



**UiO** • **Faculty of Educational Sciences**  
University of Oslo

# Strengthening Universities' Position in Society

**2019 European Quality Assurance Forum**  
**Supporting societal engagement of higher education**

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*Peter Maassen*



# Research Study: “The Place of Universities in Society”

- Commissioned by the University Leaders Council

- GUC initiative of the University of Hamburg

- Conducted by research

- Term ‘universities’ refers to all types of higher education institutions



reparation for 2019 Global

ence, the Körber Foundation , and

of Oslo, Norway

# Research study: “The Place of Universities in Society”

## Key questions addressed:

- How do universities respond to growing external expectations, demands, opportunities and pressures?
- How do the universities interpret and shape their 'Third Mission'? How do universities transfer knowledge to society; how do they engage with society?
- How important are the national context and the profile of each university for its relations to society?
- How can current developments in the university's relations to society be understood *from a university perspective*?
- How can the relationships between university and society be strengthened?

# Research study: “The Place of Universities in Society”

## Design :

- Six countries: Canada (Ontario); Chile; Germany; Japan; South Africa; United Kingdom (England)
- In each of the six countries 5-6 universities selected
- Type of university: ranging from research-intensive universities to universities of applied sciences

## Data sources:

- National / University websites
- University documents
- Academic studies / academic literature
- Survey to all universities; response rate 60%

# Focus on Universities' Third Mission

- **Re-conceptualizing 'Third Mission'**: From services initiated by HEIs to developing and maintaining *equal, knowledge-based, mutually beneficial strategic partnerships* with political, social, economic and cultural actors, organizations and agencies
- **Reconfiguring of universities and colleges**: From two primary processes (education and research) to *three equal missions* as the universities' and colleges' institutional foundation and basic mandate from society
- *"The most important unknown term at universities: **Third Mission**"* (Die Zeit, April 2019)

# Starting point for the study: “Higher Education – Society Relationship under Pressure”

## 1. Dramatic global growth and expansion of two traditional institutional missions:

- Education: massive expansion of student enrolment and course profiles
- Research: massive growth of research activities and types of knowledge production. Traditional distinctions (esp. basic-applied) no longer functional.

## 2. Key developments in society to which HEIs have to adapt

- Knowledge society: accelerated technological, economic and social change
- Grand societal challenges (‘wicked problems’): traditional responses no longer suffice
  - Climate change
  - Inequality
  - Security
- Intensifying global science competition
- Growing need for life-long learning
- Artificial intelligence
- Fake news / fake truth / deep fakes



# Global political context

## German Chancellor Angela Merkel:

*“Europe must reposition itself to stand up to the challenges posed by its big global rivals..... This is indeed a time when we need to fight for our principles and fundamental values”* (15 May 2019)

- *Economic competitiveness*
- *Science and innovation*
- *‘Science diplomacy’*

### **Fundamental value issue:**

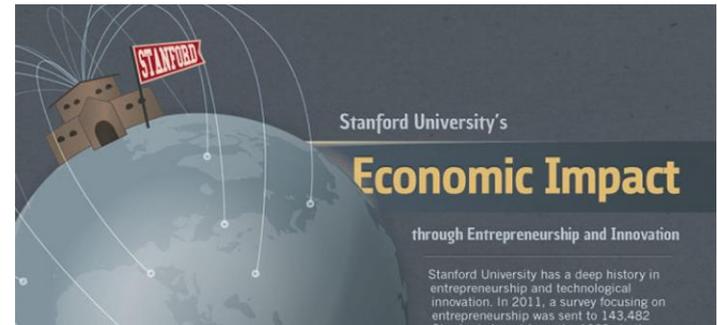
Technologizing humanity or  
humanizing technology



# “High Productivity of HEIs”

**HEIs larger, more productive, and socio-economically more important than ever before:**

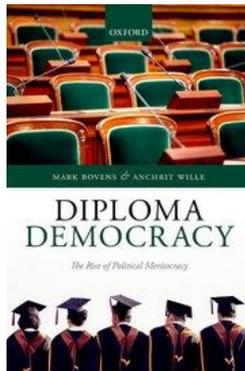
- Student and graduate numbers
- Staff numbers and research production
- Institutional annual budgets and competitive income
- Contribution to innovation and economic growth & competitiveness
  - Contribution to the economy; e.g. study by Eesley & Miller (2012): “Stanford entrepreneurs have generated world revenues of \$2.7 trillion annually and have created 5.4 million jobs since the 1930s.”



