

Comparing Management and Self-Governance Models of Universities

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Turning Universities into Actors on Quasi-Markets: How Governance Affects Research



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STRUCTURE

1. Introduction

2. Methodology

3. Results:

3.1 Quality assessment

3.2 Output strategies

3.3 Choice of research topics

3.4 Balance of mainstream and risky research

3.5 Basic vs. applied research

3.6 Research/Teaching nexus

4. Conclusion:

Does Governance Matter?

1. Introduction

**New public management reforms of national university systems
aim at a two-fold transformation:**

- **First, universities as organizations shall be developed into corporate actors**
- **Secondly, the competitive pressure between universities shall be increased**

⇒ establishment of *quasi markets*

1. Introduction

Universities are now confronted with standardized quality criteria by which their research and teaching performance is measured

- amount of third party funding,**
- number of publications in international refereed journals,**
- number of doctorates...**

⇒ scarce financial resources, especially basic funds, tend to be redistributed to the high performers

We ask in this contribution:

Which effects does this change of the governance regime have on characteristics of research?

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2. Methodology

Case studies of two scientific fields at universities
in four European countries

- **“red” biotechnology** (representative of “mode 2”)
- **medieval history** (traditional “mode 1 of knowledge production”)
- **England, Netherlands, Germany and Austria**
- **Two panels: 2004/2005 and 2008/2009**

All in all, we studied four research groups, two from each field in each country which amounted to 16 groups in our first round of expert interviews and 16 groups in the second: ca. 120 interviews in total

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3.1 Quality assessment

- Practices of quality assessment and assurance have been widely introduced into the higher education sector by now and are increasingly used for funding and allocation decisions
- ⇒ performance measurement / evaluations (internal and external) of organizational units (institutes, departments, centres)

Interesting:

Perceptions of the effectiveness of such measures differ between the *institutional management* on the one hand and *the researchers* on the other



3.1 *Quality assessment*

It seems that in matters of quality management we are confronted with a rather high degree of *symbolic compliance*:

- ***Management*** emphasizes the seriousness and the consequences of research evaluations and their role for strategic decision-making
- ***The researchers*** complain about the burden of self-reports and data gathering without any serious consequences at all (neither positive nor negative)

3.2 Output strategies

The effects of managerial governance on researchers' output preferences show a clear division between the two subject areas:

- In **biotechnology** the main tension is one between *quality and quantity*: Researchers claim to have a preference for *high quality publications* in international high impact journals

“One paper in a high impact journal in three years is better than three papers in journals with a lower reputation”

But:

Increasing competition requires publication as early as possible!

Performance based allocation of funds using publications as an indicator pushes for *quantity*!

3.2 Output strategies

- **Medieval historians** prefer to produce a monograph after a research project has been finished
 - impact factors hardly play a role (no citation index)

However:

Accountability and reporting duties as well as the pressure for quantity of output has led to an increased publication in journals!

3.3 Choice of research topics

- Attempts to influence problem choice touch upon the core of academic research, professional expertise and academic freedom and are likely *not to be welcomed by the researchers themselves*
- Researchers are not willing to compromise their research agenda, unless they are really forced to do it

We found out:

Their capacity for maintaining their problem choice depends on their *financial resource base, on their performance and reputation, and to some extent on their seniority.*

3.3 Choice of research topics

- The dominant concern is finding funding for either high cost projects (**biotechnology**) or to buy out time from teaching (**medieval history**)
- Researchers try to play the game by choosing some topics of their preference over others anticipating likelihood of funding, selling their own ideas in such a way that they fit research programmes

The outcomes of our study thus indicate that research topics have been influenced to some extent:

Fundability is the dominant theme for the researchers (esp. for the junior ones). They reflect their choices in the light of topical fashions and success rates in funding programmes.

3.4 Balance of mainstream and risky research

Research groups perceive growing constraints to pursue risky research

⇒ increasing dependency and competition for external funding!

