

Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 11:

Polishing the Family Silver.

Discussions at Roskilde University Center
in Advance of the 2003 University Law

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**Polishing the Family Silver.
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in Advance of the 2003 University Law**

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Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Anticipating the Consultation over the Proposed Law</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>RUC's Special Qualities</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>A Disappearing and Threatened Species</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>The Structural Changes and the Family Silver</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>22</i>

Introduction

In 2003, the Danish Parliament passed a law to reform the status, governance and management of Danish universities. In researching the debates preceding and surrounding the passage of that law, academic voices seemed to be almost absent. How, then, was the forthcoming law discussed within the universities themselves? What preparations did universities make in the period of uncertainty, when major changes were promised by politicians but the provisions of the new law were still being formulated? Did universities try to forestall the changes in any ways, for example by themselves introducing the kinds of changes they anticipated the law would bring, or by looking for ways to secure what they valued in their university's current forms of organisation?

The universities chosen for this part of the study¹ included Roskilde University Center (RUC) on which this paper is based. I found there had been a major debate at RUC, with consultations and working groups, discussions and reports. This study is based on publicly available documents, notably minutes of the Senate (*konsistorium*), and working groups, from the beginning of 2002, through the period when the law was passed, to the start of its implementation in late 2004 (a corpus of 95 documents). Although minutes and official reports have the disadvantage of being second hand accounts of what took place in meetings and discussions, the RUC documents have the strength of being very detailed. It is not possible to identify whether certain voices have been over-emphasised and others muted, but the documents do have the advantage of being written at the time when speakers were looking forward into an unknown future, about which they were hazarding guesses and trying to strategise. For this working paper I decided to rely entirely on these written sources, made in the years around the passage of the law. I have chosen not to supplement the voices in the documents with the interviews we also made as part of this project. The interviewees

¹ This paper is written as part of the project 'New Management, New Identities? Danish University Reform in an International Perspective (2004-8) funded by the Danish Research Council.

were looking back three to four years, and were speaking with the benefit of knowing how the story unfolded. What follows is therefore an analysis of the ways those academics who participated in the official (i.e. documented) university discussions anticipated, tried to prepare for, and deal with the 2003 University Law.

Anticipating the Consultation over the Proposed Law

In the autumn of 2002, RUC received a letter from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, asking them to comment on a draft of a new university reform. The idea behind the new reform was to position Danish universities at the forefront of the increasingly competitive development of a globalized knowledge society. In order to prepare the universities for such a challenge, the newly elected Danish Liberal-Conservative Coalition Government saw the need to change a 30-year-old tradition whereby university leaders were democratically elected by academics, support staff and students. Instead, the Ministry suggested that the university's managers (heads of departments, deans and rectors) should be replaced by appointed leaders. The governing body, the Senate consisting mainly of internally elected colleagues, should be replaced with a Governing Board (*bestyrelse*) with a majority of external members.

Faced with these new tendencies, the Rector at RUC reacted in the way he always had done, and submitted the draft of the new law to all the departments, the study boards, the students' council and the association of administrative personnel at RUC. Clearly from almost all the responses to this consultation, the university reform was not well received at RUC. But before looking further into this consultation over the draft law it will be fruitful to travel further back in time. The new government which took up office in November 2001, introduced its programme early 2002 and within a few months RUC was already preparing for changes.²

² Minutes of Senate meeting 13th February 2002.

The two major issues that were officially being discussed at RUC, were the management of the university at all levels, and the university's relation to industry. This was not a coincidence, since these two issues had already been clearly expressed in the government's programme. Following the traditional procedure at RUC, the two issues were first discussed in the Senate, then in the Budget and Executive Committee (Budget- og Forretnings-udvalget, BFU). They were then discussed in a two-day seminar in order to make a presentation to the Minister for Science, Technology and Innovation during his two-hour visit to RUC in the spring of 2002. After the Minister's visit the issues were discussed again at a Budget & Executive Committee meeting, written into a paper and submitted to all the departments. In view of the departments' responses to this consultation, the issues were discussed again at a Budget & Executive Committee meeting and reformulated into another paper in order to be approved by the Senate. This paper, entitled 'Models for stronger management/contact with the surrounding world', was finally sent to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation in June 2002 as the fully-considered views of RUC on the proposed law reform.³

During this process it is interesting to see from a variety of letters, presentations and minutes how at RUC they tried to respond to and in some ways anticipate the scattered announcements from the government. They tried to work out how they could comply with the Ministry's wish to have Boards with external members. They explored what it would mean to be an autonomous institution (in Danish 'selvejende institution', literally a 'self-owning institution, see Ørberg 2006). They questioned how the government's statement that universities should have a closer relation with industry should be understood and manifested. As a way to anticipate the potential changes that were surely to come, the Rector is quoted as suggesting the possibility of appointing a so-called University Council ('universitetsråd') consisting of 3 external

³ The official letter "Modeller for styrket ledelse/kontakt med omverdenen" is dated 26th June 2002, signed by the Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen. (accessed at www.ruc.dk 28 May 2009).

business people - 'a county mayor, a high school principal or the like'.⁴ The task of the proposed University Council, the Rector suggested at the same meeting, would be to advise the Senate, who still would have the authority to take decisions.

