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Higher Education Looking Forward: An Agenda for Future Research

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Higher Education Looking Forward: An Agenda for Future Research

Synthesis report of the European Science Foundation's Forward Look on Higher Education in Europe Beyond 2010: Resolving Conflicting Social and Economic Expectations'

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Higher Education Looking Forward: An Agenda for Future Research

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1. Introduction

Higher education has expanded massively in recent decades so that today its character and performance have great implications for all members of society, whether or not they engage directly with higher education. Its economic implications have been the most emphasised, but only slightly less so have been its implications for social equity and mobility and for social cohesion and integration. The implications of expanded higher education and research systems have local and regional dimensions together with national and global ones, as well as shaping the lives of individual citizens.

Research on higher education also attracts attention because the object of its study is the institutional basis of all academic disciplines and the contribution of systematic knowledge to the future of society. It is part of the domains of the social sciences and humanities and draws from a multitude of disciplines. It is a theme-based area exposed to high expectations of social relevance. And it is currently a relatively small field of research based in a variety of institutional settings.

The themes addressed in higher education research have tended to be influenced by relatively short-term institutional, national and supranational concerns, debates and policies about higher education. However, higher education researchers also strive to analyse salient long-term issues and trends. These concern the relationship between higher education and the creation and development of so-called 'knowledge societies'. They concern the role of higher education in shaping the social order as far as social privileges, meritocracy, equity and social cohesion are concerned. They concern the balance between, on the one hand, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the critical functions of higher education and, on the other hand, more utilitarian expectations from other parts of society. And they concern the modes of regulation of higher education, including the respective roles played by market forces, the academic profession and its leaders, the state and other stakeholders.

The rationale for the European Science Foundation's Forward Look on higher education – hereafter referred to as the HELF (Higher Education Looking Forward) project – has been to examine higher education and research within a wider context of social science research by relating it to more general conceptual frameworks of, for example, human capital theories; theories of power, inequality and social exclusion; theories of organisations; new public management etc. By so doing, it was hoped to begin to address some of the larger questions concerning the changing relationship between higher education and society and to develop research agendas that would be relevant both to researchers and to policy makers and practitioners.

Between the autumn of 2006 and the autumn of 2007, research literatures were reviewed and overview reports written on five interconnected themes:
• Higher education and the needs of the knowledge society
• Higher education and the achievement (or prevention) of equity and social justice
• Higher education and its communities: interconnections and interdependencies
• Steering and governance of higher education
• Differentiation and diversity of institutional forms and professional roles

Draft reports on the five themes were critiqued by groups of scholars at workshops in Kassel, Helsinki and Paris, at an interim conference in Brussels and, finally, in a dialogue with researchers from other fields and young higher education researchers at an ESF conference at Vadstena, Sweden. At the Brussels conference, a start was made on the process of synthesising the messages coming out of the five thematic reports with regard both to what was known and not known and to the implications for future research agendas. That process of synthesis continues with this report. The aim is to propose an agenda for future research on the changing relationship between higher education and society, to suggest that this agenda may be more deserving of the attention of researchers from a wider range of social science fields than it has typically received, and to remind future researchers – from whatever backgrounds they come – that there is an existing body of theory and research on which future work should build. A draft of this report was presented at the project's final conference in London at the end of October 2007. The present version takes account of the discussions during that conference.

The significance of the research field is conveniently summarised in the outline of an ongoing international research project organised by the US Social Science Research Council:

1. Introduction

Topping the agenda of most international organisations are priorities related to easing the transition to a knowledge-based economy, ensuring we do not become a world of 'haves' and 'have-nots', and advocating educational opportunity as an inherent right. Clearly, accessible higher education and progressive research is inherently integrated into all these priorities; these lofty goals will unwittingly fail if we do not understand how public research universities function in this global world of liberalizing markets, deregulated states, and privatizing societies.

Given the situation and what is recognizably at stake, it is surprising that the transformation of public research universities has not received more concerted analytic attention. … The issues are not only ripe for social science examination, they are in need of international and interdisciplinary interpretation, explanation, and discussion.

(SSRC, 2005:2)

The overall aim of the HELF project has been 'to examine the research literature in terms of its underlying conceptual approaches and empirical findings across a number of selected sub-themes in order to derive a future research agenda that will address scientific questions of long term strategic concern to the future of higher education'.

This is also the aim of this report, which is structured as follows. The next section notes briefly some of the characteristics of higher education as a research field; Section 3 summarises the results of the five thematic reviews; Section 4 provides an introduction to the synthesis proper; Section 5 examines changing socio-political contexts; Section 6 looks at the changing mechanisms of interaction between society and higher education; Section 7 looks at the implications of these changes for higher education; Section 8 looks at higher education's impact on society; and Section 9 raises some methodological issues. Section 10 offers a future research agenda and some concluding remarks. Appendix I offers a more detailed set of research questions derived from the previous analysis. Appendix II provides a list of participants at workshops and conferences.

2. Higher education as a research field

Reviews of the state of the research field (see for example Teichler, 2006) point out that research on higher education can be characterised as a small field, as a theme-based and relatively fragmented field and as a field with an enormously varied institutional basis. These characteristics are seen both as risks and dangers as well as challenges and opportunities.

Research on higher education was, for a long time, undertaken in Europe by only a few hundred persons. In trend reports on individual disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, it was often treated as a sub-area of educational research probably comprising no more than ten per cent of the research in this broader field. Research on higher education began to receive greater scientific attention as an area of knowledge and relevance to policy and practice in its own right in European countries in the 1970s, largely as a consequence of the growing public awareness of the interrelationships between education and economic growth, social mobility, student unrest and subsequent reform efforts in higher education. From the late 1980s onwards, research on higher education attracted interest in the wake of debates about the knowledge society, new modes of steering and management and increasing internationalisation. In the current framework of the Bologna and Lisbon processes, research on higher education is again receiving growing attention.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we can note the existence of about two dozen institutes in Europe which address higher education as the, or one of the, major domains of their research activities. Estimates of the numbers of researchers considering higher education as the, or one of the, major domains of their research activities range between 1000 and 2000 persons. The Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER) assembles the key scholars involved in European and international research cooperation, and some other associations specialising in specific areas within higher education or serving as a bridge between researchers, policy makers and practitioners. Additionally, several masters programmes in the field of higher education have recently been established in the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway and Portugal or are sub-areas of masters programmes in education, public policy or other domains; a network of doctoral programmes in this area has received public financial support in Finland. Various collaborative projects have been funded by the EC Framework programmes for science as well as for the evaluation of European education and science policies. A number of national research councils have established special research programmes in the field, for example a long-term programme for the promotion of higher education research in Sweden and a programme recently funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council on 'impacts of higher education institutions on regional economies'.

Though a relatively small field, research on higher education is expected to address a very broad range of the thematic areas. Attention is paid notably to:

- the quantitative-structural aspects of higher education systems (e.g. access and admission, patterns of institutions and programmes, student enrolment and flows, graduation and graduate employment);
- the knowledge aspects (e.g. developments of research and curricula, issues of quality and relevance, concepts and measurement of competences, job requirements of professional utilisation of knowledge);
- aspects of processes and persons (teaching and learning, research processes and organisation, students, the academic profession, emergence of higher education professions); and
- organisational aspects of higher education (steering and management, state and stakeholders, functions and powers of the academic professions within governance, institutional settings, costs and funding).

Research on higher education is defined by its theme of analysis. It draws from a broad range of disciplines, notably education, psychology, sociology, political sciences, economics and business studies, law and history. These disciplines feed higher education research conceptually and methodologically. A challenge for higher education research is to keep in touch with its varied disciplinary feeding grounds in order both to enhance its quality and to avoid being driven too much by thematic concerns and policy agendas. On the other hand, creative theme-based research has the potential and the need often to transgress disciplinary perspectives.

2. Higher education as a research field

Other disciplinary fields contribute to higher education research, though often some of the themes which are addressed are positioned outside and cross-cut the various disciplinary areas. Additionally, since higher education addresses general features of teaching and learning, research and knowledge generation, it is dependent on cooperation with experts in all disciplines, whether or not they contribute directly to higher education research.

Higher education research generally lacks a stable institutional base within higher education institutions. Unlike other areas of the humanities and social sciences, higher education research does not usually provide its practitioners with a link between research and teaching. Such a link can provide continuity and a buffer which can help protect academic freedom. In some instances, scholars in various domains of the humanities and social sciences address issues of higher education on short-term projects or during a certain period of their academic life-course; and in some instances scholars of these disciplines devote their academic work to higher education over long periods.

Some institutions of higher education have established separate academic research units on higher education. Research on higher education is often institutionally embedded in units serving the institution's administration ('institutional research'), in supporting human resources (e.g. 'staff development'), or in policy-related settings of applied higher education research. Moreover, the borderline between researchers and practitioners has become increasingly fluid through the involvement of various kinds of higher education professionals and administrators, of organisations such as rectors' associations, of scholars and students involved in higher education policy, of evaluation experts, and of management consultants.

These fluid borderlines between research and other sources of expertise are more pronounced in higher education than in other spheres. It is mirrored by the fact that only a few journals in the area of higher education in Europe operating in a supranational arena are strictly confined to higher education research (e.g. *Higher Education, Studies in Higher Education*), while a larger number cover contributions of higher education researchers alongside those of other actors and experts (e.g. *Higher Education Policy, Journal of Higher Education Management and Policy, Higher Education in Europe, Tertiary Education and Management, European Journal of Education*).

The variety of institutional settings and the fluid lines between research and practice offer ample opportunities for broadening the scope of higher education research and its practical relevance. But they also challenge higher education researchers to avoid losing themselves in daily concerns and practical ex-

pectations. Therefore, the reflective exercise of taking stock of past and current achievements and problems, of looking ahead to possible future research topics and areas for inquiry, and of designing research strategies for the future, might be more important for this area of research, being both blessed and endangered by somewhat unorthodox conditions and characteristics.

3. Higher education and society: five thematic reviews

The thematic reviews undertaken by the HELF project were intended to both summarise some of the main areas of existing research and to set it within larger theoretical and policy perspectives. Links were attempted with social science research in related fields. And while the focus was upon higher education and society in Europe, the reviews drew, where appropriate, on relevant work undertaken in other developed societies. No claims are made for comprehensiveness in the resultant reports. Rather the aim has been to draw out and emphasise points of long-term significance and importance, both for future research and for policy and practice.

The five review reports are available from the European Science Foundation[1]. This section summarises their main findings.

Higher education and the needs of the knowledge society[2]

This report begins by setting out the main features of the 'knowledge society' and the changing environment of higher education. It argues that a useful starting point for understanding the many dimensions of the changing role of universities in changing societies is to define 'knowledge society' as an imaginary space, a discourse which is based on certain intellectual starting points in the analyses of social realities of modern societies, while as a concept it tends to create its own images, expectations and narratives (Marginson, *personal communication*). Knowledge society is both the objective of policies and debates and an agent promoting policies and debates concerning its potentials (see Latour, 1988).

Knowledge society discourse takes place in the context of globalisation. This may be defined as 'the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness', as Held et al. (1999) contend. Knowledge society discourse also is rooted in the fact that higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums in global knowledge economies. In a globalised world, higher education institutions are integral to the continuous flows of people, knowledge, information, technologies, products and financial capital (see Marginson, 2006). These concepts and social phenomena are simultaneous and overlapping.

Globalisation as an analytical device focuses attention more on the changing relationships between organisations (e.g. higher education institutions, NGOs, business enterprises) or political entities (such as na-

tion states versus global and regional actors) and their changing power relations and social and commercial interactions. In Europe, the debates on globalisation and higher education have been related to two different debates. On the one hand, trade liberalisation and aims to commodify higher education (through WTO and GATS) and global competition are defined as opening new opportunities for higher education institutions and systems which are under pressure from decreasing public funding. On the other hand, many academic communities see these notions of economic globalisation as alien to, or even conflicting with, traditional values of higher education (Marginson, *personal communication*).

A related term is 'Europeanisation', which is often used together with internationalisation and globalisation. According to Teichler (2004: 4) 'Europeanisation' may be understood as 'the regional version of internationalisation or globalisation'. The phenomenon of Europeanisation is often referred to as 'horizontal mobility and cooperation' (notably through the ERASMUS programme) and subsequently standardisation of study programmes and degrees (the Bologna Process)' (Teichler, 2004: 23).

The thematic report goes on to consider the implications for the possible transformation of universities and research. The discourse of knowledge society is supported by two main perspectives concerning the recent debate on the transformation of science and the university. The first asserts that a radical metamorphosis is taking place in the relationship between knowledge production and university institution. Authors such as Gibbons et al. (1994), Nowotny et al. (2001) and Etzkowitz (et al. 2001) argue that governments have promoted national prosperity by supporting new lucrative technologies together with the universities which become 'engines' of their regions. Gibbons et al.

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1. The full reports have been published by the European Science Foundation as a single publication, entitled Higher Education Looking Forward: Relations between Higher Education and Society.
2. The full report was written by Jussi Välimaa and David Hoffman.

(1994) argue that a new form of knowledge production 'Mode 2' is replacing the traditional 'Mode 1'. Mode 2 is transdisciplinary research, characterised by heterogeneity and is more socially accountable and reflexive than Mode 1 knowledge. They argue that universities are losing the monopoly of knowledge production. The other variant of the metamorphosis thesis is the Triple Helix thesis which states that the university can play an enhanced role in innovation in increasingly knowledge-based societies. A second, more moderate view of the transformation of knowledge production and universities holds that academic capitalism is challenging the traditional values found in higher education institutions, where a subsequent attempt is made to substitute neo-liberal values and management practices. Universities become fertile ground for entrepreneurial universities and academics (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Marginson and Considine, 2000).

