

Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 15:

Collegialism, Democracy and University Governance – The Case of Denmark

By Hans Siggaard Jensen

Danish School of Education,
University of Aarhus

June 2010

Working Papers on University Reform

Series Editor: Susan Wright

This working papers series is published by the research programme 'Education, Policy and Organisation in the Knowledge Economy' (EPOKE) at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. The series brings together work in progress in Denmark and among an international network of scholars involved in research on universities and higher education.

EPOKE aims to establish the study of universities as a field of research in Denmark. The field has three components:

- 1. Inter/national policies to develop a global knowledge economy and society – their global travel and local negotiation*
- 2. New forms of organisation – their migration between private and public sectors, including universities, and their pedagogies*
- 3. University teaching, research and knowledge dissemination, as shaped by these organisational and policy contexts.*

Central questions include: How are different national and transnational visions of learning societies, knowledge economies, and new world orders spurring reforms to the role and purpose of universities and to the policies and practices of higher education? How do reforms of universities and other knowledge organisations introduce new rationalities of governance, systems of management and priorities for research and teaching? How do managers, academics, employees and students negotiate with new discourses, subject positions and forms of power within these changing organisational and policy contexts? How are their work practices changing, in terms of the politics of knowledge, conduct of research and pedagogy?

EPOKE draws together ideas and approaches from a range of academic fields – anthropology, comparative education, ethnology, history, the history of ideas, political science and sociology - and collaborates internationally with other higher education research centres. EPOKE holds seminars and there is a mailing list of academics and students working in this field in Denmark and internationally.

Further information on EPOKE, current projects, and other working papers in the series are at <http://www.dpu.dk/site.asp?p=5899>. To join the mailing list, hold a seminar or have material included in the working paper series please contact professor Susan Wright at suwr@dpu.dk or at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Tuborgvej 164, 2400 Copenhagen NV, Denmark.

Collegialism, Democracy and University Governance - The Case of Denmark

By Hans Siggaard Jensen

hsj@dpu.dk

Copyright:

Hans Siggaard Jensen

Collegialism, Democracy and University Governance – The Case of Denmark¹

The first university in Denmark was founded at the end of the 15th century while Denmark was still a part of the Holy Roman Empire and thus under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Pope. It lasted only a few years, because in 1536 the Reformation turned the university into a school for protestant priests. This continued to be the case until the Enlightenment brought some light into Denmark. A good example of the Enlightenment was the university professor Ludvig Holberg, who is mostly known for his satirical comedies. He was influenced by the streams of thought in the Europe of his time and an ardent advocate of university reforms. He thought that what happened in Germany at Halle ought to be imitated in Denmark. Denmark and Germany were both greatly influenced by the Napoleonic wars and, after these wars, universities became instruments for nation building. Romantic philosophy, conceptions and practices of science, and literature had a big influence in the period from 1810 until the onset of a more naturalistic and positivistic period from around 1860. In the cultural history of Denmark this period is often described as the “Golden Age”. The only Danish university – the one in Copenhagen - was modeled on German universities as they had emerged in the Humboldtian tradition. Danish scholars, poets and philosophers went to Berlin to study. The university consisted of the four medieval faculties, now treated equally. Later in the century the “philosophical faculty” was split into two, half was devoted to “philosophy” which was actually the humanities, and half to natural science. The reason for the equalization was mainly that a new profession of teachers in the higher secondary schools – the gymnasium was trained at the philosophical faculty. The secondary schools were introduced as a

¹ This paper was originally written as a contribution to the TAFFU project (Transatlantic Forum for the Future of Universities) funded partially by the Ford Foundation. The forum among other things focused on the developments in university governance. The TAFFU was run by Professor Dawydd Greenwood, Cornell University. At the School of Education – then the Danish University of Education – a seminar on governance was held under the project in 2006.