These ideas were quite optimistic about the possibility of maintaining the existing organisation at RUC, seen in the light of the thorough changes that were to come. Already the official letter the Rector had sent to the Ministry as a result of the internal consultations at RUC in June 2002 anticipated some of the Minister's ideas and had taken on a negotiating tone. For example, the Rector had adjusted his idea about a University Council, given the views coming from the Ministry, so that it now would consist of a minimum of eight external members, who, beside their advisory function, would also be in charge of appointing the two external members of the Senate.

In the same letter to the Ministry, the Rector argued that the suggestions presented in the paper were not made because of any need for change at RUC. According to him, RUC had no need to change their forms of organisation or management. The only change the Rector wished to see was related to the head of education programmes. This was the only post that could benefit from being strengthened.

Instead of giving the Ministry a wish list of managerial changes, the Rector praised the flat structure at RUC, a structure ensuring a strong and close network in which there is a short distance from idea to decision. Having no deans, the Rector argued, meant that the Senate took many academic decisions, whereas an externally dominated governing board would lack the academic skills necessary for such decision-making. In the same tone he defended the system of democratically elected leaders for bestowing positive legitimacy and praised the tradition at RUC for participation and co-operation.

⁴ '... en amtsborgmester, en gymnasierektor eller lignende ...', Budget & Executive Committee meeting 27th February 2002.

During the autumn of 2002, RUC received more information about the law to come and in the minutes from a meeting of the Senate the members expressed worries about the future of democracy at the university.⁵ Slowly, as they became aware of the direction the new law was taking, the Rector introduced the idea of trying to secure 'RUC's qualities' in the new structure.⁶ This was an idea that he had already mentioned shortly after the government took office, saying that they at RUC should be better at informing the surrounding society about the specialties and strengths of RUC.⁷

In November 2002, as mentioned above, RUC received the first draft of the new law. Even though the Rector was prepared for change, it seems as if he was still surprised by the thoroughness of the changes and the rigidity of the draft law. The Minister, in consulting over this first draft of the new law, asked for suggestions about how individual universities would incorporate the government's wish to strengthen the management at the universities and improve relations with industry and society as a whole. In RUC's response to the Ministry's consultation, the Rector reminded the Minister of his statement 'that Danish universities were very different, and therefore did not all need the same system of governance'.⁸ The Minister's request for information from each university made RUC's Senate feel foolish because they had already presented their ideas about such changes in the June 2002 letter, 'Models for a stronger management/contact to the surrounding world', but these suggestions had clearly not been taken up by the Minister.⁹ So from the perspective of RUC, all they got from this extensive process of discussing and sending their ideas to the government was that they had used a lot of time and energy on solutions that the government treated as irrelevant and superfluous and did not use.

⁵ Minutes of Senate meeting 4th September 2002.

⁶ Minutes of Budget & Executive Committee meeting 23rd October 2002.

⁷ Minutes of senate meeting 13th February 2002.

⁸ '... at danske universiteter var meget forskellige, og at de derfor ikke behøvede samme styreform ...', RUC's response to consultation, 2nd December 2002.

⁹ RUC's response to consultation, signed by Henrik Toft Jensen, 2nd December 2002.

RUC's Special Qualities

During the next two years, from late 2002 to 2004, RUC conducted a long and comprehensive exercise on how to secure 'RUC's special qualities' (RUC's særlige kvaliteter) in relation to the demands and new structure of the university law. As mentioned above, the majority view in the consultations at RUC regretted the tendencies in the new law. Most departments were concerned with the elimination of democracy and the centralisation of power in appointed leaders. In the official response to the Ministry's request for consultation, the Rector argued that the proposed changes in the draft law meant that 'the employees and the students at the university are transformed from being partners and 'owners' to being clients, with the risk that their enthusiasm and engagement in the daily life of the university will be curtailed'.¹⁰

In the spring of 2003 the Senate set up two working groups on the special qualities at RUC. At a Senate seminar¹¹ and at the following Senate meeting¹² they discussed the themes to be treated in each working group, and decided that one group should look at the relation between the head of department and the head of education programmes and the other group should look at the characteristics of the 'RUC's workplace culture' ('RUC's virksomhedskultur'). Their work was carried out throughout 2003, continuing even after the passage of the bill (8th May 2003). The results were presented on 30th October 2003 at a seminar for the Senate, then re-written after the discussions and put into the papers for the following Senate meeting.¹³ Finally the papers and discussions formed the basis for the work with the new University Strategy

¹⁰ '... universitetets ansatte og studerende flyttes fra at være partnere og 'ejere' til at være klienter med fare for, at entusiasmen og engagementet i universitetets daglige liv begrænses.' Response to consultation from RUC 2nd December 2002.