# “High productivity, low public trust?”

**By certain segments of society higher education not seen as part of the solution, but part of the problem**

- Contributions of higher education to society not taken for granted anymore: growing relevance, solution and innovation expectations (if not demands)
- Growing privatization as well as increasing political control
- Political distrust, e.g. in Europe:
  - Closure of CEU in Hungary
  - Farage (Brexit Party): proposes to ban university courses in European studies
  - Dutch political party *Forum voor Democratie* opened a “hotline indoctrination at schools and universities”
- Inequality: HEIs argued to be major contributors to growing societal divides (see, e.g.: Mark Bovens and Anchril Wille (2017) *Diploma Democracy: The Rise of Political Meritocracy*. Oxford University Press)



# **“Limited interest and understanding of policy-makers in the university’s multiple roles in societal development”**

*“University reform documents give little attention to the possible role of universities in developing a humanistic culture, social cohesion and solidarity, and a vivid public sphere.” (Maassen & Olsen, 2007: 9)*

# “How to strengthen relationship Higher Education – Society in 21<sup>st</sup> century?”

## Various efforts to answer question:

- Normative models as measuring device
- Best / good practices
- Political focus on impact of universities and colleges on society

## Problems:

- Homogeneous (‘one-size-fits-all’) models don’t do justice to diversity: What works for one HEI does not work for all others
- Impact is at best a weak proxy for public value and at worst a threat for the academic quality of primary processes (*see aot Stefan Collini*)
- Higher education perspective is underrepresented / lacking in efforts to create agreement on role of HEIs in society: “the collective voice of the university is missing in public debates about the university – society relationship”

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



- **SDGs highly relevant, but not higher education and science oriented**
- **European, national, institutional, study programme initiatives for contributing to SDGs**

# Findings: relevance of national context

## The university the ultimate global (knowledge) institution?

- The global nature of knowledge
- Ever-intensifying global research connections
- Dramatic growth in student (and staff) mobility
- Dramatic growth in transnational (higher) education
- Growing use of digital technology in higher education
- Emergence of global alliances of HEIs
- Growing integration of science technology in business networks (M. Castells)



## **Findings: relevance of national context (cont.)**

### **However, national contexts of continuous importance:**

- No dominant global 'Third Mission' trend.

### **'New Public Management' impact**

- Variety among countries in the extent to which national governments have withdrawn from offering public services.

### **Growing divide among high income countries:**

- a) The larger the 'public service gaps' the more HEIs are expected to contribute to filling the gaps through direct interaction and collaboration with socio-economic, political and cultural partners.
- b) The smaller the 'public service gaps' the more state authorities are determining the basic framework conditions under which HEIs can develop relationships with socio-economic, political and cultural partners.

# University/College context

1. Institutional mission statements
2. Innovation in primary processes
3. 'Third Mission' through strategic partnerships
4. Knowledge transfer *and* Social engagement



# 1. Institutional mission statements

- **Mission statements range from:**
  - Status confirming (e.g. globally leading research-intensive universities)
  - Combining various profile elements (including basic research, community development, innovation, student-orientation)
  - Focusing on one specific issue (e.g. universities of technology contributing to industrial development in their region/nation).
  - Some mission statements have not been changed since the establishment of the institution, while others have been adapted recently.

# **Institutional mission statements (cont.)**

- **Mission statements mainly symbolic**
- **Institutional mission statements are elaborated and operationalized in institutional documents, such as charters, strategic documents, or action plans.**
- **Contrary to the mission statements, these documents are hardly known to the outside world**

## 2. Innovation in primary processes

### Education:

- Educational innovations mainly pedagogical and digital.
- New learning outcomes, such as inter-cultural competences, are emerging.
- New study programmes for non-traditional students
- New study programmes or tracks addressing 'grand challenges'
- **But:** Limited multi-disciplinary and other academic educational innovations

### Research:

- More research focused on 'grand challenges', but true multi-disciplinary research difficult to institutionalize in university organization, administration and governance
- University research engagement with civil society of growing importance
- Interaction between HEIs and civil society organizations about 'citizen engagement' in research far from successful

### 3. Third Mission of HEIs in practice:

- Broad acknowledgement of importance of Third Mission, and need to (further) strengthen relationships with society; BUT, most HEIs struggle with:
  - How to operationalize their Third Mission
  - How to rebalance their three missions
  - How to use the ‘Third Mission achievements’ more strategically and structurally, moving from project-based ‘transfer’ activities to strategic, more sustainable, long term mutually beneficial **partnerships**



- Third Mission in practice: important differences between **knowledge (or technology) transfer** and **social (or community) engagement**
  - **Knowledge Transfer** refers to the knowledge-based relationships between HEIs and industry/the private sector companies with direct or indirect commercial purposes.
  - **Social Engagement** refers to the civil society partnerships of HEIs without commercial purposes.

## Third Mission of HEIs in practice (cont.):

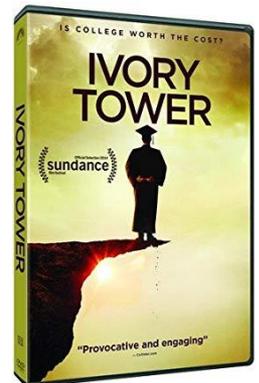
- **Imbalance** between HEIs' Third Mission activities in practice, and the knowledge and understanding about these activities in the wider society: HEIs have a communication problem!
- **Lack of integration** of Third Mission strategic aims and practical achievements in institutional mission statements, institutional management / administration, esp. educational administration and HR management.
- Most HEIs have been undertaking Third Mission activities for a long time, but there is little systematic learning and capacity building from their experiences: **projectization** of the Third Mission.
- In general, **insufficient funding** for professionalizing Third Mission activities, and unclear national political and legal framework conditions.

