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Observatory for Fundamental University  
Values and Rights

# Inventing Tomorrow's University

## Who is to Take the Lead?

*An Essay  
of the Magna Charta Observatory*

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Bononia University Press

Bononia University Press  
Via Farini 37 – 40124 Bologna  
tel.: (+39) 051 232 882  
fax: (+39) 051 221 019

© 2008 Bononia University Press  
ISBN 978-88-7395-379-1

[www.buonline.com](http://www.buonline.com)  
e-mail: [info@buonline.com](mailto:info@buonline.com)

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Printed by: Arti Grafiche Editoriali s.r.l. – Urbino

First printed in July 2008

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## Foreword

*Prof. Michael Daxner, President Magna Charta  
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Together with the University of Iceland, the Observatory of the Magna Charta arranged a series of conferences on tomorrow's idea of the university in Reykjavik, Luxembourg and Turin: the point of departure was a line of the Magna Charta that refers to the 'true' university. What can this be – today and tomorrow?

The close co-operation between Jòn Torfi Jònasson, an educationalist, Pall Skulason, a philosopher, and Andris Barblan, a historian, gave the entire undertaking a strong philosophical and ethical tone – not so usual in the writings about the academic institution.

To bring out the wealth of the debate and point to some of common points that emerged from the dialogue, the Collegium of the Magna Charta commissioned a conclusive synthesis by Jòn Torfi Jònasson, in fact his personal understanding of the key elements brought up during this three year international dialogue. He shows remarkable insights into a discussion that has

been taking place in parallel to mainstream higher education research and policy – although using the latter as material for his analysis. Jòn Torfi's closeness to the reflection of Robert Paul Wolff is one indicator of his philosopher's birdeye view. As president of the Magna Charta Observatory I am grateful to Jòn Torfi who has put eminent effort and meticulous thinking into this Essay, and to Andris Barblan, who has been the most constant companion and editor of this text.

Philosophers have always liked to discuss the university, both as a trajectory for their ideas and as an object unto itself: is it not a fascinating institution, indeed, where knowledge is generated, stored, transformed, taught, converted into truth or ideology, where inter-generational relations are also being readjusted – either a true philosophical dream or a nightmare? These many roles have evolved greatly since the setting up of the University of Bologna in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: that explains why so many want to know whether, in previous times, universities were more adequate, intrinsically better even, or whether today's institutions are really below or up to academic standards? Thus, Vico, Kant, Schleiermacher, Newman, Heidegger, Jaspers, Habermas, Marga, Dewey – and many other prominent thinkers – have expressed an opinion on the university as an institution.

The Observatory proposes today yet another Essay on the university, written by a philosopher and pedagogist, a paper clearly in line with a grand tradition. Herein, the history of the European university is being summed up, its main functions and structures explained, and the *status quo* described – all for one purpose: to glimpse

into the future of the institution. This is also the *raison d'être* of our association, of its mission about university identity: monitoring academic freedom and enhancing institutional autonomy; and, twenty years after being proposed to the world of higher education, the Magna Charta must also envisage its potential for the future. As a practical philosopher and an experienced educationalist, Jòn Torfi Jònasson offers a reasoned basis for such a forecast of times to come. The following pages may – or perhaps will – serve as a guidebook into the maze of approaches that could bring the university closer to the ideals and functions that have shaped it. Although Jòn Torfi Jònasson is well acquainted with the research concerning higher education as well as with the policies shaping the system as a whole, he resists the temptation to 'contaminate' a philosophical overview with too many details: he prefers listing ideas, pointing to terminology, setting the context and outlining academic potentialities – and this he does in a convincing comprehensiveness that allows the limitations of philosophy to appear since he does not hide behind an overly abstract scheme.

Why should this exercise be important for the Observatory? Because we must be clear on our ethical commitment – and its links to university life –, the commitment that signatories endorse when they write their name at the bottom of the Magna Charta document in Bologna. Do the universities referred to in 1988 exist in reality today? Or is the document a call for the 'normalisation' of institutions that need to meet a special ideal if they are to be considered a university? If so, which *idea* of the university is the charter proposing? The question is far from trivial since cynics could argue that signing a

document and recognising its principles may have little bearing on academic practice or the governance of an institution of higher education. In other terms, the link between the normative and pragmatic interpretations of the Magna Charta may be loose or tight. The Essay here below certainly gives guidelines for making choices in either direction. It is strict on definitions and terminology, however, and this is what we need. Since Adorno's *Introduction to Sociology* (1968) we know how important it is to accept the implication of a term (*Begriff*) signifying a reality that can be changed or corrected, criticised or re-affirmed. May the Magna Charta community make best use of those many terms: they do not challenge the reader at first glance but question him or her in the context of a reality, which has become multifarious – and thus not easy to comprehend.

We discuss academic freedom when the university has become an industry that counts in billions of dollars. We also call for institutional autonomy for a *variety* of institutions that resist any definitive typology – so much so that it is impossible to decide which of those bodies does need academic freedom to meet its ends and which may feel this value as a useless appendix, given their institutional functions and missions. We discuss the social implications of higher education but sometimes refer to societies that had no relevant statistics about the sector some twenty years ago although, today, they count for some 60% of all students. We have not yet left the cocoon of the European university that we face global developments that seem to marginalise the cultures of Europe and North America, forcing them to adapt to new circumstances in still unknown ways. And we insist on our roots and mission with the firm conviction that free-

dom, the privilege of institutions of higher education, is both irreplaceable and universal. Of course, we know that any single university has a local and unique profile, a very specific environment and a particular mission – but these are socio-ethnological variations woven around one idea: academic freedom belongs to all those social entities that produce, transform, teach and study science and care for an ethically based transfer of science and scholarship from one generation to the next.

In the light of these brief remarks, our first question about belonging to the Magna Charta community remains the following: what should the rector or president of a signatory institution *do* in order to meet, in practice, the normative prescriptions he or she has taken upon as his or her responsibility? Will increased liberties, once practiced inside the institution, have an impact on its members, will they improve ethical standards, internally, and social trust, externally? Will universities gain in importance and will their authority become relevant – from the public point of view?

Answers to these questions cannot be formal, i.e., the result of deliberations made in a governing body, an academic senate or a committee of wise persons – nor will they appear immediately when reading the book in your hands. Jòn Torfi Jònasson has outlined situations, looked for commonalities and indicated key contextual elements of general interest: to proceed towards the future, this material needs to be integrated in our minds and practice – as academics, university leaders and stakeholders. The Observatory of the Magna Charta is proud of illustrating its mission through this Essay, especially as the text is never a closed interpretation but rather an invitation to structured and open discussions.

Indeed the principles originally outlined in the Magna Charta are a vivid call for those actions that may influence the institution, its members and society. We all share the author's realistic optimism that there will be universities in the foreseeable future; this also implies that the mission of the Observatory remains relevant: monitoring, watching, offering good counsel on university development and social responsibilities – and going public when appropriate. Indeed, the very special liberties, which are needed to make a university work, do need protection and care. Academic freedom is not an obvious ingredient of institutional policy, neither for politicians nor, even, for all the members of a university. Academic freedom is a continuous challenge for all, and most importantly, for the institutions themselves, the major providers of freedom in the political arena.

Academic freedom can be used and abused, however; individuals may legitimately seek protection from undue oppression and persecution, from censorship and marginalisation. But people can also use it to guarantee or shield private interests or to apply scientific knowledge in ways compatible neither with university mission nor with the rule of law. Both extremes – from the scholarly assistance to the victims of violence and poverty unto the undue support of unethical methods leading to various forms of torture and human rights manipulation, are on our monitoring agenda. We cannot reduce the core of academic freedom to personal, individual matters; it cannot deploy its full affects outside of institutions that keep to its tenets. That is why universities are indeed responsible to protect freedom, be it that of students and scholars, or that of the institutions themselves. That is also why they need a voice

and the tools to express their worries. As a group, the Magna Charta signatories represent the voice of freedom – and it has allies in civil society, political circles and the media. Those who want to silence that voice often find rational arguments to doubt the interest of liberty: security issues justify censorship, restricted State budgets that reduce facilities also tighten the environment for free expression; national priorities marginalise clusters of disciplines; student participation rights need to be curtailed for the sake of efficiency; etc... In fact the silencing often happens even when academic liberties are drafted into law – pressure groups and particular interests usually find ways to intervene despite and beyond the rules of society. Internal and external corruption endangers the gains from the reforms that increased institutional autonomy. The task of the Observatory is it to convert these dangers into simple risks which can be managed by policies and strategies that internalise, at institutional and individual level, the principles of the Magna Charta.

The Magna Charta was first signed in 1988. Only one year after the splendid ceremony in Bologna, which brought together university leaders from East and West, the Berlin Wall came down and the dual hegemony of the Cold War came to an end – seemingly at least. In Europe, this meant peace dividends for higher education: the continent entered a decade of active improvement in freedom and strategies for autonomy, thus giving common identification tools to universities in search of a revived community of belonging. Backlashes and drawbacks soon tempered original enthusiasm, however: human rights, for which academia should be a strong voice, considering the needs of academic freedom, were

not attaining yet the position they deserve. There is still a long way to go, and the road does not stop at the borders of Europe!

At the time of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Magna Charta makes clear that the values it represents are global; thus, the Observatory wants to extend its range of activities with the support of all signatories – in so far as they share a common quest for academic freedom. This should benefit the members of universities and the societies they come from. This should entail be new ideas for the university, updated understandings of its social responsibilities as the world of academia – like everything else – is in a state of flux. This will stimulate more research and revised visions that will take advantage of the potential for transformation that rises from permanent dissatisfaction with the status quo. That is how the future is being built. The Essay here below is one constructive step on that path of change, and, for the President of the Observatory, it is a major contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Magna Charta.

*Bologna, July 2008*

## 1. An introduction

In the year 2000 the tertiary student population was over 100 million worldwide. Since it is growing around 4% in relative terms, and when taking into account the 1% growth in the world population expected during the first part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the tertiary student population has recently been expanding by 5 and 6 million students a year: this means a total student population of over 150 million students by 2010.<sup>1</sup> According to this robust pre-

<sup>1</sup> As may be evident from our discussion so far, the problems and the questions we are raising address mainly the universities as they have developed in the Western world, notably Europe and North America. We believe that the issues we are dealing with concern universities in other parts of the world too, but we do not know enough about their situation to determine to what extent this may be true.

In the following pages, we will set the stage for the modern debate on the university in chapter 2, discuss in chapter 3 the major stakeholders and their interests and influence as they relate to the discussion on quality and then, in chapter 4, envisage what the future may have in store for the university – given what we can guess about the development of the institution.

diction, the student population will subsequently have more than doubled by 2020 – relatively to 2000 figures – and the number of universities should have multiplied accordingly. By 2040 the numbers will have more than doubled once more. In other terms, university education is growing immensely on a global basis; so are also other functions of the institutions. But their activity is also shifting from the West to the fast developing nations, especially in South-East Asia, as well to other regions previously underrepresented in higher education: does it mean that Europe and North America will have difficulties to retain their relative strength?

Our discussion is about the university in the future. It is a trite cliché that times to come are difficult to predict and we cannot know what they will look like. If this is true, we should be ready for considerable uncertainties. These uncertainties include various non-linear developments as well as possible crises or even catastrophic events. The world, life in general and society in particular will differ in many fundamental ways from what we know today. However, some of the future is in our hands; we – the present – can mould or at least influence part of its structures; a *laissez-faire* attitude is not justified since, to considerable extent at least, each of our decisions today may help to determine what tomorrow will look like. We might also keep in mind that humans and humanity have a number of fairly fixed characteristics that have in the past and will in the future dominate the development of our lives: this should also

These are of course only indicative numbers, neglecting enormous difference in relative cohort sizes in different regions, and huge variations in rates of growth, both of the population and the student population.

be taken into account when considering the uncertainty of the future.

The place of the universities in this picture is important since we believe they may help us to face that future of uncertainty. Indeed, we expect academia to provide us with ideas and know-how to prepare intelligently for the next steps we are to take. Moreover we expect the university to keep track of the present as much as of the past to retain the lessons of our history, that are absolutely crucial for understanding what is and what will happen.

In the morning twilight of the 21st century the universities find themselves in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand they have experienced an explosive growth in the last few decades – in absolute terms, on a global basis, and at least in relative terms, in Europe. They have received tremendous rhetorical support from both governments and industry, whose officials proclaim that higher education is the primary vehicle for the economic progress that will define how the nations of the world will enter a new age. The universities are often hailed as the single most important societal institution on which the world can pin its hope for genuine development; they are expected to play a bigger social role than ever before. In other terms, they seem to enjoy unprecedented strength, trust and respect.

On the other hand, they seem to suffer from lack of confidence, existential uncertainty, fuzzy purpose, absence of undisputed relevant role models on which to base their development and, at least in relative terms, from a lack of funds. They consider they are neither getting the moral nor the financial backing they feel the

national or official rhetoric does imply. They deem that they not only receive contradictory messages about the necessity to advance the frontiers of science – by competing on scientific score listings – but also that they are begged to be practical and relevant to help the national or the local economy to grow in the short term – by contracting service projects, attending to practical fields and problems, or by providing first class professional education.

From the outside they seem to have everything going for them: they should be basking in the glory reflected on them by the public discourse; from the inside, however, they appear being somewhat at a loss: they lack confidence, searching their path into the future, wondering which way to go. They seem to be uncertain about their roles, obligations and loyalties, torn as they are by strong and seemingly conflicting demands made by a multitude of stakeholders. This is of course an exaggerated and simplified picture, which does not really hold true for a particular institution; such an image, however, portrays an important reality for at least part of the higher education sector; thus it can help to explain why the discourse about higher education, and universities in particular, seems both complex and disjointed – in many respects paradoxical or even contradictory.

Yet there is no doubt about the importance of modern university functions in the decades to come. Therefore we ask: how will, or how should, the university develop to fulfil its many roles, seen as crucial for the society of the future? Will the institution change? And, if so, will we recognise the essence, functions, organisation or the physical appearance of the university 50 years from now?

To answer these questions we will speculate about the possible future of the university in a fast developing world and use the present and the past as tools for our contemplation, both to provide a frame of reference but also as a reality check; our aim is to find a balance between vision and reality.

We will show that a multitude of diverse notions and strong traditions, which may have something in common, have been used to underpin the apparently simple concept of a university; they delineate 'the idea of the university'. This partly accounts for the sometimes apparent simplicity and even naivety of the discourse on academia while this also points to the complexity of the university, both of which we will explore further and elaborate. We will trace these traditions and touch their core to explain how such ideas have moulded our present conceptions and will shape the future image and operations of the university.

But, as the belief in the importance of the diverse functions of the university has grown, different stakeholders are coming to the fore, wondering if the institutions of higher education, the universities in particular, are truly fulfilling their obligations; these stakeholders express the needs of society and the national or local economy; they represent the search for truth or the importance of critical thought – even dissent – for the advancement of science. Hence the relentless and forceful demands made on the university to cater for their stakeholders' various interests: the universities have gradually become high stake institutions that can no longer retain their claim for being ivory towers, left to develop on their own, in calm waters. They are now too valuable to be left alone. We will discuss these various

concerns and their stakeholders, thus show how this has influenced and will affect the universities in the future. Many very different and apparently contradictory interests do exist; however, if we look closely, many may be reconciled.

An example of such apparent contradictions consists in the dilemma to fit in with society at large or be marginalised, a dilemma that characterised the position of the universities through the centuries, but especially in recent times. This certainly accounts for some scepticism about their status. Since universities are supposed to be at the frontier of science, knowledge and innovation, they are often perceived as so far ahead that they seem out of touch with the practicalities of everyday life and industry. At the same time they are among the oldest and, in many ways, among society's most antiquated institutions, so embarrassingly ancient in form and conduct that many politicians consider their special duty to rescue them from the past – even if, by most criteria, many universities are doing quite well. As a result, at least in the eyes of many of their non-academic friends, universities suffer from two contradictory difficulties: they are lagging so far behind that they must be brought up to-date while they are so far ahead that they must be forced to return to present day reality, by becoming efficient and practical. Academia tends to be castigated both for its fruitful advances and for the retention of sometimes sensible, if seemingly antiquated traditions – like collegial governance.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Clark Kerr (1994, p. 14) describes this apparent paradox in an interesting way: “As an institution, [the university] looks far into the past and far into the future, and is often at odds with the present. It serves society almost slavishly – a society it also criticizes, sometimes unmercifully.”

While probing the issues raised here, we will reflect on a number of serious debates now on-going about the university, its internal dynamics and organisation or its multifaceted relationship to its external environment.

We tend to talk about *the* university. Is there one type of university, however, or many? Can we clarify this issue? To phrase the question slightly differently, is there an institution that might deserve to be called a *real* university, while others, even though having the name of universities, are in some sense not true to academic identity? Is the institution we refer to as a *university* of one kind only or does it take many different forms, perhaps to be better classified as a *multiversity*, the way argued by Clerk Kerr? There is certainly a tendency to talk about *the university* as a single phenomenon: is it simply a turn of phrase or does it convey some fundamental understanding of the institution? At first sight, this seems to be one of those typical academic non-issues, but noting the fierce competition now developing in most countries between institutions of higher education searching for funds and status, and also the request of a host of institutions to be classified as universities, this matter of semantics may be both real and relevant.<sup>3</sup>

A related question concerns the role of the university. Has the university a single or at least a primary mission, or have they many purposes supposed to be pursued simultaneously? Is a university meant, first or foremost, to serve truth, science, society or some other interests? Is it intended to serve one priority concern or many, equally and in parallel? Which criteria must

<sup>3</sup> Note, however, how easily we slide into the definite singular when talking about the university.

an institution meet to be accepted as a university? Are there some essential defining characteristics that are *sine qua non* of their identity?

Many universities, notably in Europe, are run by the State. As a consequence, what should be their relations? What are precisely the rights of each, and their obligations to the other party: in terms of control, financial matters, service or tasks to perform? This may of course be of considerable practical relevance for the running of state universities in different parts of the globe, but it also entails important complications when the State wants to loosen the ties and its control, perhaps because it wishes to withdraw financial support. What happens then to existing reciprocal rights and obligations? Are they weakened in the process?

Who has the right or is best suited to run and control the university: the academics, the students or the State? Should board or council members be external or internal to the institution: how to decide what is best? It is sometimes claimed that universities should be managed like well run companies. But how, indeed, is 'a well run company' administered, managed or governed? It is certainly not clear how one may determine which organisational framework is best suited to a university, or perhaps to the higher education sector; should this be determined on the basis of fundamental principles or on pragmatic grounds?

Similarly, who should bear the cost of the university and on what grounds should this be calculated? The decision may take account of two major issues: who are the primary beneficiaries of academic operations, and what would be the direct or indirect effects of the contributions? What happens when any one source of

funding – government, students or private industry – is or becomes dominant? The essay will argue that it may be very difficult to determine who will gain most from the university's activity in the short- as opposed to the long-run: is it the students, society (or even the State), the local region, industry or perhaps science (but what is the difference between science and society in such a context)? It may also be possible to discern the concurrent positive *and* negative effects of various sources of income. For universities, for instance, it may be positive to have government providing all the money, at the risk, however, that authorities may insist on being in control, or that the universities become compliant or relaxed, a form of unwanted drawback. If all funds originate from one particular source, it may indeed become too dominant, with potentially detrimental effects. This would hold true irrespective of which source it is. How the universities are affected by their financial sources is a major and a very serious concern.

One of the longest standing debates on the university revolves around the relationship between the institution's role for advancing knowledge vs. its educational function, between accumulating (or perhaps preserving) information and knowledge vs. transmitting it: this concerns the research – teaching relationship or nexus. The question was first raised explicitly by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; he argued both cogently and forcefully that a university with teaching and research intertwined was definitely to be preferred over research institutions, academies of sciences on the one hand, or teaching institutions on the other: the combination would be advantageous for both science and learning; indeed, the researchers and the students would

benefit greatly from the arrangement. We will see how arguments for different types of institutions fluctuate, and even though the institutional ideal which Humboldt favoured is, in essence, as strong as ever, there is a tendency to argue, sometimes among governments or impatient scientist, that either research institutions or teaching establishment are in order, because combining their functions in so-called universities is too cumbersome or too expensive. For them, the arrangement proposed by Humboldt is passé. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the US solved the problem with diplomacy – by establishing graduate schools as a part of larger universities, a solution now belatedly chosen in Europe for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will consider Humboldt's argument, but note that it diverges from positions defended by Napoleon or Cardinal Newman, the proponents of the influential French and English university traditions. Nevertheless Humboldt still seems to carry the day. What is of particular interest is the dynamism implicit in his argument, a dynamic often considered to represent the most important contribution to the success of the modern university. Some people, however, think it can be replaced either by management and quality control or by the market invisible hand.