¹¹ Senate seminar held 12th March 2003.

¹² Senate meeting held 9th April 2003.

¹³ Senate meeting held 17th December 2003.

plan 2004-2010 – a Strategy plan that, according to the Rector, should ‘mark the values of RUC and the development of these values’.¹⁴

Already in the earlier paper following the Senate seminar in March 2003, the Rector had set the scene by pointing to the necessity of describing ‘RUC’s workplace culture (...) [to] put into words our special character could be an important task, in order to prevent the family silver from disappearing completely’.¹⁵ Being a reform university from the 1970s it might not have been without irony that the Rector chose the rather conservative-bourgeois metaphor of family silver – a metaphor I will come back to later in the paper. In line with these ideas, one working group started to define and designate what they in their paper called ‘the way of communicating at RUC’, ‘the identity of RUC’ and ‘RUC’s workplace culture’.¹⁶

The other working group repeatedly mentioned two fundamental principles of RUC’s culture, which were both pedagogical and organisational, namely *participation* and *ownership* (‘deltagelse og ejerskab’). As an essential pedagogical principle they referred to ‘problem oriented, participant-directed project work’ and ‘problem oriented, interdisciplinary project work’.¹⁷ It was argued that these types of project work demand and develop participation and ownership by the people involved because they rest upon the students’ own choice of topic and their independent management of the development of their project. In another paper it was stressed that this particular working method and ‘explorative forms of learning’ (‘udforskende

¹⁴ ‘... markere RUC’s værdier og udviklingen af værdierne ...’, in a follow-up paper from the Senate seminar held 12th March 2003, written by the Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen, 31st March 2003.

¹⁵ ‘... RUC’s virksomhedskultur (...) [at] sætte ord på vor egenart kunne være en vigtig opgave, hvis ikke arvesølvet helt skal forsvinde.’ (ibid.).

¹⁶ ‘den RUC’ske omgangstone’, ‘den RUC’ske identitet’ and ‘RUC’s virksomhedskultur’. Working group 1 made two papers/oplæg: one presented at the October seminar (dated 28th October 2003) and one re-written after the seminar (11th December 2003). In this paper I have chosen to refer to and quote both papers without making a distinction.

¹⁷ ‘problemorienteret, deltagerstyret projektarbejde’ and ‘problemorienterede, tværfaglige projektarbejde’, paper from working group 2, 11. December 2003.

læringsformer’) create ‘the particular commitment that characterises employees and students at RUC’.¹⁸

The working group also stressed that inter-disciplinarity was an essential part of the workplace culture at RUC. Inter-disciplinarity was integrated into the organisation of the university by having three different two-year basic studies programmes¹⁹ and several combination programmes each lasting 1½ years. From a Senate seminar in October a person is quoted as saying: ‘What is special [about RUC], is that we have a structure that makes it possible to range across [and combine,] the main disciplinary areas. That we have common rules for all the education programmes at RUC’.²⁰

Furthermore this working group found that it was ‘the house’ that framed the organisational structure and the pedagogical principle of interdisciplinary project work. RUC consisted of several buildings called ‘houses’ and each Department and Basic Studies programme was attached to one of these houses. Apart from being the frame for the intellectual environment, the idea with the house was to create an atmosphere where academics, support staff and students cooperated in making the house function – i.e. taking care of the kitchen, arranging meetings, parties etc. The house made the academics, administrative personnel and students engage actively in the organisation of both professional and practical matters. This happened, it was argued, in democratic bodies where participation and ownership were central factors. Democracy was thus understood as an active way of securing and creating participation and ownership – also in the physical structures at RUC. The close co-operation between different professional groups, as practiced in the house structure, was also emphasised by the Pro-Rector ‘(...) there is a very small power differential

¹⁸ ‘... det særlige engagement, som præger RUC’s ansatte og studerende.’. Letter written shortly after the presentations of the two working groups, by the Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen, dated 10th December 2003 (appendix 9/03/131).

¹⁹ The three basic studies programmes are Natural Science Basic Studies (natbas), Social Science Basic Studies (sambas) and Humanities Basic Studies (humbas). These three programmes identify the university’s three main academic areas.

