

УДК 378: 504.75

THE REENGINEERING OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE FACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

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Key words and phrases: dynamics; environmental challenges; environmental change; transformation; university.

Abstract: The aim of this essay is to contribute to an improved comprehension of the university's dynamics of change, as part of a larger transformation of the relationships among society's key institutions. A distinction is made between seeing the University as an institution and as an instrument. The essay then attends to one important type of environmental change: the emergence of European-level debates and policy making processes. Do these environmental actors and forces generate imperatives for universities or do they point universities in different directions? Next, the significance of University actors, structures, legacies and dynamics are considered. The last part suggests that an improved comprehension of University dynamics may depend on a better understanding of how institutional success, confusion and crisis can be related.

What kind of University for what kind of society?

The University is currently involved in changes that have a potential for transforming its institutional identity. At stake are the University's purpose, work processes, organization, system of governance and financial basis, as well as its role in the political system, the economy and society at large.

The rethinking, reorganizing and refunding of the University are part of processes of change in the larger configuration of institutions in which the University is embedded. These processes link change in the University to change in the role of democratic government, in public-private relations, and in the relationship between the local, national, european and international level.

The current dynamics raise questions about the University's long-term pact with society. What kind of University for what kind of society? What do the University and society expect from each other? How is the University assumed to fit into a democratic polity and society? To what extent and how, are the University, government and society

supposed to influence each other? What is the extent and direction of change? Prevailing trends include fundamental change in the autonomy of the University and in the academic freedom of individual faculty members, in the University's collegial and disciplinary organization, the unity of research and teaching, who controls specific bodies of knowledge and who defines criteria of excellence and social needs, the structure of departments, degree programs and courses, the relations between those who do research and teach and academic and administrative leaders, and in governments' commitment to funding universities.

The aim of the essay is to contribute to an improved understanding of the institutional dynamics of the University. Instead of starting with a definition of what a University is in terms of its purposes and functions or its organizational characteristics, *first*, a distinction is made between seeing the University as an institution and an instrument. *Second*, four visions, or stylized models, of university organization are outlined. *Third*, since University dynamics usually are seen as externally driven, we attend to one important environmental change: the emergence of European-level debates and policy-making processes. *Fourth*, we attend to the significance of University actors, structures, legacies and dynamics - the ways in which the University responds to and acts upon the environment, how it protects its institutional identity and integrity, and how it explains and justifies itself to society at large. *Fifth*, it is suggested that an improved comprehension of University dynamics may depend on a better understanding of how institutional success, confusion and crisis can be related.

The University as an institution and instrument

The University can be seen as an organizational instrument for achieving predetermined preferences and interests. Then the issue is how the University can be organized and governed in order to achieve tasks and objectives in the most efficient way. Support, economic and otherwise, depends on contributions. Change reflects a continuous calculation of relative performance and costs, and the University, or some of its parts, will be replaced if there are more efficient ways to achieve shifting objectives. The University can also be seen as an institution. An institution is a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances.

The degree and form of institutionalization impact both *motivation* and *capacity* to follow institutionalized rules and codes of behavior. In contrast to an instrumental perspective, an institutional perspective assumes that rules and practices have a value in themselves and that their immediate substantive effects can be uncertain or imprecise.

As an institution the University is involved in a pact based on long-term cultural commitments. The University is a fiduciary system. Those belonging to the University are supposed to be the guardians of its constitutive purposes, principles and processes. In constitutional democracies the University is functionally dependent on, but partially autonomous from, other institutions. Contemporary political-administrative orders, nevertheless, routinely face institutional imbalances. Collisions between key institutions are an important source of change and radical transformation of one institution is usually linked to changes in other institutions. We need to distinguish between incremental change and reforms within fairly stable organizational and normative frames, and change and reforms where the legitimacy of an institution's mission, organization, functioning, moral foundation, ways of thought and resources are thrown into doubt and challenged.