But what about the arguments developed by the Napoleonic regime for professional education and Newman for liberal education? Or kindred arguments; surely they are not totally misplaced. Is it not important to offer a strong, professional education of the highest calibre as a primary aim for a multitude of professions? And might high prestige institutions, such as the *Grandes Écoles* developed by Napoleon, not best serve that function? Deriving from this primary objective, as a secondary

consideration, what level of research activity and what type of curriculum would best serve professional competence building? If the intention is to educate an engineer, a doctor or a civil servant, we would simply assess what type of educational experience might be optimal and determine the relevant activities on that basis. Research as a separate activity would then only be related to education when it might be shown expressly to benefit the training for the profession in question.

At the other end of the higher education spectrum, Newman considered that the most relevant task of a university was to provide the young with a rounded education, with no immediate regard for practical or professional concerns. What is indeed the place of liberal education in the modern university arena? Has it some ornamental value only? The rather extreme positions proposed in the Napoleonic and Newmanian ideals make it particularly interesting to note that the tension between these two positions has fed university discussions for the last 150 years – and they still do. There are several problems that are obviously intertwined: how pertinent should university education be, and indeed, what makes its relevance? And what does this mean for traditional professional and liberal education respectively, and to what extent should these educational concerns be emphasised by the university? Such interrogations lead once more to the question of the role(s) of the universities and, when that can be established, to their core function(s). It might be noted that the civil servants, educated from within two notable and very different traditions, the disciplined French professional education and the ambitious English liberal education, helped establish two powerful political empires dur-

ing the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Might that be an argument for or against either of these institutional traditions?

From the earliest times universities did compete, at first mainly for prestige; it was often a matter of which university was best thought of among scholars and students. In modern times this competition has become more open and perhaps more tense; it is still about reputation, status and students but now more directly and more openly, it is about money. The operational problem centres around the way to attract governmental funds, in particular research funds, but also how to attract contributions for student attendance; the means found to attract lucrative industry contracts and, especially in the US, the donations from alumni and other well-wishers of the respective universities. The universities are now competing on all these fronts. In such a context, market forces tend to prevail and branding thus becomes increasingly important; the search is for criteria helping to give an institution a single and recognisable label, despite and beyond its many functions as a multiversity. In recent years *excellence* has emerged as a characteristic many universities are striving for, although the word exact meaning remains somewhat elusive. The common search for excellence in a world of growing competition for fame and funds seems to have become, indeed, a major driver for convergence in the development of universities. It is therefore of particular interest to explore the ingredients of these forces, as exerted by various stakeholders, and thus to determine the fate of some of the supposedly fundamental undertakings of the modern university – advancing and understanding knowledge, encouraging critical thinking, fostering the development and education of individuals, for instance.

Are all these tasks critical for developing and sustaining a free and equitable society?

Academic freedom is an issue that is commonly raised in this connection. By academic freedom we mean the freedom to preserve, seek and transmit knowledge in a manner uncompromised by non-academic considerations, i.e., regardless of interests other than those that relate directly to understanding and truth. Academic freedom is thus a subspecies of the freedom of thought and speech. This is not the prerogative of academics, but it is worth exploring why the notion of academic freedom is considered by many to be so important. One question which we will have to raise is whether such a principle will retain its importance and whether it is in any way threatened by the strive for excellence and funds.

Therefore we wish to demonstrate the complexities of the debate about the university or the universities, and to show how entangled are the threads of a variety of discourses concerning higher education. We hope thus to fulfil one of the primary tasks of the academic, which is to show that a situation is perhaps more complex than is apparent at first sight: superficial simplicity is not always what it seems. But we will similarly attempt to honour another and equally important duty of academics, which is to show that, in a seemingly complex and even chaotic world, some few fundamental threads, some simple patterns can be discerned. We will point out that the situation is perhaps not as confused and difficult to comprehend as it may sometimes seem.

As may be evident from our discussion so far, the problems and the questions we are raising address mainly the universities as they have developed in the

Western world, notably Europe and North America. We believe that the issues we are dealing with concern universities in other parts of the world too, but we do not know enough about their situation to determine to what extent this may be true.

In the following pages, we will set the stage for the modern debate on the university in chapter 2, discuss in chapter 3 the major stakeholders and their interests and influence as they relate to the discussion on quality and then, in chapter 4, envisage what the future may have in store for the university – given what we can guess about the development of the institution.

## 2. The idea of a (modern) university

### **What are the roots of the university?**

We believe that those who have the responsibility to develop and lead universities should come to a clear understanding of the institution as an historical and an ideal phenomenon.

What has changed? What are the invariants?

The universities face many difficult questions and they must decide to what extent their legacy, their history and the ideas that have guided its development determine or influence their views and the actions they are going to take (see box).

**Which direction should the universities take?**

What course of action should the universities take to enhance their strength? How are universities currently faring and how will they last? Where are they being taken, and by whom? We believe that this depends in important ways on how the institution has been defined or at least understood by the forces that mould it; these may come from the institutions themselves as well as from external stakeholders.

To succeed, there must be a profound clarity of purpose among those who lead and form these important institutions. If there is no clear project, or more important, no ideal, no vision, there is nothing to strive for, shape or develop, except perhaps a superficial marketable commodity! Hence it is not acceptable to discuss the university without exploring its defining features, pinning them down to determine similarities or differences with other institutions in the educational sector.

There are many ways to study the university and to define it. Few institutions carry with them as much history in terms of fundamental values that give meaning to the organisation, its actions and traditions. We will briefly discuss early academic history but only to clarify those essential internal or situational features that have

characterised the university through time, thus affecting our present understanding of the university.

The definition of the university has been approached, over the years, in many different ways. The best known and perhaps the most sensible perspective is to look at it as an idea, even an ideal; this calls for a philosophical approach. But there are other ways to consider institutional identity. Since the university, as such, is one of the oldest institutions still active today, history also seems to be of particular pertinence. Therefore, after presenting a brief historical panorama to help us situate the universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will survey important strands that affected the development of the European university. Considering that the university also plays an important role in society, we will then turn – briefly – to a more functional approach; we will ask whom the university serves. Such outlooks are important to underline very different aspects of the university, which we will explore further – to some extent: our aim, however, is to focus on some selected issues only, those we consider to be particularly useful to the people supposed to make concrete decisions about the future of their own institutions; those people who want to change and are considering what should or might be changed, and what not.

Through this brief review of the university's past, we will also focus on 'the idea of the university' as it has been exposed by a number of scholars, thus combining history with philosophy to assist in determining the current and future concepts of the university. The natural sciences will be introduced as having had a considerable impact on both the discourse and the function of the university. To try and systematise prospects, we will dwell shortly on the four main university traditions

in the Western world, and indicate how they shape the institution's different missions. Then we will turn to the basic academic principles of the university as they are expressed in the 1988 *Magna Charta Universitatum*. As policy on academic matters always reflects how universities relate to the society they belong to, we will also discuss what such links entail – in recent times especially.

We will repeatedly draw attention to the problem of what we call the 'unit of analysis' (see box below). It seems very a very innocuous issue but we will see that knowing the institutional level we address does matter a lot, indeed.

### **The university and the unit of analysis**

It is often unclear what unit of analysis is used when discussing the university. Are we interested in the university as a single institution? Are we talking about an ensemble of several institutions, like the German system, with somewhat different arrangement for the various *Länder*, or the three tier university system in California? Are we looking at the university sector in a given society or world-wide? Or, finally, are we simply taking about 'the idea of the university' in generic terms? Unfortunately, this is not often made clear in the modern discourse discussing for instance the nature of the university, its functions or obligations. If the university is supposed

to be of direct service to society, does that imply that this holds only for the university sector as a whole, and need not apply to every institution? Or, if it is contended that, in order to be a university, an institution must be engaged both in teaching and research, can this be achieved by dedicating individual units to research and others to teaching, or by appointing some staff members just to either of these tasks? If research institutions or professional schools are put under the aegis of universities, do they thereby turn into bona fide university institutions? If so, why were they not before? Conversely, if post-graduate teaching is transferred from traditional departments to research institutes that have become part of the university, do the departments lose their status and become in some sense inferior parts of a university? If not, why not? In the present text we will shy away from the problem by referring to the university as a generic term, but occasionally we will draw attention to the complications that this entails.

*A historical legacy that is reflected in the modern university*

Let us first consider the original meaning of the term *universitas*. *Uni-versus* indicates what turns around *one* thing. The Latin word *universitas* meant a unity or whole, that is to say an autonomous group forming

what was called a ‘guild’, the members of which had specific common interests. For example, there was the *universitas mercatorum*, which is a merchants’ guild, the shared interest of which was (and still is) economic gain. Among the many medieval guilds developed a corporation of people, teachers and students who decided to look at the world in a scholarly fashion. They established the only guild that, to this day, has retained the label ‘*universitas*’ to define its community.

The history of the European university may, with a variety of reservations, be divided into two periods: from around 1100 to 1800 and then from 1800 to the present: the latter period saw the development of three main academic traditions, the German, the French and the British ones – but an American perspective is also relevant since US institutions provide the important bridging of European and American developments.

The creation of universities in the Middle Ages can be traced to a revived interest in scholarly studies that derived from practical concerns in law, medicine and divinity. Institutional roots can often be traced to already existing schools run by the church or civil establishments which had usually adopted, in some form, the liberal arts (*septem artes liberales*), i.e., the old Greek and then Roman curriculum. These schools were called *studium* (i.e., a place for learning). Prominent universities became *studium generale*, not because their teaching was wide, but because their students came from many different places; their teachers were also licensed to teach in different institutions.

Those who passed the first examinations became *baccalaureus*; on top of this degree, students could receive higher certification as a master, doctor or professor. The

title varied from one institution to the next but ensured the right to teach the subject being examined. The nomenclature has survived to a varying degree in different cultures and, recently, these terms have been given a new life in Europe thanks to the Bologna process.

As the different schools were gradually taking shape in Europe during the Middle Ages, teachers and students organised as communities – or corporations – in order to defend their shared interests: either as *universitas magistrorum* (teachers' guild) or as *universitas scholarium* (students' guild), sometimes both being combined. This developed into the modern community of academic practice, i.e., the university. Both the degree and the academic community are fundamental features of the past university that can be recognised in the identity of the modern university and in its everyday discourse. Continuity and similarity were first ensured by the papal bulls 'accrediting' the universities by issuing (during the first few centuries of university operation) to the graduates of certain institutions the *Ius ubique docendi*, i.e., the right to teach in all universities similarly recognised in Roman Christendom. This did much to foster the international character of the institution.

From the beginning, universities had to deal with certain tensions. Who should have the right to accredit institutions, apart from the Pope, and what institutions were to be accredited? Who should have the right to grant degrees, which essentially meant who should appoint the teachers? Who should be in control of everyday operations, i.e., to what extent should academic institutions be self-governing bodies? Student fees paid for courses and degrees represented a major source of income for many universities but several still faced se-

vere financial problems. In some cases this led to their demise or, at times, encouraged financial and academic corruption.

To consider the medieval university as a fairly homogeneous phenomenon would be very misleading because, exactly as today, the variance among institutions was enormous – in all aspects, not least in how they were financed. The point we are trying to make by drawing attention to history is that, as a type of institutions, the university has been dealing with a family of problems, quarrels and tensions that are remarkably similar in kind to those that trouble higher education at present.

The educational heritage of the early universities is of even greater interest than its formal and organisational past; indeed, the medieval understanding of learning may be of some significance for us today still.

In the Middle Ages, universities had two basic pedagogical aims: they provided a general education thought to be of fundamental importance to every professional; they offered also professional training in specialised fields, primarily to the people going into public service – in different capacities.

In terms of general education, studying the seven liberal arts consisted in two cycles, the completion of which allowed students to move to professional studies – in the early days theology, medicine and law. The first cycle, the *trivium*, included three disciplines, grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, that all aimed at training the students to articulate ideas and thoughts (grammar), to formulate these in a logical form (dialectic) and to express them in a manner appropriate for others to follow and understand (rhetoric). These were the formal disciplines underpinning the art of communication; they taught the

student how to relate to others. Does this not remind of the 'transferable skills' now being discussed for the PhD level in the Bologna process? Having learned such skill over two or three years, the student could embark on the second cycle, the *quadrivium*: it aimed to familiarise the learner with ideas and thoughts concerning his or her environment through geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music. These were the substance for the instruments of communication mastered earlier, i.e., the ideas the students would relate to and use in their relations.

It is important to realise the logic of these two cycles offered by the Faculty of Arts: the first was intended to make the communication of ideas and thoughts more effective. The purpose of the second cycle was to teach the disciplines needed to reflect on reality – using harmony, measure and rhythm as the keys to understanding. Music (and that also covered literature and history), arithmetic, geometry and astronomy all contributed to one's positioning in the world. Having completed these two kinds of studies, the students were considered ready to enter professional learning in the major faculties of theology, law and medicine to train as priests, lawyers or physicians.

This way of organising liberal education has a number of interesting features; five of them are worth mentioning:

Competence is emphasised first rather than content. The *trivium* precedes the *quadrivium*.

The basic competences have to do with language, thought and expression; they revolve around the communication of ideas, opinions and beliefs. The overarching idea is the profound desire to help people to

communicate intelligently with each other.

The substance of the training is theoretical ideas and the methods of some basic disciplines (music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy) that touch important aspects of reality (harmony, measure, form, cosmic relations).

The curriculum is organised so that there is a progression from what stands near to us, to more abstract or intangible ideas.

Such an education is meant to be good for everyone, whatever his main occupation or professional domain is intended to be.

In this educational scheme, humanities and natural philosophy go hand in hand. It is the same mode of thinking, the same sort of intelligence, which leads to the understanding of oneself, the human society, or the reality of nature. Moreover, it is taken for granted that, as thinking beings, we are all of the same nature; that we relate to other people in basically the same way; and that the world is intelligible to us all in the same manner. In short, this scheme offers a cosmopolitan education that is appropriate for an institution that is open to all knowledge like the university. To the extent the modern university has discarded the liberal arts idea, one may wonder whether this notion of an educated person is outdated or irrelevant, or whether the university presumes that these matters have already been taken care of, earlier in the system. We suggest that, generally speaking, they have not. Therefore in terms of content, this means a fundamental change in the university.

Even though the university has a long and continued history that has through the ages retained important institutional features that are still relevant today, there is no question that it has changed – and quite substantially

in some respects. It is therefore both interesting and very relevant to consider how the idea of the university has evolved with the changes the university went through, especially during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **The Idea of the University**

In the discourse defining the university, there are some basic principles that are found in a multitude of well-argued and engaged discussions about the essence of the university; they seem to have remained very stable over a long period of time. The *Magna Charta Universitatum*, later to be discussed in this chapter, is a serious attempt to clarify these fundamental principles, in particular those related to the defence of intellectual autonomy, the dynamics of teaching combined with research, academic freedom and the nurturing of the humanist tradition.

Times change, however, and several characteristics of the old institution, considered to be outdated, have been replaced by new thinking, ideas, and operational methods. What part of the university heritage should then be retained and valued? In recent decades some answers have been formulated in discussions about the essence and relevance of Humboldt's idea of the university.

Wilhelm von Humboldt was a highly respected philologist, neo-humanist and Prussian Minister of education in 1809-1810. He was given the job of establishing the University in Berlin, an institution that later served as the model for several other German universities and, later, for instance, for the Nordic universities and some of the leading academic institutions in the US. The phi-

losophy he and his intellectual peers proposed helped to set the stage for the research-teaching nexus that we now take for granted as a fundamental characteristic of the university. A university focusing on such values is often called Humboldtian, although this never refers to any formal classification.

The main features of Humboldt's vision are found in his famous essay on the university, from which the following quote is taken:

*One unique feature of higher intellectual institutions is that they conceive of science and scholarship as dealing with ultimately inexhaustible tasks: this means that they are engaged in an unceasing process of inquiry. The lower levels of education present closed and settled bodies of knowledge. The relation between teacher and pupil at the higher level is a different one from what it was at the lower levels. At the higher level, the teacher does not exist for the sake of the student; both the teacher and student have their justification in the common pursuit of knowledge. The teacher's performance depends on the students' presence and interest – without this, science and scholarship would not grow. If the students who are to form his audience did not come before him of their own free will, he, in his quest for knowledge, would have to seek them out. The goals of science and scholarship are worked towards most effectively through the synthesis of the teacher's and the students' dispositions. The teacher's mind is more mature but it is also somewhat one-sided in its development and more dispassionate; the student's mind is less able and less committed but it is nonetheless open and responsive to every possibility. The two together are a fruitful combination.<sup>1</sup>*

Humboldt's main idea is simple and clear: society needs institutions that are dedicated to the search for

<sup>1</sup> Humboldt (1810 / 1970).

truth and understanding, centres of scholarship where teachers and students work together in the pursuit of knowledge, so that the light of wisdom may illuminate the world. It is both the task of relating knowledge with its setting, and the dynamics combining the two that make the university a very special community, unique and specific.

This combination of task and setting was later echoed forcefully by the philosopher Alfred Whitehead when he further elaborated this same idea with great clarity, thus helping to understand better why academics have persisted in demanding that the teaching research nexus be sustained:

*The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative considerations of learning. The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively. At least, this is the function which it should perform for society. A university, which fails in this respect, has no reason for existence. This atmosphere of excitement, arising from imaginative consideration, transforms knowledge. A fact is no longer a bare fact: it is invested with all its possibilities. It is no longer a burden on the memory: it is energising as the poet of our dreams, and as the architect of our purposes.<sup>2</sup>*

Both Humboldt and Whitehead, a century later, claim that knowledge, imagination and their dynamic combination are of fundamental value for the academic community that makes the university. We agree that this indeed should be the case but, in light of current developments in higher education, we are not convinced that

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Whitehead (1929 / 1949, p. 97).

this ideal describes the present situation. Consequently, we ask, if the cultivation of knowledge is still a fundamental task for universities? Do the minds of students and teachers still operate the fruitful combination suggested by Humboldt and supported by Whitehead? Reflecting on that kind of general issues is important for universities, if they are to figure out their own purpose and actions. However, will the university of the future still abide by such values? Could the latter represent an outmoded characterisation justified only by German or Anglo-Saxon aristocratic ideals that were meant chiefly to facilitate the development and intellectual pursuits of those individuals who could afford education and scholarship at the university? We don't think so.

Michael Oakeshott, the English historian and philosopher, in his essay *The Idea of a University*, emphasises the fact that, in the Middle Ages, the university enterprise was called *studium*: such a characterisation of the institution, he suggests, is still fundamental at present. His text, however, did not discuss explicitly how to juxtapose teachers and students although it emphasised the communitarian aspect of the pursuit of learning:

*This activity [...] is one of the properties, indeed one of the virtues, of a civilized way of living; the scholar has his place beside the poet, the priest, the soldier, the politician and the man of business in any civilized society. The universities do not, however, have a monopoly of this activity. The hermit scholar in his study, an academy famous for a particular branch of learning, a school for young children, are each participants in this activity and each of them is admirable, but they are not universities. What distinguishes a university is a special manner of engaging in the pursuit of learning. It*

*is a corporate body of scholars, each devoted to a particular branch of learning: what is characteristic is the pursuit of learning as a co-operative enterprise. The members of this corporation are not spread about the world, meeting occasionally or not at all; they live in permanent proximity to one another.*<sup>3</sup>

Again there is no doubt about what the principal concern of the university is: the pursuit of learning and the specific way in which it should be organised is highlighted above. This means a special community of scholars whose shared drive for knowledge exploration distinguishes the university from other important institutions that also engage with knowledge. Such an emphasis on a community of practice is even more clearly expressed by the French philosopher, Georges Gusdorf, whose ideas harmonise perfectly with those expressed above, and he completes them with the notion of public interest:

*The essential aspects of the University as they emerge from its earlier history are community and interdisciplinarity. The corporation unifies masters and students in the enterprise of teaching; in the service of the intellectual values. To be conscious of participating in a common task of public interest gathers together those who are not only leaders and subordinates, suppliers and clients, but also colleagues in the quest for common truths. The truth is not possessed by one of them and transmitted from him to others. It does not exist like already-constituted capital, but rather like a common striving of wills towards an identical aim. The efforts of succeeding generations mark the never-ending task of culture building. In the university context, the student is a master-to-be, and*

<sup>3</sup> Michael Oakshott: *The Idea of a University*, in Fuller (1989, pp. 96-97).