One of the main aims of theorists who chronicle the transformation of higher education is to highlight the changing social role of higher education and explore how this change is connected to changes in knowledge production taking place in universities. Furthermore, the aim is to argue that empirical analysis of the topic challenges the picture painted by these grand abstractions, or *Zeitdiagnose*. However, situations in universities tend to be more complex and conflicted than the theoretical abstractions suggest. Tuunainen (2005, 293) argues that there is a 'need for seeing scientific work and universities as complex and, occasionally, contradictory entities whose developmental trajectories are shaped by multiple historical, political and cultural characteristics'.

The idea of a network-based society reflects the changing idea of the state in the knowledge society discourse. In the Brave New States of the knowledge society, crucial questions are: what is the role of the state and who should the state serve? In traditional welfare states the aim of the state was to offer free-of-charge services to its citizens in matters of education, health and security. This idea of the state has been challenged by neo-liberal perspectives on society. Following a neo-liberal reasoning, the state should be more interested in its citizens as customers than as citizens. The idea of a neo-liberal state is to produce services for clients (who can pay for it) rather than to secure basic services for all of society's members. The role and position of higher education institutions in this changing ideological landscape is crucial for the state. As producers of innovations and new knowledge, higher education institutions are seen to be crucially important for the competitive capacities of nation states, whereas their role as trainers of experts is defined in terms of private (and hence payable) goods of education.

Higher education and the achievement (or prevention) of equity and social justice[3]

Although the prime focus of this theme is on higher education's contribution to the achievement of a fair and just society, the report argues that it is not possible to separate this from questions about equity and social justice *within* higher education. A linking concept is that of 'access' to higher education, both for students and staff, and the social implications of inequalities in that access. The thematic paper follows a recent contribution from Calhoun in arguing that there are two quite different senses to the notion of 'access': the first concerning whether certain groups are excluded or under-represented in higher education and the second concerning higher education's contributions to society in other respects, about who benefits and who pays (Calhoun, 2006).

Theoretical contributions to these debates tend to sit within one of two 'ideological' approaches (Moore, 2004). The first has been termed a 'liberal' or a 're-allocative' approach. Here, attention is given to meeting the human capital requirements of a high-skill economy both efficiently and fairly, to developing a meritocratic selection/allocation system, to promoting civic values and behaviour, in short – to facilitating a society characterised by high levels of social mobility. The second has been termed an 'elite reproduction' approach where the emphasis is upon the reproduction and legitimisation of existing social relations and the inequalities they represent.

Unsurprisingly, the policy literature has tended to follow the first set of assumptions. And, in its support, it is possible to identify considerably increased levels of social mobility, increased levels of income, and greater opportunities for women and 'historically disenfranchised groups' made possible by expanded systems of higher education. However, some of the research literature points to the independent effects of a changing occupational structure and of the role of increasingly differentiated higher education systems in reproducing and legitimising wider 'social differences'. There is also general recognition that expansion of higher education does not of itself reduce social inequality. Increased enrolments in recent decades have disproportionately benefited socially advantaged groups in most countries.

Returning to the second conception of 'access', there are many ways in which higher education can extend wider benefits to those who do not directly participate in it. These include the effects upon the economy and the impact of technological advance, upon democratic identities and notions of citizenship and, in Calhoun's words, 'value-rational claims about

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3. This report was written by John Brennan and Rajani Naidoo.

the inherent virtues of knowledge, culture or religious inquiry or non-economic accounts of public contributions, such as individual self-development or improved citizenship' (Calhoun, 2006: 12). Economic concepts of public versus private rates of return and seeing higher education as something more than a provider of 'positional advantage' to the individual student (or consumer) are also relevant here.

In looking to future research agendas, the report argues that there is need to achieve a better relationship between research on the topic of higher education's role in the achievement of equity and social justice and the wider social science literature on the topic.

While there is some literature on participation rates and the barriers and incentives for socially disadvantaged groups to enter higher education in various national contexts, there is limited comparative research on the extent of the differences between countries and the possibility of convergence via globalisation. Institutional and sector differentiation would be particularly interesting to compare cross-nationally.

As well as a continuing research agenda on the factors that affect the participation rates of particular social groups in higher education, other research questions in the theme overview paper concern:

• the research function of higher education, especially including knowledge transfer, and whether the benefits of this favour the powerful and advantaged or are equally distributed across society as a whole;
• questions of 'what is learned' in higher education – especially in terms of values and identity;
• 'taking truth to power', how far do we see a genuine social critique being provided by higher education;
• whether the growing importance of consumerism and markets in the regulation and steerage of higher education undermine or strengthen the 'public good' claims of higher education;
• and, very broadly, what do we know about the effects of a wide range of different types of public and social engagement by universities?

It is important to link issues of social equity to the theme of higher education's increasing differentiation (with different types of institutions and of functions within them). The idea that a single narrative or 'idea' can any longer capture the complex and often contradictory nature of higher education and its relationship with other parts of society has to be dispensed with. Within most individual countries, higher education institutions are a varied bunch of organisations and many individual institutions contain much multifunctionality within their own walls. Between countries, variations reflect different traditions and contemporary circumstances and contexts. But this should not be seen as an excuse to descend into praise of the particular and the unique.

An understanding of the *different* things that higher education does is extremely important but the range of differences is not infinite, differences are bounded and they can be typologised in relation to both internal and external variables. And we should not rule out the possible existence of some unifying concept or concepts. A focus on difference may be a key route towards identifying and better understanding such concepts.

Higher education and its communities: interconnections and interdependencies [4]

This theme report reflects the notion that higher education is becoming increasingly socially embedded, in the sense that universities and colleges are interacting closely with a multitude of external communities and that each has particular demands in terms of the services it expects from higher education.

The diversity of communities – stakeholders or constituencies – and of the demands these clients place on higher education institutions have resulted in new relationships within and between higher education institutions and in new relationships between them and the external communities they serve. These relationships have local, regional, national and international ingredients. Such interconnections and interdependencies relate to both the external functions of higher education, for example in terms of the economic and social functions it carries out, and the internal functions in terms of teaching, research and knowledge transfer. The economic expectations placed on higher education reflect both the knowledge and skills needs of workers in modern knowledge-based economies and the demands for relevance in research and knowledge creation that underlie the successful development of these economies. The social expectations placed on higher education reflect the centrality of educational credentials to opportunity and mobility structures in modern societies and the access to such structures among, for example, different social classes, ethnic groups and geographical regions.

As the set of stakeholders in higher education has expanded, so too has society's expectations of what their public obligation is. If we take a leap through history from the days of the early universities that provided education for the Church and other elites, to the present times of greatly expanded higher education systems, we may conclude that nowadays higher education has become inextricably linked to the notion of 'progress', both at an individual and a societal level. The spread and democratisation of higher education means that

4. This report was written by Ben Jogbloed, Jurgen Enders and Carlo Salerno.

many organisations and individuals have a stake in higher education and want to have their say.

The report argues that today's university must contend with a remarkably diverse set of challenges, competing claims and communities. How a university (or indeed its many constituent parts) proceeds to identify, prioritise and engage with its communities reflects a process that helps to determine its evolution and chances for survival. A careful study of such processes, the forces that drive them and their impacts on the internal workings of the university and its responsiveness to society would be both timely and warranted.

The processes of reaching out to communities and the taking on of civic responsibilities by higher education institutions conform to a trend to design higher education and science policies in ways that make teaching and research more publicly accountable and relevant to society. New forms of market-based customer accountability are restructuring the context of degree programmes and scientific research and contribute to a re-orientation of long-standing academic norms and values. These changes are designed to make academic research and curricula more responsive to the demands of various paying customers.

These calls on higher education to be responsive and accountable in a much broader sense affect the way in which higher education institutions and systems render proof of their excellence and relevance, the way in which they manage and control their internal operations, maintain close links with their stakeholders and develop strategies for their organisation. These days, the corporate social responsibility of higher education extends beyond producing graduates and research outputs. It requires them to engage in public debates, to enter into close working relationships with private actors and to be part of multiple networks and alliances with multiple actors on various levels including government agencies, students, business, research sponsors, local communities and regional authorities. This linking up with external stakeholders and communities is strengthened further by state policies aimed at deregulation and marketisation.

Steering and governance of higher education[5]

This thematic report focuses on the 'steering' of higher education systems, considering wider patterns of public sector 'reform'. Because higher education has rarely been studied as a public policy or management topic, the report suggests that 'bringing in' generic concepts from political science and public management more fully into the study of higher education institutions is a promising avenue to explore academically and may re-invigorate the study of higher education institutions. It argues that (i) the state increasingly seeks to govern and 'steer' higher education systems; (ii) steering patterns can be linked to underlying 'narratives' of public management reform; and (iii) steering patterns vary from one European nation state to another, reflecting attachment to alternative narratives, conditions of path dependency and localised reform trajectories.

The report starts with a summary of the 'state of the art'. It recalls that an important part of the literature is focused on higher education public policies in terms of reforms and decision-making, in order to qualify (or prescribe) what the role of the state should be (leaving steering of higher education in the hands of academics versus mediating the interests of the society in orienting the development of higher education versus stressing the role of the market). But another part of the literature rather tries to identify the (collective) actors involved in the higher education sector, to describe the relationships they have with one another and to qualify the mode of regulation prevailing among them. Studying public policies and their content becomes less important than discovering and understanding the policy network or the policy regimes producing them.

In the second section the report argues that European nation states are increasingly seeking to steer their higher education systems, along with other key public services, in directions which are consistent with national policies. Three possible redefinitions of the role of the nation state in the public sector generally, as well as in higher education, are discussed.

A first redefinition consists of the *transformation of the public sector into a more restricted and managed sector*. High profile student unrest and trade union strikes put universities firmly on the radar screen of this evolution: universities were asked to increase their productivity, to develop new missions, to reduce their operating costs, to improve their drop-out rates, to match the demands of the job market, to pay attention to societal needs, etc. Increasing the autonomy of more strongly governed universities has repeatedly been affirmed as the best option to reach such objectives. The effects of these 'reforms' led to significant changes in the balance of power within the higher education sector. In parallel, the role of the state in the provision of higher education has been redefined in various ways. In some countries, the development of the private sector has been encouraged. In others, reductions in public funding occurred and led universities to search for other forms of funding, including the diversification of funding sources by increasing or introducing student fees.

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5. This report was written by Ewan Ferlie, Christine Musselin and Gianluca Andresani.

A second redefinition consists of the *'hollowing out' of the nation state* which is losing functions, legitimacy and authority to an increasing range of alternative actors. Functions move from the nation state upwards to the EU level or downwards to 'strong regions'. In higher education systems the role of regional/local public authorities increased with the devolution of prerogatives on higher education to specific territories or the increase in autonomy to already decentralised units. Consequently, higher education institutions operate in regional, national and international networks simultaneously and have to engage with a wide range of different stakeholder groups. The distribution of power is more diffuse and pluralist.

A third redefinition of the state concerns attempts to ensure the *democratic revitalisation* of pathological and over-bureaucratised traditional forms of public administration. Consequently, the monopoly on expertise previously recognised in public servants has been discussed and critiqued, as well as their capacity to define public interest. Such trends are observable in comparable public service arenas such as health care where recent public policies have been developed to construct an informed public opinion which can act as a countervailing force to the views of clinicians and scientists. Within the university context, this democratising redefinition would suggest strong staff and student and stakeholder participation in the governance of the institution. Democratising would also lead to an emphasis on the social function of the university as a key part of local civil society and strong interactions with local stakeholders.

In the third section of the report, the authors try to make sense of these transformations and to link them to three main narratives of public services reform: the New Public Management (NPM), Network governance and the Neo-Weberian narrative. They are called narratives because they are not pure analytical frameworks but mix technical with political and normative elements. For each narrative, the authors try to predict some 'signs and symptoms' that should be observed in higher education.

The NPM narrative relies on (i) markets (or quasi markets) rather than planning, (ii) strong performance measurement, monitoring and management systems, with a growth of audit systems rather than tacit or self regulation, and (iii) empowered and entrepreneurial management rather than collegial public sector professionals and administrators. It is influenced by ideas in organisational economics, such as the principal/agent theory, which stress incentives and performance. There is a concentration on goals of efficiency, value for money and performance rather than on democracy or legitimacy. It suggests an increase in the strength of hierarchy, either directly through line management or indirectly through strong contracts within a principal/agent framework.

The Network governance narrative considers the development of more bottom-up and emergent models of implementation. Given an outsourcing of direct responsibility for production through privatisation, outsourcing and agentification, the state now has to steer through contracts, alliance building and partnership and persuasion rather than hierarchy. The concept of multi-level 'governance' emerges to make sense of these new conditions. It not only refers to network-based forms of organising but also allows more balance among the involved actors, more deliberative democracy and, consequently, the co-production of public policies among more numerous, more diverse and more equal actors. Within the network governance narrative, a greater range of actors and interactions emerges, and the central state plays more of an influencing and less of a directing role. It governs with society and not above it. There is a shift from vertical to lateral forms of management and the network develops self-organising and self-steering capacity.