Visions of the University

What kind of organized system is the University? Students of formal organizations provide a set of theoretical ideas about how we might view the University as an organization, and four stylized visions, based on different assumptions about what the University is for and the circumstances under which it will work well, are presented.

These are: the University as a community of scholars, an instrument for national purposes, a representative democracy, and a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets. The organizing principles are respectively: constitutive rules, command and hierarchy, bargaining and majority votes, and market prices and competitive selection.

The University is a meritocratic community of scholars. This vision portrays the University as an institution with a *raison d'être* and constitutive normative and organizational principles of its own. The University's corporate identity and integrating self-understanding is founded on a shared commitment to scholarship and learning, basic research and search for the truth, irrespective of immediate utility and applicability, political convenience or economic benefit.

Science and scholarship provide not only technologies but also codes of conduct and concepts, ideas and beliefs by which humans understand themselves, others and society.

The organization and governance of the University reflect its institutional identity and its special role and responsibilities in society. There is individual autonomy, yet the shared vision of the University provides integration and keeps together functionally specialized sub-systems. The only legitimate authority is based on neutral competence.

Protection and funding from the state, together with autonomy from government and powerful economic and social groups, is justified by the assumptions that society values objective knowledge, that knowledge is most likely to be advanced through free inquiry.

The University is an instrument for national political agendas. Within this perspective, the University is a rational tool for implementing the purposes and policies of democratically elected leaders. It is an instrument for achieving national priorities, as defined by the government of the day. The University's purposes and direction of growth depend on political support and funds more than scholarly purposes.

Expansion and fragmentation come together. Serving national objectives makes the University richer, at the price of reduced internal unity and coherence. The University is a series of communities and activities held together by a common name, governing board, and related purposes. Leaders are appointed, not elected. The administration, with its hierarchies, rules and performance statistics, becomes the core of the University.

The University is a representative democracy. This vision sees the University as an instrument for internal, not external groups. The University is an interest group democracy allowing representation on governing boards and councils to all categories of employees as well as students. Democratization of the University is linked to enhancing democracy in society at large, but internal democracy and external autonomy are justified by reference to a mix of principles and concerns.

The University is a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets. Within this perspective the University is an economic enterprise or a service station operating in regional or global markets. Research and higher education are commodities, bundles of goods to be sold in a free market. Competition and achieving profit and other individual gains are key processes. Students, faculty, donors and communities select from alternative universities in terms of how well they meet individual preferences. In-

formation and knowledge are private strategic resources for competitiveness and survival, not a public good. The University has more freedom from the state and political authorities. Simultaneously, the University is more dependent on “stakeholders”, donors, buyers, competitors and society at large and University leaders are market entrepreneurs. In the market-vision, change is governed by competitive selection and the survival of the fittest, that is, those best able and willing to adapt to environmental imperatives and incentives.

Abstractions and practices. The four stylized visions are based on assumptions which make it unlikely that any of them alone can capture current university practices. As less than perfect approximations to the abstract visions, universities as practices show “a shocking diversity”. The relations among universities, public authorities and society are characterized by a great variety of forms of interaction, intervention and control. In sum, the historic stages-perspective gets modest support. There are trends but also variation and countertendencies that make it more plausible to treat the four visions as enduring aspects of university organization and governance. The mix of visions varies over time and across political and cultural systems and invites questions about the scope conditions of each vision.

Arguably, the area in which the critical assumptions underlying each vision are realistic is considerably smaller than the area where they are assumed to be applicable by their proponents. While there has been some convergence in rhetoric, few are likely to be completely committed to a single vision under all conditions.

