The Concept of the University Revisited.
Exploration of Challenges, Purposes and Core Missions
(Or: The University Between Traditionalism, Destruction and Departure into the Future)

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- **Challenges & Threats for the Contemporary University**

- **Goals & Methodology of Study**

- **Core Values and Purposes of the University: Past, Present, Future**

- **Empirical Exploration: How Real Universities are Committed to the Concept of the University (The Sensemaking Tool "Mission Statement")**

- **Final Remarks for the Future**

- Some Limitations of Study

Challenges and Threats
for the Contemporary University

There is an **"ongoing debate regarding the purpose and function of institutions of higher education"**
(Saichaie & Morphew 2014, 499) .

[particularly in the US, Australia and UK but not only there]

(also cf. Anderson 2010; Barnett 2016; Buller 2014; Escotet 2012; Etzkowitz et al. 2000; Giroux 2002; Granados 2015; Harkavy 2006; Kreimendahl et al. 2014; Marginson 2007; Rhoades & Stensaker 2017; Seeber et al. 2017)

Challenges and Threats
for the Contemporary University

- **Upheavals and crises** threaten social security and justice, sustainable economy, democracy and human rights, the political world order and not least the continued existence of earthly nature, the foundations of humanity's survival

- Expectably & unavoidably, these crises intrude **social organizations** incl. **HEIs** because these constitute **intersectional societal knots**:

  - In them intersect the majority of forces capable of being relevant for the development of whole societies:
  Theory & practice (e.g. foundational research, application research, application of knowledge & skills in exchange in many fields from physics to political science);
  State power, human rights & democracy confronted with each other;
  Broad spectrum of **moral & social opinions & beliefs of diversity of social & religious groups** encounter conceptions of **freedom of expression, learning, research, arts**;
  Traditionalist views have to come to grips with **dynamics of education societies & knowledge economies**
  …

Challenges and Threats
for the Contemporary University

- **HEIs** are at the **center** of the above-mentioned **societal challenges of humankind** since they represent **one of the main decisive**, **innovative**, **participative & inclusive** powers and education forces in modern **education societies & knowledge economies**.

For illustration: HEIs are challenged by

- General demands of public policy (e.g. massification of higher education; requirements of national qualifications frameworks; government request to develop quality management (QM))
- Enhancement of (global) "market" position (e.g. rapid growth of international competition for students, staff, cooperation partners, research funding etc.)
- Tendency for entrepreneurial strategies

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Ergo, "**Idea** (= idealistic concept) **of the University**" (i.e. certain elements of it) is **under pressure** (cf. Buller 2014; Granados 2015; Jessop 2017; Taatila 2017):

- **Decline of public funding** (despite increasing load and societal mission) (e.g. 3rd party funding & **external power**; student fees & **graduate debt**)

- **Increase of** (global) **competition**

- **Accelerating race for** (global) **reputation** ("whatever it is") & **rankings** ("whatever they mean")

- **Value-for-money** (accounting) **approach** & **entrepreneurial focus to transfer of skills** (**threat to academic freedom**; **personal exploration & development**; **open research projects**)

- **Students as teaching-receivers or customers** instead of being an integral part of an inspiring community

- **Significance decrease of classical educational qualifications** (e.g. "many have it"; shorter half-life of acquired competences; LLL; Further Education; transdisciplinarity/ non-academic knowledge)

- **New types of global online offerings** (e.g. Edx; Coursera)

Goals and Methodology

- **Do contemporary HEIs have** the necessary **tools**, **competencies** and **measures to meet these challenges** and **pursue the 'Idea of the University' under renovation**?