The *Neo-Weberian narrative* may be seen as an operation of the principles of democratic revitalisation within public management reform. Neo-Weberian reforms thus try to combine a reassertion of some fundamental Weberian principles (role of the state as the main facilitator of solutions; role of representative democracy; role of administrative law; preservation of the idea of a public service with a distinctive status, culture and terms and conditions) with 'neo' elements (shift from an internal orientation towards bureaucratic rules to an external orientation in meeting citizens' needs; supplementation of representative democracy by a range of devices for consultation with citizens; modernisation of laws to encourage a greater achievement of results; professionalisation of the public service).

The fourth and last part of the report suggests three main research perspectives which could be developed. The first relies on the hypothesis that public/political governance of higher education will remain influential and important but tries to analyse how it will evolve. The second research perspective also builds on the hypothesis mentioned above to question the outcomes of higher education governance. The third and last perspective suggests the potential emergence of other forms of regulation beyond government in international networks.

Differentiation and diversity of institutional forms and professional roles[6]

The 'shape and size', i.e. the quantitative-structural aspects, of the (national) higher education systems is one of the key areas both of public debate and of research on higher education (cf. Clark, 1983; Geiger, 1992; Gellert, 1995). The manifold concepts and terms underscore a widespread interest in establishing a 'map' on which the degree and the direction of 'diversity' of higher education can be pinpointed. Thereby, the report argues that higher education systems can be characterised according to the extent of their homogeneity or diversity *horizontally,* i.e. in terms of the substances of research, teaching and learning and thus of the 'profiles' of institutions or their sub-units, and *vertically,* i.e. in terms of 'quality' and 'reputation'. Thereby, formal distinctions are common in terms of types of institutions and programmes as well as in terms of levels of study programmes, while informal differences tend to be reported as ranking lists of classifications of ranks of individual institutions or their sub-units, either according to quality and reputation or according to substantive profiles (cf. Teichler, 2007).

When the view spread in the 1960s that expansion of student enrolment had to be accommodated by a greater diversity of institutional provisions, distinctions between types of higher education institutions became a key mechanism of diversification in many European countries (Cerych, Furth and Papadopoulus, 1974; OECD, 1973, Teichler, 1988; cf. also Kyvik, 2004). Since the 1980s, however, vertical differences between individual institutions and study programmes increasingly gained momentum in European countries characterised historically by a flat hierarchy. In most recent years, this trend has been reinforced by a widespread belief that universities are bound to compete globally. Concurrently, European countries cooperate in the Bologna Process in strengthening the role of levels of study programmes and degrees and in creating a convergent structure of study programmes across Europe (Neave, 2002; Witte, 2006). One of the key aims of this policy, i.e. to facilitate intra-European student mobility, however, seems to be realised most successfully if higher education systems do not move further towards vertical stratification.

Systematic information on the shape and size of higher education is often provided officially by governments and related agencies and emphasis is put on quantitative developments and descriptions of the shape of the system in tune with official classifications (e.g. EURYDICE, 2005). In contrast, the majority of interpretative policy papers and the majority of academic publications in this domain suggest a conscious or subconscious preference for increasing 'vertical diversity' and a steeply stratified higher education system as being the most desirable (cf. Sadlak and Liu, 2007; see also CHEPS, 2005). Often, arguments and information are presented in a biased way, i.e. by either only presenting indications for increasing diversity or in describing minute vertical differences in an exaggerated way. The advocates of a steeply stratified system pronounce such a view – in recent years in tune with the *Zeitgeist* – without seeking evidence about the real extent of vertical diversity, without properly searching the links between the vertical and horizontal dimension and without any interest in exploring the overall functional outcomes of different degrees of diversity of higher education systems. Most analysis of university rankings, for example, seem to exaggerate difference, are part of efforts to ensure anti-meritocratic gains of leading institutions and do not care at all about the overall effects of steep stratifications on the functional outcomes of higher education systems (cf. the critical analysis of Dill and Soo, 2005; Altbach, 2004).

Research on the patterns of higher education systems has a conceptual focus in explaining major directions of change. Some explain the dynamics primarily from the viewpoint of internal trends of research and teaching ('internal perspective'), and others underscore the role of policy actors in higher education ('systemic perspective'), while others perceive strong influences on the part of economic and social developments as well as of key external political actors ('environmental perspective') (see the overviews in Huisman, 1995; Meek and Wood, 1998; Birnbaum, 1983). Various 'developmental theories' have been produced which might be characterised as 'expansion and diversification theories', 'drift theories', 'flexibilisation theories' and 'cyclical theories' (see the overview in Teichler, 2007). Concepts vary according to the extent to which they consider structural developments to be driven by the persistence of national traditions ('idiosyncratic approaches'), by more or less universal modernisation pressures ('modernisation approaches') and by specific policy options ('political approaches') (Teichler, 1998).

The report makes proposals for future research in this area. A spread of research on the 'impact of college' on students and society is called for in Europe in order to improve the information base on the most salient issues and to counteract the biased and *Zeitgeist*-driven discourse. Research has to control its basic assumptions in order that public myths on the strengths and weaknesses of certain features of higher education are not reproduced and reinforced.

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6. This report was written by Ulrich Teichler.

4. Higher education and social change

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It is clear that there are many interconnections between the above themes. Thus, institutional differentiation impacts directly on how higher education performs its role in relation to social equity. Many of the pressures on higher education to widen participation and provide avenues of social mobility are driven by, and have consequences for, the characteristics of the 'knowledge society'. Patterns of governance adapt to changing relationships between higher education and its communities and stakeholders. As well as interconnections between the themes, there are also clear connections to additional themes and research areas. Thus, investigation of the knowledge society takes us towards the field of science policy. Differentiation has implications for the professional roles of academics, their training and development.

At the HELF interim conference in Brussels, a number of cross-cutting issues emerged as general characteristics of the research field. These included the pervasiveness, on the one hand, of 'grand narratives' – of globalisation, of knowledge society, of academic capitalism etc. – and, on the other hand, of quite localised, policy-driven empirical research. Research – especially comparative research – which addressed the big themes posed by the grand narratives seemed to be quite rare. Global, regional, national and local levels of analysis appeared to be warranted and, where possible, to be combined.

While much research addressed higher education's responsiveness to external pressures and requirements, one could also identify a clear strand that addressed its capacity for resistance, if not downright subversion – 'escaping governance' as one contribution put it. High hopes and aspirations were to be found in many national and international policy documents but research tended to point to complex and conflicted realities. Higher education was generally cast as a real or potential 'hero' in contemporary society but examples were not difficult to find where higher education emerged as the 'villain', variously legitimising social inequality, blocking off opportunities, failing to equip the workforce, failing to innovate or failing to take 'truth to power'. That the various critiques reflected contradictory ideological positions and demands is a further characteristic of the field.

Public and private dichotomies were also much in evidence, not just in terms of the ownership and funding of higher education but in terms of its contribution to a larger and wider 'public good' beyond the various private and positional advantages accruing to individuals, enterprises and nations. From such perspectives, intellectual property could be seen as the 'hoarding of knowledge' and educational goals replaced by 'credentialism'. Tensions such as these and other sorts could sometimes appear to be creating a 'legitimation crisis'.

Questions could also be raised about higher education's central processes. Who, within the knowledge society, was educating whom? Were calls for new forms of 'engagement' and the 'pursuit of relevance' likely to be the salvation or the destruction of higher education? Who were the 'new higher education professionals', some of whom apparently neither researched nor taught, at least not in recognisable ways?

Fragmentation, interest groups and mission overload could be identified in many places. A new cast of characters (consumers, users, producers, owners) could be identified with new sets of roles to play. Should one be talking about 'higher education' or 'university', about 'system' or 'institution' or 'autonomous professional'? How did a greater institutional diversity map on to changing (and arguably growing) social diversity? Had the university's traditional claims to 'exceptionalism' in its dealings with state and society all but gone in most jurisdictions? What today was the role of the state and was it generally benign or, if not actually malign, frequently indifferent or uncomprehending? What were the effects of structures, systems and ideology at all levels?

It was noted that higher education was frequently 'in the news' these days. But were the boundaries between 'public debate' and 'expert discourse' always clear and did this matter anymore? A priori value judgements abounded on all sides of most debates. What was the relationship between the categories and concepts used in debate and analysis and the realities they purported to refer to? Were academics too self-interested to apply their various crafts to their own professional world? Was there a tendency towards fatalism in attitudes towards policy studies? Was there a danger in adopting too passive a view of the roles of higher education's various participants?

These and many other questions emerged in the preparation and discussion of the five thematic reports.

4. Higher education and social change

A senior British policy maker in higher education once referred to 'the research questions that are too dangerous to ask'. In posing a future research agenda, it may be that an element of danger can no longer be avoided!

In attempting a synthesis of the issues raised in the five reports and the discussions they have provoked, interconnections and contradictions must necessarily be explored. It is also impossible to avoid some overlap with the thematic reports on which they are based. The rest of this report is structured in terms of the following areas of potential future inquiry: changing social contexts; mechanisms of interaction between higher education and society; their implications for higher education; higher education's impact on society; methodology, including comparative research, research design, data collection etc.

Changing social contexts importantly include processes of globalisation and Europeanisation, of massification and its consequences, of forces for standardisation and harmonisation and of claims made for and on behalf of the knowledge society. Research questions include the ways in which such 'mega trends' are interpreted in different national and institutional settings, how they interact with different national and disciplinary traditions and with what implications for those who work and study in higher education.

Mechanisms of interaction between society and higher education reflect the increasing social embeddedness of higher education institutions within a multitude of communities that make their own particular demands. New interconnections and interdependencies relate to both external and internal functions of higher education. These raise questions about the drivers of and instruments for changing interactions between higher education and society, about the kinds and amounts of institutional and functional differentiation that are required and achievable, and about the kinds and the ownership of the criteria for judging performance.

The implications for higher education arise from the expectations that higher education should be more visibly useful for economy and society; that higher education should be more efficient and effective; that greater institutional diversity *and* multifunctionality are required; that more streamlined systems of regulation and decision making are needed at the same time as the composition of actors and arenas of action are becoming more complex; and that established borderlines of arenas and functions are becoming blurred in the process of 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation', with implications for both autonomy and vulnerability.

Higher education's impact on society can be conceived in terms of constructing and supporting the 'knowledge society', of constructing the 'just and sta-

ble' society, and of constructing the 'critical society'. There are tensions between these different areas of 'impact' and there are increasingly problematic boundary definitions of the social spaces that are 'impacted upon' – local, national, regional, global. At some times and places, 'obstruction' rather than 'construction' may be in evidence.

Methodological issues include the current paucity of data and a lack of comparability in what data exists, the particular contribution which comparative research can play and the need for better integration between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Alongside these issues are another set of issues concerning the organisation of research – and especially of comparative research – and of training and capacity building in this research field, including its degree of apartness or integration with various neighbouring fields.

Finally, it must be accepted that there is a degree of arbitrariness in all this. In particular, boundary issues are always difficult, here in connection with higher education's institutional forms, the roles of its practitioners and the central functions of their craft. Neither research nor high levels of learning are restricted to what goes on within higher education institutions. Arguably, the most central higher education processes of all – teaching and learning – do not receive the attention they deserve in this report and nor do their relationships to similar processes in different organisational contexts. The boundaries around higher education as a field of research are especially permeable and probably rightly so. One of the aims of HELF has been to help bring higher education research 'within the fold' of broader social science research. But that implies both a large agenda and a long timeframe for its achievement. Therefore, this report does not claim to cover everything but it does claim that the things it does cover are worthy of our continuing attention as scientists and researchers.

5. Changing socio-political contexts[1]

The concepts of 'globalisation' and 'knowledge society' have been used to describe recent changes in the nature of industrial societies with fundamental implications for the future shape and role of higher education systems and institutions. They have also been widely adopted in policy discourses where there are a number of *Zeitdiagnoses* through which the media, national and international higher education policy makers and higher education institutions themselves have appeared eager to show the importance of higher education institutions in a world where knowledge has become one of its most important production factors. Yet, as we shall indicate, both 'globalisation' and 'knowledge society' are contested concepts with ambiguous implications for the future of higher education. Related concepts are those of political ideologies, such as neo-liberalism, with their implications for the role of the state and the 'marketisation' of relationships with and between public sector organisations, including universities.

The concept of globalisation

Globalisation is a contentious issue both as a concept and as a social phenomenon. As a word, global means something 'covering or affecting the whole world' (see *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* ,1995). Held et al. (1999) distinguish between three different schools of thought regarding globalisation, called by them *hyperglobalisers, sceptics* and *transformationalists*. Each represents a distinct attempt to understand the social phenomenon of globalisation. They maintain that 'for the hyperglobalisers, contemporary globalisation defines a new era in which people everywhere are increasingly subject to the disciplines of the global marketplace'. The opposite perspective is presented by the sceptics, who maintain that globalisation is essentially a myth, one which conceals the reality of an international economy increasingly segmented into three major regional blocs within which national governments remain very powerful. As for the transformationalists, they see contemporary globalisation as historically unprecedented. According to them, states and societies across the globe are 'experiencing a process of profound change as they try to adapt to a more interconnected but highly uncertain world'.

Beerkens (2004) has defined four different perspectives on globalisation: those of geographical globalisation, power and authority, cultural meaning and an institutional concept. With regards the last of these, Beerkens (2004: 10) notes 'the logic of national identity, commitment and citizenship is called into question and

substituted by the emergence of a cosmopolitan identity or citizenship'.