²⁰ ‘Det, der er særligt [for RUC], er, at vi har en struktur, der gør det muligt at bevæge sig på tværs af hovedområderne. At vi har fællesregler for RUC’s uddannelser.’, notes from Senate seminar 30th October 2003.

both in the style of management and in the style of teaching. This is not found at the other universities, and RUC is a particular exponent of this'.²¹ In line with this statement, one of the working groups wrote that 'at the central level there is a degree of openness, debate and participation which is unique to RUC (...) at RUC we have a laudable culture of consultation'.²² Both students and leaders, have 'stood as guarantors for an extensive democratic culture of debate at the centre' and 'we have found that the students' sense of ownership is one of the main pillars upholding the way we communicate at RUC'.²³ So, according to the working group, the students' participation and notion of ownership was not only related to their studies, but also to the house and to the central organisation of RUC.

At this point it will also be interesting to look at the other working group. They were troubled by the increased power given to the head of department in the draft of the new university law. As a result of that, they were concerned with the reduced power given to the head of educational programmes. They found that the intention of having power and decisions concentrated in one person was very much seen as being in opposition to the ideas of ownership and participation described above.²⁴ Therefore the working group suggested different initiatives that would give more power to the head of educational programmes and prevent the possible 'inbalance' that the concentration of decisions and power would give to the head of department. All such initiatives aimed for RUC to be able to pursue 'business as usual' as they themselves wrote in their paper.

The involvement and participation of many people in decisions at different levels (in the management of the house, the department, the studies and the university) were

²¹ '(...) der er en meget lille magtdistance både i ledelsesform og undervisningsform. Det har de andre universiteter ikke, og det er RUC i særlig grad eksponent for', notes from Senate seminar, 30th October 2003.

²² '... der på det centrale niveau er en grad af åbenhed, debat og deltagelse, som er særegen for RUC (...) vi har på RUC en prisværdig høringskultur.'. Paper from working group 2, 28 October 2003.

²³ '... stået garant for en udbredt demokratisk debatkultur på centeret' and 'De studerendes ejerskab er, har vi fundet, en af grundstenene i den RUC'ske omgangstone'. (ibid.).

²⁴ As mentioned above, RUC's Rector had, however, suggested the fusion of the Head of department and study leader positions in his letter to the Ministry of June 2002.

seen as part of the identity of RUC. These were seen as creating a feeling of ownership that was defined as a vital part of the RUC identity. It was argued by the Rector that the engagement so characteristic of RUC was fostered by the particular working method and way of organising themselves that ensured ‘that community autonomy that is so important for the enthusiasm’.²⁵ Following this idea of ‘autonomy’, management is seen more as ‘organisation rather than regulation’²⁶ – as ways to organise oneself not through limitation, but through participation and ownership. To sum up, the working group argued: ‘It is our thesis that certain pedagogical and organisational principles create RUC’s unique identity because they institutionalise a sense of ownership in the people who associate with them in every day life’.²⁷

A Disappearing and Threatened Species

I mentioned above that I would come back to the metaphorical idea of the inherited family silver - ‘arvesølvet’. RUC was established in 1972, in the wake of the 1968 student revolt, as a ‘reform’ university whose pedagogy was purposefully very different from traditional universities, and especially from Copenhagen University. Its emphasis on collaborative relations between academics and students in ‘houses’ and its central focus on student-led project work had the express aim of breaking with the hierarchical relations and more traditional teaching methods of older universities. Even though RUC’s organisation and pedagogical practices had changed through time (Hansen 2006), it sustained an image of itself as breaking with older academic traditions. It was felt that it was these special qualities that motivated students, many of whom lived in Copenhagen, to travel out to study at RUC. It was with a twist of irony that the Rector, when suggesting that they should identify RUC’s special

²⁵ ‘... den autonomi i fællesskabet, som er så vigtig for entusiasmen.’ Follow-up paper written shortly after the Senate seminar in March 2003 by the Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen, dated 31st March 2003.

²⁶ ‘... organiserer snarere end som regulering’ (ibid.).

²⁷ ‘Det er vores tese, at disse pædagogiske og organisatoriske principper skaber den særlige RUCske identitet, fordi de institutionaliserer en følelse af ejerskab i dem, der omgås dem i dagligdagen.’ Paper written by working group 2, 28th October 2003.

qualities in order to preserve them, referred to them as ‘family silver’.²⁸ In similar metaphorical terms, he talked about the necessity to polish the family silver, to preserve it, to bring it forward on the shelf – ‘it should be brought forward and be polished up’.²⁹ As expressed later by a head of department, ‘I think the time has come to bring the family silver to the front of the shelf and polish it’.³⁰

The work of the two working groups can be seen as actively polishing the family silver, by their defining and trying to secure the identity of RUC. While they set out to identify modes of organising the university and its education with a view to projecting them for the future, there were also references to a golden age when the identity of RUC was homogeneous and uncontested. The silver had been inherited from that age. The metaphor of the family silver had a dual reference to the characteristics of present ‘business as usual’ and to the inheritance from a golden past. The first suggested a dynamic present that needed to be made explicit in order to sustain it against the perceived threats from the 2003 University Law; the second suggested that the heritage had become dusty and had slipped to the back of the shelf, so that they had to recapture it and polish it up. The discussions moved ambiguously between identifying the dynamism of current practices and looking for RUC’s special values in a golden past.