- Explorative study gives provisional & partial answers through qualitative content analyses of

  - **Mission statements** & **value preferences** & **functional descriptions** reflected therein of **29 German** and **3 international HEIs**
    – limitation: possible gap between symbolic representations/identity narratives of multiple hybrid identities and practice of directing formulation & implementation of strategic planning

  - **Statutes & strategic plans** (SDPs) – limitation: limited availability of SDPs

  - **Literature** based on **survey studies** on competencies and roles of **HEI presidents/rectors**

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"Ultimately, the life of any enterprise is its mission, either stated or assumed. Hence, virtually all of today's policies and issues in higher education […] derive from institutional mission" (Scott 2006, 1-2).

- Advantages
    - "Developing a clear sense of purpose"
    - "Enhancing communication between and among internal & external stakeholder groups"
    - "Aiding institutional evaluation and measurement"
    - "Clarifying marketing strategy" (Scott 2006, 2; cf. Peeke 1994, 8-12, 32)

- Disadvantages (Peeke 1994, 8-12, 32)
    - "Cursory nature"; not (very) systematic, contingent genesis
    - "Lacking involvement by the majority of organization's members"
    - "Little impact upon actual management of institution" (Scott 2006, 2; cf. Peeke 1994, 8-12, 32)

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Excerpts from a comprehensive list of university missions (incl. values & visions)

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
	Relative proportion of HEIs		
Quality TEACHING (ca. 1100) & LEARNING ['internat. excellence'] (Bol)	9/9	14/20	C H Z
Quality RESEARCH (ca. 1800) ['internat. excellence'] (Bol)	9/9	11/20	C H Z
Promote INTERDISCIPLINARITY (general) (ca. 1970/80) (specification of research & teaching; cross-cutting issue)	9/9	5/20	C – Z
Commitment to unity/CLOSE LINKAGE OF RESEARCH & TEACHING (ca. 1810) (Bol)	8/9	4/20	C – Z
Promote young academics & artists (spec. of teaching & learning, research & personality development)	8/9	5/20	– – –
Promote international cooperation/ INTERNATIONALIZATION (21st century) (cross-cutting issue)	8/9	15/20	– – Z

* Baden-Württemberg HEIs; ** U Cambridge; Harvard U; Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
Promote **gender equality** (spec. of **DEMOCRATIZATION** (since ca. 1800); **MORALITY**)	8/9	8/20	– – Z
Promote focus disciplines in teaching (spec. of teaching)	8/9	15/20	– – –
Promote interdisciplinary research (spec. of interdisciplinarity)	7/9	0/20	– – –
Cooperate with other HEIs, public, or publicly promoted institutions of research & education (spec. of **SERVICE TO SOCIETY** (always/since ca. 1862) & **COMPETITION**; **ENTREPRENEURIAL DIMENSION** (late 20th century); cross-cutting issue)	7/9	0/20	– – Z
Promote **cooperation with external research & industry** (spec. of service to society & competition; entrepreneurial dimension)	7/9	14/20	C – Z
Promote interdisciplinary teaching (spec. of teaching & interdisciplinarity)	6/9	1/20	C – Z

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
Promote research-based teaching & learning (spec. of teaching & learning)	6/9	1/20	– – Z
Contribute to societal progress by promotion of knowledge & technology transfer (spec. of service to society & **competition**; **entrepreneurial dimension**)	6/9	15/20	C – Z
Promote **PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT** (spec. of teaching/education & learning, democratization; morality) (Bol)	5/9	9/20	– H Z
Promote **innovation** (spec. of research)	5/9	8/20	– H Z
Promote equal opportunities for all HEI members (spec. of democratization; morality)	5/9	11/20	– – Z
Take into account/promote diversity of students, HEI members & staff in the performance of their duties (spec. of democratization)	5/9	1/20	– H Z
Promote further education (spec. of teaching/education & learning, democratization)	4/9	12/20	– – Z