Higher education is at the crossroads of all these perspectives on globalisation. For centuries universities have claimed that they continue disciplinary-based, *international* (and eternal) traditions. Simultaneously, however, universities have been *national* cultural institutions taking care of the education of national professionals and elites. They have also provided a cultural and academic basis and context for disciplines (such as history, sociology and national economics), thus buttressing the existence of the nation state as a social entity (Beck, 1999). Higher education institutions have thus supported the idea of the nation state as the institutional container of society.

In Europe, the Bologna Process serves as an interesting example in the context of globalisation because one of its most important objectives is to enhance 'the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education institutions' (*Bologna Declaration,* 1999). This could have been taken from a handbook of globalisation in higher education – if one existed. This process initiated by European nation states aims to make European higher education one of the most lucrative higher education areas in the world through the homogenisation of degree structures and by introducing European accreditation agencies (*Berlin Communiqué,* 2003).

An important feature of the Bologna Process is the introduction of a structure that facilitates comparability with the other higher education systems in a way that forms an instant matrix in which stratification, differentiation and ranking, based largely on research productivity, can occur. In addition, current developments in quality assurance may provide nearly simultaneous mechanisms for the comparison of teaching and learning outcomes alongside research outputs. Because the idea of quality assurance is based on

standardisation (and hence comparability), this may lead to the use of similar numerical data gathering and mining processes. Such trends bring implications both for the discourse surrounding the differentiation of higher education and for the realities which underlie it.

Processes of harmonisation and standardisation are taking place all over the globe. These processes are fuelled by and based on competition in the market places where the social forces of exchange relationships and the imitation of the best universities are uniting higher education institutions symbolically. This symbolic harmonisation is indicated and supported by the increasing use of league tables in national higher education policies that fuel at the same time a certain vertical differentiation of higher education systems.

It is evident that international interconnectedness – globalisation – has increased and will be increasing in European higher education in the future. National systems of higher education can no longer be regarded as the closed social systems they have been in the past. Competitive horizons opened by globalisation have influence on the policy goals of nation states. Simultaneously, however, it is important to acknowledge that national traditions which are part of the cultural landscape of the nation states continue their influence to greater or lesser extents (Välimaa and Hoffman, 2007).

Globalisation thus throws up many challenges for higher education researchers, not least to two central traditional categories used by researchers. These are the idea of a national system of higher education and the idea of a university. Both of these categories need to be questioned in order to see how changes in society challenge our thinking as higher education researchers.

Basically, therefore, current changes in societies – and in higher education – challenge not only the functioning of higher education institutions but also the uses of traditional categories as intellectual devices to understand this functioning. These traditional categories have, for example, been questioned by Marginson and Rhoades (2002) who have proposed a 'glonacal heuristic' suggesting that local, national and global dimensions should be taken into account in the future analyses of higher education.

Within European higher education, supranational and national policies contribute to dynamics towards a future where status hierarchies among universities and other types of higher education institutions are enforced or emerging. Once status hierarchies are in place – like any form of social stratification – it becomes difficult to estimate who those hierarchies benefit most, or if they in fact shift attention away from more important debates and focal points in higher education (Bourdieu, 1988; Välimaa and Hoffman, 2007).This points to im-

portant future research questions on the causes and effects of homogeneity, diversity and the dynamics of differentiation in higher education.

The 'knowledge society' discourse

Knowledge society discourse takes place in the context of globalisation and is rooted in the fact that higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums in global knowledge economies. However, globalisation as an analytical device focuses attention more on the changing relationships between organisations (such as higher education institutions, NGOs, business enterprises) or political entities (such as nation states versus global and regional actors) and their changing power relations, social and commercial interactions. Bearing this in mind, we will try to analyse the kind of roles higher education is expected to play with regard to various knowledge society discourses. This aim, in turn, calls for understanding of how the knowledge society has developed as an intellectual device and been defined as a social phenomenon.

The role and importance of knowledge in the development of economies and societies has emerged over time. Daniel Bell (1973) was among the first to note that between 1909 and 1949 in non-agricultural sectors, skills contributed more to economic growth than labour and capital. According to Bell (1973: 212), post-industrial society could be characterised as a knowledge society in a double sense: 'first, the sources of innovation are increasingly derivative from research and development (and more directly, there is a new relation between science and technology because of the centrality of *theoretical* knowledge); second, the weight of the society – measured by a larger proportion of Gross National Product and a larger share of employment – is increasingly in the knowledge field'. The same notion has been repeated by Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) when he analyses the difference between previous modes of development with the mode of development of the 'digital world' (a term introduced by Negroponte, 1995).

The use of the term 'knowledge society' began to expand with the studies of researchers such as Robin Mansell (1998) and Stehr (1994) in the 1990s (UNESCO, 2005). While Mansell et al. (1998) focused attention mainly on ICT as a driving force of the 'knowledge society' or 'information society'[2] in a source book of the knowledge society, the aim of Stehr was, in turn,

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2. Mansell refers to Machlup (1962) and Porat (1984) when he writes that 'for three decades or more, people have been discussing the major transformations that are possible through harnessing electronic information processing technologies to the social and economic priorities of industrial societies. These new technologies are vitally important for "information economies" or information societies' (Mansell 1998, 12).

to create a social theory based on the notion of the knowledge society. As a sociologist he responded to the disciplinary challenge of 'the need for a theory of society that resonates with the new social realities'.[3] According to Stehr, societal relationships cannot be explained without integrating the primacy of dynamics related to knowledge. The sociological question is: does the nature of knowledge production change societies, cultures and economies? The popularity of the term 'knowledge society' is evidence in and of itself that understanding modern society as knowledge-based indicates that traditional understandings within societies are changing.

The idea of social change based on extension and enlargement is also familiar to higher education researchers. Martin Trow's assumption that the social role of higher education changes with the expansion of the student body has been accepted as an insightful conceptualisation of mass higher education (Trow, 1974). Through this conceptualisation, it is evident that mass higher education is the social form of higher education in the knowledge society. A similar trend has been noted by Clark (1983) who maintains that the main source of social dynamics in higher education is the expansion of knowledge. Following the reasoning of Clark, the expansion of knowledge leads to new research fields creating a demand for new chairs and professorships to be established for emerging fields of research and disciplines. It also creates the need to establish new training programmes and new higher education institutions. This expansion is taking place simultaneously with the development of modern (knowledge) societies.

As an intellectual device, knowledge society aims to analyse a new situation in which knowledge, information and knowledge production have become defining features of relationships within and among societies, organisations, industrial production and human lives. Furthermore, the social theory of the knowledge society aims to explain the crucial role knowledge generation and dissemination plays in economics, culture and the politics of modern societies. All of this raises questions of whether knowledge societies call for more and different things from their higher education systems and of whether they strengthen or weaken the position of universities as 'knowledge institutions'.

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3. The knowledge society discourse is simultaneous with discourse about the 'Information Society', which began in the 1960s. According to a number of writers (Stehr, 1994; UNESCO, 2005) 'Information Society' tends to give a more limited and technically oriented description of the challenges in a modern society. The main critique against this (limited) perspective to changes in societies acknowledges the fact that knowledge always has a social function which is rooted in the production, distribution and reproduction of knowledge. The nature of these issues is political, not technical, because the quality of information and knowledge are related to social structures and the use of power in society.

For many commentators, a central role is claimed for the university within the knowledge society. But for some, the role is contested and calls for further conceptual and empirical investigation. According to this second view, the university is actually endangered and risks losing its key position and leadership role in the generation and dissemination of knowledge and, in consequence, its role in the future development of society. In effect, it may be argued, the needs of the knowledge society might be better served by institutions other than higher education. According to a third view, however, the university as an old-style professional and collegial organisation will be transformed in the context of a post-modern or post-industrial society. In the optimistic version of this perspective, it is assumed that the older class, occupation and stratification based functions of higher education will be replaced by a 'mediator' function between growing expert systems and the individualisation of life-courses.

Knowledge as a private and as a public good

The debate on private and public goods in higher education is a typical example of emerging problems in the era of the knowledge society. There are two interrelated issues here. The first concerns the ownership of innovation(s). In a number of countries, the problem has been addressed through legislation which regulates the intellectual property rights of academics and universities. However, the idea of intellectual property rights is challenged by the ethical basis of the open source development process, which envisages information and communication technologies as public goods, in which anyone is welcome to participate and all are invited to benefit. The second issue is related to student tuition fees. The question of 'who benefits' from higher education is often translated into the question 'who should pay' for higher education. The acquisition of educational credentials can be regarded both as providing 'positional advantage' for those who possess them (and hence a 'private good') and as contributing to the creation of a more productive workforce and a successful national economy (and hence a 'public good').

Marginson (2006) discusses the nature of knowledge when he criticises the problems of traditional liberal distinctions (see Samuelsson, 1954) between private and public (goods) in higher education. According to Marginson: 'For example, language and discourse, and knowledge as "know-how", as distinct from knowledge expressed in particular artefacts such as texts, are about as close to natural public goods as we can get. The mathematical theorem retains its value no matter how many people use it. Nor are its benefits confined to individuals for long: knowledge can only

5. Changing socio-political contexts

ever be a temporary private good' (Marginson, 2006: 50). Marginson's assertion is that questions of the ownership of knowledge need to be taken seriously in global knowledge societies where intellectual property rights are one of the issues at stake. Furthermore, the commodification of knowledge is crucial not only in research (as knowledge production) but also in teaching, as Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) assert. They argue that 'attempts at the commodification of information are probably less problematic than attempts to commodify knowledge, pedagogy and assessment' (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005: 45).

The 'publicness' of higher education, including the important role of governmental responsibility, oversight and financing in many countries, and the legal status of the organisational providers and their staff is currently challenged in many ways. There are many indications of a major transformation of the relationship of universities with society that also affect the universities' 'publicness'. In elaborating future research on the public-private dynamics in higher education, the different meanings of the 'private, the public and the good' need to be addressed. These terms tend to be confused in the often heavily politicised discussion around the transformation of the modern university. Issues of governance (who decides?), financing (who pays?) and ownership (who provides?) will need to be addressed, as well as the issue of 'winners and losers' (who benefits?)

Regional and global dimensions to the knowledge society

In Europe, it is easy to find support for the idea that higher education should support national economic competitiveness in the global market place. The national level is, however, only one of the political levels in which the development of the knowledge society has been set as a specific political objective.

In addition to European nation states, knowledge society discourse has opened up an imaginary social space in the European Union itself. This argument is emphasised on the European Commission's Knowledge Society homepage, which begins with the central objective of the Lisbon strategy: *'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.* The Commission is confident of the potential this type of society offers for its citizens. According to the cited webpage, the knowledge society means: *'new employment possibilities, more fulfilling jobs, new tools for education and training, easier access to public services, increased inclusion of disadvantaged people or regions'.*

In the global context, the use of information technologies, the access to knowledge resources and the political aspects of knowledge society are key issues (UNESCO, 2005; Mansell, 1998). It is in this perspective that a 'global information society' emerges as one of the main challenges for development, because it is evident that the global information society is a political goal which is far from being reached. One should not forget that knowledge society discourse is dominated by the conditions of the relatively young, well-educated working-age citizens geographically located in the urban areas of a few rich countries (UNESCO, 2005; Castells and Himanen, 2002); in other words, by the stakeholders of higher education.

The role of higher education is seen to be crucial in the development of global information societies. The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education emphasised that the relevance of higher education means being:
• politically responsive,
• responsive to the world of work,
• responsive to other levels of the education system,
• responsive to culture and cultures,
• responsive to all,
• responsive everywhere and all the time,
• responsive to students and teachers.

As a conclusion the declaration says: 'In these circumstances, higher education can truly help to underwrite the generalised spread of knowledge within industrialised societies and in developing countries' (UNESCO, 2005: 97).

This impressive list of social responsibilities expected from higher education clearly indicates that world communities have high hopes regarding higher education. It also indicates that the socio-economic role of higher education in the global information society is seen as being crucial for the development of societies. Furthermore, the list of expectations highlights the central role of universities as producers of knowledge and educated experts in knowledge societies. However, looking at these goals with a critical eye, it can immediately be seen that these multiple expectations describe higher education from the outside, looking in. There is little indication that the effects of growing expectations and the potential 'mission overload' of higher education and research are understood. Furthermore, there are no operational suggestions of how societies should develop their higher education to realise these comprehensive, multifaceted challenges.

Shifts in conceptions of governance

During the last few decades there have been shifts from traditional state-centred governing arrangements to alternative modes of governance. There is no doubt that these shifts – driven by economic, ideological and pragmatic motives (Kickert, 1997; Pierre and Peters, 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000) – have modified the forms and mechanisms of governance, the location of governance, governing capabilities and styles of governance (van Kersbergen and van Waarden, 2004). Traditional modes of government steering, based on the notions of comprehensive planning, have been in retreat while new modes of governance, in the form of 'steering at a distance', new public management approaches, communicative planning and network approaches, have been gaining ground. We have argued earlier that European policies on the national and supranational level are increasingly seeking to steer higher education and research systems in directions which are consistent with policies for emerging knowledge societies in a competitive global economy. At the same time, we witness the rise of an international competition among various models or narratives for 'good governance' in higher education and research. All of this points to the need for further conceptual and empirical investigations building on the stream of existing higher education policy studies. A number of promising perspectives can be identified.