The idea of developing the family silver into the future was often mentioned as a challenge, but in the written material there was little discussion, for example by the two working groups, of the detailed practices through which they could do this. The working group looking into the relation between the head of department and the head of education programmes, came up with suggestions that were more or less copies of what had been done in the past and that they themselves characterised as ‘business as usual’. And it seems from the written documents that the other working group

²⁸ A follow-up paper from the Senate seminar held 12th March 2003, written by Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen, 31st March 2003.

²⁹ ‘Det skal frem og pudses af’ (ibid.).

³⁰ ‘Jeg tror tiden er inde til at få arve sølvet frem på hylden og få det pudset’, Paper written to the Senate seminar 6th May 2004, by head of department, Tove Kruse.

believed that they secured the family silver principally by naming it rather than discussing it and questioning why it actually was dusty (though, as discussed below, a Head of Department later addressed this issue under the heading of ‘relevance’). From the documents it seemed that there was a presumed understanding and shared rhetoric about this family silver – a very homogeneous idea about how to describe the identity of RUC – or at least a shared vocabulary connected to the university in the golden age.

It is therefore interesting that the working group in their first draft actually questioned the family silver and said ‘but this workplace culture is in danger’ (‘men denne virksomhedskultur er i fare’). They argued that this had partly come about because it was sometimes hard to find enthusiastic representatives among students and supervisors and partly because of lack of resources like group rooms and offices. They also criticised a new building at RUC that was only made for the academic and administrative personnel and not for students – this, they wrote, was undermining the traditional idea of the culture at RUC based on ‘houses’. One might expect that these challenging issues would have been thoroughly discussed, but it seems that they were not; at least not in any written documents to which we have had access. In this light it is also interesting that when setting up the two working groups the suggestion to make a third group that should work with ideas of how to ‘strengthen the informal organisation of RUC’ (‘styrke RUC’s uformelle organiseringer’) was not acted upon, even though this was on the list of potential themes to be tackled by a working group.³¹ Maybe a group with such a mission would have considered the problems and challenges of the actual organisation of daily life at RUC differently.

Another and different attempt to discuss the family silver was presented in a paper written for a Senate seminar held in 2004.³² Here the author, a Head of Department, was trying to re-actualise and develop the question of relevance in educational

³¹ A follow-up paper from the Senate seminar held 12th March 2003, written by Rector, Henrik Toft Jensen, 31st March 2003.

³² A paper with the title ‘Værdikamp’ written by Head of department, Tove Kruse, held at a Senate seminar, 6th May 2004.

programmes as well as in research. Relevance was treated as ‘maybe the most important part of the family silver at RUC’ as it was stated in the paper.³³ The argument in the paper was that the question of relevance in both research and educational programmes had been too much related to a political project that had collapsed. But unfortunately at that time ‘nobody wound up the estate’.³⁴ This means that a discussion about relevance had been associated with ‘the childhood of RUC and a left-wing utopia’³⁵ that had been more or less dead for the last 20 years. Therefore the Head of Department called for an active discussion and development of the family silver, asking, for example, how to understand relevance at RUC, especially as an alternative to the government's narrow and utilitarian way of defining relevance.³⁶ This is a different angle on the family silver in that the academic content of both research and educational programmes is questioned in relation to a notion of relevance. Instead of a discussion of the structuring and managing of the organisation or yet more words trying to describe the family silver, the Head of Department wanted a contemporary and critical discussion on how relevance is related to academic work. As far as I can see from the minutes, this discussion was limited to the Senate seminar and a wider discussion of actual practice did not take off. Instead, in the second draft of the Strategy Plan 2004-2010,³⁷ made after all the consultations at the departments and after this paper had been presented at the Senate seminar, the word ‘relevance’ is used several times.

The Structural Changes and the Family Silver

Having described the process of finding ‘RUC’s unique qualities’ (‘RUC's særlige kvaliteter’) both in terms of identifying and naming RUC’s heritage, and in terms of current ‘business as usual’, I will now look into the structural changes that came with

³³ ‘... [d]en måske vigtigste del af arve sølvet på RUC.’ (ibid.).

³⁴ ‘... gjorde ingen det samlede bo op’ (ibid.).

³⁵ ‘RUC’s barndom og en venstreorienteret utopi’ (ibid.).