modernization of the medieval cathedral schools with a classical and humanist curriculum including the new forms of natural science. During the 19th century, new forms of university level institutions were created. A polytechnic school was started by Hans Chr. Oersted in 1829 and a veterinary and agricultural university in 1855, and the school of surgery was merged with the medical faculty of the university. The university was governed by a rector elected by and from among the professors, and decision-making actually lay in the hands of the college of professors of each faculty – Fakultät. An anecdote gives a picture of the state of affairs: all questions requiring a decision from the university went to the rector. He sent the files to one professor – Madvig, professor of classical philology – who looked at them and made his comments and recommendations. Then the material was circulated to all the other professors, and they all wrote “Agree with Madvig” on the files, and thus a unanimous decision was made – slowly because the circulation took weeks or months. For decades in the middle of the 19th century Madvig also ran the Danish higher secondary school system from his apartment in Copenhagen, and instituted a tradition of extreme attention to quality. He was, in a time of sometimes rampant nationalism, a defender of the broader classical or “European” tradition in learning and education. One can say that in many ways his opposite was the founder of the Danish system of folk high schools, Grundtvig, who advocated a special Nordic people’s tradition of learning based on an alliance between a joyful Christianity and the mission of the Danish people. The university and the other professional schools on a university level were extremely small and meant for an absolute elite. Only several decades into the 20th century did Denmark get a second university and in 1965 a third. By then the university scene had started to be transformed.

Up until the 1960s, the university institutions were state institutions, or modeled on state institutions, and all funded by the state. This was regardless of whether they were privately owned by a foundation or association or owned by the state. Professors were civil servants, or employed on conditions imitating this as closely as possible. Thus the professors were in a sense part of a public bureaucracy, but the institutions were

governed by the college – or “collegium” – of professors in each faculty. In a way the college of professors was the faculty. The picture was one of “establishment”, a pillar of society. All this changed in the 1960s when the number of university students expanded and the role of the university in society changed. This had begun after the Second World War when the Danish social democratic party started transforming Denmark into a welfare state. Education and higher education were important elements and instrumental in this. The ideal was to create a more egalitarian society based on equal opportunity for education. Higher education was seen as an important inroad to positions of power and influence. Danish social democratic parliamentarians increasingly became academics, typically trained in economics. Thus from 1945 till the 1960s there was a steady increase in the number of students at university. Expansion was part of the natural development of the mixed-economy welfare state, and the leading role was taken by the state as directed by what was often called “The Movement” – the alliance of the Social Democratic Party, the labour unions and the various cooperatives e.g. in the field of public housing, or in various industries with worker or union owned companies. The ideals were equality and democracy. The aim was welfare for all through economic growth that would be distributed or re-distributed to create a state of so-called social justice. In the period from 1945 to 1982 Denmark had a government run by the Social Democrats, except for two periods of three years each.

As student numbers expanded, so did the universities. Often the problem was how to use all the money allocated to the universities by Parliament. New institutions were created, new buildings built. New forms of academic positions such as assistant and associate professor were created. Slowly departments started to appear which carved up the old faculties which still existed but were no longer an assembly of professorial “chairs”. All decisions were still made by the professors, and there was no clear government policy or policy-making body, nor a ministry that kept an eye on the universities. They were “autonomous”.

Students had since the beginning of the 1950s had the possibility of favourable loans and stipends if their parents did not earn enough to support their studies. Financial conditions improved during the 1960s, and in 1970 a permanent support system was introduced that made support less dependent upon the income of parents. Thus access to higher education was greatly widened during the first decades after the Second World War. These were all fairly traditional social democratic policies.

The situation changed radically in the period from 1968 to 1970. The 1968 student uprisings spread to Denmark, mainly from Germany. Inspiration, of course, also came from the various protest movements in the US concerning discrimination and the Vietnam War. In the period from March to May 1968 a student movement was formed which demanded radical reform of the universities. Basically, it demanded that the social democratic government/state take its own ideals of democracy seriously. The universities should not be governed by the college of professors but by elected representatives of the academic and administrative staff, and of students. The degree programs especially should be governed by study boards with equal representation of faculty and students. The research policies of universities should emphasize not only traditional academic quality but also social relevance in the spirit of the slogan “research for the people”. By the fall of 1967 slogans such as “Bring the universities out of the Middle Ages” had appeared in elections for the board of the students union, and demands for reform were widespread among students and also the younger non-professorial faculty which the expansion had created. After many demonstrations the liberal-conservative government, which had taken power in 1968 after a short period with a parliamentary majority based on social democrats plus “real” socialists”, enacted in 1970 a university law which more or less totally met the demands of the radical students. All decision-making bodies were elected and had representatives from faculty and students on an equal basis. Department heads, deans and rectors were also elected. It was a very democratic system. It was a two-tier system, with independent study boards with 50-50 representation from faculty and students, and a system of representation for the research and resources side including students, faculty