The first relies on the assumption that government will remain influential in the governance of higher education while there is a need to analyse how public governance is re-defining itself and its role in steering higher education and research. It means further developing the reflection based on the identification of different models or narratives of governance in three directions: understanding how narratives combine and evolve over time at the country level; studying the instruments pertaining to these narratives; and using these narratives as a framework to analyse European and EU policies as well as Europeanisation processes.

The second research perspective also builds on the hypothesis mentioned above to question the outcomes of higher education governance. One important question which can legitimately be raised from the point of view of evidence-based policy is: do these higher education reforms 'work'? This raises theoretical, methodological and empirical issues about the criteria and theoretical framework for deciding whether a reform 'works' or not: How can the impact of a reform be isolated from many other confounding variables? How can we gather appropriate evidence? What do high quality research designs look like in this field? How do we compare before and after? How can we measure the effects of reform, not only quantitatively but also in terms of quality? The development of a high quality research base in higher education reform efforts is, therefore, an important long-term objective which needs further thought, coordination and investment.

The third and last perspective suggests the potential emergence of other forms of regulation (international networks of higher education institutions based on self-selection, inter-regional networks) of the higher education sector, escaping the control, steering and political influence of any levels of public authorities (regional, national or supranational) and proposes to develop research on the interstitial changes which are already observable.

Conclusion

Issues of globalisation, knowledge societies and governance will inevitably provide a backcloth to future research on higher education and social change. The next three sections of this report look more explicitly at questions of change within higher education and the consequences of such change (or the lack of it) for other institutions of society.

6. Mechanisms of interaction between society and higher education

Multiple stakeholders and multiple expectations

Higher education and research are becoming increasingly socially embedded in the sense that universities and colleges are interacting more closely with a multitude of communities and that each makes a particular demand in terms of the services it expects (Burrows, 1999; Neave, 2000). As the set of stakeholders in higher education has expanded, so too have the number and range of society's expectations. Nowadays higher education and research have become inextricably linked to the notion of progress and innovation, both for individuals and society. The spread and democratisation of higher education means that many organisations and individuals have a stake in higher education and want to have their say.

The diversity of communities – stakeholders or constituencies – and the diverse demands these clients place on higher education have resulted in new relationships within and between higher education institutions and in new relationships between them and the external communities they serve. These relationships have

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local, regional, national and international ingredients. Such interconnections and interdependencies relate both to the external economic and social functions of higher education and to services it provides in terms of teaching, research and knowledge transfer. Likewise, the ability to devise efficient means of accommodating these demands is held to be a prime criterion for higher education institutions to be considered as innovative and responsive.

How a university (or indeed its many constituent parts) proceeds to identify, prioritise and engage with its communities reflects a process that helps to determine its evolution and chances of survival (Mitchel et al., 1997). A careful study of such processes, the forces that drive them and their impacts on the internal workings of the university and its responsiveness to society would be both timely and warranted.

The consequences for higher education institutions of a multiplicity of stakeholders have been explored indirectly as sub-components of inquiries, for example, into the diversification of funding sources, as a concomitant to the overhaul of higher education management, or as an aspect of relations between higher education institutions and their region. Nevertheless, systematic scholarly examination in this field is rare while there is an increase in the weight of societal interests in higher education.

Drivers and instruments of change

It is important to shed light on the drivers of and instruments for changing interactions in the relationships between higher education and society; in other words to study the causes for a growing multifunctionality of higher education and a blurring of its boundaries with other institutions in society (Enders and Fulton, 2002).

The reaching out to communities and the taking on of civic responsibilities by universities and their units conforms to a trend to design higher education and science policies in ways that make teaching and research more publicly accountable and relevant to society. New forms of government regulation, market-like competition and network governance are restructuring the context of degree programmes and scientific research and are contributing to a re-orientation of long-standing academic norms and values.

One of the major assumptions behind the notion of such a revised social contract for higher education is that changes in the modes of coordination imply changes in the balance of power between different constituencies and interests acting around and within higher education. The expansion in the number and nature of external constituencies is assumed to be one of the consequences of a 'de-centralisation' from state

control towards self-regulation and marketisation. It is also closely tied to policies of financial diversification and stands as a form of accountability to communities and sponsors alternative to government. Changes in the participation of different stakeholders may also be brought about in a number of ways: by legislative enactment, by contractualisation, by devolution of specific responsibilities from central government to the region or to the individual establishment.

If we assume, on the one hand, the emergence of a more weighty interaction between higher education and its environment and, on the other hand, a greater measure of self-regulation, we have also to recognise that different forms of coordination are likely to impinge on the reality of the university-society interaction and the other way round. In this context, universities and scholarly communities are not only driven by this transformation but they are also drivers of border-crossing activities. They increasingly embed themselves in new networks and configurations, sometimes being major players in a global competition.

Institutional responses and changing interfaces

In order to identify factors that are of relevance for analysing institutional responses and changing interfaces between internal and external communities, we have to look both at structures and actors. As regards the actors, we are interested in the various stakeholders in the environments of organisations, the roles of governmental actors, other higher education organisations, private businesses, labour unions, local and regional politicians and others in the development and implementation of new interfaces and intra-organisational change strategies. Concerning the internal organisational actors, their perceptions of the organisational environment and the main environmental actors are at stake as well as their role for the development, implementation and effects of change strategies. In a higher education system that produces public and private goods and is characterised by volatility and unpredictability in terms of demands, it is worth exploring how the higher education institutions and their internal constituencies respond to 'societal demand'.

Further, quasi-market elements are becoming increasingly popular in higher education policy making. As Texeira et al. (2004) have shown, experimentation with market mechanisms takes three main forms: the promotion of competition, privatisation and the promotion of economic autonomy of higher education institutions. Dill et al. (2004: 345) point to the contribution of market mechanisms in terms of cost per graduate and scientific productivity, the transparency in the system and the op-

eration of universities, their growing flexibility, resilience and responsiveness. At the same time, serious concerns about the costs of an increasingly fierce and globalising 'academic arms race' are raised. Competition for academic reputation may create a tendency to become an end in itself (Calhoun, 2006). Public money would increasingly be used to reproduce or enhance the reputation of institutions and scholars as a market signal rather than as a means of linking up with society and serving the private and the public good.

Enhancing further linkages between actors from different social systems (such as politics, university, industry and representatives of civil society) is part and parcel of the increasingly visible move from top-down steering and hierarchical forms of governance to interactive processes and networks. The basic assumption apparently is that the social relationships between these systems are limited and thus have to be increased by governmental incentives. At the interorganisational level, questions arise about interaction patterns in such networks within and beyond the organisational field of higher education and research. Of special interest are the determinants and correlates of different types of networks, the influence exerted by different actor groups in such networks and the impact of such networks on the shape and structure of the higher education system.

For higher education institutions, this produces the risk of running into problems of 'mission overload' as they 'try to be all things to all people'. The need to fulfil their obligation towards being a socially accountable institution producing public and private goods, therefore, may urge them to carefully select and identify the 'right' degree of differentiation. This raises questions about institutional and disciplinary responses and strategic choices, the functional and structural reforms that higher education may create to handle the growing complexity of its external relationships. Investigations along these lines would thus need to look at variables that address institutional responses as well as the (changing) interfaces between higher education and its communities.

Efficiency and legitimacy

Whereas in the past, establishments of higher education could rely on set and formal criteria to demonstrate their effectiveness and to assert legitimacy vis-à-vis their main constituent – i.e. government – they now have to accommodate a more complex, fluid and varied environment. Changes in the balance of demand and power between higher education's different constituencies impact upon the nature of higher education's social and economic functions. The question then is whether a set of institutional selections and interfaces can de-

6. Mechanisms of interaction between society and higher education

liver the required outcomes of efficiency and legitimacy in the public interest. This leads not only to questions of performance but also to questions of democratic legitimacy which need to be addressed in the light of a changing social contract for higher education.

Put very simply, two alternatives, even though not mutually exclusive, challenge the view that public science and scholarship are performing well in serving the public good. According to the first argument, science and scholarship are just not doing enough to serve the public good. In this context, it is widely agreed that the most important challenges facing us today can be met only with the massive support of research-based knowledge. Scientists and scholars are, however, continuously busy communicating within their own system, that is their scholarly communities, instead of being responsive to the societal needs of today and tomorrow. New forms of governance, financing and organisation are thus needed to stimulate 'new modes of knowledge production' (Gibbons et al., 1994) and interaction between the university and its publics. According to the second argument, science and scholarship are not only serving the public good but also producing 'public bad'. In this context, it is widely agreed that science and scholarship are not only the solution to the problem but also the very reason for major problems, such as global warming. Beck (1992) has built the notion of the public losing faith in science and scholarship into his theory of the risk society that calls for a new public understanding of science as well as for a new scientific understanding of the public.

Commitment to the public is thus more than just maintaining contacts with 'clients'. It means the organisation and its communities seeking and using ways of engaging in a dialogue with various stakeholders in order to learn about how its services are valued and to encourage it to perform them better. Horizontal accountability includes mechanisms to ensure transparency about choices made and to assure the involvement of civil society. The word 'horizontal' stresses the fact that higher education institutions do not just communicate with and render proof to a principal that is placed higher up in the hierarchy, but to groups, bodies, agents that have an interest in the higher education institution. A careful study of the public view on universities' performance and emerging new forms of horizontal governance and accountability would, therefore, be both timely and warranted.

This leads us to the issue of the institutions and mechanisms responsible for the overall coordination and effective functioning of the higher education system. Once universities have become more autonomous and entrepreneurial actors, it is difficult to assume that their corporate activities can constitute the public interest; organisational self-interest does not necessar-

ily contribute to systemic performance and the public good. This may imply that universities are not necessarily seen as serving the public interest and thus raises new questions about the institutions and mechanisms assuring the public interest in higher education systems in a 'de-centred' environment.

7. The implications for higher education

The growing power of external demands versus an increasing room for manoeuvre

Both available higher education research and the public discourse on higher education in Europe suggest that higher education perceives the current situation as ambivalent as far as the power of external forces and the room for manoeuvre is concerned. On the one hand, detailed public bureaucratic control of higher education has been reduced over the years. In addition, with the gradual erosion of the welfare state, higher education has been increasingly encouraged to seek funding from sources other than national governments. This multiple funding is seen as an opportunity for counterbalancing the expectations of single 'masters'. On the other hand, higher education is increasingly exposed to strong external expectations: e.g. to implement certain governmental-led reform concepts such as the Bologna Process, to be more visibly useful for the economy and society, to create stronger incentive-based internal regulation, to identify and meet the needs of perceived 'market forces', etc. This tension is often characterised in a harmonious way: higher education gains increasing 'autonomy' along with expectations to be 'responsive' and 'accountable'. But, at the same time, enormous tensions between externally led and internally led programmatic decisions cannot be denied.

For future higher education research this implies the challenge to analyse the operational dimensions of this interaction between external demands and internal goal-setting. What is happening in the processes of identifying needs and goals and of coping with them in the daily life of higher education institutions?

Moreover, higher education research has to ask about the changing values underlying decision-making processes. 'Autonomy' of the higher education institutions and 'academic freedom' of the scholars are values held in high esteem within academia and, at least as lip-service, in higher education policy arenas in general. These terms signal that modes of decision making are enormously influential for the outcome of higher education and imply that a substantial freedom from external interference is needed for a higher education system to be truly innovative. Higher education research is challenged to analyse the changing interpretations of these terms and the extent to which higher education proactively determines the interaction between higher education and the outside world or is mainly responsive.

In addition, future higher education research has the task of analysing the consequences of this ambivalent setting: for example, does the variety of independent options increase within a certain 'legitimate' range provided by external expectations, while options which are

obviously in conflict with the currently prevailing external expectations decrease?

Establishing a notion of knowledge society

As we have already argued, the 'knowledge society' is a powerful construct for creating a widespread consensus in society that 'knowledge' has become increasingly more important in central spheres of life and society. The construct is widely accepted within higher education and is generally viewed as a positive development and advantageous to higher education because its function is viewed as increasingly valuable to society, even though some scholars have pointed out that universities are endangered by the advent of the knowledge society because they are losing all or most of their monopoly or oligopoly functions.

As a consequence of the abundance of diverse claims about the future of the knowledge society, higher education, as well as individual scholars, are challenged to construct their own notion of 'knowledge society' as a basis for strategic action. It is a worthwhile endeavour for future higher education research to identify the typical notions of 'knowledge society' emerging within higher education and to compare them with the typical 'knowledge society' notions expressed by its stakeholders, the governments and society at large. It is important to explore the extent to which institutional profiles of higher education institutions are based on widely agreed concepts of knowledge society within the institutions themselves or the extent to which higher education institutions act on the basis of heterogeneous notions. Also, higher education research might identify the extent to which teaching and research activities lead to 'congenial' concepts of knowledge society.

7. The implications for higher education

The shift from a macro- towards a meso-perspective

No matter what degree of governmental influence higher education has been exposed to in the past and what institutional autonomy and academic freedom have meant in practice, higher education institutions were tacitly expected to serve the knowledge system and the public good from a macro-perspective. They have had to strike a balance between external influence and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, between academic quality and societal relevance, between elitist, meritocratic and socially cohesive norms, etc.

A substantial paradigmatic shift has happened in this respect in the last two decades. Higher education institutions are increasingly encouraged to opt for institutional strategies led by institutional rationales. What are the thematic priorities for teaching and research in this institution under its specific context and resources? What would be the admission and selection criteria to form a student body most congenial to the specific aims of the institution? What can be done to assure the best professional placement of the institution's graduates?

