenda, the Kok report (European Commission 2004) ended the dance by focusing education decisively on the needs of the labour market in order to lift growth and increase employment as, far from creating a ‘world-beating European economy’, gaps with USA and Asia had widened (European Commission 2004: 1, 8, 10; European Commission 2006: 224).

The EC's documents also seem not to reflect academic debates about the failed promise of 'learning to earn' in the knowledge economy (Brown et al. 2004, 2011). Initially Reich (1991) had argued that a country's success in the global knowledge economy would require 50% of an age cohort acquiring the degree-level cognitive skills needed to be 'symbolic analysts' (although he also said states needed education and social policies to give the other 50% hope of improvement and avert disenchantment and anger). By the late 1990s, this promise of well-paid knowledge work looked doubtful. Stewart (1997) argued that western companies did not need a mass of knowledge workers as by then most 'knowledge work' could be standardised and outsourced to parts of the world with cheaper (and sometimes better) graduates. Companies only needed a small number of knowledge workers with exceptional talent, especially if they could systematise and gain proprietorial control of their knowledge. Brown et al. (2011) went further, calling the Western image of infinitely-expanding highly paid knowledge work a 'false promise'. Their study of leading transnational companies revealed that the Euro-American idea of a new affluence based on knowledge work was a chimera. University enrolment in the world had doubled in a decade, employment opportunities for knowledge workers had not expanded as predicted, and the market for knowledge jobs was now a 'global auction'. China had more university students than the U.S., and produced more engineers and scientists than the West. Western companies were outsourcing standardised technical, managerial and professional knowledge work to high quality, low-cost Indian and Chinese graduates; whilst Asian companies were also competing higher up the value chain (Wright and Ørberg 2017).

University Reform

Universities were declared to hold the key to the Europe of Knowledge because 'they sit at the crossroads of research, education and innovation' (CEC 2003: §3.1). However, the EC argued they needed to undergo radical changes to 'achieve excellence', 'become a world reference' and meet the Lisbon Strategy's target of Europe 'becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' by 2010 (Ibid.: §1). A joint communique by the Commissioners for research and for education and culture declared:

After remaining a comparatively isolated universe for a very long period, both in relation to society and to the rest of the world, with funding guaranteed and a status protected by respect for their autonomy, European universities have gone through the second half of the 20th century without really calling into question the role or the nature of what they should be contributing to society (CEC 2003: §6)

This trope is found widely in policy documents at this time. In its publication, 'Redefining Tertiary Education' (OECD 1998) which set the argument for the need to reform universities to meet the needs of the forthcoming knowledge economy, the OECD argued that what was needed was a 'market' university whose 'Primary 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). In contrast, the 'Humboldtian', 'classic liberal' or 'traditional' university was described, even ridiculed, in negative language:

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 (OECD 1998:45)

The EC put it even more bluntly: 'The EU has supported the conversion process of sectors such as the steel industry or agriculture; it now faces the imperative to modernise its 'knowledge industry' and in particular its universities' (CEC 2005: 10). The EC defined three areas for action: 1) increasing and diversifying universities' income; 2) consolidating excellence, including through efficient structures of governance; and 3) effective decision-making processes and broadening their international competitiveness and role in regional integration (CEC 2003: §5). The Bologna Process made similar calls for reform, but OECD took the lead by establishing the Directorate for Education Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) and using the Open Method of Coordination to review university management systems, define best

practice, set out guidelines and checklists for reform and publish performance statistics. Most European countries responded to these calls for urgent reform, and although each implemented the OECD's and EU's guidance slightly differently, Denmark, which worked especially closely with the OECD, is a good example.

The reform of the Danish University Law in 2003 required universities to respond to the demands of 'surrounding society' and gave universities the status of legal persons, so they could organise their relations with stakeholders (industry, consultancies and the state) through contracts. Universities became part of a general reform to organise the public sector through chains of contracts. The minister responsible for higher education now sets the political aims and budget framework for the sector, which are contracted to the relevant ministry to perform. The ministry then enters into a performance contract with the head of each university board. Following slightly varying models, the board subcontracts these to the rector, who then allocates the performance targets between faculties in contracts with each dean, who subcontracts these again to head of departments. The formerly elected leaders and boards at each level were replaced by appointed leaders who are responsible to the leader above them, not to their employees. This system has changed the meaning of university autonomy: it no longer means a space for academics to provide a public service by using their expertise to develop research and education as freely and as secure as possible from political and economic influence. Now the university is a 'service provider' for government and autonomy means the leaders have freedom of action to deliver on the performance demands. The top-down and political steering has been intensified by the way government manages university funding, so that universities do not have sufficient reserves for independent action and have to be responsive to detailed changes in the ways funding for research and education is allocated (Wright and Ørberg 2015).

The avowed aim was to make universities more responsive to changing political priorities, which is certainly the case. The system was designed to increase government's trust in universities, so that they could increase public funding for the production of research and students, which could be harvested by knowledge industries. The appointed leadership was also intended to ensure industry had interlocutors with whom they could contract for services and hold to account. There were strong arguments from industry at the time, which are still continuing, that industry does not

need such a tightly bounded and hierarchically run ‘Fordist’ system, but rather a more open, networked system where academics could be flexible and use their own autonomy to engage in horizontal collaborations.