and administrative staff. In 1973 the law was revised and faculty were given 50% of the representation in the faculty councils and the senate. Each department was run by an elected department head, an elected board and a department council on which students and administrative staff had up to 50% of the places. The election system was reformed to make proportional representation mandatory. This was because inside the university what amounted to “political parties” had emerged. So there would typically be majority and minority parties/lists in the election of student representatives to the various bodies, and only some form of proportional representation could secure the minority some of the seats. The elected department heads, deans and rectors took their office, not as a job, but as a type of civic duty. These two laws created a big experiment in democratic governance of public institutions. Soon attempts were made to reform the system, and in 1993 a new law was enacted, but it preserved the basic principles in a simplified form, especially regarding elected representation. In 2003 a law was enacted for the governance of universities which abolished the system of internally elected governing bodies.

A number of factors contributed to the rapid revolution of university governance that took place at the end of the 1960s. There was the long tradition in academia of self-governance. This was phrased as ideas of autonomy and independence. According to the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt, the university should be independent of the state – although funded by it – but in the service of the nation. This was a particular German situation during his time. Germany was not one country or State, but a patchwork of smaller states. Prussia, of which Humboldt was for a time the education minister, was among the largest. At the same time, during the age of Napoleon, the idea of a nation took form – think of Fichte’s lectures to the German nation from about the same time. The idea also took hold that a nation should be one state, something that came into being with the creation of the German imperial state after the Franco-German war of 1870-71.

The medieval university was, of course, often understood as a “college”, a self-governing body of professors who actually were the university. Hence the later phrase “the faculty is the university”. From the Reformation onwards, many universities in Northern Europe were in effect schools for training the priests needed by the new state-churches. Only at the end of the 18th century did it start to become something like what we now understand a university to be. Humboldt had the idea that the university could at one and the same time, be a state-owned institution with civil servants and an independent self-governing institution. This of course could only be possible if the state abstained from interfering in the internal affairs of the university, and also by a common understanding of what were internal affairs and what were external affairs. The student uprisings of 1968 were to a large extent fueled by an anti-authoritarian and radically democratic spirit often associated with what was called “The New Left”. It grew out of various forms of freedom movements that were critical of the status quo, such as, in Germany, the criticism of the growing media monopoly of the Springer Press and, in the US, the black liberation movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement. In general, the youth culture of the middle 1960s was anti-establishment and anti-authoritarian, although it was soon co-opted by the various parts of the advancing media and culture industry. The student “revolutionaries” demanded influence and a new form of socially relevant research. Thus, in many ways, they reinforced the idea of the autonomous university because, without autonomy, the university could not function as a place for criticism of established society. The democratic ideals demanded free and open access to the university, because a university education played an important part in securing social mobility and a move towards greater equality. Education in general should be free, and an important slogan was “equality through education”. Thus it was important that universities were kept as state institutions fully financed by the state through taxation. In Scandinavia there had been for some time a movement towards a so-called industrial democracy. The idea was that workers in the various companies and institutions should take part in the exercise of power. They should share the power. There were also widespread ideas about “economic democracy”, in which workers did

not only share power but also ownership – not as shareholders, but as employees. This was part of a search for non-communist forms of socialism, a “democratic socialism”, as it was termed. So it was natural for employees of the university to ask for a role in the power structure of the university. And it was especially easy to demand it as the university was a publicly owned institution. The public sector, it was felt, ought to be showing the way towards a truly democratic society.