In a democratic society there are probably long-term adaptive processes that make internal and external conceptions of the University’s autonomy and social responsibilities converge to some degree. If so, an existing balance is most likely to be challenged in periods of radical regime change. One may hypothesize that implementing national priorities may be more legitimate in periods of war and crises than in normal times, that some government objectives are more legitimate than others and that it is more legitimate to intervene in some activities than in others. Universities, disciplines and individuals with strong academic credentials and high status are less likely to have their autonomy challenged than others. Disciplines that are highly dependent on outside funds (many natural sciences) are probably more vulnerable to outside influence than those who are not (many of the humanities), and they are in particular so where there are attractive alternatives to the University. Systems with strong trade union traditions and general acceptance of workplace democracy, such as the Scandinavian countries, are also likely to be most willing to accept representative schemes in the University.

European-level debates and policies

The European case illustrates that debates and reforms concerning the future of the University can evoke several, competing visions of the University and that they can be driven by a confluence of processes taking place in different organized settings, and not by a single dominant process taking place in a single setting.

The confluence of reform processes. On September 18 1988, the Magna Charta Universitatum was signed in Bologna by more than 400 Rectors of European Universities and later endorsed by many others from different parts of the world. It is important also to remember the Bologna Declaration on the creation of a European Area of Higher Education by 2010, but this time the initiative came from a different source. While the Charter was initiated by the academic community, the Bologna Declaration was a pledge taken in 1999 by the ministers of education from 30 countries. The expressed aim

was to reform national systems of higher education in order to promote mobility, employability, and European dimensions in higher education. Focus was on structures rather than content - the development of a system of readable and comparable degrees, a system with two main cycles (undergraduate and graduate), a quality assurance system and a credit transfer system.

To some degree the Bologna-process has changed the terms of the debate and provided elements of a common understanding. The Bologna process has primarily been an intergovernmental process. Ministers of education have been the key participants and national control over policy making has been emphasized. The removal of barriers to mobility is, however, consistent with aspirations of European integration and making European higher education more competitive in global markets. The occasion is the emerging knowledge economy and doubts that the universities will be able to play a constructive role in these transformations.

A sustainable level of competitiveness is seen to require many different and not easily reconcilable things: concerted action, better investment in knowledge, adequate and sustainable incomes, ensured autonomy, professionalism in academic and administrative affairs, priority to excellence, contributions to local and regional needs and strategies, closer co-operation between universities and economic enterprises, and the fostering of a coherent, compatible and competitive European Area of Higher Education and a European Area of Research.

The co-existence of competing visions

Consistent with the neo-liberal reform ethos, the University is an enterprise in competitive markets. This vision is also seen to coincide with the vision of the University as an implementer of market-oriented economic policies, even if some emphasize the value of competition in general, while others view universities as an instrument for supporting European industry in the global competition. In order to compete globally, universities had to be granted more autonomy from government within stable financial and legal frameworks, and the "management deficit" required stronger leadership and improved strategic capacity. One conclusion was that today there is no ready-made model likely to address all current challenges. The solution is to be found in a diversity of models, reflecting the diversity of European cultures and perspectives. Diversity is an asset and imposing a single model will threaten the diversity. The Commission had not considered what should happen to the losers - whether full systems, individual universities or individual academics; yet competition creates losers, as well as winners, and it would be a serious mistake to focus on the brilliant few and forget the rest.

The European case displays that a new level of university debate and reform has been added. Different visions and legacies, partly located in different institutional settings and carried by different types of actors, are evoked simultaneously at the European level. Universities are not solely seen as national institutions. For example, the Commission wants Universities to be enterprise-like tools involved in global economic competition and Rectors reach back to a past where geographical and political borders were of lesser significance. The EU's funds, Framework Programs, Tempus-Tacis Projects and network-building have already had consequences for academic contacts, cooperation and co-authorship, making the large Europe a more significant entity.

In several respects the European situation is unsettled. There is a multitude of partly inconsistent criteria of "success" and competing understandings of what forms of organization and governance will contribute to good performance. There is also a confluence of processes, and the European case illustrates the difficulties of disentangling the effects of global, European, national and local processes and thus comprehending university reform and change.

The search for an institutional identity

The claim that universities must reorganize and deal more imaginatively with problems ahead is well known from history.