Reforms such as those in Denmark imagine universities as economic actors, whose performance should be focused more narrowly on the needs of the knowledge economy and who should be made accountable by delivery on targets and responses to financial incentives. Other academic activities such as researching without externally funded contracts, e.g. on issues concerning civil society, acting as critique and conscience of society, or contributing to public debate do not ‘count’ in localised, and sometimes individualised, performance audits (Wright 2014). The aim of a politically accountable and strongly managed system has been achieved, but the purpose of the university has been narrowed and the wider social mandate, flexibility and academic autonomy of the university eroded (Wright 2016, 2017, Wright and Shore 2017).

Critical Futures for the Europe of Knowledge³

The ‘Europe of Knowledge’ was designed for a global context that is now rapidly shifting, with doubts about the global knowledge economy, the rise of China and India and the decline of USA as university powers. The university landscape in Europe has also been disrupted, not least by Brexit (see Courtois 2018) and struggles over the Central European University in Hungary, whilst pressing challenges face Europe from unprecedented global population movements, global warming and populist, nationalist and illiberal politics. In the midst of radically transforming European and global contexts, new scientific concepts and methods are needed for understanding and developing universities’ social, political and strategic roles. This situation calls for the type of organized effort among the academic community that was highlighted above in the development of the ERC. Not least universities’ ability to act as a ‘critical’ institution needs rethinking in two senses. First, universities’ unique responsibility to act as ‘critic and conscience of society’ depends on fostering academics’ and graduates’

³ This section draws on the project proposal, co-written with Jakob Williams Ørberg, DPU, Aarhus University.

capacity to ‘sustain open and critical thought’ and develop autonomous knowledge that relentlessly scrutinizes society and explores alternative ways of thinking and organizing (Deem and Eggins 2017: 3). Second, universities are critical for European development, in terms of social and political integration, and in providing an institutional framework through which Europe acts in the world.

To this end, the Centre for Higher Education Futures (CHEF) at Aarhus University is leading a consortium project, involving 17 European research centres on higher education, with the objectives of reshaping the agenda on European university research and generating ideas for engaging with national and European policy makers on future higher education and research strategies. (Learning from the academic mobilisation that led to the ERC, above). The central research question is:

What are the future roles of universities in creating social and regional integration in Europe, in a shifting global context?

This question is addressed through three themes and sub-questions:

I. Roles of universities in social and political integration (social mobility, refugees, democracy)

When the EU’s Lisbon strategy made universities central to the ‘Europe of Knowledge’, the volume of higher education and research activities expanded whilst universities were ‘modernised’ into more coherent or corporatised organisations more instrumentally responsive to industry’s needs and more easily accountable to political aims (Wright and Ørberg 2015; Slaughter and Leslie 1999, Bok 2003; cf. Clark 1998). This responsiveness, especially where output-oriented steering mechanisms are tied to political aims and market performance, has limited universities’ broader societal engagement and critical public purpose (Shore and Wright 2015, 2017; Wright 2017; Naidoo 2015, Marginson 2018). In 2017, when the refugee crisis and votes for populist and xenophobic parties send alarm bells ringing, universities were called upon to develop a renewed social contract devoted to creating a citizenry of critical thinkers and fostering integrated and democratic societies through inclusiveness and social mobility (UNESCO 2015:17; Wende 2017). These social purposes have to varying degrees been removed from universities’ core strategic aims and research suggests that re-establishing universities’ wider public orientations may not be easy with the current

leadership and management structure (Levin & Greenwood 2016). **How do university mandates and organisation need to change in order to reconceptualise their public purpose and deepen their societal engagement?**

2 Roles of universities in European integration (global knowledge economy, ERA, EHEA).

The EU's Lisbon strategy (working through ERA, EHEA and the Bologna Process) made universities central to the creation of a 'Europe of Knowledge' capable of competing with other world regions in a supposedly fast-approaching global knowledge economy. But this economy is increasingly questioned and the globalisation it fostered is seen as divisive rather than bringing benefits to everyone. European countries are now considering 'differential' integration where they no longer adopt the same measures but continually negotiate over the overall project and each nation's involvement in it. **If Europe shifts from being a coherent actor in a global knowledge economy into an only partially integrating landscape, how does this shape universities' strategies and outlooks?**

3 European universities in a shifting global context (China's rise)

The third theme explores how these internal challenges to the role of universities in European integration are taking place in a shifting global context. Notably, neo-protectionists in the USA and China's increasing global ambitions embed universities in a complicated dynamic of global science diplomacy rather than an open market place for knowledge. Flows of internationally mobile students are already reflecting these geopolitical shifts (UNESCO 2017). Europe looks to China for talent to meet its shortage of highly skilled labour and a growing range of cooperation agreements between European and Chinese universities have been integrated into the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD). **How does Europe position itself in a world characterised by competing global strategies, including China's New Silk Road, One Belt One Road and other South-South linkages, rather than an ever-expanding global market modelled on European and North American systems?**

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