So the university reforms of the 1970s created a huge experiment in democratic control of public organizations and institutions. They were built on the continuing assumptions of Humboldt, that the university should be independent and autonomous, and a state institution fully financed with free education made available to all who were capable of benefitting from it.

The first serious problems with the new form of democratic governance came at the end of the 1970s. An economic crisis had started in the middle of the 1970s, but it was kept at bay in Denmark by the creation of large deficits and a large foreign debt. At the end of the 1970s it became necessary for the Danish government to start cutting back. The number of students in the universities and the expense of research and higher education had to be reduced. The size of the university sector had been expanding steadily for the last 150 years, accelerating in the last two decades. The system was thus used to expansion. New initiatives were made possible simply by getting more funding, and at that point funding was available. The state wanted to expand the higher education sector. When reductions became necessary, the new democratic governance had to cut back and to make a set of priorities. The universities responded with the opposite – new demands for expansion. This of course necessitated central control. Budgets were reduced and as the universities were unable to make the reductions – they were of course politically opposed to them – they had to be implemented by the government. Thus a process of transfer of control to the central government – the Ministry of Education – was started. Central planning was already being done through a series of advisory groups and central agencies. Each university

now came under close scrutiny and a system of financing was developed that made central control possible. Universities were funded according to the number of students passing exams. The intake of students in the various degree programs was decided centrally. New degree programs could only be started by central decision etc. etc. The age of expansion never returned in the same form, although the university sector actually continued to grow. Instead, new forms of public governance came on the scene – often known as “New Public Management”. The public sector had to be modernized; it had to be seen as efficient and accountable. New forms of control were introduced such as performance contracts, continuous evaluations, assessments and bench-markings. All this was done in a general climate of skepticism and opposition on the part of the universities: it was all seen as cutbacks in funding and in independence. The universities pushed the ideals of Humboldt as justifying demands for both more money and more independence. A general atmosphere of distrust between the universities and the Ministry of Education developed. The universities saw the ministry as a hostile central controlling agency intent only on cutbacks in the name of higher efficiency, and the ministry saw the universities as irresponsible institutions that were not open to the demands of society and the needs imposed by the economy. They were only operating on the principle of the young teenage son or daughter writing to the parents: “Send more money”. In the period 1982 to 1993 Denmark had a liberal-conservative government that eagerly embraced the ideals of New Public Government, but when the government changed to a social-democratic and social liberal coalition in 1993 the relationship between the government and the universities did not change. The necessities of the state demanded tight control, although the government soon actually started on a programme of expansion in the higher education sector called “Growth for Universities”. This programme was basically not seen, at the time, as a very positive thing, although a huge expansion in the funding for doctoral education was carried out. It was also accompanied by a more specific set of rules for doctoral programmes and the abolition of the total reliance on a German model of pure apprenticeship.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the development of important new fields of research and higher education. A couple of examples were the enormous expansion of research in IT and the appearance of environmental issues. IT – or “computer science” as it was known – was in the beginning understood to be a sort of mathematical discipline concerned with computation, or an engineering discipline concerned with the construction of computers. The technological development and the accompanying economic and social development of an “information society” and a “knowledge society” rapidly revealed that the field was much broader. It involved the use of computers in organizations, the development of software, the interfaces between humans and machines etc. And there was an accompanying rapidly increasing demand for highly educated manpower. The university sector had difficulty in responding to this development. One reason was that, with an almost steady state situation budget-wise, it necessitated cutting back or doing away with other sectors of the university. In a system of collegiate and democratic governance this proved nearly impossible. Thus the government had to earmark funds for the area and create special situations for the departments working in the field, such as a different salary level. From the middle of the 1980s the universities were clearly seen by both the government and private industry as responding inadequately to the challenges of the new technology. In 1999 the government actually created a new independent IT university.

IT was an academic field at nearly all the institutions of higher education in Denmark. In the Copenhagen area it was represented at the Technical University, at Copenhagen University (in several departments), at the Copenhagen Business School (again in several departments), at the Agricultural and Veterinary University. There was very little coordination or cooperation between the various departments and although Denmark had a strong tradition of research in computer science, no really great research environment was established. It was thus broadly perceived that universities were unable to adapt to new and rapidly changing demands. Universities were seen as

being by nature conservative, and the structure of governance made them unable to take unpleasant decisions and prevented the introduction of new fields.