*the master himself remains a potential student, rescued from arrogance and pride by the true humility of the person who recognises himself to be the servant of truth among the many other servants of truth.*<sup>4</sup>

The notion of community and the importance of a shared discourse within that community has been directly expounded by the American philosopher, Robert Paul Wolff, when he discussed the ideal of the university:

*A community of learning differs from all other kinds of community, such as a political community, a religious community, a community of work, or an artistic community, in the character of its collective goals and the forms of activity and organisation which flow therefrom. The university is a community devoted to the preservation and advancement of knowledge, to the pursuit of truth, and to the development and enjoyment of man's intellectual powers. Furthermore, it is devoted to the pursuit of these goals collectively, not merely individually. The public discourse of the university community is not a mere means to the private activity of research, [...]. Rather, that discourse is itself one of the chief goods to be found in a flourishing university. It is precisely this devotion to an essentially collective activity that makes the university a community rather than an aggregation of individuals.*<sup>5</sup>

The message coming from these different authors is quite clear: the university is a community of teachers and students whose steady purpose is the acquisition, preservation and transmission of knowledge in the service of mankind. All these authors weave together the mission of the institution and its operational form, its special form of community; indeed what makes an insti-

<sup>4</sup> Gusdorf (1964, pp. 88-89).

<sup>5</sup> Wolff (1969, p. 128).

tution a university is precisely this combination of task and conduct. And it is a demanding arrangement. In particular, this common, transparent view of the university community expresses an ethical urge that requires not only the active and responsible cooperation of everyone in the community but also the cultivation of those virtues connected with the beliefs, theories and arguments that people must learn to employ in scholarly work.<sup>6</sup>

The question is to what extent this idea of the university is still valid for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Is it not outdated? The basis for such views as summarised above is primarily practical: the quoted authors proposed such ideas because they seem to work; or, at least, they have worked in the past. The question is whether such a vision still represents a basis for the dynamics of present progress. We think so. We want to argue that the creative tensions between means and ends that may exist in the community of scholars within a university setting still ensure the best way for knowledge to grow. In other words, we think this combination is eminently relevant for our time and day. But we do not know under what shape the ideal will survive.

### **The emergence of natural science within the university**

There is one particular trend in university development we want to draw attention to because, in many ways, it

<sup>6</sup> Dill (2007) in agreement with Oakshott emphasises that it matters immensely how the academic communities operate; it is certainly not sufficient just to have a group of people together, even though they have common interests and ideals, there must be an organisational structure that fits the purpose.

has affected the evolving idea of the university perhaps more than anything else; and the effect acted from inside. This is the advent of natural science in universities. This field of study changed their institutional character in many ways and, during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the integration of these sciences has dominated a good part of the university discourse – particularly in recent decades. Important contributions of university research that are most often quoted as examples in the public discourse might be bio-technology, genetics, computer science, nano-technologies, all come from the natural or technical sciences.

We suggest that the natural sciences were in some sense foreign to traditional university culture; they were outside the classical legacy of academia and did not fit particularly well within the university *modus operandi* or discourse, even in 19<sup>th</sup> century German or English institutions devoted to Humboldt's and Newman's ideals of knowledge development. But gradually they came to dominate the discourse on the content and criteria of academic pursuits. The arrival and impact of natural science did not simply equal the integration of 'yet another discipline'. One may wonder why the same cannot be said of highly articulated professional disciplines such as engineering or business studies: surprisingly, they have not affected the institutional discourse in the same way, even though they had an impact on university operations – not least because of their size and general relevance.

We want to argue that the natural and technical disciplines have been brought into the universities largely on a functional platform; they were primarily practical fields when they came within university purview.

As time passed they built up their status as academic disciplines and began to dominate the political debate and popular discourse concerning the modern universities, especially as they were increasingly seen to justify university relevance and enhanced their economic significance and, therefore, their social importance. This development is only marginally related to older university traditions and ideals; it partly explains why there is some noteworthy discontinuity in university rhetoric.

This is also why serious attention needs to be paid to the growth of natural science, with its twofold promise: understanding the natural world and fuelling the continuous drive of the economy. Major strides were made in various fields of natural science, notably in chemistry, physics and biology during the 16<sup>th</sup>, to be enlarged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This scientific activity, with no operational focus, was run under the aegis of general societies, or Academies, with loose or no connection with the universities. Initially such activities were not thought to be within university purview: despite the revival of the Greek legacy – that ruled the university with its interest in natural philosophy –, the new sciences of nature (as opposed to natural philosophy) did not have an obvious place in the universities.<sup>7</sup> Neither did investigation (i.e., the production of new knowledge or re-

<sup>7</sup> The classification is relevant here. Mathematics was for instance definitely among the classical disciplines and in some instances had become very prominent and even a dominant discipline; this was especially the case with the English universities, in particular the University of Cambridge, see the Danish text, Kjærgaard & Kristensen (2003, pp. 120-122). It is even a moot point if research in mathematics has been thought of as research, rather than perhaps simply doing mathematics.

search as promoted within the sciences of nature) fit well within 600-year-old institutions that were entering the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> But the very visible progress made within these fields clearly demonstrated the practical or economic value of such a new set of disciplines.

This growth of natural sciences and their relevance for economic development led to the gradual subordination of other university disciplines – not only the humanities, but also the social sciences – due to their overwhelming scientific and economic strength. As a result, little by little, they invaded and took over the whole discourse about the performance and relevance of universities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy, that the *realschulen*, established by the Pietists in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany and onwards, and later became “*real-skole*” in the Nordic countries – pointed in their name to the natural sciences, even though they were intended to provide general, but useful education. The name referred to the real world and thus fairly directly to the natural sciences, which were certainly the practical subjects of the time.

<sup>9</sup> Germany was the first of the European states to assimilate science into the universities. The fruits of this were seen already by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in terms of trained scientists, texts and apparatus. Bernal (1969) suggests that “[i]t was also in the mid nineteenth century that the opposition of the English and French universities to the new science began to break down.” Bernal goes on to say that “science did not so much transform the universities as the universities transformed the sciences” (p. 554). From the point of view of the sciences this was perhaps true. They became institutionalized, as the scientific activities move from the independence of the general societies under the administrative constraints of the universities. But from the long-term perspective of the universities we are not convinced. According to Ben-David (1977) “[t]he success of German research was attributed to the German university: first to its principle of ‘unity of research and teaching’ but also... to its

## The Modern University and its different traditions

In the development of the modern university in Europe, three different traditions proved particularly important; all stem from the resurrection of the universities at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – after their demise or even closure at the time of the French Revolution.

In France Napoleon re-established the university with an explicit purpose: serving the State. The institution's governing structure was strongly centralised, the State being responsible in principle for all practical decisions. The main role of the university was to teach, whereas research was entrusted to institutions outside the universities, time passing, however, they entered university bounds. Of particular interest were also the specialised, elite institutions (*les Grandes écoles*) that focused on educating for key professions, in particular for civil service. As a consequence, the Napoleonic university is a tool for society's development that is closely linked to State functions, also in terms of governance. Thus,

1. The university should at all times take account of

self-government". He then goes on to argue that the "success of the German research was due mainly to the intensive courses of training originally intended for teachers (seminars) and pharmacists (chemical laboratories)..." (p. 22). From the pragmatic and functional point of view the strongest scientific field during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> was chemistry (Bernal, 1969, p. 555). Wittrock quotes Perkins (1984) as claiming that "despite rather than because of the Humboldtian ideal, the German university became the embodiment of the specialized research-oriented ideal and the model for the progressive system of higher education in other advanced societies" (Wittrock, 1985, pp. 20-21).

the needs of the State and national society; it should interact vigorously with its environment, i.e., the society it is meant to serve.

2. The university, a teaching institution, should provide its students with the ability and skills to perform particular functions in society.

3. Universities are controlled centrally – in all important respects – by State administrators who have a professional understanding of university functions and activities: as a result, the Ministry of Education appoints teachers, grants degrees or oversees the construction and maintenance of university facilities.

In Germany, universities revived under Humboldtian influence – as outlined already.<sup>10</sup> There the university remained first and foremost an educational institution, but with teaching and research combined. Such universities were public institutions but enjoyed considerable independence for their own administration. The search for knowledge was the fundamental feature of Humboldt's arrangement. As a result, academic freedom in

<sup>10</sup> The Humboldt idea still receives considerable attention and it is debated whether the Humboldt legacy is totally or partly outdated, see e.g. Wittrock (2006). Gustavsson (2006) is somewhat sceptical about its modern relevance and Nybom (2006) shows both sides of the coin. Nybom (2003, p. 144) suggests five cornerstones for the Humboldt university: "1. The unity of research and education/teaching; 2. The holistic nature of knowledge – New Humanism; 3. The primacy of research – that is, an education 'infested' and controlled by research; 4. A national culture dominated and distinguished by higher learning – Bildung and 5. The promotion of higher learning, science, and 'Bildung' as a core obligation of the central state." In his writings he stresses that what is being described is an idea not a functioning institution.

research and teaching became central tenets of the system, researchers choosing what to investigate and teach, the students what to learn and where.

Three points in Humboldt's message which have made a difference for the development of universities over the past two centuries:

1. As a community of professors and students, the university should place the interests of science and scholarship at the highest level and make sure that non-academic considerations do not interfere with scholarly work.

2. The University should provide an education meant to increase the students' ability to perceive and understand life as a whole, while probing deeper knowledge; the aim is to turn university members into mature human beings, able and ready to improve human life

3. The University needs academic freedom – the freedom of teachers to dwell on topics they consider of high intellectual value, and the freedom of students to learn what they think will suit best their intellectual development. That is why, at every level, university governance builds on the active participation of members of the academic community.

In England, universities came under the sway of Newman's ideals. He advocated the education of the human mind, the universities preparing the students for a worthy existence. Students were not trained for a narrow profession: that was not the task of the university. The latter was organised around non-disciplinary based colleges, i.e., general communities of learning encouraged to use tutorials in order to ensure the personal education of each and every student.

In a Newman perspective,

1. The University should offer the most suitable environment for learning, in particular by guaranteeing close interaction between students and tutors.

2. The University should first and foremost provide an education that favours the formation of the student's character and mind so that he or she masters the intelligence processes needed for a successful life.

3. The University should be governed by the academics themselves who understand best the needs and interests of a collegial community of learning.

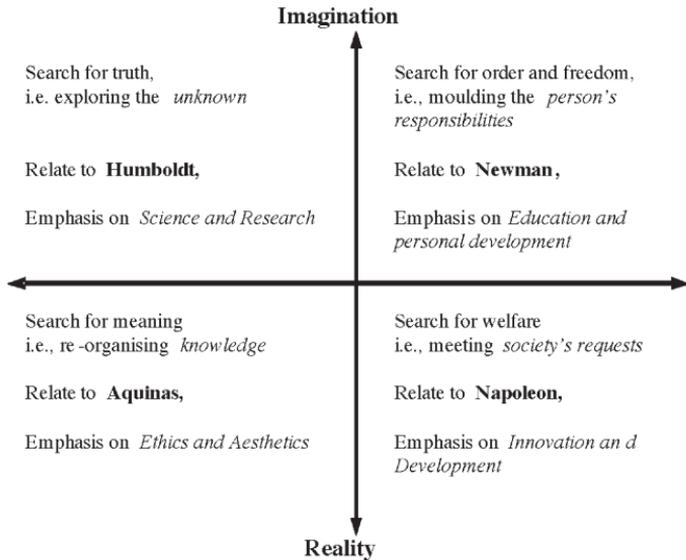
These different models for university identity can be brought together in various modes; we suggest two possible syntheses, one stressing the underlying social function of the system, the other – more in line with the previous considerations – emphasising university organisation.

Figure 1 below illustrates the first model by deconstructing key university functions, thus drawing attention to their not always recognised social importance.<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, the brilliant 13<sup>th</sup> century theological scholar who also formalised the university didactic system, is here mentioned since he endeavoured to systematise current knowledge and tried to formalise the discussion on ethics and aesthetics.

The vertical axis in the model emphasises the dimension of reality and imagination, with reference to a potential tension between pragmatics of what is knowable (Aquinas and Napoleon) and creativity, i.e., what might

<sup>11</sup> This approach was suggested by Andris Barblan, of the Magna Charta Observatory at a seminar at the new University of Luxembourg in June 2006.

be (Humboldt and Newman). The horizontal axis emphasises the dimension of consent and dissent, where the former emphasises conformity to the established system (Napoleon and Newman would accept what is known), whereas the latter brings to the fore questioning and change (Humboldt searches for new knowledge, and Aquinas for the re-organisation of the known). The different traditions highlight various combinations of missions and it is interesting for individual institutions, or perhaps departments, groups or individual academics to place themselves within the figure and thus within the tensions of university traditions. It can be very helpful to disambiguate in this way one's position within academia.



**Figure 1. Mapping four central missions of the university with four different traditions.**

Another way to synthesise the different traditions is simply to survey the higher education tradition in North America; it may be regarded as merging British and German perspectives and ideas – with a significant addition, the ‘land-grant’ universities created in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, from early on, education, research and application, were seen in the US as distinct university roles although brought together under a single institutional roof, essentially as a harmonious whole. By the land-grant arrangement, State universities were given important independent means, and it is interesting to trace their development into ‘applied’ academic institutions.

Thus, in the United States,

1. The University should have as a basic mission to service the community it belongs to.

2. The University should make a clear distinction between undergraduate and graduate education (Newman inspiring undergraduate studies and Humboldt the graduate programmes).

3. The University should be run by two categories of people, namely professional managers when organising the university as a business, and members of the faculty, i.e., those scholars responsible for study programmes and the organisation of research.

Despite the obvious and important differences between the four university models pervasive in the Western part of the world, they show strong family resemblance. For instance, though the Napoleonic model does not seem to emphasise the community of teachers and students, it has in fact developed along such lines. The universities referring to this tradition have always em-

phasised the importance of the academic community and the decisive role given to it in running the institution.

Convergence is by no means universal, however: that may explain why it seems so difficult to reach a clear-cut definition of the university. We claim that differentiation exists not only between the four models just outlined, but also within each class of institutions and also notably within each institution, even though it embodies a given tradition.

In many ways the American model is both a synthesis of the European strands and a preview of European developments to come. Indeed, in several aspects – also commercialisation – American developments are miles ahead of what is happening in Europe; this does not mean that it is necessarily better – it might be, and it might not – but it offers European universities references for what appears to lie in their evolutionary path.

The discussion above has drastically simplified the arguments – perhaps at the risk of failings that could have been avoided. That is why we would like now to propose a critical view of those arguments.

### *A Critique of the Traditional Idea of the University*

The academic who more than any other has been responsible for reshaping the discourse about today's university is Clark Kerr, the former chancellor of University of California. Some forty years ago, he gave the name 'multiversity' to those institutions of higher education that serve a number of different interests. According to Kerr, 'the university is so many things to so many dif-

ferent people that it must, of necessity, be partially at war with itself'.<sup>12</sup> That is why, according to him:

*The multiversity is an inconsistent institution. It is not one community but several – the community of the undergraduate and the community of the graduate, the community of the humanist, the community of the social scientist, and the community of the scientist; the communities of the professional schools; the community of all the non-academic personnel; the community of the administrators. Its edges are fuzzy – it reaches out to alumni, legislators, farmers and businessmen, who are all related to one or more of these internal communities. As an institution, it looks far into the past and far into the future, and is often at odds with the present. It serves society almost slavishly – a society it also criticizes, sometimes unmercifully. Devoted to equality of opportunity, it is itself a class society. A community, like the medieval communities of masters and students, should have common interests; in the multiversity, they are quite varied, even conflicting. A community should have a soul, a single animating principle; the multiversity has several – some of them quite good, although there is much debate on which souls really deserve salvation.*<sup>13</sup>

Apparently Clark Kerr thinks that the idea of the university has been dissolved and distributed among the various tasks, interests, roles and commitments that institutions of higher education and research have been asked to serve in contemporary society. Kerr considers that economic interests have had such an impact on the university that it induced the break-up of the institution as such. But when he proposes the 'multiversity' idea – apparently rejecting the traditional idea of the univer-

<sup>12</sup> Kerr (1994, p. 7).

<sup>13</sup> Kerr (1994, pp. 14-15).

sity – he never loses sight of what gives the university its deep-seated self-identity, where freedom and reason matter:

*The ends are already given – the preservation of eternal truths, the creation of new knowledge, the improvement of service wherever truth and knowledge of a higher order may serve the needs of man. The ends are there, but the means must be ever improved in a competitive, dynamic environment.*<sup>14</sup>

The integrity of the university whose internal aims or mission are the acquisition, preservation, and transmission of knowledge as such, consists precisely in turning these identity features into the services answering the varying knowledge needs of society.

Thus Kerr is simply suggesting that a large university can normally have a multitude of very different units within its purview; each, however, must embody some of the essential elements of the idea of the university. Therefore, in a multiversity, there are certainly many different units; yet, despite their differences, there is something fundamentally important they share, even though they don't, according to Kerr, have a common soul, they share common values.<sup>15</sup> There is no question that in most universities there exist many very different cultures related to the different disciplines and functions, but rather than dwelling on those differences, which should definitely be respected and nurtured, we want to underline the importance of the commonalities.

<sup>14</sup> In our view, one key item is missing from this description, which is the transmission of knowledge; probably Kerr took this as too evident to require mentioning.

<sup>15</sup> Kerr (1994, p. 34).

We shall now turn to some of these fundamental academic values, in particular those expounded by the Magna Charta Observatory.

### **Values and the university: the four fundamental principles of the 1988 Magna Charta Universitatum**

There are at least three main aspects of the discussion concerning higher education. The first one, a worry for many politicians and academics, consists in determining how to ensure the largely economic contribution to the development of society: how can the institution be helped to deliver? The second one relates to the operational mode of the university: how should or might the institution be structured, governed and financed? We have already evoked these two aspects of the matter. A third one is perhaps less tangible and less discussed; it is most important, however, for those who have qualms about higher education entering the market place. It deals with the values universities stand for, the basic principles on which they rest – or should rest. Our concern is about the moral or ethical compass the knowledge culture should use when joining the market of mass education and industrial research that defines our century.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> There is of course a host of different volumes on this very issue. Ranging from the Morin's (2001) lessons for the future which implies fundamental values for all, not least the institutions of education, to writings that deliberate on the values that academia must uphold; see e.g. the treatise by the former president of Stanford, Kennedy (1997) on the duties of the academy; or the treatise by Graham (2005), similarly transforming the intellectual values of older times into the modern setting the universities are now placed in.

Thus, when we look at history and the trends shaping current university development, the crucial question is to what extent can the basic principles of the modern university be upheld in the higher education sector as it develops throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century? But these principles, what are they? A tentative answer has been given by the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, a document originally endorsed in 1988 at the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna.<sup>17</sup>

The Magna Charta declaration attempts to define the university through the basic principles the institution embodies (see box below). They refer to four themes: the endeavour to (1) retain *moral and intellectual autonomy* from political and economical powers, (2) ensure a close and dynamic *connection between teaching and research*, (3) ensure *freedom in research and training*, (4) be the trustee of *the European humanist tradition* on the way to universal knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

### **Fundamental principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum**

1. The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organized because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teach-

<sup>17</sup> From the Magna Charta Universitatum. [http://www.magna-charta.org/pdf/mc\\_pdf/mc\\_english.pdf](http://www.magna-charta.org/pdf/mc_pdf/mc_english.pdf), at the Magna Charta Observatory, <http://www.magna-charta.org/home2.html>.

<sup>18</sup> See an extensive discussion of these principles in Lay (2004).

ing must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.

2. Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge.

3. Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and governments and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement. Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, the university is an ideal meeting-ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation, and for students entitled, able and willing to enrich their minds with that knowledge.

4. A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition; its constant care is to attain universal knowledge; to fulfil its vocation it transcends geographical and political frontiers, and affirms the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other.