## 4. Knowledge Transfer and Social Engagement

- ***Knowledge transfer*** better organized and managed, as well as more strongly institutionalized in HEIs than ***social engagement***, which is taking place more bottom-up and fragmented
- ***Knowledge transfer*** often organized as part of central institutional administration, but variety in the nature and size/capacity of knowledge transfer offices, the terms used, and the involvement of external (private) actors
- Wide variety of ***social engagement*** activities in practice, but not only insufficiently institutionalized at institutional leadership and administration, but also organized in a fragmented way, and weakly coupled to primary processes (e.g. personnel policies and study administration)

# Knowledge transfer (KT) and Social engagement (SE) (cont.)

- Need for professionalization of governance, management/administration and organization of ***knowledge transfer and social engagement***
- In nearly all HEIs there is the need to scale up ***social engagement*** activities and broaden ***knowledge transfer*** activities to involve structurally and strategically more than just the central administration, external actors, and a few selected academics.
- The continuous 'Ivory Tower' and elite image especially traditional research-intensive universities still have can act as a barrier for further strengthening relationships with society.



# What kind of University for what kind of Society?



## Return to the Institutional Foundation of the University:

- Combining institutional defense against invasion of alien norms with proactively adapting to environmental changes and new societal expectations/demands

# Strengthen Higher Education's Relationship to Society

## Three equally important basic Institutional Missions:

1. Education
2. Research
3. Third mission: Knowledge transfer and social engagement partnerships

## Requires proactive development of strategic institutional profile

- What are the key profile areas in which HEIs have developed / want to develop strategic, mutually beneficial partnerships with society (*private sector and civil society*)?
- How to (further) stimulate the development of strategic partnerships with society?
- How to ensure that strategic partnerships contribute effectively to the solving of wicked problems and the handling of grand challenges in society, as well as to enhancing the quality and relevance of the HEIs' academic core areas?

# Strengthen Higher Education's Relationship to Society

## Key change areas:

- **External:**
  - **Public funding mechanisms**
    - Supporting three instead of two missions
  - **Legal/regulatory framework conditions**
    - Allowing more room to manoeuvre for HEIs in operationalizing their Third Mission
  - **Quality assessment systems**
    - New indicators: incl. shift from 'impact' to 'equal partnerships' orientation

# Strengthen Higher Education's Relationship to Society

## Key change areas

### Internal:

- **Institutional governance**
  - Integration of Third Mission in governance structure
  - More explicit and proactive Third Mission strategies
  - More effective (administrative) support structures for Third Mission
- **Personnel policies**
  - Equal career incentives and opportunities in all 3 mission areas
  - Individual and team performance
- **Communication strategies and practices**
  - Communication instead of PR
  - Communicating institutional profile, ambitions and achievements in all three missions



# **Strengthen University's Relationship to Society (cont.)**

## **Key change areas**

### **Internal:**

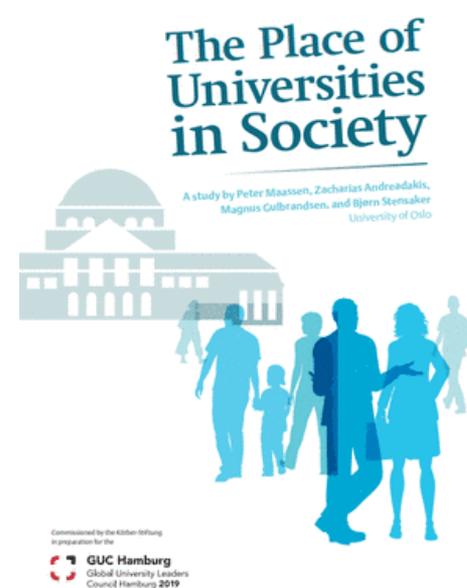
- **University/college organization and structure**
  - Combining disciplinary and inter-disciplinary
  - Promoting, supporting and integrating 'strategic partnerships'
  - Promoting organizational learning and capacity building in Third Mission area
  - Creating meeting places ('open door approach')
  - Identifying key networks
  - Deciding on, organizing and governing strategic partnerships
- **Study programmes**
  - Linking disciplinary knowledge foundations with wicked problems / grand challenges
  - Promoting, stimulating and supporting knowledge transfer and social engagement ideas and initiatives of students

# **Strengthen University's Relationship to Society (cont.)**

## **Key change areas**

### **Internal:**

- **Quality assessment**
  - **Internal quality systems and institutional quality work to include Third Mission / strategic partnerships (knowledge transfer & social engagement) more explicitly and directly, as well as SDGs contributions**
  - **Individual and team performance**
  - **Communicating key quality ambitions and achievements**



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**Thank you very much for your attention!**

[peter.maassen@iped.uio.no](mailto:peter.maassen@iped.uio.no)

Research Group:

Knowledge, Learning and Governance: Studies in higher education and work (HEDWORK)

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