³⁶ It is also an interesting paper in that it gives an explicit understanding of RUC as being both in great opposition to the government and its economically utilitarian tendencies, and as an answer to some of these tendencies through their tradition of dealing with relevant issues.

³⁷ Strategy Plan 2004-2010, dated 16th June 2004.

the new university law, and take a closer look at the reactions at RUC. In other words, how were all the ideas about the family silver turned into actions – or not? What was the relation between the actual changes and the ideas of the family silver?

Let us look at some cases:

Inter-disciplinarity: As mentioned above, after the first two years' 'basic studies', students could choose 'superstructure' courses from two different disciplines for the last 3 years of study for a master's degree. This was where RUC's special approach to inter-disciplinarity resided. This definition of inter-disciplinarity was secured in what they called the 'common rules' – 'fællesregler', i.e. that all educational programmes should follow the same structure. But in the Strategy Plan of 16th June 2004, the old paragraph from the two former drafts,³⁸ saying that they should 'ensure that there continue to be common rules for all the educational programmes at the university that will secure the necessary common foundation for having flexible choices', was taken out.³⁹ Why were they not guaranteeing this inter-disciplinarity in the educational programmes, when they, at exactly the same time, were praising inter-disciplinarity as a vital part of the family silver? Though the common rules were maintained after all, the changes might indicate that this particular quality at RUC might not have been as uncontested as expressed in the official documents made by and in the slipstream of the working groups; though one cannot know from the documents if the discussions were internal at RUC or subject to external demands from e.g. the Ministry.

Student participation: Similarly, while the working groups described the tradition for participation and ownership by all groups at all levels at the university (as shown above), a sentence in the Strategy plan about students' participation in the development of the university as a whole was deleted. In this way the paragraph

³⁸ Drafts of Strategy Plan 10th December 2003 and 17th February 2004.

³⁹ '... sikre, at der fortsat er fælles uddannelsesregler for hele universitetet, der sikrer nødvendigt fællesgrundlag for fleksibelt valg af uddannelseskombinationer og specialiseringer.', Drafts of Strategy Plan of 10th December 2003 and 17th February 2004.

‘strengthen the students’ personal competencies through group work, participation in the planning of the educational programmes and the development of the university’,⁴⁰ was changed to ‘develop and strengthen the students’ personal competencies through problem-oriented project work in groups and through participation in the planning of the educational programmes’.⁴¹ In other words, the importance of the students’ involvement in the development of the university was left out in the ‘Education’ section of the document. Instead, in the same new draft to the Strategy Plan, they added a sentence saying that the university ‘should continue developing its tradition for democracy and participation in decision-making processes for all its groups’, in the ‘mission vision’ section of the document.⁴² Whilst they were stressing participatory decision making and a feeling of ownership as fundamental to the family silver at RUC, why did the wording of the University Strategy limit students’ ownership and participation to only dealing with the study programmes, and not the overall development of the university?

The House: An often-mentioned frame for the culture at RUC was the house. The house was presented as an essential brick in the democratic, non-hierarchical structure where academics, support staff and students should co-operate and mingle with each other, as described above. Whilst the documents studied here praised the kind of participation and ownership, as practiced in the house, at the same time, a decision was made that a newly built house was to be reserved only for the administrative and academic personnel. No rooms were made for or given to students in this building. This decision to build a house without space for students was taken even though it was seen as part of the family silver and there had been protests by both the students and the official newspaper at RUC.⁴³

⁴⁰ ‘... styrke de studerendes personlige kompetencer gennem gruppearbejde, deltagelse i studiernes tilrettelæggelse og universitetets udvikling.’, Draft to Strategy plan of 17th February 2004.

⁴¹ ‘... udvikle og styrke de studerendes personlige kompetencer gennem det problemorienterede projektarbejde i grupper og gennem deltagelse i studiernes tilrettelæggelse.’, Draft to Strategy plan of 16th June 2004.

⁴² ‘... skal videreudvikle sin tradition for demokrati og medindflydelse for alle grupper.’ (ibid.).

⁴³ RUC-NYT nr. 5, 24th November – 15th December 2003.