It is beyond this essay to discuss in detail how the heterogeneous group of organized activities called “universities” and “institutions of higher education” in everyday language will develop, the processes through which change will take place, and the factors that are likely to favor or hamper changes of a particular kind. The future of the University will be affected by many factors and some are obviously outside the control of the University. Still, universities, and different parts of each university, have responded differently to changing circumstances and attention is here primarily focused upon what discretion universities have and the possible impacts of the University’s own actions and institutional characteristics.

Institutions and environments. A key distinction in the literature on formally organized institutions is the extent to which a perspective views institutions as epiphenomena that mirror environmental circumstances or deliberate willful reorganization, and the extent to which a perspective pictures institutions as partly autonomous and reproduced with some reliability, independent of environmental stability or change and deliberate reform interventions.

The idea of influential, or deterministic, environments gets support from the fact that universities have never fully controlled the direction, substance or speed of its development. Large-scale processes such as the industrial, democratic and scientific revolutions and the development of the nation-state have fundamentally affected universities. Nevertheless, developments have not merely reflected functional responses to macro-forces and national styles, educational ideals and cultures, or differentiation within science itself. The University has been influenced, but not determined, by their environments.

The idea that university organization and governance can be designed and reformed through deliberate intervention is a key assumption behind the recent promotion of strong university leadership, the formulation of clear, consistent and stable goals, and the development of long-term-strategies for managing change. In contrast, students of university organization and governance have called attention to the limits of understanding and control and the complications of rational intervention where there is no agreed upon and stable meaning of “improvement”.

Such processes can be more or less loosely coupled. Sometimes they operate separately and in parallel. At other times they flow together and participants, problems, solutions, and choices are connected through timing and simultaneity more than through intention and plan, and seemingly accidental outcomes appear. The consequences of such processes depend on whether they take place in more or less institutionalized settings, more or less constraining the confluence of processes, actors and concerns.

Dilemmas to be faced. If it is assumed that the future of the University (at least partly) depends on how convincing the University argues for its institutional identity and autonomy, a first step may be to call attention to four dilemmas facing the University. They are, how to balance: (a) the search for unity of purpose and the proliferation of identities and accounts, (b) the desire for unity of action and for protecting individual freedom, (c) the need to secure adequate resources without being seduced or being abandoned, and (d) the desire to embrace self-renewal as well as continuity.

Unity of purpose and the proliferation of identities and accounts. The University is a specialized institution with limited legitimate purposes. “Institution” implies some degree of internal coherence. Yet there are tensions and conflicts in all institutions. Insuring that a shared sense of purpose does not disintegrate is a constant challenge and it has

to be inquired to what degree the University constitutes a community with a strong identity and a shared sense of institutional purpose.

In this perspective it is important to ask whether faculty, other university employees, and students are able to define what their common, institutional identity is. Do they know, and agree upon, what are the constitutive principles, values, structures and rules by which they want to be organized and governed, what they wish to share as an academic community and how they want to be different?

Unity of action and individual freedom. The current enthusiasm for strengthening academic and administrative leadership and introducing more hierarchical elements as a condition for institutional autonomy, is also based on a perceived threat to the coherence of the University. Strengthening internal University leadership and external representation and weakening collegial and discipline-oriented organization, is likely to impact individual freedom and creativity. It is then important to understand how different organizational arrangements and forms of governance are likely to function in different historical and cultural contexts.

In principle, one way around the management-dilemma is to restrict the scope of the University. The answers given are likely to have consequences for how unity of action and individual freedom are balanced in the future.

Resources: Being seduced or being abandoned. The prospect of a loss of institutional purpose, direction and integrity has a resource aspect. The fear of seduction linked to the University's inability to say "no" to funds was typically voiced in the American context during the 1960s. Facing a plurality of sources of support, it was asked whether the University should accept the goals and values of whoever could pay.