The Magna Charta Observatory, <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna.html>

There are two related reasons why the first principle – autonomy – is of paramount importance. Since knowledge is so powerful an instrument, a multitude of

interests are likely to try to restrain, sway or even control its accumulation; such an attempt would hope to master those elements of knowledge that might threaten the powers that be or, more simply, those pieces of information which can be manipulated for the defence or promotion of particular interests. This might harm both the knowledge itself and the society it is meant to serve. That is why the use and transmission of knowledge must be kept autonomous. Many parties, notably governments and other sponsoring agents, may indeed have a vested interest in given elements of knowledge they would prefer *not* to be revealed or used – or, at least, to be used in a particular way. Please, do not to rock the boat of society through critical understanding, would be their argument! They could also wish to protect an advantage that a special bit of information offers to the group of those already in the know. In this context, upholding the first Magna Charta principle prevents the distortion of knowledge.

The demand for close links between teaching and research stems from the Humboldt – Whitehead ideals we discussed earlier. This is essentially a pragmatic principle: science can best be served in an environment that serves both researchers and students; if one of the two fundamental components is missing, and thus also the connection between them, then the operation would no longer qualify as a university; this second principle – the interconnection of missions – holds a very special definitional status.

The third principle – academic freedom – has two components, ethical and pragmatic: the ethical one relates to the first principle – autonomy – by underlining

the need for freedom from any political, ideological, normative or methodological constraints in conducting research. If academic freedom refers to independence from all restraining forces that may pervert in any way the accumulation, preservation or transmission of knowledge, it also implies some liberty of choice as far as the content and methods allowing for the best study of a particular field. It all entails a margin for manoeuvre needed by academics in their daily assignments. The pragmatic side of freedom, strangely enough, verges on the mystical. Indeed, experience shows it is impossible to ascertain in advance which scientific endeavours may prove fertile for science and society. Often investigations determined by hunches or intuitions turn out to be most fruitful. Thus, since science breakthroughs are usually unexpected, giving the scientist or the teacher a free hand to develop their professional interests may prove most effective – at least in the long run.

The notion of academic freedom – inherent in the first and third Magna Charta principles – has yet another and somewhat wider connotation and relates to the obligations and responsibilities of the academics within and outside their institutions. It requires a strong element of self-control, by setting up those rules that govern academic matters in the university as far as content, methods and in particular standards of research and training are concerned. In addition to operational freedom, academics, by virtue of their expertise and special position, have both the licence and obligation to express a considered opinion on all issues that relate to their field of expertise. This means exercising a critical part, – well informed, constructive and relatively free from those special interests most people are affected by. The third

Magna Charta principle thus assumes that academics, because of their professional standing and capacity for critical thinking, have also the obligation to take up issues that they know to be ignored by others, due to various pressures.

The principle of academic freedom also extends to students and, as for their teachers, it engages them inside and outside the university.

The fourth principle is of a different kind: it points to the European humanist tradition which considers that, to shape fully human people, a broad and liberal education is needed that differs from theoretical learning, operational training or general information. Such a process centres on the person rather than a given expertise and leads to generic competencies in all students. The university should be the guardian and proponent of such a liberal and humanistic tradition – today like yesterday. No other organisation has that role indeed. Earlier on, we mentioned the ‘unit of analysis’ applied to the university. What do we mean by a ‘university’ in this trusteeship function? Is it sufficient to retain a department that offers some courses in liberal education – of the highest quality of course? No, this does not suffice. To ensure a humanistic dimension in higher education, universities must ensure that all faculties, all departments, abide by this cultural obligation even though it may be implemented in countless different ways.

These values have a direct bearing on the structures of the university, as much as on its mission and functions. When the institution, as an organisation, is in the hands of a community of scholars partaking in a similar culture, it is rather easy to observe how the four Magna Charta principles are being respected. But when the

university has become a multi-faculty institution with thousands of staff and students, is the university then condemned to use organisational rules that strongly diverge from these principles? And when universities are expected to serve many interests other than those related to attaining universal knowledge, the question arises of how the priority on knowledge does relate to other interests or values the university also needs to cater for. In other words, can the university define priorities for action at the risk of sacrificing one or other fundamental principle to some 'higher' cause? What might that cause be? Would this not tarnish the *raison d'être* of the institution?

We accept of course that a large organisation, as a university often is, must be well governed, managed and administered. But we are still convinced that universities are, more than any other association, company or institution, the responsibility of those who work in them, the teachers, students and administrative staff. This explains, we believe, their longevity. But it is not only the operational side that must be taken care of but also the essential values.

All these values are important because they matter both to the university and the society in which it operates; it is somewhat difficult to dissociate the two, even though we argue below that it can and might be done.

### **The Modern University and its relationship to society**

In the modern discourse, it is often taken for granted that the university is not only an integral and vital part of modern society, but that it has obviously been estab-

lished, funded and governed for its services to the community. Indeed, the universities have been entangled in their milieu y from the beginning; Kivinen and Poikus (2006) note that,

*...functional relations of exchange with surrounding communities have always been a vital necessity for the entire university institution, whether with spiritual or secular, as well as local and national communities. All through their almost 900 years of history, universities and their academic people have known how to make themselves useful, if not indispensable, in the eyes of religious and secular potentates (p. 188).*

We do not, however, infer from this the inevitability of universities providing service to society; but there is certainly a range of reasons that encourage society to expect a service from these institutions.<sup>19</sup> This calls for a pact of cooperation about this function, which requires a dialogue and respect from both parties. It also means that society contributes to the success of its universities with some solid and generous support; in turn, this requires universities to define their societal mission and to explain the services they may genuinely provide to society.

The link between academia and society has varied over time and there is no doubt that in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the mission of the university has been substantially re-arranged by various powers – in particular the nation states. The prominent social mission that defines the modern society has its roots in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but, as we have seen, it varies in function according to the platform then adopted, e.g. as defined by Napoleon, Humboldt and Newman.

<sup>19</sup> See a similar view expressed by Watson (2008), e.g. p. 47.

Despite continuous developments, the 19<sup>th</sup> century university retained its role as a seat of professional learning (derived from its medieval predecessors): it kept stressing the training of civil servants, although in a number of new professions that were slowly emerging. This happened everywhere. And it is still the case today, even if social reproduction is easily brushed aside in modern debates, perhaps because it is not a very exciting topic. Many institutions, both Humboldtian and Napoleonic, were also given a cultural role in nation building, a function that has now evolved towards economic development. It may also be argued, if very tentatively, that the socially related mission of the university has shifted, during the recent past, from an accent on the individual, then to the collective needs of the State, the nation, society<sup>20</sup> and the economy; today, there is perhaps a tendency to return to the individual as the main beneficiary of universities,<sup>21</sup> even if the latter still relay more general needs.

We suggest that there are basically three categories of social mission that the university has adopted or has been given: a *cultural* mission (that includes the cultivation of science); an *economic* mission (that entails professional education and research for technological innovation) and a *political* mission (that ensures the

<sup>20</sup> We distinguish here between society and nation, partly to allow for the multicultural dimension and thus bypass the problems caused by a narrow definition of a nation, which was assumed to start with.

<sup>21</sup> The use of the term economy indicates that we are moving away from the grip of the national definition. We may be talking about the local, the national, the supra-national (e.g. the European) or the global economy. Those who adopt this view are no longer burdened by the social discourse, e.g. democratic or egalitarian values.

high level of critical and sophisticated information and knowledge needed for democratic debates). Some suggest the universities have yet another social function, an *egalitarian* mission (that makes certain that the world of higher education is available to all): however, it is not at all clear whether the institution is equipped to take up such duties, even though it may endeavour to do so, for instance through liberal access policy or lifelong learning.

The history of the university and its concept shows that institutional mission and functions have changed; and are still changing.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the transformation is not as dramatic as we would sometimes like to think – especially when we are constantly reminded about the speed of societal evolution. But there is an invariant: the core function of the university remains to cultivate learning, in particular through scholarly teaching and research. An institution without such a scope of action cannot really be considered to be a university.<sup>23</sup>

In other terms, all universities share a common core although, in all other aspects, they may vary considerably. The university, however, has no inherent mission such as various services to society. Rather, it has basic functions such as teaching or research that may be of service to society, either in the short- or in the long-term (see chapter 3).<sup>24</sup> This does not prevent universi-

<sup>22</sup> As shown by Kivinen and Poikus (2006).

<sup>23</sup> The complication is of course that the idea Newman expounded did not involve research, but Humboldt had already explained why these two had to go together. But he was open to all useful things, but this was precisely why he championed liberal education, see e.g. Graham's (2005) Essay I.3.

<sup>24</sup> Here we distinguish between the aims or goals an institution may

ties from taking up – or refusing – tasks proposed by a variety of interested agents: such externally inspired missions may be used for the sake of social engineering, i.e., as a means to an end. Society can thus decide, as it has done, to guide the universities to adopt a variety of missions: to cultivate applications and produce public goods of various types and at various levels, and may therefore for this purpose support the advance of science; individuals may see the institution as a vehicle for gaining education or credentials for their own personal advantage; industry may see it as a forum for solving practical problems.<sup>25</sup> It can thus be decided by the institution or by its ‘owners’ what mission to adopt. From this point of view, the term ‘true university’ refers only to the extent an institution carries out its structural (internally inspired) task of cultivating learning, which is an invariant, rather than to fulfilling missions that are negotiable and may for that reason be variable. This is important since, too often, the institution is being discussed as if it were to retain forever its current social mission, whatever happens during its future development. This may not be so.

It is difficult to enumerate and classify the many missions that have been attributed to the university, explicitly (in mission statements) or implicitly (in general

have and the way it operates, e.g. how it is governed or the functions it carries out, such as teaching or research. A university may, as an example, define its noble aims or mission, which may perhaps not be well reflected in the way it normally functions.

<sup>25</sup> The call by Lester and Piore (2004) for the provision of the missing dimension in the innovative process is a functional argument insisting that this component must be supplied and it is best done by the universities (see chapter 3).

assumptions). In the general discourse, however, we can recognise diverse dimensions to university missions – a matter to be explored in chapter 3 when debating the place of stakeholders, be they local, national or global. We can already indicate that missions or roles given to universities or assumed by them may refer to different entities; we refer to individuals, science, or society as important beneficiaries. The following table suggests that science as a construct may benefit society at various levels, in addition to the gain science itself may enjoy.

All this is very tentative; only twice do we use question marks, even though one big question mark hangs over the whole exercise! But we still think it may be useful to engage in such reflections, in particular to assess how university functions, i.e., what the university actually does, may be matched against such a classification.

**TABLE 1. A TENTATIVE OVERVIEW OF SOME MISSIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND POTENTIAL BENEFICIARIES**

	<b>The most direct beneficiaries:</b>				
<i>Serving:</i>	<i>The individual</i>	<i>Science</i>	<i>Society Local</i>	<i>Society National</i>	<i>Society Global</i>
Missions					
Developing the individual					
Fostering an independent spirit					
Educating professionals					
Cultural mission					
Ethical mission					
Education for democracy					
Egalitarian mission					
Advancing science			?	?	
Product development					
Economic development					
Creating a competitive edge					
Enhancing the local community					
		Intended effect			
		Possible unintended effects			

### 3. The stakeholders, quality and the university

For whom does the university operate? Whom do universities serve? It is easy to brush these questions aside by saying that the answer is so obvious that we do not need to bother with it. On the other hand, the issue is so multifaceted and context dependent that no simple and intelligible response seems possible. In the normal discourse about the universities, many people hold one of these two views. We accept neither.

We think it is important for the university community to make up its mind about the principal rationale that guides its operations as it may help define its short- and long-term development; to clarify who benefits from its operation and how. This should also help to make the university's case to its stakeholders, both for moral and financial support. Such reflection is essential for the university itself in order to monitor effectively and channel its own efforts, thus retaining its current strengths and lessening its weaknesses in a rapidly changing world.

The institution may be led astray if it is not cognisant of, or is naive about its own rationale, not to mention unduly arrogance regarding its own importance. Making its rationale transparent would also clarify institutional abilities vis-à-vis prominent stakeholders, in government or industry: thus, they might find the balance between being very demanding, perhaps wanting immediate transparent applicable results, and showing considerable patience, because they must understand that the most valuable contributions of any university may need time to mature, and that their ‘products’ may also be truly intangible. As for the universities, they must also understand that nobody makes their case for them: they have to explain to others what they are about. To do so, they need to know for whom and with whom they operate, how valuable they are for different stakeholders and how the worth of their work is being assessed. In other words, we need here to discuss both stakeholders and quality. We will show how context-dependent, or rather time-dependent the pinpointing of stakeholders may be and we will point out the strength of the peer review system and attempt to make the case for not sacrificing that principle on the altar of simplicity and transparency.

The term *university stakeholder* refers to individuals, groups or organizations that have a legitimate interest in the operation of the university. We also take it to refer to abstract entities like democratic processes and constructs, like knowledge or science. Society or the economy, are also generic entities even though we discuss these as stakeholders. All these ‘bodies’ may have something to gain, by some measure, when the op-

eration of a university is successful, and in some cases something to loose if it is not.

Once we have figured out who the stakeholders are, we will ask how their different interests are being expressed. Is their representation implicit or explicit in the arena of higher education? For example, who speaks out for them? Does anybody officially represent the views of the different stakeholders? Or who decides whether basic research is more relevant than applied research?

We will first turn to these issues and subsequently to collateral issues, such as the tensions between different stakeholders and how they bear on the issue of quality. We will discuss two sides of quality, the quality of research and teaching and issues that relate to their assessment. The question also arises for whom is the quality monitored and how it may affect the operation of the university.

*Is society the only legitimate stakeholder?*

According to the modern European view there is, in principle, only one legitimate stakeholder, i.e., society at large. This view has been developing gradually from very early stages in the history of the university. Only from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century would this development, however, refer to given principles, but the service to society is not inherent in the notion of a university as we discussed in chapter 2. It is now generally accepted that education of the professional classes, the pursuit of scientific knowledge and understanding, or the cultivation of critical discourse are all deemed to be important, because they aid the development of a healthy and constantly improving society. And that is why the recourse

to the public purse is considered appropriate to pay for all these tasks. In other terms, all traditional university functions are seen to contribute to society; from that perspective the university should be discussed and is entitled to support when providing a public good. This is based on a very long-term perspective.

But would this view be accepted by all those concerned with the development of the modern university? We must discuss this question, both because it is of fundamental importance to those engaged with the university, especially those arguing for its sustainability, and also because debating it will help to disentangle some of the complications in the university discourse.

There are of course a number of complications. Notice that the public unit referred to, if only implicitly, may vary. It can be the local community, national society, region or the globe. When we insist that general education improves society and is thus a public good, the public is the society which indeed pays for it; we might use the term national public good. In some cases unions, such as the European Union, instigate programmes that are supposed to serve the public within the union and this would then be a trans-national or regional public good. When the idea is put forward that science serves society and is thus a public good, the public implicitly referred to is the world population: it is thus taken to be a global public good. Or is it? We will see that this should perhaps not be taken for granted any more.

There are further complications: what is the difference between a long- and a short-term view of the contribution of the university? We find that the time perspective becomes very important in determining who

the stakeholders really are: their number multiplies as we shorten the time perspective.

### **The short- and the long-term stakes**

The time perspective is perhaps the most interesting determinant of who has high stake university interests. Thus before attempting to discuss a variety of stakeholders in some detail, let us start by distinguishing in general terms between the long- and the short-term perspectives.

Even if we accept that, in the long-term, society at large is the beneficiary of the work done at the university, i.e., the cultivation of knowledge, this does certainly not preclude its services being harnessed by individuals, professions, institutions, companies, local communities, nations or a variety of other groups when they compete for advantages within an evolving society, local or global. In fact, it is through a multitude of such channels that the university activities gradually permeate to the general public. Therefore the effective short-term beneficiaries of academic institutions can range from individuals to national interests. The universities thus produce private goods or in many cases what we might call local (national) public goods: thus, they may serve local industries, in addition to an overarching global contribution, the advancement of science. For instance a nation might invest in scientific research in order for its economy to gain competitive advantage over other nations, even though the benefits of this research are not 'owned' by any particular agencies within the country and are, in principle, also available on a global level, through international journals or conferences.

The research is thus funded with the expectation it will become a local public good that benefits the surrounding community through being used by local private enterprises, even though the investigative effort is neither explicitly private nor even explicitly local.

As a result, the justification of a national contribution to scientific research often turns out to be somewhat confused since short-term local rhetoric becomes entangled with long-term global expectations. However, to what extent should scientific research be considered a national or a global public good? Politicians may stress the former whereas scientists will normally emphasise the latter; as for the university leadership, it may advocate both, building on the general agreement that scientific research is important – defending both its fundamental (long-term) and applied (short-term) contributions. Thus the proponents of the university typically vacillate between the short- and long-term views, quite understandably and justifiably, but do not seem conscious of the confusion it all entails: after all, it is nice having one's cake and eat it too!

We will now discuss the important difference between long- and short-term views with respect to the stakeholders by touching on two difficult and perennial issues: the problem of whether the university should be considered a private or a public good – taking professional education as a point of departure and why this matters. We will also discuss the tension between the advocates of pure and applied science and some of the problems related to this distinction.

*A private or a public good? Professional education, fees, equal access, the market*

Society holds a definite stake in the universities' training of those professionals who are key actors of social development, like the medical doctors and engineers, not to mention a myriad of other disciplines. It is obviously crucial for its daily operation and development that society has access to solid education in all qualifications of key interest. Indeed, professionals do not only operate as individual specialists but they also develop a proficiency culture that embraces both their operational environment and their own standards of conduct – for instance in the highly developed health systems existing in many countries. From that perspective, the education of professionals can be considered a public good which society should pay for out of the common purse; a justification in addition to the egalitarian arguments of a developed welfare system. In most societies, however, and for a variety of reasons, education favours the already educated, thus making a private good out of the access to knowledge – although its value varies immensely from one person to another. But, in general, the higher their educational level, the higher are the individuals' income and status.

In Europe, the axiom has long been that the provision of knowledge, a particular form of public good, is crucial for the welfare and development of society; thus, in the discussion about university policy, public considerations should prevail, especially in terms of State financial support to the institutions. Nevertheless fees for university education are increasingly being introduced or contemplated, this policy transformation being justi-

fied by private goods arguments; those individuals who receive the degree are going to benefit specifically. But are not paying contributors also members of society and are their future services not a general contribution, over and above the part they play in their individual occupations? Both in the short- and long-term society thus remains a key stakeholder when it comes to the education of any group of experts; and it is increasingly accepted that the individuals within those groups are also important stakeholders themselves; at least in the short run since each of them may increase their personal 'social value'. The issue of fees for university education thus creates tension which is difficult to resolve.

Indeed, the public benefits from university education have led to a heated debate about the need for wider access while the growing emphasis on private benefits encourages demands for equal access; in both cases the discussion revolves largely around university fees, a bone of contention in Europe but also in the global, university arena. Given that university education has become an advantage for a better career, it is argued that its beneficiaries should pay for this added personal value that, later, will translate into notable private advantages. But also, for the same reasons, if university education is indeed an important private good, egalitarianism would require that specific fees or other hurdles are not set up that might diminish the accessibility or attraction of university education. Thus, the fact that such education is partly a private good can be used both as an argument to support or reject fees. Although they represent only a fraction of the expenses incurred by the institution, their introduction is difficult to justify since they may reinforce social stratification and hamper access. It seems

particularly tricky to argue that, universities producing crucial public goods, they should be largely supported by the State while saying, simultaneously, education carrying with it private benefits, student contributions make sense. The risk in this context would be to subsidise the privileged!

Equality of access to higher education for both males and females as well as for underprivileged social groups is one of the main aims pursued by all European governments. This, however, seems exceedingly difficult to achieve, even though, generally speaking, higher education credentials are worth acquiring: but higher education is a difficult or unappealing route to many. This is due to a complex mixture of attitudes rooted in culture, traditions and beliefs that shape motivation. In such a context, fees may not be the deciding issue; for sure, creating equality just by refraining from fees or setting up a 'corrective' grant system does not suffice to ease imbalance. The problem has much deeper roots and should be tackled right from the beginning of the education system – so that education really turns into a tool against inequality. Anyway, education, and higher education in particular, is both a private and a public good. And great care must be taken to ensure that this public dimension should not be forgotten when re-designing the universities' future.

Well-intended wishes, however, do not solve problems! Especially since the private good dimension of higher education opens universities to market forces. Firstly, because it appeals to those who can afford it, to pay for entering institutions that, in a relatively short time, may provide them with the skills and credentials that lead to rather well-paid positions, with status and

a potential for stability. It therefore becomes a viable enterprise to set up such institutions, hitherto on a non-profit basis but, increasingly, as for-profit institutions. They compete on the same playing field as public institutions but adopt slightly different rules of conduct, to their own advantage. Their success makes it very tempting for governments – for financial reasons – and public institutions – to remain competitive – to adopt private behaviour. The institutions, in particular, may tend to consider their offerings as marketable products and lament not to be allowed to sell them as valuable assets.