A further case was the various scientific approaches to the study of environmental problems. Ecology had been slowly developing during the 20th century from its beginnings at the end of the 19th. Environmental problems started exploding in the 1960s and 70s. Many countries created research institutions that had the task of monitoring the environment and giving various forms of policy advice. The basic knowledge came from ecology and biology and some areas of civil engineering, such as the long tradition of engineering works in the area of water and wastage. The area grew in complexity and involved both basic issues in biology, in economics, in political science and in engineering. As in the case of IT, the various schools of higher education created departments, such as the Department of Environmental Technology at the Technical University, or sub-departments. It became an important field at the Agricultural and Veterinary University and the Technical University, and was the focus of the degree program in Technology and Society at Roskilde University where the department housing the degree program was called “Environment, Technology and Social Studies”. But the very central aspects of environmental economics and, to a certain degree, the policy aspects involved with the environment were not covered. There was no concerted effort by the universities to secure a well-structured research and teaching base in the broad field of environmental studies. In the 1990s the Danish government placed a very high priority on the environment as an area of politics and secured the placement of an EU agency in the field in Copenhagen: The European Environmental Agency. It also created the funding for a large strategic research program in the area with a broad spectrum of research projects. So there were many initiatives taken. Again, the universities responded hesitantly, although they were eager to use the research money made available.

The two cases share one aspect: both have to do with the problem of new research and education areas. Both IT and environmental studies are cross-disciplinary and both are

connected to rapid and important developments outside the academic field: developments in technology driven to a large degree by private companies; and developments in the sphere where pollution, destruction of various parts of the ecosphere, resource problems etc. are important items on the political agenda. In 2002 the then new liberal-conservative government established an Environmental Assessment Institute and made the controversial empirical statistician Bjorn Lomborg – author of “*The Sceptical Environmentalist*” – the director. It was a political decision of course, but again showed that the universities had somehow not created a research effort and an accompanying degree program that could provide credible and usable knowledge in the field. Thus it was possible for Bjorn Lomborg, at the end of the 1990s, to create enormous discussion and debate through the publication of newspaper articles and his book “*Verdens Sande Tilstand*” (*The True State of the World*) in 1998. His ideas were taken seriously in Denmark, even though he and his work were brought before the Danish Committee for Scientific Dishonesty, which gave a verdict of objective dishonesty on the English version of the book – *The Sceptical Environmentalist*. His ideas of cost-benefit analysis and the opportunity for cost analysis concerning the environment – the slogan “more environment for the money” – caught public attention and there was no credible research environment to take up the discussion, and no group of trained graduates to take up the issues and make them live in the public debate. This was especially due to the fact that environmental studies had been seen in a too narrow perspective as involving only biological and technological expertise. The cross-disciplinary nature of the field had not been reflected in the way universities had taken up the area.

The funding model of the university established in the 1980s was based on grants covering the expenses of educating a number of candidates and on a basic grant for research. Each academic was supposed to do both teaching and research: the old ideal of Humboldt of the university teacher. Besides the basic grant for research, universities could also apply for funding from the research councils. They were designed to provide supplementary additional funding and marginal cost funding. The

university was organized basically as a production unit that produced graduates according to the maximum number allowed by the government, funded by the actual number passing exams, and that conducted research connected to this activity organized in departments. The ideal was that for each degree program there was a department which followed a discipline and was thus also a natural research unit. This fitted physics, mathematics, psychology, economics, law, linguistics, and, to a lesser degree, medicine, theology, engineering and management. With the increasing economic role of research and the increasing distrust between the government and the universities, more and more funding for research was moved to the research council system. This was manned mainly by representatives from the universities, as there were many large research councils, and the members decided on the applications themselves, only rarely using peer reviewing. They were their own peer reviewers. The government wanted more and more control and this was achieved by creating research programs by direct political decisions. More and more funding for research was thus moved to a system based on project funding. Smaller and smaller parts of the research effort at universities could be covered by the basic grant. Universities had to seek so-called “external funding”. This of course was the normal state of affairs in many other countries, but it necessitated a restructuring of the research system of the universities towards a more project-based organization. This tended to split up the university into a type of professional bureaucracy responsible for running the degree programs and securing the teaching income of the university by producing as many degrees as possible, and an adhocracy that was responsible for securing research money which was mainly project-organized. This development challenged very basic ideals of the university as a unit of teaching and research – the old Humboldt model.