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
Prepare students for qualified professional activities (spec. of teaching/education & learning, service to society & competition; entrepreneurial dimension) (Bol)	4/9	10/20	– – Z
Contribute to societal progress by implementation of the results of research & development into practice (spec. of service to society; entrepreneurial dimension)	4/9	4/20	– – Z
Promote societal responsibility/**cooperation with society** (spec. of service to society; morality)	4/9	11/20	– – Z
Refer to founding condition of HEI (spec. of **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**; cross-cutting issue)	4/9	0/20	– H –
Commitment to freedom of research, teaching and studies (spec. of **SCIENTIFICATION**, democratization, enlightenment; morality) (ca. 1810) (Bol)	3/9	1/20	– – Z
Commitment to the principles of good scientific practice (spec. of scientification, democratization, enlightenment)	3/9	0/20	– – Z

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
Promote **TRANSDISCIPLINARITY** (general) (spec. of research, teaching, service to society & democratization; cross-cutting issue)	3/9	3/20	– – –
Mediate interdisciplinary key qualifications (spec. of interdisciplinarity)	3/9	4/20	– – Z
Support graduates in transition to working life (spec. of service to society & democratization)	3/9	4/20	– – –
Promote commitment to the region (spec. of service to society)	3/9	9/20	– – Z
Promote European study programs (spec. of internationalization)	3/9	5/20	– – –
Promote connection to HEI's graduates (spec. of service to society & democratization)	3/9	4/20	– – –
Regularly inform the public concerning the HEI's duties and achieved results (spec. of service to society & democratization)	2/9	3/20	– – Z
Establish a QM structure (spec. of organizational development; cross-cutting issue)	2/9	6/20	– – –

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Missions & values (& visions) in mission statements	9 Us*	20 UASs*	3 intUs**
Foster **ability for social engagement** (spec. of teaching/education & service to society)	1/9	2/20	– – –
Refer to geographical position or locality (spec. of service to society)	1/9	5/20	C – Z
Promote international teaching (spec. of teaching & internationalization)	1/9	4/20	– – –
Promote socially responsible business practices (spec. of entrepreneurial dimension & **SUSTAINABILITY**)	1/9	2/20	– – –
Operate financial management (spec. of organizational development)	1/9	1/20	– – Z
Promote education of executives (spec. of teaching/education; service to society)	1/9	0/20	– – –
Management/administration are to support academics (spec. of organizational development)	1/9	0/20	– – Z

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Suggestive summary: 16 core missions (open for revision)

6 classics (1000-1900)

- **Teaching** (subject/discipline specific)
- **Research** (s/ds)
- **Close linkage of research and teaching** (s/ds)
- **Democratization** (subject/discipline transcending)
- **Scientification** (s/dt)
- **Service to society** (s/dt)

10 more recent ones (1900-now)

- **Learning** (s/ds)
- **Interdisciplinarity** (s/dt)
- **Internationalization** (s/dt)
- **Competition** (s/dt)
- **Entrepreneurial dimension(s)** (s/dt)
- **Personality development** (s/dt)
- **Organizational development** (s/dt)
- **Transdisciplinarity** (s/dt)
- **Sustainability** (s/dt)
- **Morality** (s/dt)

Constitute the core concept/idea of the contemporary (& future?) university

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What concept(s) of the university do presidents/rectors have?

Self-characterization of German university presidents
(based on 29 semi-structured interviews: Kleimann 2016; 2017)

Task understanding	Personal features	Motivation for position	President's role
Integration of multiple hybrid forces/system logics (cf. "community of teachers and scholars"/ "totality of sciences")	**Practical know-how** of university functioning (university mechanisms?)	**No intended career decision**	Moderate trend to strengthen leadership/ no strong managerialisation; state-dependent
	Multiple hybrid competencies (strategic; entrepreneurial; resilient; healthy and mentally stable,; …) (no specific competence profile)	Presidency is "consequence" of preceding leadership functions in academic self-governance	**Multiple hybrid role functions**: moderator; designer & builder; decision-maker

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Self-characterization of German university presidents			
Task understanding	**Personal features**	**Motivation for position**	**President's role**
Locomotion: change management (**organizational development?**)		Attractive activity	Roles are not "contradictory"
Representation: successfully representing the university (politics, society, economy) as a **strategic formal organisation**		**Identification with organizational goals (concept of the university?)**	
Tasks are not "contradictory"		Conscientiousness against the university	
		The will, options and duty to structuring and forming the university (**organizational development?**)	

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What do interviews with HEI presidents tell about **presidents' attitudes towards the concept of the university**?