The second force pushing higher education onto the market, although of a similar nature, operates at a different level. Many universities, Anglo-Saxon in particular, would like to take advantage of their working language – English – to develop their international outreach, not only in less developed areas of the world but everywhere where there is demand for high status education and where people look for valuable credentials. The idea is to enable countries with less developed higher education provisions to take advantage of tested products the developed high status universities sell like any other commodity. From the buyers' point of view, such goods are most tantalising when supplied on their doorstep, in newly provider-built campuses, through e-learning mechanisms or other distance educational provisions. In this way can these countries establish a platform to compete on a level basis with all those that are diligently strengthening their own systems, precisely for competitive reasons. That is why higher education is included in the WTO negotiations extending free trade to services (GATS). This may also place the distinction between local (national) and global public goods in a new light.

Normally, when people talk about higher education as a public good, they are largely referring to their national context, even though science and knowledge, in the abstract, are also a global good. Institutions selling higher education similar to any other commodity would not fit easily into this classification.

There is a good chance that these forces – supported by the general tendency to trust market wisdom while using its modalities of operation – will increasingly dominate higher education systems. This is a trend that may be supported by very ambitious, competitive and financially hard-up public universities although it is not at all clear who will gain most from such developments in the short or long term.<sup>1</sup>

### *Pure versus applied science*

There is still another, but very different complication, resulting from the disparity between long- and short-term perspectives. This is the tension between people who want to emphasise the value of pure science and those who stress the practical contribution of scientific research. The conflict can be couched either in ideological terms or approached more pragmatically, in a way directly related to our discussion here.

To some, the pursuit of scientific knowledge is a goal in itself that needs no external justification, not more than would artistic or cultural endeavours that are developed irrespective of possible economic benefits. For

<sup>1</sup> Brint (2007) presents a fairly optimistic, if a sobering view on the possibility for public research universities to compete with the private ones.

them, engaging in scientific discovery is simply a normal activity in any society: as a cultural activity and asset it needs no further rationalisation. Other people, however, would take a more down to earth stance and demand that scientific research, particularly since it uses public funds, must prove useful, i.e., contribute in some tangible way to the economy and the development of society. They do not really tolerate scientific activities, paid from common funds, that cannot be turned into an economically viable product and they question whether such activities deserve public support. In most European societies, the two groups have vocal advocates but their differences do not really depend on the time perspective adopted.

A more pragmatic look at that conflict presumes that all science may become useful (in economic terms), pure or basic science, i.e., curiosity driven research, needing time to turn into objects or service: in the long run, science will become economically or socially important. Hence, on economic grounds, public support can be justified but with a clear bottom line, economic viability. Indeed, economic benefits may be long to materialise; and, if so, it may happen outside of the local (e.g. national) community that funded the research. These possible drawbacks make governments, whether local or national, increasingly hesitant to fund theoretical (pure, basic) research or they need somehow to be convinced that potential benefits are around the corner – to be channelled into their political environment. Companies also feel uncertain about funding curiosity-driven investigations, even if they depend on ground-breaking discoveries to retain their competitive edge.

By encouraging pure science to deliver in the long

future, decision-makers put theoretical scientific pursuit on an economic leash. But this leash is often tight as planners, perhaps to protect themselves, adopt quite narrow economic criteria to measure the final contribution science can make. That is why those scientific or academic activities that are generously supported by public funds are often restricted to the 'productive' fields of natural sciences and technology. The various contributions made by the humanities and social sciences – even when substantial, direct and tangible – tend to be played down, perhaps not in the discourse, but in the financial arena. This division of treatment between various fields of science (in monetary terms) proves dramatic in many instances, partly because it does not justly reflect the operation of the universities in terms of academic staff or student numbers nor, we believe, their input to a healthy, thriving and dynamic society.

In recent years a distinction has been made between different organisational settings framing research activities, the discipline based mode (Mode 1) as opposed to a more field-oriented organisation (Mode 2).<sup>2</sup> Mode 1 is considered to be typical of university-based research whereas Mode 2 would be more sensitive to solving problems arising from the field. We think this distinction is useful to draw attention to the variety of ways in which science is produced but also contend that the difference between the two is often fuzzy; intense

<sup>2</sup> This view has been proposed and argued by Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons (2003), see also and their colleagues (see also Gibbons et al., 1994; Helga Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001). Some of their contentions have been criticized, but there is no question that their perspective is very useful for discussing how science works in its interaction with society.

problem-based lines of research may soon become very theoretical; highly academic research may often soon be usefully harnessed given the right conditions and incentives. In any case, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many universities in Europe and the US have had a very strong practical basis for research.

### *The short-term stakeholders of the university*

We have proposed that any classifying of university stakeholders critically depends on the perspective adopted. By changing it, we may dramatically shift from a view in which the global society is perhaps the university's single benefactor to a perspective that presumes a multitude of stakeholders, be they individuals, firms, local municipalities or even whole nations. In the following discussion, we shall keep a short-term perspective.

Towards the end of chapter 2 we enumerated a number of missions for the university; missions that it meets both in the short and in the long run. They all imply potential beneficiaries or stakeholders.

In the short term perspective, the list is long because interested agents may range from the very abstract representatives of truth, knowledge or science, to those standing for society, the nation, the economy, the new economy, industry, the democratic discourse or the development of society in general. More concretely, they are individual firms, professionals, previous or prospective students, city authorities, close neighbours or, in the institutions themselves, their staff and students. These different agents may have some converging but, quite often, conflicting interests.

It helps to distinguish between internal stakeholders (staff and students) and external ones (all outside partners). In many ways, however, the former groups are subsets of the latter, and in general we will not here discuss internal stakeholders – except when referring to the academic freedom of academic staff since the immediate interests of individual staff members may differ from the institution's plans or the desires of the public at large.<sup>3</sup>

We will consider science as a stakeholder, in the short-term perspective. This is reasonable irrespective of whether knowledge or science is pursued for its own sake or as a means for economic development.

#### *Knowledge or science as a stakeholder*

Knowledge or science is certainly a stakeholder. Indeed, as a field of operation, it has an immense vested interest in the structures within which it operates. For science, the crux of the matter is what environment – academic or not – will help it thrive (see chapter 2). The Humboldt-Whitehead argument was that it was best positioned when at the crossroads of knowledge accumulation and dissemination, i.e., where there would be a genuine and dynamic interaction of research and teaching, of researchers and students. We adduced a number of telling quotations to support this point of view.

It may also be argued, whether science is pursued

<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this text to discuss the potentially very different interests of new vs. established staff at the institutions and also undergraduate vs. graduate students or indeed of the many different groups working within a complex institution like the university.

for its own sake or for the sake of economic progress, that being free from any immediate interests or pressure outside its own purely scientific purview is of utmost importance if it is to develop at the most healthy and productive pace. Therefore its progress should not be meddled with by any guidelines, which may be short sighted and narrow minded, drawn up on behalf of applied or economic pragmatists. This warning is justified on purely practical grounds, i.e., on the premise that attempting to control scientific progress from outside its own rules – critical debate and competition of ideas – is simply not efficient in the long run. Thus there need not be any conflict in claiming that the main justification for the scientific enterprise is societal progress and at the same time that it should be left alone, totally free from any societal pressures. Scientists have argued this for a long time and many governments have indeed accepted this view and provided substantial financial support for free or pure research. But their tolerance for this position of ‘no constraints’ may be diminishing.

Gradually governments, especially in developed countries, are becoming impatient, especially when they put value on science contributions for national economic development. Thus, while increasing their grants to research they may be also inclined to require contributions whose effective impact on economic growth may be monitored easily. Scientific research is no longer an aside in the progress of the nation; it is increasingly being treated as an important, substantive, even crucial provider of competitive advantages for expansion – and rightly so. Science has thus become an expensive high-stake actor, which means that governments can no longer bear or dare to leave it alone. It has to be evalu-

ated, controlled and has continually to prove its value. It cannot be trusted to deliver the required results on its own: it has to be managed and monitored.

This is perfectly legitimate as a matter of principle. It is neither wrong when governments endeavour to monitor the use of public funds, nor that they want to encourage the use of scientific knowledge. We should stress, however, that a great care should be taken not to treat this matter as an either-or question, as it is too often. Lester and Piore (2004) (see box) have made a strong plea for the space that allows for what they call the interpretative part of scientific discussion, which nurtures the unforeseen, the creative ideas that are the prerequisites for real innovation. They further argue that this space needs to be public and is most appropriately open in universities. Yet, they are worried that this space is shrinking in the US and that it could have serious consequences for technical developments in the long run. Thus they argue for science to be given a public space, not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of the economy.

This does of course not preclude that great effort should be made to establish meeting places and build bridges between the producers of knowledge and the various fields of operation, and attempt to ensure that connections are working. It is just not a question of one or the other.

**A pragmatic plea for a long-term public space: the university should fulfil the need for public space for technological innovation.**

Lester and Piore (2004) claim that, what they call the interpretative dimension of technological innovation, introduces a new slant to the argument for the universities and their research teaching function. They are convinced that interpretation ‘plays in the space of ambiguity’ (p. 53) where ‘novelty and originality lie’ (p. 54), and conclude that ‘interpretation needs to be protected from the pressures of competition ... in a sheltered space’ (p. 176) which they claim is the public space provided by the universities. The necessity is particularly great from the long-term perspective. They argue that such public space is an absolute prerequisite for technological innovation, no less important than a competitive setting, which is also vital, but at later stages.

Lester, R. K. and M. J. Piore (2004). *Innovation, the missing dimension*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Because of the way science has been run as a global, cultural enterprise, a paradoxical situation is emerging which is relevant to the stakeholder perspective on science. On the one hand, if science is a disinterested pursuit of knowledge to be shared by all, it is not for any-

one in particular to benefit from its progress, everybody can, i.e., not only those who directly pay for it. Up to now, this has not been considered a big problem, either because people have assumed that all those who engage in effective research will somehow automatically benefit from it or because those who have invested most in research have indeed benefited most. On the other hand, national governments are increasingly asking: what is the direct return to us, on our investment? Thus, for civil authorities – who have until now unquestioningly supported the open pursuit of knowledge – arises the question: can we take any measures in order to ensure that we, who pay for this research, will benefit directly from its results? In terms of national economic development, as mentioned, but also to build a competitive advantage for international economic competition. From that perspective one may be reluctant to distribute to all the benefits of a ‘competitive investment’, thus reducing one’s own advantage vis-à-vis competitors. The massive scientific enterprise supported by each country is meant to make ‘us’ (i.e., this nation) more competitive, not ‘them’ (i.e., other nations). This of course begs the question that both civil authorities and private companies are increasingly asking themselves: what are the pros and cons of keeping the results of scientific research open to everyone rather than locked up with those who are immediately engaged in it, for instance by not publishing, or at least by making some economic mileage out of innovation before access to it is opened up? Civil authorities have until now accepted without reservation that the pros of openness are overwhelming whereas private companies have a much more ambivalent attitude.

All in all, science, i.e., pure scientific inquiry, is a proper stakeholder in university operations – and increasingly so. This holds true independently of its cultural or economic value. It matters enormously to scientific inquiry, especially in its substantive creative dimension, what conditions are created for its fruits to ripen. We have suggested earlier that the interaction of a variety of actors within the university and the operational freedom afforded by the university provides these conditions. It matters where science is situated, how it is governed and stimulated, who are the actors, what directs its course, how it is funded and how it is assessed. And when taking the side of science as a stakeholder we question the tendency of governments to put scientific activity within the universities on a progressively shorter economic leash, or even making it too short – as Lester and Piore fear.

### *Society and its constituent elements as stakeholders*

In chapter 2 we concluded that several of its social service functions were no sine qua non of its operation in the Middle Ages, even though they were present all the time. Western societies, however, evolved by weaving academic work more and more into the operations of society, to such an extent that universities became a natural part of the social fabric. The evolving missions of the university and its functions now reflect this complex development.

Society is therefore the chief stakeholder in the modern university whose main functions are now undertaken with the implicit long-term aim of improving society's operation or the citizens' wellbeing. But 'society' sig-

nifies a crowd of potential partners, all with particular stakes. Some are somewhat abstract, as we said earlier, such as the democratic process, the economy, or science whereas others are more tangible such as developing industries, local districts, professional classes and students. And there are others.

We will not analyse the stakes of each but discuss how their interests are determined, how they are represented or spoken for and in the process we will speculate about the short term compatibility of so many interests.

The diversity of stakeholders and the issues involved points to the complexity of the discourse about the university and makes it both very real and urgent. Of course the universities want to respond genuinely and effectively to the needs of their different stakeholders. But whom should they talk to, on what basis and how are they to steer the course between apparently conflicting interests?

### **Presenting the interests of the stakeholders?**

In principle all groups of stakeholders may have their say and exert influence. It does not normally happen, however, and apart from government, only one group of stakeholders does speak as a body expressing consensus opinion and thus justifying specific demands: they are the students, a population constantly present at the university. No other group or interest has an organisation and mechanisms to figure out its interests in the university sector, thus able to make its case. (Staff unions are a different ballgame altogether but it is a moot point where they fit into the picture.)

Other groups have also their say, perhaps not in so

traditional a way. At the one end of the spectrum we have national and local governing bodies that speak for various interests expressing the needs of the community. As such, they are representative too. The problem is the variety of different interests they can press for, some of which may be at odds with each other – consequently they cannot be urged together. This is especially true when public authorities consider that short-term expectations do not dovetail with long-term interests or even counter deeply held principles. Moreover, in some cases, there is a confusion of roles: with public universities, government may operate as if they were representing both the needs of external stakeholders – which they are – and those of the university itself – which they ‘own’. This may prove most unfortunate if state authorities thereby elude a dialogue between the different interests. We think, however, that a partnership is essential between the university and the powers that be, – and the various stakeholders they represent, – it can only be built on an exchange of opinions, a negotiation of interests.

There are also associations of various sorts, labour unions, and numerous professional corporate bodies – for medical doctors or nurses for instance. Not to speak of federations of industry or of particular industries or employers’ associations. Though these groups may represent strong interests and have a clear idea of the services universities can render to them, there is usually no intercommunication channels – direct or otherwise –, i.e., no arena for discussions with the higher education sector.

In other terms, who should talk to whom, and about what? Both questions seem rather innocent but have no

easy answer. On both sides, there is no single agent who can speak with authority – or negotiate – on behalf of its institution. Universities are composite entities (as are their collective bodies, such as rectors' conferences); they often have no authority or willingness to enter real negotiations with external partners. If they were to take up shared concerns and explore where this might lead them, the first difficulty would be the level at which dialogue could start: who is selected as the 'ambassador' of the institution, and what are his or her plenipotentiary powers? A bigger problem might be the content of the discussion. It may be uncomfortable for any organisation, especially when its scope becomes very general (such as in a federation of industries), to clearly gauge how its interests would be best served, either in the short or the long term: is the outside partner more able than a university to decide what it wants, or by what it might most benefit? Not so sure. This does not mean that their needs and expectations, although diffuse, should be ignored; far from it. The point is simply how problematic it may be to decide what is best for the future – in terms of detailed content and method. Thus, even though these many groups are real stakeholders in the university, either the dialogue infrastructure or perhaps the substantive basis for it are missing – or remain fuzzy to say the least.

In the end, the university sector itself may be the best arbitrator of which general interests it is to serve and how to prioritise its actions: indeed, if it has developed its 'scanning power' and its capacity to synthesise demands, it knows best the multitude of different interests of a variety of short-term stakeholders, and is aware of the long-term stakes – both for academia and

its partners. The problem is that nobody else may think so, especially not officialdom, civil servants considering they should lay down the rules of the game in order to defend properly the vital interests of society; it is not clear, however, on what grounds they might know better than the institutions. But public authorities may think the stakes are too high to let the universities themselves be in charge. It is difficult to take issue with such a view, as a matter of principle, especially as the only long-term stakeholder may be society in general, but the problem, here again, is that universities may be by-passed as partners for a dialogue on various substantive issues which deeply concern the universities.

As a result, there is hardly any conversation going on and the rules applied by governments are essentially unilaterally constructed. This seems all the more problematic as the institutions are to follow them through: the lack of participation turns the process into a top-down operation – that usually does not work very well for the lack of motivation of the actors.

The situation becomes much more tractable when it remains at the level of individual institutions, or even of departments: research groups or other units like to negotiate contracts or projects with public or private groups, be they institutions or companies. In such cases the content is usually well defined; so are the beneficiaries on both sides and their expectations in terms of scientific papers, product development, consultation or even courses taught. In such a context, the operational challenge for the various stakeholders consists in keeping open the arena for negotiation so that the university sector remains attractive for non-exclusive co-operation, others being possibly enticed to join the process.

Often a bi-, tri- or multilateral coordination of projects in specific areas may be of immense value to all parties. The *triple helix* model, that brings together the nation state, academia and industry and provides a forum for discussion and project co-operation, is an exciting example of a conversation with and between university stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> However, this arrangement is normally used in quite well-defined areas, such as the Foresight forums instigated by a number of governments as well as by the European Science Foundation.<sup>5</sup> Some scientists may frown on these consensus-building efforts, we think unjustly however, when they express their hidden fears about the supposed narrow vision of those mechanisms set up to channel the contribution of science to its environment.

But given the enormous range of potential co-operation between individual departments and the specific stakeholders, a wide variety of bi-lateral relationships is most likely to accommodate the vast majority of projects. As a matter of fact, all European universities can boast of hundreds of such ventures, large and small, a way to demonstrate a rich spectrum of interactions.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff (2000) and Etzkowitz (2008).

<sup>5</sup> The European Science Foundation claims that Forward Looks is “the flagship activity of ESF’s strategic arm”. It has recently published two major studies on higher education, *Higher Education Looking Forward: An Agenda for Future Research* (2008) and *Higher Education Looking Forward: Relations between Higher Education and Society* (2007). July 2008: <http://www.esf.org/activities/forward-looks.html>.

## **The stakeholders and the issue of quality**

The question of quality has always been an issue for the universities and also for their stakeholders. Very early on in their history the universities used to be ‘licensed’, i.e., allowed to graduate masters or doctors whose teaching quality would be guaranteed. But some institutions were thought better at providing quality education. Thus some form of accreditation has long been in use. Indeed, established universities have always expressed doubts about the quality of newcomers in the field of higher education. Will they be up to the level? Students may also have had serious doubts, for instance in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe where attendance dwindled in some regions to the point of having the universities’ future jeopardised. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, roles were clarified and the build-up of various scientific disciplines led to a culture of quality based on the professional standards shaping different disciplines.

In recent decades, the quality debate has turned around both the quality of research and that of the education provided, involving both the process of teaching and the competence signified by the degrees awarded. Later on, the analysis of the quality of the organisation and its management has also become a concern.

### *Quality of research determined*

Generally speaking, the quality of academic research is not much of a problem since, in many respects, the issue is being tackled quite successfully: a common criterion is simply the test of time. Time will tell if a piece of research turns out to add something new, large or small,

to the never-ending search of human intelligence. Some findings may refresh an older understanding; others open up completely new venues or challenge accepted truths. The final judgement is made in retrospect. The process refers to the enlightened judgement of professional peers, i.e., people who have met at seminars and conferences, presented their ideas and debated them, criticised each other with the express intention of refining their investigations. More formally, researchers also submit their work for stringent review to academic journals, a process ensuring that no consideration other than research quality does colour the judgements made. There is a unity of purpose and the stakes are clear: the advancement of science.

But this is only one part of the story, although a large one. No system is this simple and so perfect. Brilliant research that does not fit in with current paradigms may never be acknowledged – which is perhaps the major weakness of a system that is unfriendly to the really unexpected; in contrast, defective ideas with a high status may survive longer than they deserve; moreover the review process may have definite loopholes. The strength of the process, however, derives from a shared culture of scientific behaviour that is supported by a strong commitment to knowledge and truth and facilitated by the relatively low personal stakes involved in research – although ambitions and a touch of arrogance may exist there too.

In the whole process, we want to underline that the biggest stakeholder is 'science' itself, as an organised activity, even though the researchers who publish in respected journals may also gain status, in terms of personal and institutional prestige. 'Publish or perish',

a well known adage in North America – that is linked to the tenure track system commonly used there –, indicates that publications are of key interest for career conscious academics in America – perhaps less so in Europe, at least until recently. Indeed, there is an increasing premium placed on refereed publications when they are used as the firm and often the main basis of evaluation systems that range from institutional audits to the assessment of departments or individuals; potential reward is modulated by the weight given to the number of publications of a person or a department, a figure often adjusted by the status of the journals publishing the material.