Degree programs were run by study boards with equal representation from faculty and students. They decided on general structure and content, leaving a certain freedom to the individual faculty member teaching a course. It was a so-called freedom of methodology. This seems to have worked quite well. When the university governance system came up for revision nobody seriously challenged the quality of the degree

programs. The study board elects a chairman, who functions as the de-facto leader of the degree program. It was a different matter concerning the research activities of the university: there was the old principle of research and academic freedom. The individual researcher freely chooses what and how to research. Humboldt spoke of two characteristics of the university researcher: loneliness and freedom. In previous decades, the research councils were seen as guarantors of this freedom. If a researcher could not get funding for a certain project from his or her university, then the researcher could apply to a research council. This system fitted nicely a funding structure where most of the research funding was given to the university in the form of a basic grant with no strings attached. Using the research money was then totally up to the university itself, and basically it was given as an individual right to each faculty member to do research for, typically, 40 percent of his or her time. In this way research management was really superfluous. The only way management was enacted was through the hiring of faculty. It had to be decided which positions should be made available and who should have them. Through a system of the objective evaluation of applicants and the public announcement of all positions, it was thought that one could avoid decisions other than those strictly based on research quality and competence. When more and more research funding is secured from external sources and the research typically takes the form of larger projects with many researchers involved, then this system becomes very strained. The need for research management and entrepreneurial activity arises. Under a system of democratic and collegiate governance with a strong attachment to the Humboldt values, what develops is a system in which those capable of getting funds and attracting talent will expand. But this is only insofar as such research entrepreneurs can fund their activity from external sources. The internal sources – the basic grant – will not be redistributed and there will not be any institutional priorities made. This generates pressure towards moving research resources from the basic grants to the system giving external funding. This is the case when the assumption is made that those that can attract external funding are also those doing the best and/or most relevant and useful research. This again intensifies the split in the university between the part of the organization having a

function of continuous operation – the teaching part, and the part doing research – the project-organized part.

The university laws of 1970 and 1973 defined threefold purpose for the university: to do research and to deliver degrees to the highest level, but also to help spread knowledge about the methods and results of scientific research. This was a reference to an institution called “Folkeuniversitetet” (The People’s University) which was created at the beginning of the 20th century in the tradition of general adult education. It was part of the Danish system of adult education based on a principle of free teaching and no degrees or examinations – the tradition from the Danish educationalist N.F.S.Grundtvig, the main founder of the Danish “Folkehøjskole” (The People’s High School), which gave a liberal and national education for 6 months to 1 year to young people to prepare them for their task as Danish citizens and for the challenges of life. This was called an education for living life using the living – the spoken – word, not dead books. The system of The People’s University made it possible for any group of Danish citizens that felt a need for knowledge about a given subject to get a university faculty member to come and deliver lectures, with salary and travel expenses paid. Each university had a committee running the local branch, and across the country there were local committees organizing series of lectures and courses. In the 1980s a movement began to open up the university to other than the traditional students. Open-university activity started, and the ideas of open access for adults in employment gained ground. Slowly an “alternative” degree system based on part-time teaching and payment of tuition fees was developed. This quickly resulted in a broad range of master degree programs with the aim of qualifying practitioners using research-based teaching. Thus the university was opening up to new segments of society, though mainly to academics or professionals in employment who needed further education.