Higher education research is challenged to analyse the extent to which higher education institutions move from macro-perspectives towards meso-perspectives. What does this imply for the programmatic character of institutional strategies and its consequences at the level of individual institutions?

Higher education research has to identify the consequences for the higher education system as a whole. What degree of diversity emerges vertically, i.e. the level of quality and reputation, and horizontally, i.e. the substantive profiles of teaching, learning and research? Does the increasing power of meso-perspectives and the increasing willingness of higher education institutions to identify a specific role for themselves in competition with other institutions overall strike a balance for an acceptable macro system? To what extent do we observe visible 'distortions'? It is clear that the sum of institutional strategies does not serve a 'collective wisdom', for example, a dominance of 'academic drift', a curtailment of small fields of study, a neglect of fields of study not promising easy transition to employment, etc.

Implications for higher education's interactions with stakeholders

Higher education institutions in Europe have had to respond to a shift from a dominant state-university interaction based on the assumption that the state is the legitimate voice of the varied social forces towards a 'stakeholder society' where all social actors both try to have their voice heard in the political system as well as in direct interaction with the institutions expected to serve the public good. Accordingly, higher education institutions have intensified their communications with relevant actors interested in higher education. And this is done more frequently on local, regional and national levels as well as worldwide. Moreover, this interaction has been increasingly formalised and embedded in the deliberation and decision making of higher education systems, for example through stakeholder representatives on university boards and curricula committees, joint coordination of technology transfer, etc.

Again, higher education research is increasingly active in exploring the operational side of this development. What kind of communication and cooperation is taking place? How does this affect the interaction between government and higher education? To what extent is the involvement of external stakeholders driven by their financial resources and political power or strategically balanced according to the tasks and functions of higher education? How is the 'expertise gap' handled in the process of communication, i.e. the fact that stakeholders face problems of translating their expectations into the language of academia and that academia has a legitimate professional claim that nobody else fully understands the potentials and modes of teaching and research.

Moreover, higher education research certainly will increasingly address the substantive consequences of increasing stakeholder involvement. Does increasing concern for 'social relevance' turn towards utilitarian subordinance? Or does higher education construct itself in the communication and cooperation policies with 'relevant others' in a balanced civil society?

Implications for actors within higher education: the roles of management and scholars

The legal system or other regulatory devices were substantially changed in most European countries from about the 1980s. In most countries, the internal decision-making power of academics was reduced in favour of a stronger managerial authority. In the past, the response of higher education to external demands and pressures was often viewed as being predominantly the academic response. Increasingly in recent years, the voice of the university is understood to be the voice of the university management, or at least the management increasingly claims to be the voice of the whole university. For example, on the symbolic level, it was not only the European 'rector's conference' which renamed itself the European 'university association' but also several of the national associations of 'university heads'.

In-depth knowledge about the processes within higher education institutions in these domains and their consequences is scarce. To what extent do the norms and intentions of higher education management and academia converge or diverge? Under what conditions is higher education seen as coercive to prevailing academic approaches or as liberal, flexible and encouraging? How does the academic climate within academia change under the combination of changing external expectations and increasing power of the management of the individual higher education institution?

The strategic paradigm

Higher education is expected from outside, and increasingly intends from inside, to be a strategic actor. This implies a need to:
• set clear goals for actions, even symbolically in the form of 'mission' and 'vision' statements;
• clarify the 'why', 'what' and 'how' of any major action;
• base decisions on the analyses of potentials, opportunities and constraints;
• consider the 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' – key words of strategic reflection – of activities;
• establish forceful means of pursuing the implementation of strategies, e.g. through efforts to create a widespread consensus among actors, to stimulate strategic activities with the help of rewards and sanctions etc.;
• evaluate and to be regularly evaluated externally with respect to the processes and outcomes of activities; and
• consider the consequences of the results of such evaluations for future strategy and action.

Higher education increasingly aims to analyse these trends towards 'strategic universities', for example with regard to the strategic concepts as such, the role they play between lofty declarations and powerful guidelines for daily actions. Higher education research, moreover, addresses the dynamics of the various elements of the strategic emphasis. For example, research on evaluation in higher education aims to establish the extent to which evaluative judgements can claim validity, its ambivalent role between feedback for improvement and control, its conflicting rationales between 'fitness for purposes' and control according to general yardsticks as well as the links between evaluation and – external and internal – decision making. Last, but not least, analyses of the strategic paradigm of higher education have to ask how changes are made to the actual norms and actions in the daily life of the higher education institutions. For example, does higher education limit its actions to norms and activities which fit best into the logic of higher education strategies, while neglecting those tasks for which the success cannot be easily assessed in terms of effectiveness and efficiency?

Coping with complex and conflicting tasks

Higher education increasingly feels itself under pressure to cope with a growing range of expectations which are viewed as demanding and conflicting. A notion of the 'over-burdened university' seems to be spreading. The following tensions with respect to the relationships between higher education and society transcend the individual fields and the individual functions of higher education and deserve attention in future higher education research.

First, higher education is expected to be more visibly useful for economy and society. Yet, higher education is expected to generate unpredictable innovation, to prepare students not only to be highly skilled professionals in established areas of knowledge but also to cope successfully with indeterminate job tasks and to challenge constantly in a critical way conventional wisdom and established practices. Moreover, higher education is likely to lose necessary public support if it does not demonstrate visible utility, but it may also lose its characteristic features to other knowledge institutions if it bows simply to the external expectations.

Second, higher education is widely conceived as acting most successfully if interinstitutional diversity grows both vertically, i.e. institutions and departments characterised by distinct levels of quality in a steep hierarchy, and horizontally, i.e. through distinctive profiles of individual institutions and departments. On the other hand, institutions and departments seem to be expected to be more multifunctional than ever, e.g. to serve both quality and remedial learning, to pick winners and to support affirmative action, to be international, national and local, to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to be visibly instrumental, to specialise and to promote knowledge across the established dividing lines. They are expected to both gain from interinstitutional diversity and to increase intrainstitutional diversity.

Third, higher education is viewed as being more successful when the individual institution acts strategically. But strategic coherence is constantly challenged by the broad range of ever-increasing expectations, the conflicting nature of the external demands, the different academic and social arenas of the various disciplines, the increasing difficulties of coordinating the often incompatible conditions for teaching and research. Strategic response might be to forego any coherent pattern.

Fourth, established borderlines of arenas and functions get blurred in the process of 'internationalisation' and 'globalisation'. This creates new opportunities for gaining from contrasting experiences and from winning room for the extension of activities beyond the traditional fishing pond. But it also reduces protection from and heightens visibility to external demands. Moreover, it often requires more resources to do the job decently while financial pressures call for 'discount' solutions.

Fifth, higher education is facing increasing tensions in relation to its role of reinforcing or changing the social order in which it is embedded. It pursues implicitly or explicitly policies of fostering existing elites, strengthening or reinforcing meritocratic and compensatory mechanisms in society, e.g. strengthening the opportunities for the success of those socio-biographically disadvantaged or educationally unsuccessful.

These urgent and vocal, but also conflicting and incoherent, pressures are often viewed as offering ample and interesting strategic options, but they are also viewed frequently as 'mission impossible'. Research on higher education will need to identify how higher education is handling these tensions and conflicts. It will need to identify how the societal role of higher education, behind the key functions of generating and disseminating knowledge in various disciplines and cross-disciplinary areas, is shaped or shapes itself in societies which have dramatically changed in the wake of a *Zeitgeist* driven by beliefs in the advent of a knowledge society, in the strengths of competitive settings and of managerial power.

8. The impact of higher education on society

Previous sections of this report have already considered the growth of the often conflicting expectations placed on higher education by other interests and institutions of society. Many of these are centrally concerned with economic impact, whether through the work of science and innovation or through the servicing of labour market needs for appropriately trained human capital. But others are concerned with issues of equity and social justice, both providing the means for individuals and groups to achieve positional advantage in societies marked by considerable inequalities as well as addressing the maintenance or the removal of such inequalities. Increasingly, issues of social integration and cohesion, of citizenship and culture, are added to the list of expectations.

However, issues of 'impact' are ultimately separable from issues of 'expectations'. We can find many examples in the literature of the ways in which societal expectations are 'transformed' into something quite different by the mediating efforts of social actors inside and outside higher education (e.g. Kogan et al, 2000). In considering higher education's impact on society, therefore, it is important to look beyond the intentions, both honourable and otherwise, of those with power to shape systems, institutions and processes towards the actions and outcomes – for both individuals and society – of the various forms of engagement with those systems, institutions and processes by an increasingly wide spectrum of social actors.

In this section, we look briefly at higher education's social impact on the creation of 'knowledge societies', on the creation of 'just and fair' societies and on the creation of 'critical' societies.

Constructing the 'knowledge society'

Many claims are made about the pivotal role of higher education in the creation and transfer of the knowledge central to the construction of the 'knowledge society' and these have been discussed at some length in earlier sections of this report. Some influential contributions have emphasised the increasingly external mediations of knowledge production (e.g. Gibbons et al, 1994; Nowotny et al, 2001; Magalhaes, 2001) with concepts such as 'Mode 2' knowledge, legal conceptions of 'intellectual property' and 'academic capitalism' replacing, or at least challenging, concepts such as 'autonomy', 'academic freedom' and 'academic community'. These shifts may represent a greater emphasis upon a role for higher education as an agent in the transmission of social change sponsored by others rather than as itself an originator of change. They also represent a shift in emphasis from 'discipline' to

'application'. Issues arise concerning the organisation, funding, location and management of research.

Such issues connect to questions of power and decision making, of relationships within and beyond the academic community and, above all, of the uses to which knowledge is put. They raise questions about who in society has access to the knowledge created, and to some extent 'stored', within higher education, and about whose interests are served. They also raise issues for the boundaries and relationships between 'scientific' and 'everyday' knowledge and for the roles and training of academics. As far as impact is concerned, questions arise concerning the respective roles and qualities of research conducted under quite different conditions in different institutional settings. As we have already noted, the pressures towards increasingly 'internalist' considerations among the university-based research community may have the unintended consequence of reducing the relevance and social impact of much research.

Much of the debate on these topics has verged on the rhetorical. Future research might 'track' the impact of different forms of knowledge produced in different forms of organisational setting. Questions of 'impact on whom and on what' also arise.

A second element of the 'knowledge society' emphasis is the centrality of human capital to its functioning together with the perceived importance of higher education to its production. While much evidence attests to the continuing 'employability' of higher education's graduates (Schomburg and Teichler, 2006) – notwithstanding the massive increase in their numbers in recent decades – there is little consensus about the basis of this employability, in particular whether it is a function of the relevance of the knowledge and skills transmitted by higher education or of the use made by employers of educational credentials as a selection device, identifying individual 'potential' and the existence

of social and cultural capital. There is some evidence that the balance between the two hypotheses differs between different European countries. Within the human capital approaches, increased emphasis can be found on higher education's contribution to workforce development through lifelong learning and continuing professional development as well as the initial 'formation' of the graduate workforce. Questions of 'employer engagement' are raised within policy discourses in some countries and the nature of the division of labour between higher education and employers in the formation – both initial and continuing – of skilled and professional labour differs between individual countries and may be changing.

Direct evidence on the relationship between education and productivity in the workplace remains difficult to come by. Recent debates have seen a growing emphasis on more generic concepts of 'employability' which stress notions of adaptability and flexibility over the life-course rather than professional competence based on mastery of subject-based knowledge. However, the evidence base remains slim although labour market changes in the uses of credentials provide new opportunities for research, e.g. in the comparison of differently qualified individuals performing the same job. Research on higher education's role in the continuing professional development of the workforce as well as its initial formation is also needed in a context of flexible labour markets, career changes and lifelong learning.

Higher education's place within the knowledge society has been described as a 'silver bullet' (Robertson, 2007), where different conceptions of knowledge – as 'not ignorance' versus economic valuations of 'relevance' – may stand in a contradictory relationship. And notwithstanding the 'grand narrative' of the knowledge society, different conceptions of knowledge, of graduates and of graduate work roles may be found in different places, reflecting differences in national cultures and traditions and in contemporary economic circumstances.

Constructing the 'just society'

Credentials acquired through higher education are increasingly central to the determination of life chances in most developed countries. Therefore, the degree of social equity in the acquisition of these credentials becomes an important indicator of social justice. The empirical evidence from most of Europe, however, is that increased enrolments in higher education have done nothing to achieve more equitable social access to them. In fact, the evidence points to an opposite conclusion – expansion of numbers of graduates having

been achieved mainly through increases in middle-class enrolments, hence increasing the disadvantages faced by people without educational credentials. Such evidence lends support to the 'reproduction theorists' (Bourdieu, 1996; Brown and Scase, 1994) who see higher education as providing both the mechanism and the legitimation for class reproduction. In this view, upward social mobility was created by changes in the occupational structure (more 'room at the top'). Without such changes, higher education is predominantly a process of 'status confirmation' for members of the elite and socially advantaged groups more generally. Status (and wealth and power) is legitimised through an ideology of meritocracy. The appearance (at least) of equal opportunities to acquire socially valued credentials is vital to that legitimacy in order that those lacking status etc. may be persuaded that 'it is their own fault'.