- **Multiple hybrid character of universities** (& not the "idea" as such) **is core theme**

- Interviewees express that they have **some practical understanding** of the organisational specificities **of "multiple hybrid organizations"**.

- **Theory-informedness** of this understanding **may be questioned**

- Mentioned personal characteristics required for presidents' role do **not** seem to **explicitly refer to ethical values & moral virtues**

- **Core characteristics of the university are rarely and mostly only implicitly mentioned** in the interviews although the questions for task understanding, required personal characteristics, motivation for position & description of president's role might suggest such references

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- **Concept of university** has become **more complex**
- **Core missions of university** have **grown**
- **Subject/discipline transcending core missions of university** have **grown**

Ergo: **need of university leaders has grown**

- Main function: **support and develop – multiple hybrid – organization & – subject/discipline transcending – strategy/ies** of university in view of mission(s), values, vision(s) & institutional profile

- This tends to be, or is, **realized by rectors – doubts remain because core missions are not explicitly named**.

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- Are the **five ideals of science** and correlated **intellectual virtues** adequately **represented in mission statements** above?

  - **Truth**, or **reliability** – To discover and overcome as much as possible all deception, every error, every prejudice, every form of mere wishful thinking

  - **Justification** – To prove that an opinion about the world is actually true, reliable

  - **Explanation** and **Understanding** – To prove how facts hang together (structures, patterns, rules, natural laws)

  - **Self-reflection** – To explore and research scientific exploration and research ("Which concepts, justifications, explanations are the most reliable and valuable in epistemological and ethical terms?")

  - **Intersubjectivity** – No secret knowledge of a privileged minority; science is essentially a cooperative endeavour, a through and through collective and social undertaking; scientific research and teaching and learning shall foster knowledge, personality development, and professional abilities "for all"

- **YES**, mainly via **teaching & learning**, **research**, **democratization**, **scientification**, **service to society**, **personality development**, …

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- Are these **moral virtues** adequately represented in mission statements above?
    - To behave **honestly**
    - To behave **respectfully** against others
    - To behave **cooperative** & **communicative**
    - To behave **motivational** towards others
    - To behave in accordance with **cosmopolitan tolerance**

- **YES,** mainly via **democratization**, **personality development**, **sustainability**, **morality**, …

Final Remarks for the Future

Options for the "Idea of the University"

- **Extend "Humboldtian University" to all parts of mass HE system**
  - Excessive demands on resources; unnecessary for much vocational training & application research & patent invention & application

- **Fit all HEIs into an entrepreneurial structure & managerial mould**

- **Practice more open acceptance that a variety of (core) missions for HEIs exist which are in conflict/competition with each other and can be combined in different ways according to different profiles and strategies of "multiversities"** (Kerr 1963) **or "multiple hybrid organizations"** (Kleimann 2016; Pratt 2016)

  "To understand the university is to **understand this eternal struggle**" (Barnett 2016, 185).

Some Limitations of Study

- Statutes & Strategic Development Plans could be analysed
- Interviews & surveys explicitly focusing on the "concept of the university" could be carried out
- Statistically representative sample could be investigated
- Longitudinal study could be carried out (development/history of "concept/idea of the university")
- Coding of items of comparative conceptual analysis of mission statements could be formalized
- Conceptual coding could be changed (e.g. by distinguishing various categories such as "goals", "means", "served stakeholder group", "attributes of activities and services")
- …
- Sheer complexity makes it difficult to complete the topic

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