In contrast, the primarily state-financed European universities now tend to define their problem as financial more than a question of identity. They are concerned about being abandoned by public authorities - that national governments abdicate their traditional role as the universities' guardian angel and that public funds dwindle so that the University becomes dependent on private sponsors, alumni support and student tuition. Slack resources buffer conflicts and make it easier for an institution to live with conflicting goals and principles. In periods of austerity, budgetary struggles over cut-backs create more visible winners and losers and easily strain feelings of community.

Self-renewal and continuity. The belief in the self-regulatory capabilities of markets stands in contrast to the wide-spread belief that the University is unwilling or unable to change and that its structures are too rigid in an era of rapid scientific and societal change.

Concepts such as "university", "institutional autonomy" and "academic freedom" are not completely static. They have changed slowly over time and developed somewhat differently in different political and cultural contexts. Their content, and what are seen as reasonable reciprocal expectations, cannot be determined by universities or any other single group alone. They evolve in the interfaces between the academic community, public authorities and society at large, including the power relations typical for those interfaces.

The future of the University then depends on how its autonomy is used in practice. The self-reforming capacity of the University affects both the likelihood of external interventions and the prospect of being abandoned.

Institutional success, confusion and crisis

Institutional change is often seen as driven by perceived failure – the institution fail to meet expected functional performance or there is an erosion of its normative basis and legitimacy. The essay, however, suggests that institutional success may also carry the seeds of institutional confusion, crisis and change.

The University has in many ways been a success. It has developed into a key institution that impact most aspects of democratic societies. The University has never before been asked to fulfill more roles, take on more tasks and solve more problems. It has never before attracted more students and resources and many organizations want to use the name in order to improve their status and attractiveness.

Yet, the success has also created problems. Success has made aspiration levels raise rapidly, creating what may turn out to be unrealistic expectations. A result has been work overload and institutional confusion. The vision of the University as an enterprise embedded in global economic competition has gained strength, but other visions also have their more or less resourceful spokespersons. There are many and inconsistent purposes, expectations and success criteria and it is unclear who has legitimacy to talk on behalf of "society" and define what social needs are. Governments are unable or unwilling to formulate clear priorities; societal groups have different expectations and demands and only few of them are likely to be accommodated through market competition and price systems. Universities are uncertain about their identity – what they are, what they want to become, and in what direction to go. Boundaries between institutions are blurred and it is difficult for universities to find their place in a larger order of research and higher education institutions and in the political system and society at large. Institutional confusion, in turn, generates disappointment, criticism and sometimes an atmosphere of crisis.

Historically, universities have survived by turning institutional confusion and crisis into reexamination, search, innovation. There is no guarantee it will happen again. Developments will, as before, depend upon many factors the University can not control. A possible starting point is to focus upon the University's work processes (and not solely its processes of governance) and its participation in a global intellectual competition among ideas (and not solely its role in economic competition). A key question is: what are the organized settings that attract highly qualified people and encourage academic excellence and free inquiry and also make the University take seriously its social and cultural responsibilities in a democratic society? The answer is most likely found in a mix of visions and principles and improved analytical frameworks and better comparative data are likely to be of great help in such an endeavor.

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Инженерная реформа университета в свете экологических проблем

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Ключевые слова и фразы: динамика; экологические проблемы; перемены в сфере охраны окружающей среды; трансформирование; университет.

Аннотация: Цель данной статьи – способствовать более глубокому осмыслению динамики изменений университета как части более серьезных перемен во взаимоотношениях между главными учреждениями общества. Основное различие проводится между видением университета как учреждения и как инструмента. Поэтому статья посвящена одному важному аспекту экологических перемен, а именно дискуссиям, ведущимся на европейском уровне, и основным направлениям в данной области. Действительно ли современные тенденции в сфере охраны окружающей среды задают приоритеты для университетов или толкают их в разных направлениях? Кроме того, рассмотрена роль университетских образований, юридических структур и динамика их развития. В последней части делается предположение о том, что углубленное осмысление динамики развития университета может зависеть от понимания того, насколько связаны успехи, трудности и проблемы учреждения.

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