Somewhat different perspectives arise if more emphasis is given to diversity within society and to differentiation within higher education. *Even if* the elite reproduction function is maintained, this is not the only function of 'mass' systems of higher education. Within the 'less noble' reaches of most higher education systems, important 're-allocation' functions may be taking place as routes of upward mobility provide access, if not to elites, then to careers and lifestyles unknown to previous generations. The interesting research question then becomes how higher education manages simultaneously to contribute to elite reproduction and to social mobility, and hence to the creation of both efficient and fair societies.

Such questions are closely linked to productivity issues raised above in relation to higher education and the knowledge society. Does the possession of the credential provide access to economic and social positions because of its link to enhanced job performance and productivity? Or is the link more to do with social and cultural capital and the ultimate 'arbitrariness' (cf. Bourdieu) of what is socially valued?

Some other perspectives argue that higher education's contribution to social justice is not just through the extension of participation. Higher education may impact both on cultural change and citizenship in ways that affect everyone in society, whether or not they have ever attended a higher education institution (Calhoun, 2006). The diffusion of knowledge and the engagement of the academic community may impact on society independently of participation rates. The social and cultural impact of universities on their various communities has generally been under-researched.

In some countries, a 'third mission' of higher education – to do with service and citizenship – is a strong feature of academic and institutional cultures. However, the content and function of this aspect of mission is not impervious to the effects of social change. There

are certainly questions to be posed about 'who is being served', with answers to be found along a spectrum from the 'public good' at one end to 'academic capitalism' at the other.

The above questions may take us beyond issues of the 'just society' to issues connected with the 'stable society'. Questions of social cohesion and integration are being asked in new and forceful ways at the beginning of the 21st century. Higher education's contribution to achieving them may be considered at local, regional, national and – through the increasing international mobility of both academic staff and students – at global levels.

Constructing a 'critical society'

Many have chosen to emphasise the importance of higher education in providing a 'critical space' within which new and potentially controversial views can be elaborated. The idea of the academic role as 'taking truth to power' is a linked notion and something of the opposite calls for greater responsiveness and relevance. It is a concept which stresses the importance of 'autonomy' rather than 'responsiveness' in the functions of the academy. However, empirically, there may be more examples to be found of higher education bolstering existing power relations than of it critiquing or subverting them (Brennan et al, 2005).

Again, there are connections with the other two constructs. The 'critical society' may not be unrelated to the 'critical graduate'. There are issues of 'elite' and 'mass' in relation to the locus of power and of how far 'power' welcomes or resists a visit from 'truth'. Is 'criticality' required of all or only of those in elite parts of higher education? (The rest can concentrate on honing their work-related competences!) But claims to 'truth' are themselves open to question within post-modern and other conceptions of science and society.

Related conceptions take us to the 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1997) and towards notions of 'negotiated' and 'cycles' of knowledge construction (Beck, 1992; Nowotny, et al., 2001). The question of who has access to different forms of knowledge connects to issues of justice, stability and efficiency within the knowledge society.

Global and differentiated societies

A further issue concerns our understanding or definition of the 'society' that higher education may be impacting upon. On the one hand, the nation state may be being replaced by global notions of society, or categories such as 'developed nations', or regional categories such as

'Europe' and, on the other hand, it may be replaced by local/regional settings and sub-groups within them. The international mobility of students, for example, gives rise to large sub-populations of international students within some universities. The potential social impact of the university through such sub-groups is likely to be different from its more localised impacts, and the nature of those localised impacts may themselves be changed as a result of the international element of the university's mission. Within notions of differentiated and fragmented societies, the provision of an integrative force may become an important function for many universities.

The links between higher education and mobility of all kinds are relevant here. Are students, socially and geographically, en route from one space to another? Are higher education institutions places where 'differences' are confronted and changed or are they places where they are reinforced and formalised? And to what extent are differentiations within societies matched (and possibly legitimised) by differentiations within higher education systems?

A characteristic of most of these areas of social impact is the paucity of research evidence to support them. There are considerable methodological difficulties in addressing them but comparative approaches may possess considerable power. The 'laboratory' notion of Europe may be useful in this respect as distinctive sub-regional and national differences exist alongside some broadly common features and trends. Additional areas of methodological challenge concern the timescales of impact and the difficulties of measurement – e.g. what impacts on what – and the need to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. Whatever methods are adopted, there may be occasions when higher education's contributions to social change are best described as 'obstruction' rather than 'construction'!

9. Methodological issues

Several issues concerning methodology have been identified in the thematic reports and discussions which have taken place as part of the HELF project.

Availability of data

This is a recurrent issue in many domains of research but it is a particular problem in respect of higher education, especially at national system levels in some countries where the higher education sector has been under-equipped in data collection, systematic surveys, centralised information, etc. Some parts of the higher education systems can also escape any kind of data collection because they are not under the control of the relevant public authorities. In some cases data exist but are not available to analysts (they are the monopoly of offices in the public administration), are not reliable because they are based only on self-declaration, or are of limited use because they are collected only from the perspective of immediate administrative objectives.

Existing data are also often difficult to compare across countries as no systematic efforts to ensure comparability have been made. Even when they exist (as by EURYDICE or the OECD), many analysts complain about having integrated data with no access to breakdowns.

Potential solutions include:
- the funding of projects aimed at collecting comparable data, (but not necessarily indicators);
- the funding of projects aimed at launching EU-wide surveys (the equivalent of the National Study of Post-Secondary Faculty in the US would, for instance, be a good example to follow);
- bringing politicians, administrators and researchers together in order to try to identify some common needs and determine how they should be met; and
- making more use of and greater connections between existing European surveys, such as the European Social Survey and Eurostudent.

Research at the institutional and more micro levels is not exempt from these problems. There are great variations in institutional practices regarding regular and systematic data collection and in making such data available to researchers. It is frequently not possible to link different data sets and, therefore, to explore the relationships between different functions and activities. Thus, much higher education has to be concerned with the collection of new data relevant to the research objectives. This, of course, is true of all fields but higher education is in a worse position than some in its access to systematic publicly available data.

Comparative research

The funding structures for research in Europe have favoured a model of comparative research which can be summed up by the following characteristics: (i) it concerns at least three countries and most of the time more than six, (ii) each national team is responsible for the empirical work in its own country, and (iii) it results in a publication introduced by a comparative chapter preceding a number of country reports. Additionally, reliance is normally almost completely placed upon quantitative data and contextual knowledge necessary to its analysis and interpretation is frequently lacking.

While comparative studies of this sort have produced important results and enhanced our understanding on a range of issues, such an approach, if employed in isolation, has some intrinsic limitations. First, it is confronted with the methodological and theoretical heterogeneity among the participating teams. As a result, each team works 'as it always did' in its own country. Second, it rarely provides opportunity (or time and resources) to proceed to an in-depth comparison. The heterogeneity mentioned above is one of the reasons for this, as is the typical situation where each national team has very little intimate knowledge of the results of the work of the other teams.

Possible solutions would see more emphasis given to the funding of comparative projects led by one single team and/or of comparative projects involving many teams but where none of the members of a national team would work on only one country.

Comparative research in this field has particular value as it provides the only way of disentangling the effects of general trends and social changes from the effects of particular contexts and traditions available in particular jurisdictions. Indeed, these differences in context and tradition are potentially a valuable resource for research with the bounded differences between European countries and sub-regions providing almost 'laboratory conditions'. And for these reasons, an historical perspective will often be a valuable element in comparative studies.

However, there is another sense of comparative research involving higher education. This would favour more studies comparing higher education and other sectors, thus trying to link the evolution of higher education with the general evolution of society and to understand how each influences the other.

Articulating qualitative and quantitative methodologies

This issue is not unique to higher education research and is probably one of the main challenges faced by

the social sciences today. The emphasis upon purely quantitative studies (where the mathematical or econometrical model used can become more important than the empirical issue it is supposed to explore) or on purely qualitative approaches (sometimes excluding any possibilities of generalisation) is a major limitation in the higher education research field as it is in others.

Research combining both quantitative and qualitative methods should be favoured. Some case study methods have particular value in facilitating a quantitative comparative approach within qualitative studies. But more imbricate research design may also be developed trying to articulate some quantitative methods with some qualitative ones: the study of academic careers could for instance rely on transition models methods and on biographical interviews.

A related point concerns the need to address the perspectives of all relevant actors, including those of the learners themselves and the various 'users' of higher education and research. In doing so, the articulation of qualitative and quantitative methods is again highly desirable.

Research organisation and design

A lot of higher education research is undertaken by a relatively small but independent and multidisciplinary group of scholars. Higher education specialists are often not very active in disciplinary groupings and, reciprocally, higher education is not treated as a main theme of research within the main disciplines. National and international disciplinary associations, for example, tend not to have sub-groups dedicated to higher education research.

That said, higher education research groups often have some kind of organisational links to social science and/or education faculties – public administration, sociology and school-level education being among the most frequently found. The type of link can influence the focus of research. Thus, research groups located alongside public administration faculties tend to have particular interests in governance issues whereas groups that are part of education faculties tend to have interests in learning and teaching, etc.

The aim should be to combine the disciplinary strengths of good links with other social science groupings while maintaining and developing the substantive strengths of the higher education research field. While some research is not sufficiently informed by current disciplinary developments, other research appears to be insufficiently aware of previous research within the higher education field. In general, higher education research will always be interdisciplinary and has always benefited from the confrontation of historians, political scientists, sociologists and economists.

Research organisation has also to address the training and career needs of researchers and to take account of the wide variety of types of research. The latter include evaluation and policy implementation studies alongside more strategic research and practitioner-oriented studies. It must also be recognised that much research is done outside of universities and research institutes, for example within national ministries and funding agencies, by 'think tanks' and private sector consultants. There is often very little interface between these research types and research networks.

For those embarking on an academic career, higher education research will often seem 'too narrow' and insufficiently related to teaching opportunities to be a sole area for specialisation. In such circumstances, the co-location of higher education research within a disciplinary setting may help to attract and retain good researchers. But there is then the risk of relative isolation from the other specialist groupings of higher education researchers. The answer rather suggests a need for a variety of organisational settings for research into higher education.

Maintaining objectivity

Not only is much higher education research funded to address the questions of policy makers, but it is frequently carried out by people who have some vested interests in the answers to these questions. We referred in an earlier section of this report to 'those research questions which are too dangerous to ask'. Most higher education researchers live their daily professional lives within the object of their study. They must play multiple roles as teachers, researchers and managers while being capable of sustaining critical assessment of these roles – at least as performed by others! The local and familiar settings in which these roles are played out need also to be the subject of critical and objective attention. Local knowledge can be valuable but familiarity can be dangerous.

The balancing of multiple roles and interests is not unique to the situation of the higher education researcher but it does have a particular force in this context. Maintaining objectivity in the research role may be assisted by organisational arrangements which avoid the more obvious conflicts of interest but also by more balanced funding arrangements with research councils taking a greater share than has typically been the case. There have been some interesting recent examples in the UK of the higher education funding council working with the relevant research council to support research of policy relevance while ensuring that policy 'interests' and interference were kept at bay.

10. Conclusions and research agenda

An important aspect of this ESF Forward Look has been the attempt to locate higher education research more firmly in its social science context. The project aimed

> to examine the research literature in terms of its underlying conceptual approaches and empirical findings across a number of selected sub-themes in order to derive a future research agenda that will address scientific questions of long-term strategic concern to the future of higher education.

The Forward Look instrument has provided a rare opportunity for research into higher education to take a step back from its more immediate concerns with contemporary policies and practices in order to take a view of its field that is both broad and long. It could have been 'broader' – academic boundaries are increasingly porous and this report recognises that there are some highly relevant fields of inquiry which have not been examined in any detail here. It could also have been 'longer'. The 'beyond 2010' of the original Forward Look title now, at the project's end, seems to be rather immediate. And the use of that particular date misled at least some of the participants at one of the project workshops into seeing a 'Bologna' connection in the project where none was intended. Indeed, one of the major questions which HELF has been attempting to answer is the part played by particular policy initiatives and frameworks in steering higher education's future as against the role of larger social forces and the agency of actors within higher education.

In placing its emphasis on developing a *scientific* agenda for future research in this field, HELF has not been resisting the pressures towards relevance and responsiveness which, as this report indicates in several places, are an increasing feature of research in most academic fields. The authors of this report believe that the needs of policy makers and practitioners will be better met if there is sometimes some element of 'distance' between their immediate concerns and interests and the questions pursued by research. The important role of research in responding to policy questions is certainly not denied but, alongside it, there is another at least as important role in helping to set future policy questions. Scientific research agendas should not just reflect policy agendas, they should help determine them.

This report is the second report to have been published by the ESF as a result of this Forward Look. (The first report contained the five thematic reviews.) But the important outcomes of HELF will go beyond its reports. Hopefully, the outcomes will be seen in the shaping and development of higher education research over the coming decades. Two other initiatives of the European Science Foundation may be of further help to achieving this.
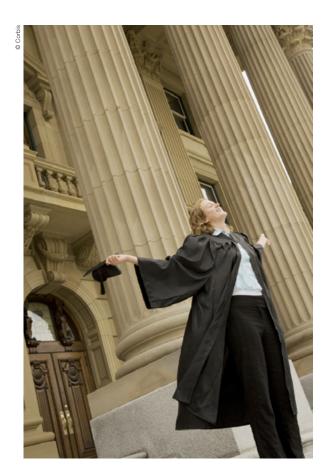
The first is a special conference, part of the ESF Research Conferences programme, organised in association with Linkoping University in Vadstena, Sweden with the title of 'Higher education and social change at the beginning of the 21st century'. Over four days in September 2007, researchers from across Europe and beyond debated the issues that have been at the heart of HELF and brought a yet wider set of perspectives to bear upon them.