Open meetings: Another contestation relating to the ‘family silver’, as defined by the two working groups, was the intention to preserve the open democratic culture and how to achieve this in practice at RUC. The debate arose when RUC’s Senate encountered the new situation of nominating members for the Governing Board. One of the fears associated with the 2003 University Law was that the new Governing Boards would change RUC’s tradition of open discussion. There was therefore a debate about whether the Senate’s discussion about nominees to the Governing Board should preserve a legacy of openness to be passed on to the new Governing Board, or whether the discussion of the individual characteristics of potential nominees should be treated as akin to personnel matters, where the Senate had a tradition of closing its doors. The Senate decided to treat it as a personnel issue and to close the doors. This resulted in protests and demonstrations by students on the grounds that the Senate had curbed its own traditions of openness without any pressure to do so (Senate meeting 8th September 2004)., As the working group was praising openness, debate and participation as part of the family silver, a narrow interpretation of the procedures for a closed meeting were argued for at RUC – procedures that might be followed by the new Governing Board itself. Actually the first Chairman of the Governing Board argued in the RUC newspaper that closed doors could be a reality in order to ‘hold our cards a bit closer to the chest in certain cases in relation to the outside’.⁴⁴ There were therefore different motivations for closing the doors, and different ideas of openness. The institution was shifting away from favouring an internal perspective (that openness secures the family silver at RUC, and thereby the particular involvement so unique at RUC, as argued above). Instead an external perspective was beginning to be favoured (that openness would diminish the chances of survival of the institution). The new Chair of the Governing Board later summarised this theme as:

I see it as, where the old Senate was completely dominated by members who were chosen to represent particular interests, we in the

⁴⁴ ‘... holde kortene lidt tættere ind til kroppen udadtil i visse sager’, RUC-NYT nr 12, 17th May – 5th June 2005.

Board are placed there to take care of the overall interests of the institution. The majority of the Board do not represent any particular support base within the university, and that also means, that we, to a greater extent, can focus on the common life and development of the University. To me this is a huge advantage in relation to the former way of governing the university.⁴⁵

This change of focus as a result of the new management structure and thereby the different strategy towards openness might be very interesting to study further.

These four cases all indicate how challenging it must have been to try and secure the family silver. They also point to the difficulties of holding a critical discussion about how the idea of the family silver could be developed in practice – at least this discussion is lacking in the written documents we had access to. Instead it seems that what they succeeded in doing very convincingly at RUC, was to secure the family silver by re-producing and naming it. In doing so, it seems that they neglected some of the actual and serious problems at RUC – problems following from, or maybe at the very foundation of, the family silver. One of these problems, as indicated by one working group, was how to make people interested in the democratic structures of the university – in other words, problems of making people participate and develop a feeling of ownership in relation to the organisation at RUC. The working group mentioned that few students engaged in the different boards at the university and that there was very low voter participation for the governing organs. One could see the students' engagement in the discussions of the newly built house and in the case of making decisions with open doors, mentioned above, as alternative ways of engagement that could be studied further. In the daily life at RUC it seemed as if

⁴⁵ 'Jeg ser det meget sådan, at hvor det gamle Konsistorium var helt domineret af medlemmer, der var valgt til at repræsentere særskilte interesser, så er vi i bestyrelsen sat ind for at varetage den samlede institutions interesser. Bestyrelsens flertal repræsenterer ikke noget specifikt bagland indenfor universitetet, og det betyder også, at vi mere kan fokusere på Universitetets samlede liv og udvikling. Det ser jeg som en meget stor fordel i forhold til den tidligere måde at styre universitetet på' (ibid.).

participation and democracy in some ways could be sought in new and different forms of participation and engagement.

Often the particular structure at RUC, with a two-year basic studies programme and a three-year superstructure was emphasized as part of ‘the identity of RUC’ (‘den RUC'ske identitet’). But at the same time as they wanted to distinguish themselves from other universities in their particular structure and organisation, when the new Governing Board came to write the new Statutes (vedtægter), they moved the paragraphs that had secured this educational structure in the old Statutes to an additional paper that did not have the same status as the Statutes themselves. Seen alone this action might not have caused any fear of changes since the educational structure was still written down. But seen in a larger perspective, it was part of a discussion about the level of detail to be included in the new Statutes – a discussion that was also heavily inspired by wishes from the Ministry. The University’s Director wrote that they had been the tradition at RUC to include ‘a relatively detailed description of the organisation and the decision making powers in the Statutes, in such a way that the Statutes have been a very suitable instrument for information about the management of the university, but also (...) on where a given power is located’.⁴⁶ The Director went further ‘As it is the administration’s experience that the relatively detailed wording of the Statutes has been an advantage, the starting point is that, likewise, the [new] Statutes should be made with the same level of detail’.⁴⁷ When the new Governing Board started work, all the external members, including the Chairman, wanted the Statutes to be much less detailed, and here the argument of experience – the professional argument made by the Director, was not discussed - at least not in the minutes. Instead it was argued that simplified Statutes would increase flexibility. Simplification of the Statutes should not be seen as a wish to ‘change the distribution

⁴⁶ ‘... en relativ detaljeret beskrivelse af organisationen og kompetencen i statutten, således at statutten har været et velegnet instrument i information om universitetets styrelse, men også (...) hvor en given kompetence er placeret’.