The positive aspect of such performance-based reward systems – designed for individuals – is that they are effective. Thus, when a simple bonus scheme with visible rewards is introduced, the administration responsible may usually sit back and relax. Should the university or external authorities also want to introduce a group bonus scheme, where not only individuals, but also units such as departments, faculties or even institutions are rewarded, this tends to increase the effect on performance.

What works as a reward for academics may vary but, in addition to tenure, a key prospect, status and money may be effective too. Not that everybody is after such ‘compensation’, but a bonus system usually has an effect.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Plato, in the Republic, was hoping that philosophers would be least likely to be tempted by any worldly goods, because of their thirst for truth and knowledge, and should therefore be given control of the State, see e.g. Plato in Bloom’s translation, (1991, pp.

Strangely enough the efficiency of such reward systems has its drawbacks, especially when they work really well, up to the point of taking full control of career development: this may harm other aspects of university life when the reward prioritises a given task to the detriment of other tasks, also of importance for the institution. The writing of research papers, for instance, may take precedence over teaching (which normally brings lesser rewards), even though both activities are supposed to have equal importance from the standpoint of university management, or according to the mission statement of the institution. Furthermore, nominal performance may take over substantive evaluation: the number of peer reviewed papers (or whatever measure is being used) may thus become more significant than the novelty or importance of the ideas being developed and expressed in the documents. The risk is for quantity to take precedence over quality.<sup>7</sup> The transparency and effectiveness of the evaluation process offer a simple control mechanism but its operation remains a cause for serious concern.

This may sound very much like an over-simplification but we believe that it still reflects the essence of administrative mechanisms that are widely used – or are now being introduced in academia –, certainly in Europe but in those other regions as well where the process has not been operative; in other areas it has been in place

198-200), book VII, 520-521 (also 540b). For him the incentive mechanism was no less important than the value of knowledge for government.

<sup>7</sup> A somewhat similar concern is presented by Lindqvist (2006) in his discussion about research, innovation and the Nobel prize.

for a long time. The system seems to work efficiently and one may wonder if its serious flaws are the price to be paid for some specific gains in university effectiveness. We have no problem with incentive schemes encouraging academia to engage in sensible activities that correspond to the task at hand. We think, however, that there is a gradual tendency in the incentive systems now operating (or looming) in most universities, not only to steer most academics towards a narrow track of action (in practice, but not in terms of university rhetoric!), but also to steer most people to follow one and the same track only.

Yet diversity within and between institutions is taken as a defining feature of well-functioning modern higher education systems. Considered highly desirable in a dynamic society, this diversity should also enhance competition among universities. This goes with another tenet of the academic discourse, i.e., that the only way to thrive is to find a niche fostering a unique institutional identity – thus adding variety to diversity. Quality assessment, like other forces in higher education, may, however, contradict craved for university differentiation processes.

Take the ranking tables and the competition they entail! It is not entirely clear why they took the importance they now seem to have – especially as they are so crude and elementary. They answer a need, perhaps, by positioning an institution among others thanks to a comparison of the presumed quality of the work done in different institutions. More importantly, they help brand high ranking institutions as a benchmark others must emulate – a situation most attractive for the staff, students and researchers concerned whose work condi-

tions seem most conducive to success. Being labelled as among 'best' can only encourage good work in university ranks and file and attract outside partners. Therefore the position achieved in a table may prove terribly important. If so, attention should be paid to the criteria used in the assessment: it turns out that the emphasis on academic research is crucial in such rankings, thus encouraging already existing trends – a manner of developing convergence in the global system – presumably inadvertently and of course, only implicitly.

Moreover, on the same line, many countries have developed some kind of research assessment programme – a well-known example being the RAE (research assessment exercise) in the UK. Although these programmes use various criteria, they give much weight to scholarly output, as measured by refereed papers. A fact of some importance considering the monetary stakes often involved. Nobody would like to suggest that the measures used tell more than a fraction of the story; people, however, tend to act as if this were the whole story. When these instruments are also used to evaluate group results, the scales becomes totally dominant, as it is hardly possible to infer from the results anything about the actual quality of the work they measure. When using a simple scale to measure individual output, it is still possible to discuss the papers published, both in terms of numbers (quantity) and ideas (substance, quality). For a department or an institution, points are being added up when the system moves into ranking or indulges in the competitive discourse; very little substantive discussion about the academic quality of results may be possible.

Given the accepted discourse on quality, and presuming that these instruments provide credible verdicts,

institutions have a strong inclination to accept the road-map they imply. All over the world universities are now constantly adjusting strategies in order to adapt to prevailing assessment criteria as fast and firmly as possible. Indeed, there are perhaps tangible rewards involved for those universities accepting the system, lock, stock and barrel. And the higher the real stakes, the greater their efforts to meet the criteria!

There is an interesting twist to this development: universities themselves appear to become the key stakeholders of the system as a whole, rather than outside agents. Such a situation can be both defended and explained. Defended in so far as the institutions themselves have everything to gain by ensuring high quality, at least in a competitive environment; no other agent has more at stake in the process of comparison; in addition to the fact, explained earlier, that there are no clear channels of communication with the major stakeholders. The situation can also be explained: when one enters competition, one accepts the rules of the game and tries to outperform other contestants. There is no time or opportunity to stop and speculate whether this corresponds to most appropriate system of competition, and whether its rules are the most appropriate. But opting out is no option considering the expectations about ranking.

From this perspective the interests or views of those stakeholders coming from outside the university simply do not enter the picture; there is no attempt made to ensure that research activity meets their own quality criteria as outsiders, except to the extent that good solid scientific research should always meet any criterion of quality. The external stakeholders become some kind of

spectators, like in a football match: they have little direct influence on the game progress but, nevertheless, their support and attitude may be crucial for the final score.

Being at the level above the myriad of different institutions, their diverse ambitions, missions and operations, we hope to have pointed to the forces at play, such as incentive schemes, ranking competitions and assessment exercises; we contend that they mould effectively the development of higher education as a whole and that they affect quite dramatically the adaptation of institutions to prevailing market forces.

### *The international peer review system*

It is perhaps worth pausing for a while and speculating on why the international peer review system has taken such a hold of academia. For several reasons, there is a good chance that the system will prevail for a long time to come.

Most importantly, a peer review system calls on professional judgement. The author's academic peers, who know the field well, probe the work from every substantive angle, which they know best, thus offering positive criticisms and constructive opinions. This is a unique process, at least given the scale it operates on. In order to ensure the transparency of substantive judgements and thus prevent *ad hominem* influences, anonymity is ensured as much as possible. Additionally, the strong international emphasis usually required, especially in non-English speaking cultures, takes in two arguments. Firstly, scientists of most disciplines must prove they belong to the international scientific community, abiding by its culture and providing an intellectual contribu-

tion in the frame of its constraints. Secondly, it is also wise to play according to the international rules of the game, in order to be recognised as a proper actor in the global field. Furthermore, because of tough scholarly competition, publications in respected journals draw attention and prestige as a way to move up the academic ladder.

We believe that this method of evaluating scientific work remains fundamentally sound and strong. Any proposal that might be submitted to modify peer review arrangement will need comparable internal strength. The system, however, also derives significant strength from the stakes that are increasingly tied to it.

As mentioned already, this is no flawless method; far from it. In addition to a multitude of practical defects, the system is difficult to apply, when assessing something other than scientific merit. Determining for instance if a discovery is pregnant with marketable spin-offs is usually problematic.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the research production system is guided onto a very academic track and is kept there – despite genuine attempts at charting a different course, for instance to take into account service to the economy or the local community in general.

The main point we have been making is that both the principal instruments used and the operational environment related to research tend to develop according to their own rules; rules that unfortunately ignore most stakeholders other than science, scholarship and the academics involved; rules that outsiders, even so, justifiably tend to treat with some respect.

The peer review system has some perturbing defects,

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Scott (2007) where he discusses the peer review procedure from the perspective of social relevance.

as seen from inside the academic community as a whole: as it develops, it discriminates fields like the humanities and social sciences, and small linguistic communities; here we are referring to the hegemony of the natural sciences discussed above and to the fact that the English language dominates the prestigious journals. It may lead to serious distortions but these are rather practical problems of implementation than faults inherent in the process.

Peer review is certainly the ground on which institutional evaluation and ranking systems grow; it is also the foundation of the more general discourse on academic excellence, which refers to a complex of working conditions, cultural milieu and scientific ability; they represent the constraints for intellectual outputs combining innovation and high scientific standards – in other words creativity. Simple performance measures, however, as referred to in bureaucratic parlance, have tended to replace the substantive ingredients they are supposed to be indicative of. The means took over the end with one result: the discourse becomes stale, and terms like excellence, losing their deeper meaning, become worn out clichés. Readings (1996), questioning the use and meaning of the term excellence in the context of university rhetoric, is very critical of the present situation; he argues that the term 'excellence has the singular advantage of being entirely meaningless' (p. 22) but that it has nevertheless gradually been harnessed by the culture of competition within universities. He suggests that 'the University of Excellence serves nothing other than itself' (p. 43); thereby he brings once again to the fore the question of who are the real stakeholders.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Readings (1996).

The internal and external quality systems now being set up by governments in Europe and beyond are basically of the peer review ‘family’. University employees are first being asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their own operation. Despite some limitations this is a sensible approach, especially as the assessed group is given guidelines or criteria to reflect upon; moreover they can usually take up issues they think to be relevant to their own situation. Then a group of outside experts monitor and assess the internal evaluation – the self-evaluation report – by making some independent probing. In so far as such procedures are properly a peer review, we think it is a healthy way to stimulate and guide university development and strategies. But it is unlikely to have as much effect as transparent ranking scales that may have associated with them high stakes, in particular in terms of branding. It is perhaps such context that motivate veteran academic governors like Clark Kerr to develop the notion of the multiversity (see chapter 2), as to counter the temptation to reduce an institution to a single scale, on which it is being judged.

### *Quality of teaching determined*

Most universities would assert that they give the same weight to teaching and research and that their students deserve teaching, i.e., education, of the highest quality. Such is the discourse at least. It evokes some difficulties, however. The most important one is that no mechanism assessing the quality of education comes near to the publication reviews used for research. In fact, there is no consensus about how and when teaching should be judged, but the evaluation discourse seems to evade that problem. If the test of time is final for research, even

though we seldom have the patience to wait very long, the same cannot be said for teaching; no such test is available. It seems that educational tasks, by their very nature, are impossible to ascertain in any stringent and transparent manner. Even if it could be established that a student is well educated, has solid knowledge of a certain field, exhibits good judgment and shows critical ability to analyse and synthesise, we would not know at what point in time it would be most appropriate to ascertain this or whom to thank. To what extent would we attribute such achievement to his or her teacher, or to all of them not to speak of his or her own efforts, which certainly aided appropriate teaching? A student was once reported to have remarked after a course: I certainly learned a lot, but the teacher was of no help and it was all due to my own efforts. Was it? Rousseau presents this problem in a delightful way; he knows exactly what he wants Emile to learn, he arranges all contingencies in such a way that Emile indeed learns what is intended, but without realising that his teacher had anything to do with it; thus he was an excellent teacher, without the student knowing it. So how much should a good teacher teach? And what would count as teaching? We call this the *Rousseau dilemma*. In his case the teacher is omnipresent, he is constantly planning and preparing but his control is nowhere to be felt by the student who feels simply to awake to knowledge; teaching is not evident – a fact not easy to accept by any conscientious teacher; let alone in a performance based system, where the criteria of quality are based on visibility. Rousseau wrote:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rousseau (1762/1991), p. 119, but see also pp. 102, 120, 123 and 142, etc on the same train of thought.

*Young teacher, I am preaching a difficult art to you, that of governing without precepts and doing everything by doing nothing (p. 119).*

We are definitely not advocating this, or any other particular approach, but his view highlights how complex the evaluation of teaching may be.

In the case of Rousseau's student, emphasis is put on two aspects of education, i.e., how teaching is being carried out, which calls for evaluation of the teacher's performance, and with what results, which calls for an assessment of the student's learning. And Rousseau had very clear but unconventional views on what is worth learning, where he emphasised the dramatic difference he saw between receiving education and passing a course.

We argued above that the outstanding merit of the peer review system in research is the critical and informed judgement applied to each and every case. A kindred system is to some extent also used to evaluate student learning, i.e., when teachers evaluate the students' work by judging their projects or reading their exam work, sometimes bringing in an external examiner: such a system, however, is far less used to assess teaching as such. In neither case is the judgmental process anywhere as meticulous as allowed by journal reviews for research. A good teacher can certainly judge what the students are capable of by comparison with what they could do before they started the coursework. And such a teacher, a professional, is also the person best positioned to collect evidence, through various interactions with the students, reflecting on how they have learned to master the content, the methods, the tasks or the critical attitudes they were intended to come to grips with. It is

the professional judgement made by the teacher that, in the end, is best suited to evaluate whether a university student is grappling with the discipline in a novel or idiosyncratic way.

It is interesting to note how tempting it is, nevertheless, to move out of the domain of professional expertise and apply some kind of standardised, or semi-standardised measurements, constructed away from the teacher's daily work, thus putting more trust in formalised tests than in the teachers own ascertaining powers and forms of evaluation. Certainly every mode of operation has its strengths and weaknesses; this applies also to evaluation. It is not a black or a white picture. Here, our primary intention is simply to emphasise the importance of professional judgement, no less when evaluating learning, or teaching, than research.

With regard to the evaluation of teaching we often feel there is an easy access to expert judgement, that of the students. This is fair enough; they are on the receiving end and have considerable stakes in the process; they have also been studying for quite a while before they come to university and in that sense they are no novices to learning procedures. But many of them are nevertheless not ready – yet – to use professional judgement about the task in question. Moreover, the criteria they are often asked to use in standardised questionnaires are not always appropriate. Indeed judging teaching is no simple task.

The point is that reflective judgement as exercised by a professional, is appropriately used to evaluate research and should also be used to evaluate learning and teaching. Easier said than done! At its best, the journal peer review process involves three or four independent

judges who go through the paper in detail, sometimes more than once. The equivalent for assessing teaching would presumably be that three colleagues investigate each course, considering all its aspects: definitely an incredibly cumbersome and expensive process. But we are only attempting to draw attention to the imbalance between the laudable attention paid to properly assessing a scientific paper and the process of evaluating the allegedly equally important teaching process. University culture would need some kind of balancing act, which acknowledges the importance and complexity of the educational part.

But instead of moving in this direction, higher education is moving the other way when establishing external accreditation systems and qualification frameworks that are supposed to ensure the quality of administration, learning, research and teaching. The effort is based on the belief that even though the universities are in many ways ambitious and proficient institutions, civil authorities have a duty to check on them to ensure quality on behalf of the citizens. The institutions themselves also feel the same need for their own purposes. Consumer protection must be done but, to ensure that the process does not become too heavy, the tendency is to use simple indicators. No problem if they prove valid, but it is difficult to ascertain on what basis their suitability may be assessed. Therefore their usability cannot easily be established, but, and more seriously, it cannot be rejected either.

Even if many of the external frameworks now being put in place have been thoughtfully constructed, there are problems, both with the general characteristics of the systems and also with the environment with which

they interact. As indicated earlier, systems removed from the individual teacher and student, the individual researcher or the individual administrator and their immediate environment, tend to become aloof, superficial, mechanistic and therefore purely bureaucratic. They therefore lack validity despite expert efforts to justify them. The problem is the tendency, justified by expediency, to use a variety of scores that are transparent and understandable, are relatively easy to accumulate and use to compare between units; these scoring boards are, however, far from being suitable to convey many important aspects of the institution being portrayed; even to the extent of being misleading.

The environment, within which the system operates, may also have considerable effects on the judgements passed. An example is the mechanism by which institutions are financed. This may seriously affect the evaluation systems used in universities. Many public universities are increasingly being funded, at least for the teaching part of their operations, on the basis of the number of students they recruit. For them failing a student or allowing him or her to leave the institution has financial consequences and is therefore not just a question of applying academic criteria. This holds also true for privately run universities who rely to a considerable part on student fees. The problem may vary according to the demand for places at each university but, generally speaking, this may gradually affect the way the evaluation of student learning is handled. Should distortions occur, the pressure is more likely to come from university administration (that carries the financial worries) than from the academics themselves. Civil authorities may have a very ambivalent attitude about this.

On the one hand, they consider themselves to be the guardians of academic quality but, on the other hand, they want to sustain increased participation in education that translates into growing graduation rates. The balance between the two is difficult to find. They would presumably want to solve the problem by better teaching; it is not clear however what that might mean.

A similar dilemma faces the students, when they assess teaching. They want good, solid teaching that provides them with competence and knowledge, which will be of good use when entering working life. The programme should be reputed as demanding and effective. Many students are very clear about this and call for their teachers and fellow students to act very much in the spirit of Humboldt's dream. But the students also need their credentials, sometimes even more than the skills. Anyway, very few jobs demand exactly the skills acquired at university, but many require the particular credentials offered. Thus, for many students, it is the degree, the credit they aim for, rather than its content. Good teaching therefore becomes the work which enables them to pass exams and they will evaluate teaching on that basis. How subversive this may become depends, of course, on the type of exams proposed, and the criteria really applied; however, it may obviously and substantially affect the way teaching is conducted. This combines with the value the student gives to the degree; in many cases the certificate is highly desirable and thus leads to some version of credentialism, i.e., the seeking of degrees for their own sake; this may significantly influence the system's development.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This has been an issue especially in the US, but we have argued

### **Quality and stakeholders, a strange relationship**

The situation we have described concerning quality and its assessment may be summarised around four issues. The first refers to the fundamental and unanimous quest for things well done. This is the attitude coming from within the institution, from the shop floor. Academics have been given the complex responsibility of creating, preserving and transmitting knowledge, thus serving society in various ways. Their professional education and environment are meant to ensure that their work reaches the highest standard, and thus serves all stakeholders; this is an important part of their professionalism. We consider this to be an overarching concern of higher education; today's accountability culture, however, brings up a variety of concerns about how to demonstrate and quantify quality; on what basis and from what perspective should this be done? We are concerned that the primary sense of responsibility resting with each and every member of the university may be undermined, partially at least, by very alluring (or imposing) reward and accounting schemes; these instruments may exert much stronger control than the guidelines provided by academic professionalism. Different stakeholders, in principle at least, might of course have different views on how academics should fulfil their responsibilities. Normally these outsiders have no collective voice, so we may not know although we assume that, in general, stakeholders are quite satisfied.

that it may be a general concern (see on this issue Brown, 1995; Collins, 1979; Hersh & Merrow, 2005; Jónasson, 2006; Labaree, 1997).

The second issue is the reasonable push for accountability, but equally important the consequent bureaucratic necessity to quantify performance, both in order to keep a check, i.e., for the sake of transparency and expediency, but also to encourage comparison and competition between institutions. We have suggested that the necessity of being accountable is relatively uncontested. Institutions usually feel directly responsible for their efforts at doing a good job; they also see the need to position themselves in a competitive market.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, they know they are accountable to government, which represents the various stakeholders and decide about the granting of public money. Systems of internal and external evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance are built, on the basis of decrees and the pressure of public authorities, thus ensuring that the operation is properly functioning. Government tends in this case to be the only stakeholder that is in direct contact with the universities and, as said earlier, it does not normally engage in a dialogue with institutions; rather it determines unilaterally the action to be taken.

Thirdly, there is a variety of highly focused forces that shape and perhaps, in some cases, subvert what happens in higher education by concentrating on a series of simple measures, attaching high stakes to them. For instance, university administration and government tend to press for the production of more scientific papers or more registered patents; efforts also exist to

<sup>12</sup> Much has been written in the recent decade on the intersection of the university and the market, see e.g. Bok (2003), Geiger, Colbeck, Williams, & Anderson (2007), Hirsch & Weber (2002), Kirp (2003), Kohler & Huber (2006) and Wittrock (2006).

boast the number of students, and graduates. Another shaping force is the pressure exerted by students to obtain value for their money, i.e., degrees. This is part of the real world; the stakeholders or their representatives – be they students, administrators or government officials – do convey, if indirectly, very clear and forceful demands. Even though these forces are not taken into account by the quality system, they may indeed have a very direct and formidable impact on the operation of a university and its quality. Our particular concern is about how they will affect the university in the long-term, as we think they might have more to do with defining the actual quality of the university work than compliance to a host of other mechanisms; in other terms, such forces should all be under the constant and critical vigilance of the institutions themselves.