The second initiative is a proposed new ESF EUROCORES programme of research on 'Higher Education and Social Change'. The objectives set for that research programme derive directly from HELF so it is appropriate to repeat them here. They are to:
• develop and implement a programme of comparative research into the relationship between higher education and society;
• develop theories and hypotheses about this relationship and the factors which influence it;
• address methodological issues of comparative research in this field, including data comparability, combining quantitative and qualitative research, and different levels of analysis;
• explore ways of utilising other social science datasets – for example, the European Social Survey and Eurostudent – in order to set higher education research more firmly within the different social and cultural settings in which it occurs;
• draw out relationships with other fields of social science research;
• draw out implications for national and international higher education policy makers;
• make a significant contribution to the development of research capacity in the field of higher education research and to an improved integration between the field and related scientific fields.

One conclusion of this report is that the achievement of such objectives will require not only funding but the arousal of greater scientific interest in higher education as a legitimate and rewarding field for future research from among social scientists beyond the specialist 'tribe' of higher education researchers.

A second conclusion is that many of the pressing research questions in this field would benefit from – and in some cases probably require – a comparative approach that is cross-European, and frequently beyond. As noted elsewhere in this report, higher education research is about systems and institutions. A European level of activity provides research with a set of both historic and contemporary differences which facilitate almost 'laboratory conditions' for scientific inquiry into both systems and institutions. Higher education systems in Europe provide a range of contrasting contexts and settings for comparative investigation. They provide significant dif-

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ferences between countries and groups of countries in the traditional conceptions of higher education and its relationships with other social institutions. They provide differences in contemporary circumstances in terms of higher education's organisational forms, governance and mission. And they provide differences in the features of contemporary political, economic, social and cultural contexts in which higher education institutions and personnel must work. Yet these differences are bounded by sufficient similarities to make comparative research particularly powerful, i.e. in setting limits to the range of the 'unknowns' that may affect data.

A third set of conclusions was prompted by debate at the project's final conference in London at the end of October 2007. This included reminders of the importance of historical perspectives to many of the issues requiring investigation, the need to acknowledge the 'agency' of the many groups of actors present in the field and, relatedly, the need to be less 'fatalistic' about the emergence and effects of policy. The need to be alert to the unintended consequences of policies, coupled with the challenges of identifying the causal

relationships involved in producing various kinds of impacts, was a further conclusion from the conference. There was also a call for more 'translational research', i.e. research which was fed into university staff development programmes, which would contribute to the emergence of more 'reflective practitioners' within the academic profession, and which, in the words of one delegate, could lead to the 're-institutionalisation of the university' itself.

As to the research questions themselves, many have already been raised in the pages of this and the thematic reports. In terms of priorities, however, we repeat here the research agenda which we included as part of our EUROCORES proposal to ESF.

In that proposal, we argued that a research agenda needed to start with the following overarching question:

(i) What are the relationships and interconnections between contemporary social and economic changes and transformations and the changes and transformations occurring within higher education institutions and to the roles of academics?

This leads on to a set of interconnected questions.

(ii) How are the changes in the balance of power between higher education's different constituencies and interests impacting upon the nature of higher education's social functions and the manner in which these are discharged?

(iii) Are a growing multifunctionality of higher education and a blurring of its boundaries with other social institutions necessary in order for higher education to have an importance within a 'knowledge society'?

(iv) How do changes in the organisation of higher education institutions relate to changes in intellectual programmes, agendas and advances?

(v) Do different forms of differentiation and interinstitutional diversity result in different relationships between higher education and the larger social and economic worlds of which it is a part?

(vi) To what extent and in what ways do national, regional and local contexts continue to play a decisive role in determining the characteristics of modern higher education systems? What is the role played by various public authorities? How much variation is there in the extent to which universities are internationally connected or integrated and with what consequences?

(vii) How might new forms of comparative research, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches, be employed in order to achieve a better understanding of the interactions between higher education and society and the *different* forms these interactions take in different parts of Europe and more widely?
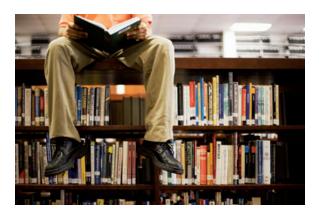
10. Conclusions and research agenda

Of course, other questions can and will be posed[1]. The answers to some of them may prove to be uncomfortable for many of the people currently working and studying within higher education. That may raise additional organisational questions about the conditions and contexts in which higher education research is best carried out and the kinds of training and experience that its practitioners need to have.

To repeat, the purpose of researching higher education is not just to make higher education 'better' – although hopefully it will also do that – but to enhance our understanding of contemporary societies and the futures that are available to them. The parts that learning, knowledge and science in all their forms and in all their organisational settings have to play in achieving such understandings and in shaping such futures deserve, we believe, to have a central place in social science endeavours.

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1. A compilation of research questions posed in this and
   the five thematic reports of the project is contained in Appendix I.

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Appendix I

Reflections on research questions, topics and themes identified during the HELF Project

Jussi Välimaa

1. Introduction

We have analysed the trends of higher education and higher education research with the help of both theoretical and empirical research literature in trying to see the future challenges of and for higher education. A traditional approach in the analysis of research topics and themes in the field of higher education research is to reflect on how research topics and themes are related to the academic disciplines, or to research methods, or to the actors in the field (see Teichler 2000). The approach of this appendix is somewhat different. Instead of using these traditional starting points, I will try to categorise the research traditions which have been developed in European higher education research over recent decades. These are as follows: (i) policy implementation studies; (ii) social studies of higher education as a part of society; and (iii) analyses of the functioning of higher education as a social entity (system or culture). Research questions identified during the course of the HELF project are grouped below in terms of these categories.

2. Policy implementation studies

Policy implementation studies pay attention to research which aims to examine what has happened – or is happening – in higher education in relation to, or as a consequence of local, national or regional policies. This intellectual starting point may result in more technical follow-up studies of reforms or to critical analyses of the reforms (see e.g. Amaral et al. 2005). One part of this research tradition is to play the 'devil's advocate' in order to design questions for debates and analysis which are really suitable to challenge and test prevailing assumptions and options. This may also entail the challenge of 'taking truth to power'. Therefore, there is the possibility that higher education research can offer a *genuine social critique.* In order to reach this critical perspective we should sometimes have the courage to ask 'the research questions that are too dangerous to ask'.

This research tradition may also be related to *evidence-based policy* with the aim of providing objective and reliable information on reality. We should consider whether higher education research should adopt a more active role in supporting decision making through producing data and analysis for decision-makers and decision-making processes both at national and European levels. If we accept this social role, then we should also consider how to improve the relationship between researchers and policy makers.

In our reports produced as part of the HELF project, this research category has been formulated as research objectives and/or research questions such as:

(i) Do higher education reforms 'work'? The answer to this question raises theoretical, methodological and empirical issues because valuing a reform as successful or not is based on normative or political assumptions. Therefore, one should ask what are the criteria and the theoretical framework for deciding whether a reform 'works' or not?

(ii) How do changes in the organisation of higher education institutions relate to changes in intellectual programmes, agendas and advances?

(iii) One of the challenges of higher education research is to conduct studies on current and important topics such as the Bologna Process.

(iv) New perspectives. 'Research on higher education does not have to be driven by public concerns. Higher education researchers could anticipate changing issues and make the key actors aware of the salient issues they are likely to face in the near future. We could give greater attention to issues which are looming but have not been analyzed in the public debate.' (Schwarz and Teichler 2000: 23). While this quote is as self-explanatory as it is self-evident, it would be remiss if we did not point out that the higher education research community is better equipped than most to identify, analyse and raise issues which are off the radar screen of policy discussion, public and general academic debate.

In addition to responsive studies of ongoing reforms, higher education research may also provide

(v) in-depth analysis of the current dynamics in order to establish some *most likely future alternative scenarios* of the development of institutional patterns of the higher system. This might help to design research approaches aiming to analyse major phenomena and major causes comparatively for various likely 'futures'.

3. Social studies of higher education as a part of society

This category of research refers to those studies which aim to analyse higher education, both theoretically and empirically, as a part of society. This tradition is theoretically rooted in the *disciplines of sociology and public administration* in higher education studies. Sociological theories of *Knowledge Society* (Stehr 1994), of *social systems* (e.g. Parsons and Platt 1973, Luhmann 1995) and *field theories* (e.g. Bourdieu 1988) provide examples of this approach. Also a variety of *governance and steering theories* (such as agency theory, resource dependency theory (Kivistö 2007)) and *cultural studies* (see Välimaa 2008) aim to analyse the relationship between society (or stakeholder or funding body) and higher education. Basically this research interest focus-

es on the social dynamics taking place between higher education and society – and inside higher education as a part of society and its social dynamics.

Changing societal dynamics in the relationship between higher education and society can be regarded as a general theme connecting various research topics defined in our papers. Recent changes which increase the fragmentation of higher education and its interest groups together with mission overload can be identified in many places. A new cast of characters – consumers, users, producers, owners – can be identified with a new set of roles to play. Furthermore, higher education's contribution to achieving the many goals defined by societies may be considered at local, regional, national and at global levels through the increasing international mobility of both academic staff and students.

In our reports these topics have been approached through the following (exemplary) questions:

(i) What are the relationships and interconnections between contemporary social and economic changes and transformations and the changes and transformations occurring within higher education institutions and to the roles of academics?

(ii) Who, within the knowledge society, is educating whom? Are calls for new forms of 'engagement' and the 'pursuit of relevance' likely to be the salvation or the destruction of higher education?

(iii) Who are the 'new higher education professionals', some of whom apparently neither research nor teach, at least not in recognisable ways?

(iv) How does a greater institutional diversity map on to changing (and arguably growing) social diversity? Have the university's traditional claims to 'exceptionalism' in its dealings with state and society all but gone in most jurisdictions?

(v) What today is the role of the state? Is it generally benign or, if not actually malign, frequently indifferent or incomprehensible? What are the effects of structures, systems and ideology at all levels?

(vi) Questions of social cohesion and integration. The issue of who has access to different forms of knowledge connects to issues of justice, stability and efficiency within the knowledge society.

(vii) What do we know about the effects of a wide range of different types of public and social engagement by universities?

(viii) Do different forms of differentiation and interinstitutional diversity result in different relationships between higher education and the larger social and economic worlds of which it is a part?

(ix) Is a growing multifunctionality of higher education and a blurring of its boundaries with other social institutions necessary in order for higher education to have an importance within a 'knowledge society'?

Some broader themes which belong to this category of research can also be identified. These include the following:

(x) *The research function of higher education,* which includes especially the problems and challenges related to knowledge transfer: do its benefits favour the powerful and advantaged or are they equally distributed across society as a whole?

(xii) How are changes in the *balance of power* between higher education's different constituencies and interests impacting upon the nature of higher education's social functions and the manner in which these are discharged?

(xiii) *The role of different levels of higher education field/ systems*. To what extent and in what ways do national, regional and local contexts continue to play a decisive role in determining the characteristics of modern higher education systems? What is the role played by various public authorities? How much variation is there in the extent to which universities are internationally connected or integrated and with what consequences?

(xiv) *Higher education and working life.* This is one of the major topics of empirical research in higher education. In spite of its popularity, it does not diminish its central value in higher education research because training of experts and professionals is one of the main channels of interaction between higher education institutions and society also in knowledge society. For example; if the ageing of many European societies is considered, longitudinal designs focused on different (national or regional) manifestations connected to lifelong-learning becomes interesting.

4. Analyses of the functioning of higher education as a social entity (system or culture)

The third category of research pays attention to studies which have analysed *higher education as a social entity* whether it has been defined as *a social system* (e.g. Clark 1983, or Becher and Kogan 1992) or as *cultural entities* (Becher and Trowler 2001, Välimaa 2008). The main aim of studies in this category is to base theories or conceptualisations on empirical studies of higher education focusing on academics, basic units, institutions or national systems of higher education. Furthermore, the aim is also to theorise higher education as a social entity obeying its own social dynamics. In fact, these studies belong to the basic body of knowledge of higher education research because they aim to develop theories which explain the nature and dynamics of higher education as a social entity.

In the HELF reports, this category of research has been approached in terms of the following perspectives and questions:

(i) To what extent are differentiations within societies matched (and possibly legitimised) by differentiations within higher education systems?

(ii) Are students, socially and geographically, en route from one space to another? Are higher education institutions places where 'differences' are confronted and changed or are they places where they are reinforced and formalised?

(iii) Research on the 'impact of college' in Europe is relatively scarce up to now. We tend to be overwhelmed by claims that certain input and process factors are highly relevant for the output and outcome without any solid evidence in support of the claims.

(iv) The questions of 'what is learned' in higher education – especially in terms of values and identity – should be asked in the higher education institutions of the knowledge society.

(v) Curiosity-driven studies on emerging issues. Higher education researchers should be prepared to identify emerging topics in policy, public or academic debate.

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Appendix II

List of participants at workshops and conferences of the HELF project

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Sandra Buerger, University of Kassel, Germany
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Roderick Floud, United Kingdom
Steve Fuller, University of Warwick, United Kingdom
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