⁴⁷ ‘Da det er administrationens erfaring, at den relative detaljerede udformning af statutten har været en fordel, er udgangspunktet ligeledes, at vedtægterne udformes på samme detaljeringniveau’, In the document ‘Hoveddisposition og problemkatalog for universitetets vedtægt’, written by the Director at RUC, Erik Ebbe, 9th December 2003.

of power' ('ændre på magtfordelingen') but only to delete the elements that referred directly to 'the completely unique structure and organisation of RUC' ('RUC's helt specifikke struktur og organisation'). All this, it was said, should of course be written into a supplementary paper. Simplified Statutes 'could form a common dynamic frame for the development of RUC' while 'The high degree of detail (...) could be understood as limiting RUC's development'.⁴⁸ Again we can see different motivations for particular actions – one arguing internally for the benefit within the organisation, the other arguing for the benefit gained in external relations (see also the issue of openness mentioned above). As the internal members were a minority in the Governing Board, the Statutes were changed into a less detailed document, as the external members desired. One of the internal members asked for a re-formulation of the minutes from this meeting, so that it became clear that only a *majority* of the Board members wanted the Statutes less detailed and not the Board as a whole. The internal members also wanted to start making the Statutes from the draft Strategy Plan of 17th September since 'departments, employees and the Senate had invested a great amount of work in the preparation of the draft Statutes'.⁴⁹ Here we can see that the internal members were arguing for the family silver and the feeling of ownership and participation that was created in the process of actively making the Statutes.

Up to this particular meeting of the Governing Board, the minutes had indicated whether it was an internal or an external member who was quoted, but at this February meeting, a member of the Board asked to stop making this distinction in the minutes. The minutes should represent the Governing Board acting as an entity, representing the interests of the university as a whole, and not particular departmental interests.

⁴⁸ '... kunne danne en fælles dynamisk ramme for udviklingen af RUC.' and 'Den høje detaljeringsgrad (...) kunne opfattes som begrænsende for RUC's udvikling.', First Governing Board meeting, 1st December 2004.

⁴⁹ '... institutter, ansatte og konsistorium havde lagt et stort arbejde i udarbejdelsen af udkast til vedtægter' Governing Board meeting 1st December 2004 and 2nd February 2005. (The quoted sentence is asked to be added to the minutes at the February Board meeting).

Conclusion

I have found through this detailed study that participants in the decision making bodies and seminars at RUC tried to react in different ways to the changes posed by the 2003 University Law. As mentioned in the introduction, the written documents only record some voices, while silencing others. It is important to note that my analysis has further reinforced this silencing/amplifying by focusing on certain debates in some of the written documents and turning these into my story line. When this is said, I would argue that the official documents at RUC show that there had been a lot of confusion and little knowledge about the radical changes to come. In some ways RUC tried to anticipate what they thought would come by for instance introducing the idea of having a university council made up of external members or by strengthening the information about RUC's qualities among the public – a defensive strategy in line with the polishing of the family silver. But as became apparent, the Minister wanted far more radical changes. The frustrations of not being heard when asked by the Minister for inputs to the draft law, and of RUC's particularities not being accepted, as, according to the Rector, had been promised by the Minister, have been expressed in the documents.

In such a chaotic time it seems difficult to strategise and to anticipate what was to come. One of the explicit main strategies chosen at RUC was, in their own terms, polishing the family silver. I have argued that from the accessible written documents it seems as if this strategy was turned into a process of describing and naming traditional ways of functioning at RUC. This reproduction of the ideals represented in the family silver was a defensive strategy, expressing satisfaction with the existing system. It was found for instance in the attitude of 'business as usual' – just supplemented by strengthening the communication to the public. Unfortunately, it seems that part of this strategy left the family silver unexamined in practice and did not thoroughly discuss the challenges attached to that very same family silver, as seen in, for example, the problems of finding enthusiastic representatives among students and supervisors.

At the same time as tracing and re-producing the family silver, the very same ideals of engagement and openness were being contested and overruled by ‘new’ procedures and initiatives accepted by the very same people. Examples include the construction of a new house only for staff members, the closing of doors at a Senate meeting and the limitations placed on students’ involvement in governing bodies. From this perspective there has been a gap between the polishing of the family silver and the actual practices taking place in the same period at RUC.

RUC was not alone among Danish universities in pursuing the logic that in times of trouble it becomes important to define oneself; to essentialise and reify the values of the organisation, in the hope of not losing them. But at RUC, where the university logo is a piece of coral, the strategy they pursued ran the risk of closing off the corals from the moving water. Instead of collectively addressing the current problems with achieving their ideals of pedagogic and organisational democracy in practice, it seems as if, in some ways they could only agree upon, or be content with reifying their inheritance.

*In tranquillo mors – in fluctu vita*⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The seal of RUC.

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