Finally, we have to keep in mind the wide spectrum of various stakeholders, going from the individual students inside the institution to the many agents outside the university who, apart from the government, have no formal and generic communication channels; nevertheless universities have very substantial and fruitful arrangements with them, the more clearly the stakeholders may be specified, the more substantive are the contacts between them and the institutions. These relationships, indeed, may be infinitely varied, intimate, influential and successful, but they are normally *ad hoc* and, apparently, they are not tied on the whole to formal accountability structures, except in a very perfunctory way. Thus these many stakeholders are being served through a large spectrum of initiatives and responses coming from the institutions; these lead to indirect, but nevertheless massive, substantive and professional

feedbacks about their various projects – and this seems to be a very healthy state of affairs.

A complex of relationships links these various aspects of the university; it is especially intriguing to note, on the one hand, the areas where interactions are dynamic and those others where there are none. We considered the quality mechanisms from four perspectives: academia's strive for doing good work, the systematic efforts to ensure quality by government and institutions, the bearing of strong forces that effectively pull in different directions, and finally the diffuse but essentially healthy effects of a crowd of varied stakeholders – companies as well as other societal agents. From one point of view the effort to achieve quality is totally fragmented, but by putting all the pieces of the puzzle together it seems that some acceptable harmony may emerge.

We have argued it is sensible to distinguish between long- and short-term stakes since, in the long run, society remains the chief stakeholder. There are in the short-term a host of stakeholders for whom higher education, both as teaching and research, is very important, and the convergence of their interests effectively defines the role of the university. There are, however, few formal channels of communication between these partners and the higher education sector, except through the public authorities, which traditionally do not involve universities in serious negotiations on their societal future.

There are plenty of signs that the universities manage nevertheless to demonstrate their flexibility, adaptability, dynamism and indeed sensitivity to stakeholders. The interaction varies among the different partners and different institutions. Many European governments do not think, however, that this is quite the case; so they

tend to enter the arena as catalysts for interaction with various stakeholders, thus becoming proactive. These interventions are ambitious and well intentioned, but we suggest that sometimes public authorities, and indeed the institutions themselves, may turn overzealous and perhaps counterproductive in the long run in their use of simplistic performance measures involving very high stakes.

It is imperative for the institutions to have a clear view of their rationale, how they serve long-term partners but, no less importantly, how they cater for short-term stakeholder. Universities must be very clear about how their function reflects their mission and be wary of using simplistic measures as the ultimate basis for judgement. They must also contemplate seriously who is at the steering wheel and what course they are really taking. The universities can obviously do much to determine their own destinies and thereby nurture the values they hold in highest regard.



#### 4. The future of the university

It is now time to turn to the future of higher education. We ask: which are the functions and features of the traditional university we want to retain, which new ones should we take up for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? If something is amiss, how can we uncover the fault – in terms of organisation, management or administration? Should research divorce from teaching, or postgraduate from undergraduate studies? Are not research and teaching so massively different and so highly specialised undertakings that they simply cannot cross-fertilise on a large scale? Do engineering, business studies, medical or teacher training truly belong to the same institution as education in science or the humanities? In the past, this has been hotly debated and university tradition had an unequivocal answer to all these questions: integration into one single whole. Has something changed in this respect? Or can we anticipate a change of heart?

It is sometimes claimed that the Humboldtian legacy is outdated and hampers the advancement of science in the service of the economy. Is this fair? In other terms, which of the 'ideas of the university' should we discard, and which new ones adopt – with what gain or what losses?

Universities are a curious mix of seemingly antiquated establishments that forge ahead to remain at the frontiers of knowledge; often miles ahead of anybody else and, never far behind the front runners, when those may be outside the institutions. Many do claim, however, that universities are slow and cannot keep pace with the tempo of the times. That may be so, but speed should not be increased at any cost. A friend recently saw an advertisement for speed-reading saying: 'you can think much faster than you read'. After pausing for thought, he concluded that if the thinking process alluded to led to immediate acceptance of such a slogan, his thinking was too fast indeed – and faulty, since it lacked the deliberation and questioning such a statement demanded. Scientific advance hastened by healthy competition and a sense of urgency but tempered by wise judgement and prudence are perhaps what universities should still aim for. Similarly, teaching or training must be given time to mature – if it is to mean anything.

We will now consider the position of the universities at present, briefly ponder about their past before speculating on what the future may hold in store for them. The main thread of the argument will be: to what extent will universities be allowed to shape their own destinies? We refuse to see the university as a rudderless vessel drifting in open seas, a boat moved by the currents that flow

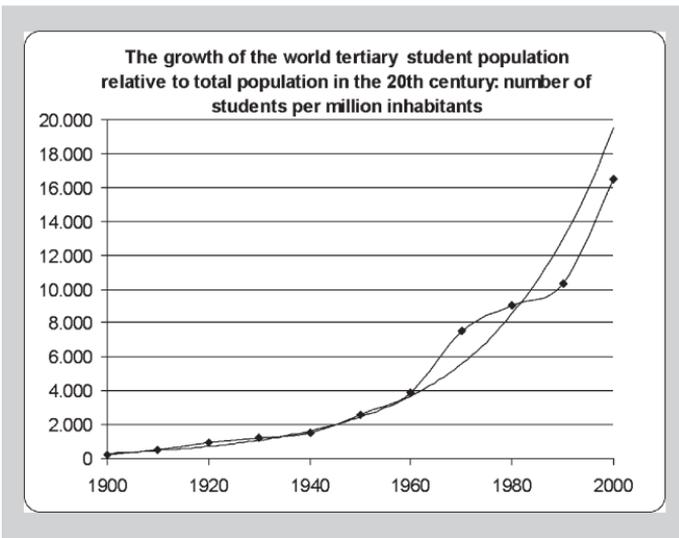
and the winds that blow. We are convinced the university can itself, to a significant extent, set its course and we argue that the institution, to take the wheel, needs to make its role explicit – first to itself – thus realising it carries wide social responsibilities that it must understand before meeting them appropriately. But where is the university going? We will refer to some empirical trends before looking at scenarios outlining the future of academia and wondering what this may mean for institutions – in terms of adaptation and change.

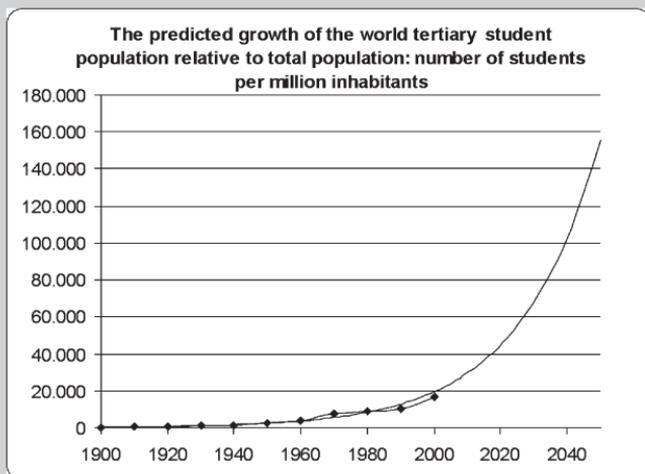
When speculating about the future, the distinction between the probable, possible or preferable future is often made in the literature. Most of our discussion is within the realm of a probable future, but our intention is certainly also to stimulate a discussion on what is the preferred future universities may aim for – what they would really like to occur and why.

### **Some visible trends**

There are several important and interesting trends in the university sector, many of which are universal, even though there exist wide differences due to both culture and demography. All aspects of higher education are concerned: its volume in terms of the number of students and institutions; changing infrastructures; the drift of institutional purpose within the system; university governance; financing and status as a public enterprise. Many of these developments are robust but it is not always clear what forces drive them. Even if many governments believe they spur change by virtue of their policies, there are several reasons to doubt that they steer the course to the extent they think.

*Volume.* The most notable development is the increase in student numbers, at least in relative terms: in fact, governments do not control the attractiveness of university education, on the whole, but the students do. It is up to them to choose the path of higher education, or not. True, here or there, state policies have hampered access to higher education – by limiting the offer of study places in some highly attractive disciplines – like medicine. In recent years, however, several governments have also set targets for participation in tertiary education as high as 50% of an age cohort and, concurrently, they opened new venues within higher education, e.g. by redefining its scope by moving new categories of educational institutions into the sector. Thus, public authorities have belatedly encouraged higher education growth, even when they are not directly responsible for it.





**Figure 1.** The two graphs above show a) the relative growth of the world tertiary student population, with the corresponding exponential line and b) the predicted relative tertiary student population given the same exponential growth projected over the next 40 years. We do not assume any saturation during this period in tertiary education. The data is inferred from Fig. 1 in Schofer and Meyer (2005).

University education used to be the prerogative of a relatively small elite – within Western societies mainly. It is now provided to a considerable part of the world population, although this holds mainly true in wealthy nations. However, systems embrace wider groups everywhere so that higher education is on the way to become universal.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, the relative growth has been

<sup>1</sup> The notion of universal higher education, even though it only refers to half the cohort, has been on the cards for a while, see e.g. McGrath (1966) presenting the outcome of a conference discussing this possibility in the US, held in 1964.

regular and continuous in many countries – although with some interesting leaps here and there. Figure 1 shows that, globally, the relative growth is quite robust and averages slightly more than a 4% rate over the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a whole. It also plots the predicted growth relative to the population: instead of the present 20 thousand students per million inhabitants, there could be more than 100 thousand students per million inhabitants by year 2040 – i.e., five times more world wide. This means one out of every ten persons will enter higher education institutions of one kind or another. Another trend concerning access, that is particularly evident in several European countries, is the increasing age range of students in universities since people increasingly take up studies at very different times in their adult life. Even if the growth rate for OECD countries is 4%, for the WEI<sup>2</sup> countries (according to UNESCO studies) the growth rate is over 7% (nearly 10% if we take only type A); thus our conjecture may be a serious underestimate.<sup>3</sup> Although saturation must occur at a later stage, there are no signs of it yet, in a global setting.

We noted in the introduction than in the year 2000 the tertiary student population was over 100 million world-wide. Furthermore, assuming an increment around 4% in relative terms, and when taking into account the 1% growth in the world population expected during the first

<sup>2</sup> These are 19 so-called middle income countries, that UNESCO has studied specifically, most of which are very populous. These are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Malaysia, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> See Table 10.1 (UNESCO/OECD World Education Indicators Programme., 2005).

part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the tertiary student population has recently been increasing between 5 and 6 million students a year, with a total student population of over 150 million students by 2010. According to this prediction, the student population will subsequently have more than doubled by 2020 – relatively to 2000 figures – and we also assume that the number of universities will have also have multiplied. By 2040 the numbers will have more than doubled once again. Higher education is also shifting from the West to South-East Asia, as well to other regions previously underrepresented in higher education: Europe and North America will have difficulties to retain their relative strength.

But if these seem high numbers and an incredibly massive expansion, we might remember that the primary and secondary educational sectors experienced a similar growth during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. If, indeed, the numbers are increasing fast, they do not do so at rates faster than before – at least according to these crude predictions. Thus, in relative terms, nothing new is expected! Given these numbers, the notion of higher education becoming universal is realistic; however, such numbers still beg the question of the nature of the enterprise – its role, cost, governance or management. In particular to what extent does such a mammoth phenomenon with its strong global overtones develop as a marketable commodity?

*Institutional drift.* Another obvious trend is the way higher education expanded, as a system: academic drift is the term often used to characterise this development: institutions gradually acquire the distinctive features of theory and research oriented bodies, i.e., of the most prestigious universities. If many traditional universi-

ties have grown in order to meet the demand, it is the transformation of the sector as a whole, in many countries, which is most interesting: a number of institutions, lower down in the academic hierarchy, have been given university status, either because they strove for it or because governments decided to upgrade them by decree. As a result, upper secondary, technical or other non-university institutions entered the university sector, their programmes drifting towards more abstract contents to meet academic criteria. Usually the systems of tertiary education are either dual (i.e., universities on one side, non-university establishments, on the other) or binary (institutions have different status but are all considered academic). The institutional standardisation promoted by the Bologna process makes this drift perhaps more transparent in Europe, its outcome being the generalisation of university type institutions as providers of higher education.

Because individual systems differ so much in detail, only crude generalisations can be made. However, the trends now at work in Europe, had occurred earlier, in particular in the US, or are happening in other parts of the world, – showing that the institutional transformation introduced in the Bologna framework has roots in more general societal changes.

Most institutions that have recently joined the university community have been offering vocational or professional programmes – usually their original *raison d'être*. This has led to a shift in the overall balance within the system, the relative weight of those programmes having grown. Simultaneously the governments have challenged the universities by asking them to care for the immediate needs of their supporting communities.

And, indeed, universities, as a system, have increased the relevance of their service dimension, in a visible and transparent way. But next to wondering about what is most practical in the end, theories or skills, other questions may be raised concerning university development – from a long-term perspective. For instance, Labaree (2006) argues, when analysing American higher education, that

*... over the years, professional education has gradually subverted liberal education. The counterpoint is that, over the same period of time, liberal education has gradually subverted professional education. My aim is to show how these two views can be woven together by arguing that the professional has come to dominate the goals of higher education while the liberal has come to dominate its content (p. 1).*

We would indeed agree that the situation may be more complex than it appears at first sight; a kindred scenario of tension between a professional and an academic emphasis may have developed in European universities too, but we deem that the terms academic or theoretical are perhaps more pertinent in this case than liberal education; we also suggest that this opposition of two cultures impregnates all aspects of the present university discourse and development.

The crux of the matter: what activity is most relevant for progress and fruitful improvement? And cannot we say that discoveries and theoretical approaches that offer an understanding of fundamental principles are also most practical? Even when universities want assiduously to serve their communities by being entrepreneurial, thus becoming service universities, they may indeed be spurred into a theoretical direction. The main source of tension, however, is between the paymasters, whoever

they are (governments, industry or students), who want immediately tangible results and, on the other side, the institutional academic researchers whose endeavours (and incentive schemes) are driven both by the wish for high status and institutional ranking or by research assessment exercises and tenure plans. The former (the paymasters' practical urges) may seem to carry the day, whereas, really, it may be the latter (the researchers' incentive patterns) that do so.

To sum up, the system of higher education is growing massively, worldwide, and more and more professional and vocational fields are entering the higher education arena; as a consequence, the tension between the academic and practical approaches becomes perhaps more noticeable.

*Changes.* But there are several other trends, that have an impact both within Europe<sup>4</sup> and beyond, around the globe. Thus governments, that claim to rely increasingly on the universities for sustaining economic growth, are also more and more reluctant to pay for academic operations, notably teaching. It seems as if the private goods argument and the market ideology, dynamics and practice are being given more weight in the higher education sector.

This materialises in several ways: here, governments encourage public universities to adopt market forms of management as if they were private companies (thus depriving the academics of power); there, public authorities introduce fees for higher education, making of

<sup>4</sup> See the extensive *Trends I to V* reports by the EUA, describing various aspects of the development of European universities, especially as it relates to the Bologna process, <http://www.eua.be/index.php?id=347>, June 2008.

academic work a commodity for a competitive market with export potential; in both cases, higher education becomes to certain extent a business activity, a process with important consequences for the organisation of learning and innovation. Universities also feel the pressure to seek research funds from industry, largely because research outcomes may increasingly be seen as private good. We should remember, however, that highly successful private universities in the US obtain a large proportion of sponsored research funds from public (federal) sources 82% at Harvard, 87% at Stanford, to name but two well-known examples.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Future scenarios*<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to envisage the future of higher education have been made in Europe and elsewhere. This may be of interest for institutions ready to reflect on where they are going, how and perhaps why they should be moving in such a direction. For instance, in 2005, CHEPS, a Dutch think-tank on higher education, proposed a range of development scenarios (see box) outlining possible alternative routes for higher education.

<sup>5</sup> Stanford University, a highly rated private university in the USA obtains 87% of its sponsored research funds from federal sources, <http://www.stanford.edu/home/stanford/facts/research.html>, and Harvard 82%, [http://www.provost.harvard.edu/institutional\\_research/2007OnlineFactbook.pdf](http://www.provost.harvard.edu/institutional_research/2007OnlineFactbook.pdf), p. 30, June 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Scenario building is a well known method when attempting to gauge the future, but there are a host of different approaches to speculating about the future of higher education, see e.g. Brint (2002) but also the various sources referred to in this chapter.

### **The CHEPS scenarios for higher education in the future**

The main themes were three: system diversity; governance; funding and quality (but account was also taken of other relevant issues). The scenarios were constructed from answers to questionnaires sent to European experts, those replies being further discussed in a series of interviews. Three scenarios emerged from the process, named *Centralia*, *Octavia* and *Vitis Vinifera*; they indicate how very different could be the development paths followed in higher education. The question is not only which movement will prevail but also who will decide the course of action.

*Centralia, the city of the sun*, is characterised by a top-down organised system diversity; a higher education sector well controlled and funded by the public; and organisational rigidity. Control over the institution should remain in academic hands – but with strong professional support in terms of management. As to the quality of education, it would be based on graduate employability and guaranteed by a central (European) accreditation system.

*Octavia, the spider-web city*, is characterised by much greater organisational diversity; it shows flexibility and higher education is in constant flux – in terms of

programmes and students. Emphasis is on leadership and considerable effort is being made to coordinate the relationships between the different actors involved, largely because of the importance of private-public partnerships. Quality is ensured by a web of accreditation agencies.

*Vitis Vinifera, the city of traders and micro-climates*, shows extreme organisational diversity, which even makes higher education difficult to characterise or classify. Private markets are allowed to have considerable influence and higher education is considered to be a private good. The education provision itself is largely web-based. Assessment of quality is mainly in the hands of the market.

Enders J., File J., Huisman J., & Westerheijden D. (Eds.). (2005). *The European higher education and research landscape. Scenarios and strategic debates*. Enschede: Center for Higher Education Policy Studies.

The CHEPS scenarios as well as the Council of Europe Higher Education Series,<sup>7</sup> the *Looking forward in higher education* project instigated by the European Sci-

<sup>7</sup> See the reference to a series of publications at [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Resources/HEseries\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Resources/HEseries_en.asp) July 2008.

ence Foundation,<sup>8</sup> all have the express purpose of drawing attention to the changes taking place or that might occur: the idea is to challenge all participants within the sector to take a stand, preferably to become agents of change themselves. These texts ask what could be the long-term impact – positive or negative – of various institutional dynamics and functions in terms of diversity (homogeneous or heterogeneous institutional landscape), governance (top-down or collegial decision-making), funding (private or public support or both), or quality (peer based review or systematic and bureaucratised quality control). Then, if one has a strong opinion on such developments, scenarios ask what can be done to influence the course of change in a desired way. Projections into the future show that there are multiple answers, many of which could be enumerated. Even if none of the CHEPS scenarios were to emerge as a potential future (after all, they are but scenarios), such reflections prove eminently useful to sum up the dramatic changes that might occur, such changes that beg the question, whose responsibility are they?

### **The moulding forces**

It is both an emotional and an empirical matter to decide how far one should accept a deterministic view of social evolution; the issue has been long debated by historians and social scientists alike. We have partly a somewhat

<sup>8</sup> See the report: Higher Education. Looking Forward: Relations between Higher Education and Society. [http://www.esf.org/index.php?eID=tx\\_nawsecuredl&u=0&file=fileadmin/be\\_user/publications/HELF.pdf&t=1215438856&hash=7ebd90118f0e20034744998e4579b44e](http://www.esf.org/index.php?eID=tx_nawsecuredl&u=0&file=fileadmin/be_user/publications/HELF.pdf&t=1215438856&hash=7ebd90118f0e20034744998e4579b44e).

deterministic stance when discussing student numbers and academic drift of institutions, but our argumentation has been otherwise that universities must endeavour to determine their own fate, and may perhaps be able to do this to a much larger extent than may consider possible at present.

We indicated a few of the forces that influence the direction in which the universities are heading. The question now is: where are they heading, in what direction? Are all institutions moving in unison – in one and the same direction? And what aspects of this development may be influenced or even determined by the universities themselves?

We have pointed to the existence of three categories of drivers or system rules (implicit and explicit) supposed to be of importance for university development, some stemming from the world of education itself, others from the world of politics and those issued from the prevailing social culture-commercialisation, globalisation or technology. Even though institutions or parts of the sector have some control themselves over the first set of drivers – the educational –, one may wonder how much institutions can have any influence on what is really happening in the other fields.