Even funding from the research councils tends to favor mainstream research, focus increasingly on predictable, demonstrable outputs

- There is little room left for researchers to ‘fail’ and to adjust their research projects**
- They tend to carry out risk-averse mainstream research to ensure predictable financial inputs and scholarly outputs in an increasingly uncertain and demanding environment**

3.4 Balance of mainstream and risky research

- **Most research units are, however, successfully combining this mainstream work with more risky research lines**
- **Mainly highly successful researchers and groups are using different tactics to pursue risky research lines while at the same moment conforming to the mainstream**
- **The motivation to pursue risky research is related to the researchers' serendipity and desire to fuel their reputation building**

3.5 Basic vs. applied research

- The actual weight of extra-scientific criteria for the determination of what kind of research is done at universities is still basically the same as in the decades before

⇒ The new mechanisms of research evaluation work as an overriding counter-force

- This is most clearly visible for all evaluations based on peer-review:

The peers uphold scientific quality as the undisputed dominant standard of judgment, and extra-scientific relevance is of secondary importance

3.5 *Basic vs. applied research*

The same rank-order of standards can be seen for indicator-based systems of evaluation:

- **Publications in international peer-reviewed journals and third-party funds from agencies which rely on peer-reviews rank highest**
- **Patents or money from industry sometimes do not even count at all**

3.5 Basic vs. applied research

- Also scientists of “red” biotechnology explicitly reject ideas to orient their work according to extra-scientific priorities:

“We neither orient our work to potential applications, nor to markets, nor to anything else.”

Interesting:

Medieval historians mention a somewhat increased interest of the general public in parts of their work!

They see themselves to be confronted with the “relevance” question.

⇒ popular activities (Radio, Television, participation at exhibitions) are highly valued within the scientific community!

3.6 Research/Teaching nexus

- **Our findings in all four countries and both scientific fields show, first of all, that a tight coupling of research and teaching is emphasized as a desirable ideal**

What has happened de facto differs from these wishes

⇒ Matthew beats Humboldt (esp. in England)

- **The mechanism which produces this effect consists, first of all, in a separation of the financial flows for teaching and research, and, secondly, in an allocation of finances for research according to performance whereas in teaching only quantity counts**

3.6 Research/Teaching nexus

- **The systems of quality assurance and evaluation which are built up now use separate sets of performance indicators for research and teaching**
- **This separation makes transparent different performance levels of individuals, institutes, or departments with respect to both tasks; and this invites policies of government or university leadership which bring about a stronger de-coupling**

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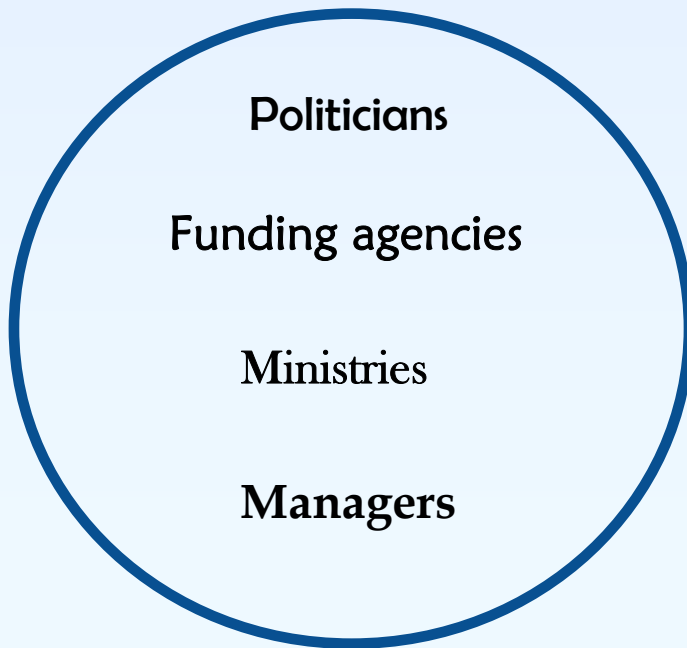
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The scientific, and even more the public debate about NPM and the universities is dominated by a sharp opposition of enthusiastic NPM promoters on one side, and its fierce opponents on the other:

PROMOTERS



OPPONENTS



4. Conclusion: Does Governance Matter?

- **Whereas NPM promoters are inspired by great hopes how universities will improve their performance in teaching and research, NPM opponents are driven by fears about the end of autonomous science in “academic capitalism”**
- **So for each of the two camps governance surely matters: NPM is either the bright future, or the decline and fall of universities**
- **Our view presented here is that governance does matter indeed! Our empirical data do not just refer to vague impressions of researchers how university research in general is affected by NPM but to immediate own experiences of NPM effects in their actual research work**

4. Conclusion: Does Governance Matter?

- **With respect to effects of NPM we presented a mixed blessing:**
Many of the effects seem to be dysfunctional for a prospering and innovative scientific knowledge production, other effects may turn out to be quite functional
- **We can neither recommend radical NPM nor returning to the status quo ante**
- **What seems to be the best way of reforming university governance *is a careful point-by-point comparison of how the old governance regime worked with the effects of cautious steps in the direction outlined by NPM*, accompanied by a preparedness to modify the direction taken**

Thank you for your attention!