For us, the world of education – which has its own and complex system of competition (based on status, students and funds) – will tend, in the long run, to increase its institutional homogeneity; here we will again repeat the significance of academic drift, status competition, and ‘credentialism’.<sup>9</sup> Thus – despite the internal (institutional) and external (policy) calls for diversification and operational specialisation –, the signs are, as

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Jónasson (2004; 2006).

we read them, that the opposite is going to happen. This will, however, largely depend on how institutions manage the growing competition affecting them.

At present the world of politics has a peculiar relationship with that of higher education. On one side, it wants to increase its influence while, on the other, it tries to reduce its commitment to universities. At least for the time being, we may assume that politicians will try to increase their domination over the universities' developmental path since, in a way, they cannot trust academia to meet its specific social responsibilities. At the same time they do not want to ensure continued funding – and are thus tempted to loosen their links to academic bodies. However, while pushing the universities towards the market, governments will continue to perceive the universities as essential incubators for change and economic growth, and in many ways an important social instrument. To hold or let go is certainly a dilemma for public authorities that are understandably most reluctant to give up their grip on these intelligence providers.

The market, globalisation and technology, here treated as moulding forces of convergence, are certainly going to influence greatly the universities' progress, even more so than academic or political strategies for change that are closely connected with the university community. Earlier we said that the homogenisation of the higher education sector is in the cards even if the forces for convergence could uncover also some strong impulses for temporary differentiation; institutions could thus be pushed to specialise, turning specific products into commodities, or they could be encouraged to profile their uniqueness in teaching and research. But this could

often be make-believe for the conformity fostered by mega-institutions supposed to reach a critical mass in efficiency terms, or for the uniformity of standardised commercial products and services all competing for a growing share of the same – most lucrative – markets. In such a context, institutions that are already powerful, wealthy and prestigious may simply attempt to become yet bigger – by ‘commodifying’ their assets in order to capture a market – and thus emulation each other.

Despite globalisation, higher education development could vary in fundamental ways in different parts of the world. There may obviously be other drivers than those we have discussed, especially religious and cultural traditions, which may have substantial modulating effects. Economic conditions may also prove of key importance, as would military conflicts, social crises or natural catastrophes; but would this entail quantitative or qualitative change first? On the whole, there is good chance that unexpected blows would simply slow down the processes here described, perhaps drastically, but not necessarily cause qualitative transformations in the structures or operation of higher education systems.

### **The future of Magna Charta principles and values**

What will be the place of academic values in tomorrow's society – as we discussed them in the second half of chapter 2? The answer is twofold – very much like for scenarios of the future – and depends on the angle of vision: are we interested in the probable or the preferable state of future affairs? In other words, what will or what should be the coming situation? In our earlier discussion, we have implied that most of the forces that drive university development will undermine traditional

academic values and fundamental principles unless the institutions are vigilant and really on their guard – an obligation evident in the monitoring role of the Magna Charta Observatory. However, it is for the institutions themselves to fight for their integrity, i.e., keep loyal to what has built their identity over the years. Will they do so? In some ways, governments may consider that they are better guardians of those fundamental values, since they do foster and warrant them from outside the walls of academia. But is not ambivalence still going to prevail in governmental circles that do not always consider that the unique identity of universities is really needed to serve social development?

Serving science and society is certainly part of academic values; yet, it is not clear how far this turns academic institutions into staunch guardians of democracy, critical discourse, social equity and coherence, or into engines of healthy social development and sustained economic growth. The extent of their engagement in social issues will very much depend on the surrounding culture (if integrated into academic behaviour), on personal attitudes (if academics bother) and on incentives (if university administration and government encourage commitment). Generally speaking, there is no other place in the community where social expertise is more easily found, explored and explained than in universities; they can take advantage of academic freedom to engage in critical opinion making, indeed: however, even though their clarifying and advisory function is generally accepted, academic institutions are rarely pressed to play a social enlightenment part. The representatives of stakeholders that might have most to gain might also feel threatened by such action. To commit

themselves, academics and their institutions should take a proactive stand on many issues, not only as technical experts but also as responsible people also exercising their freedom vis-à-vis technological or financial interests. Intelligence should thus support empathy, another way of defining ethical conduct.

Academic freedom, made possible by the ability to dissent, has become a defining tradition of universities. The values thus entailed, paradoxically, may be among those most difficult to defend – especially at a time when status has become an obligation for academic acceptance. History shows that dissent, also in its political form, has often stemmed from universities – although much more from the side of students than staff. This may point to the fact that its paymasters have a considerable grip on the institution. In fact, from very early on, governments have tried to ‘buy’ immunity from criticism or dissent, with some, but not complete success however, as a historical survey of the relations between town and gown would certainly show.

The more respected the university, the more disconcerting but also credible is intellectual criticism coming from any of its members. This may mean that many interested and threatened parties will do everything in their power to prevent critical comments from academia. At the same time the university – as a key explorer of difference and diversity, often the only institution allowed such a role in the community because of prominent expertise and professional communication – must take up the obligation, not only to encourage its members to participate in the public debate, but also to counteract any pressure to do otherwise. This is certainly no easy task for the institution.

Liberal education is one of the traditional functions of the university and we discussed its development earlier (see chapter 2). In the medieval universities every scholar was to have a solid general education before embarking on professional training. At present, the idea revives under different guises, both in the US and Europe. Considering the current political ethos – essentially utilitarian – within and outside the universities, one may wonder how far this revival might expand. This will certainly depend on the universities' willingness to re-organise in function of holistic educational approaches. For a long time, however, their main focus has been professional education on one side, and research-related training, on the other. The training of the student as a person, free and responsible, was of marginal interest. Today, the interest in liberal education is being revived in different guises. For instance, in Europe, the discussions concerning the modernisation of PhD education re-emphasises the importance of generic or transferable skills, i.e., talents that are the core of liberal education. Should liberal training return in force, universities will have to face tensions between different educational aims, time consuming specialisation – that admits no distraction especially when it is based on research work –, on one side, and, on the other, training for the novel and the unexpected, so that graduates become versatile communicators as much as competent experts, i.e., responsible citizens able to take up a multitude of tasks other than specialised research.

Academic integrity, i.e., the honesty to account for scholarly intelligence in teaching and research, both at personal and institutional level, is an accepted characteristic of modern academia – but are the forces at

work in the knowledge society still conducive to such an ideal? We already indicated how serious was the problem for medieval universities often corrupted by intellectual shortcuts and power games. The main cause for misconduct was direct financial ties (related to various fees and fines) that linked students and masters, or the institution and its stakeholders. The problem has not disappeared and is really, relatively simple in the modern circumstances: as the stakes become more alluring thanks to institutional success and the universities' massive growth, passing a student, improving his or her credentials, faking results for the sake of quick publication, plagiarism, i.e., bending the rules for various personal advantages becomes a strong temptation. Unfortunately, intellectual honesty, academic responsibility and personal integrity can no longer be taken for granted. To ensure acceptable behaviour at a time when the stakes grow with the universities' increasing social importance, institutions may increasingly have to institute measures to counteract academic misbehaviour, but hopefully not to the extent that it make distrust – or control – the prevailing attitude within academia.

The various academic values should not be taken for granted in the building of tomorrow's university when higher education becomes universal. Sharing and living by a common academic culture may turn impossible in a fragmented, differentiated, diverse and all-encompassing system of tertiary education. Are then university values and principle dispensable? No, as long as they are made explicit, debated and integrated in any decision that upholds university identity. Indeed, we deem them essential to the survival of the university as such – the social institution that probes knowledge. And

paying them lip service only is not sufficient if institutions are not to lose credibility, prestige and their *raison d'être*. It is an uphill fight universities need to pick up if they are to remain true to their intellectual and social purpose. If they do not do it, nobody will.

### **What are the issues for the university of the 21st century?**

#### *The challenge for the universities as a class of institutions*

Governments and the market tend to prefer a division of labour between higher education institutions that leads to university diversification. As a sector, universities will certainly adapt to this differentiation, and thus learn gradually to distinguish between their role as a collective and their identity as individual institutions. The temptation to improve status will remain and academic drift will further entice institutions to move into the top league, however it is defined. The trend is now to define a fairly simple and transparent scale of prestige, its value being determined by the institutions starting at the top – by some kind of popular consent based on diverse but often converging ranking procedures. Those universities, like the Russell group in the UK or the Ivy League in the US, may resist the pressure of upstart institutions, simply to retain the advantages linked to their position. In other words, the tensions within the university sector will stay.

It would be more sensible for the sector to accept the need for a clear division of labour, based on its own initiative however. Such a voluntary agreement will be difficult to obtain and maintain as long as the alloca-

tion of finances favours some more than others, as long as status influences funding level, or attracts grants and donations – wealth going to the prestigious. If that is so, it is easy to appreciate why being in the top group seems so attractive! It is not surprising that not only the amount of funds that are allocated to the universities but their more general financial environment is of utmost importance for their future strategies.

We believe that divisions of labour and monetary concerns are not the only crucial issues for the university, however. Ensuring the trust of society and regaining its self-confidence are also vital – and this will also entail some institutional humility! Then competition and co-operation will be natural conducts to re-establish and renovate university identity in terms of academic values and its basic functions; the debate will no longer be on generic excellence (with its vague meaning) but rather on excelling at what one does best, reinforcing thus a clear institutional profile upholding clearly defined values and services. Indeed, excellence as such is a totally unhelpful concept, but tied to clearly defined objectives, it makes sense. As a result, universities should re-assess the weight and importance of all their functions and activities, social responsibilities and academic values to decide which are essential to their operation, how and why. To build a recognisable identity, priorities are needed. Then diversity becomes a normal consequence of academic earnestness.

Differentiation will keep tensions alive as long as institutions keep comparing their achievements, supposed or real, with others', especially when this is with reference to simple scales. Tensions can subside, however, when diversity becomes the basis for cooperation and

compatibility turns into the source of new efficiencies. Then status will evolve, naturally and not through the shortcuts of ambition. To tame their urge for the fake bounties of prestige, universities will need to learn how to balance competition and cooperation, thus improving the success of the higher education sector as a whole – a sector that, as a consequence, may engage in society and commit to its transformation. This will not be easy.

The reader must notice how hard we find to distinguish between the generic discourse referring to the university as an abstract concept, on one hand, and the much more specific discussion concerning the individual academic, department or institution. How to embody essence into the categories of existence – here and now – will remain as much a fundamental question tomorrow as it is today or was in the past!

*Seats of learning: will campuses survive as a study location?*

During the Middle Ages, the universities were originally less tied to a particular place than they later became. Some had no fixed address or specific quarters of their own; their ties to the city were fairly loose, if not extra-territorial in case of order and justice, for instance. In a way, their functions were general enough for the institution not to commit to a specific location. When the situation was getting too uncomfortable in a city, the university – the corporation – could migrate to another, a little like trans-national corporations do today: they have no nationality, in a way. This could happen to universities again if the global worth of their activities takes over their local rooting. Two interesting but opposing forms of evolution seem to occur.

On the one hand, with net-based electronic communication, e-learning may gradually replace the *modus operandi* defining today's campus, a well protected intellectual harbour in a given urban landscape. The virtual operational mode has taken time to develop and will prevail, we are told, as soon as the age group born with Internet has replaced the older generation of scholars, students, teachers and researchers. The wider use of technology should be driven both by the demands of the younger generation and the supply of technical support by those institutions competing for well-paying students in a high status market. As for research, it could be de-localised away from the universities to specialised research bodies mandated to produce results by contract. Both developments are already well on the way. They could lead to blowing up the institution or to universities expanding beyond their geographical limits by adding operational volume to their activities without investing in the endless extension of physical structures.

On the other hand, despite the ubiquitous presence of the Internet, new communication technologies and web-based distance education, the campus core of modern universities might retain its importance since there is something vital in the proximity of persons really meeting on campus, an existential link the new technologies will never replace. Indeed both the old and the new understandings of what the university should be have great practical strength. The book, at the Renaissance, or the TV and video recordings, in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have not substituted the 'lecture' as the primary mode of teaching: oral presentations still retain great appeal, after centuries – presumably because of

the particular type of encounter they allow between students and teachers, and despite the many criticisms such a knowledge transmission system may evoke. Most universities repeat or want to be convinced that ICT are to transform in a radical way their way of operation. Most often, however, they still plan their infrastructures, e.g. their new facilities, in a remarkably traditional manner. Potentially, the campus is *passé*; nevertheless, we are persuaded that it will survive a few waves of technical innovation still to come. Chapter 2 pointed to the fact that, in the Middle Ages, the word *studium* referred to a geographical location and the term *university* to a community (of students or scholars). Their combination has structured the academic system for centuries by binding a community of scholars – students, teachers and researchers – to a particular place of study. Despite numerous criticisms – that could justify its demise – the campus, we think, will still be around for quite a while.

*Is there an alternative institution for the stakeholders?*

One way to evaluate the university and its importance is to speculate whether or not its many tasks can be carried equally well by others. For instance, would research have a brighter future if entrusted to a different institution? Our point of departure so far has been that the university is an irreplaceable institution, which benefited many stakeholders. Turning the perspective around, what do these stakeholders really think of university claimed relevance? Can they dispense with universities and receive in other ways the services they now get from academia? Or are only specific stakeholders in need of universities? Might stakeholders find elsewhere alternative partners for a better future as far as investigation, teaching and cultural commitment are concerned?

Research, in a large measure, can indeed be conducted outside the walls of universities – and it is already so. In several European countries, for example, there is a long-standing tradition of research run within specially designed institutes, often run by the State; however, they generally confine themselves to some special subject areas. Big manufacturers have also their own research and development units that focus on advancing the development of company products.

Thus, it seems that research may be fruitfully carried out in many different places, with many different short-term aims and at many different levels of abstraction. In this context, the question can also be asked: can such special institutions be dispensed with? We submit that there are at least three reasons to consider that research is best placed within universities. The first is the Humboldt-Whitehead argument discussed in chapter 2: the intellectual cross-fertilisation researchers and students creates a fruitful community. The second one is somewhat less exciting: it presumes that universities are the ideal setting for the spread of new ideas since the researchers themselves may disseminate their ideas through teaching; there is thus a direct link between accumulating and disseminating information. The third argument considers that research students make an appropriate labour force, given their commitment, efficiency, and youthful imagination – as well as their relative low cost. The first justification remains true for sustaining the teaching-research nexus well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The second one may not retain much strength since researchers often deem more sensible for them to opt out of teaching. It is only to the extent that it is the same staff involved in each function that the argument holds. The validity of the third – cheap labour – might disappear

should specialised research institutions take the lead in the guidance of doctoral research. At any rate, none of these proposals would combine an undergraduate institution with a research centre, except in a very nominal way. However, this mix could represent an alternative to the classical European university – and we have seen it set up for long in America, where, usually, there is a clear separation between undergraduate and graduate schools. Many in Europe – especially those professors who want to immerse themselves in their research field and forget about their educational functions – would like the same arrangement to be put in place. It is very likely that the European university will develop in the same way. Once again the question is, to whom belongs the institution – its members, customers or paymasters – and how can it best discharge its responsibilities? It is of course also the question who decides and on what basis.

### **Determining one's own fate: a challenge and responsibility for individual institution**

Coming back to the university as an individual institution, it must make up its own mind – not only in theory and on paper – but also in practice. To take the lead, while facing urgencies pulling the institution in many directions, the university may have to seize the opportunities while it can (see Scurry, p. 213).<sup>10</sup>

Opportunities in reference to what? As mentioned earlier, it is imperative for each institution to determine its mission, the frame of reference for its action. This

<sup>10</sup> A point made by Newman, Couturier and Scurry (2004), in their Futures project on higher education in the US.

seems may appear a strange point to make considering that every single institution of higher education has tried to do so over the recent past – or long before. However, the documents produced are usually terribly abstract and general, i.e., rarely precise enough to offer the institution criteria for an operational development that can embed the university daily activities. Too often mission statements do not make explicit the core functions the university should work from.

A university must also determine who its stakeholders are and prioritise their importance for chosen development. It does not suffice either to make such choices in abstract terms only. As long as mission and stakeholders have rhetorical value only, their mentioning will remain an ornament hiding the real operation – that remains implicit then at the risk of using a double language. This may help, at least in the short run, to keep all options open – in fact not to take the responsibility of real choices concerning the many stakeholders discussed before: should emphasis be given, to science or general knowledge, to the students, the professions, economy or democracy, to individual companies or the surrounding community, for instance, and in which constellation of interests? Choosing is never easy since it implies the risk of ‘fixing fate’ onto a certain path of development – that could prove inadequate in the long run. Profiling the institution means courage from members, stakeholders and paymasters: the priorities could be wrong but will need to be assumed if they are to be turned around in terms of potential benefit. Linking those institutional priorities will define the culture of the enterprise, for instance the weight given to each department that will determine their potential for cooperation, or the modalities of networking in the university

research and teaching activities, service programmes, internal incentive schemes and external competition – to mention but a few items for institutional deliberation. Strategy definition is no easy task indeed since balances have to be found between short and long-term objectives, practical and theoretical concerns, social and economic interests, local and national and global matters; those equilibriums will be woven into the identity and image of the institution, making it unique among a range of related but dissimilar academic bodies within the sector of higher education.

It has been the main theme of this essay: urging universities to extend their autonomy by proving they can decide *on their own* of small and large matters. This is the way to master one's institutional destiny, to become a partner worth working with in a local and global community of knowledge stakeholders, people and institutions, which are interested in the development of society. All this starts, however, from a clear awareness of the institution's identity and purpose. It implies will and lucidity.

The process develops in three stages: where does the institution stand in the social fabric, is the first query. How does it become a real community of practice (rather than a collection of individual interests), is the second stage of reflection. Thirdly, what are the forces that shape the institution's course? In short, to what extent is the university really in charge – and what are its levers for influencing a desired future?

In terms of academic values, the identity search process evokes the conditions that make the institution an instrument rather than an actor of change, an object rather than a subject of social evolution. There is

however a complication in terms of 'unit of analysis': at what institutional level should such a discussion take place? If we accept Kerr's view that the academic enterprise is in fact a multiversity, only universities acting as a single enterprise can answer several of the questions just mentioned. Can a multiversity develop a compound mission that can fit all the units of the 'academic business'? Or does each operational level develop its own rules – as if it were a single institution – the median solution being for general modes of operation to be adapted to the needs of each unit, shared goals that help the members to allege a common destiny that federates and 'glues' the diversity of their own activities. We think it imperative that the institutions respect the differences in their principal operational units, faculties or schools, but ensure that the fundamental academic values are recognised in all of them. There is no way for the academic enterprise to eschew the task of making explicit its values and principles if it is to remain credible and develop institutional integrity – as a reference for personal honesty. To sum up, we are simply asking the universities to be proactive in the design of their own capacity to be, to become active subjects of their own destiny rather objects of the expectations of others: indeed, autonomy and academic freedom are not granted but gained, if they are to be effective, i.e., integrated in the life of academia and the university.

Basically such a process represents the challenge accepted by university leaders when they sign the Magna Charta – simply a call to each, institutions and their officials, to join a community of shared purpose the objectives of which are defined by the members in function of their own development and uniqueness.

The overall expectations of society can build a bright university future – if the institutions pick the challenge of its formulation and adaptation to their needs and potential. The academic system has enjoyed and will still know an enormous growth (an asset and a problem); it represents a treasure trove for the mastering by society of technological advance and knowledge development and it retains the capacity to roll back the frontiers of ignorance. Thus it has the basis for warranting the pertinence of important societal values, like democracy, equality and critical thinking. It is for each and every university to embody so compelling a purpose and heritage. Their future is in their hands, even if nothing can evolve without the strong social support single universities have received from those partners who have benefited from academic services over the centuries. Funding coming from traditional stakeholders could be relatively smaller tomorrow than today: this could incite universities to reflect on how to keep the future open, in new circumstances, both for the future of society and their own. All those who care about the university should wonder how they could help institutions to shoulder their social responsibility, to uphold those academic values of use to define humanity, to face reality for the sake of knowledge development. This is the defining task of the university stakeholders, within and outside the institution, whom we have brought to the centre of this Essay. They are the makers of the university, the pullers and pushers of its transformation. Their courage, lucidity and wisdom will be the drivers of the university of tomorrow – socially responsible and intellectually creative.

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Finito di stampare nel mese di luglio 2008  
presso le Arti Grafiche Editoriali s.r.l. – Urbino