For a long period Denmark had developed a system of making the knowledge of universities available to practitioners in various fields. A number of institutions were created that had the purpose of being brokers between the universities – especially the

parts doing applied research – and practitioners. Small companies, groups of professionals, farmers and other organized groups could get advice and support from a network of “general technological service” institutions. The development of technology and the increasing importance of knowledge in the economy, plus the rising level of education and competence in both the private and public sector, made it important for many institutions and companies to be able to have direct contact with the research being done at universities. This was new to the university. It was thus perceived as a closed institution, where it was difficult, if not impossible, to get contacts and access. At the same time important segments in society, such as major industries, thought they had a right of access to the knowledge resources of the universities. They were, after all, institutions financed by the taxpayers and accountable to the public. On the other hand, the universities insisted on the importance of their independence – again referring to the ideals of Humboldt. Thus many politicians perceived the universities as possessing knowledge resources that were actually underused or circulated only in closed networks, mainly of an academic nature, and not in the economically important knowledge networks that constituted the new knowledge economy (the idea of which became important in the course of the 1990s and the dot.com bubble).

Humboldt made a remark in his manuscript on the internal and external organization of the higher scientific institutions in Berlin about the relationship between knowing and doing. He said:

- only the science that comes from the inner life and can be transplanted to the inner life shapes the character, and what is important for the State, just as for Humanity, is not knowledge and talk but character and action
(my translation)

Thus Humboldt thought that the pursuit of research was actually a way to form the character of the citizens such that they would be capable of significant and meaningful

action. Ultimately knowledge and research were not goals in themselves, they were – to Humboldt – means to an end. This conception of the university in a changed form was important at the end of the 20th century. It had been possible to create a view of the university as a place for so-called “basic research” or “pure research” as it was also called. The idea was that the university was doing research for its own sake while other institutions took care of applications. These could be institutions performing a brokering function, or institutions that were not universities but locations for applied research and teaching based on these applications. Examples include the polytechnics or “high schools” as they were often called after the German “Hochschule”, such as The Danish Technical High-school, or The Danish Pharmaceutical High-school (both later renamed using the term “university”). Increasingly important segments of society thought that if university funding was going to increase, it would also be important for the university not only to teach to the highest level and to do basic research, but also to involve itself more directly with knowledge matters of direct economical importance. There had to be a pay-off or a return on investments that was more immediately perceivable than publications in journals of basic research, although, of course, such publications should assure the quality of the research and the research teams. Thus the fairly well-established idea and obligation of making the results of research available to the public was amended with an obligation for the university to be a competent and willing partner in the ventures and exploits of the knowledge economy. Sectors of society with very different norms and values thus had to meet and create partnerships. This again and again proved difficult because of the governance structure of the university: decisions were difficult to make and resources difficult to allocate. Many contacts and partnerships were created at the individual level, but fewer at the institutional. One access point where it was possible to make contact and cooperate was in doctoral education, and here it was possible to see a common benefit.

These new demands on the university thus contributed to the abolition of the democratic and collegiate governance system. It was perceived by important

stakeholders that the university was to a large degree unable to meet these new demands. One could say that the university became too important to be left on its own, and the political situation also excluded the possibility that it could be a totally state controlled institution. New public management and a tide of new liberalism did not want to reintroduce the university as part of a large public bureaucracy with a hierarchical line of command from the responsible ministry downwards. The university had acquired extended obligations towards sectors of society, including doing basic research, providing degree programs, and making the results and methods of research known in the spirit of adult education. These obligations had to be met by a type of institution that was more open and responsive. This had to be achieved by changing the structure of governance and thus starting a reformation of the culture of the university.

In 2000 the then liberal and social-democratic coalition government named a commission to look at the university law and the structure of the Danish research system. The commission produced its report in September 2001. It recommended that the university governance structure be changed to a system with boards made up of a majority of representatives from society at large and representatives of faculty and students in a minority. The chairman of the board would come from outside the university. Rectors, deans and department chairmen would be hired and not elected, and there would be a clear line of command from the rector down. Democracy was thus abolished, and only a very limited form of collegialism was kept. Certain academic matters would be decided in an “academic senate” with representatives from faculty.

The collegiate and democratic system of governance had strengths and weaknesses. It secured, of course, a high degree of internal legitimacy to decision making. On the other hand, it had difficulty making hard decisions in cases where external conditions changed. The basic problem was that it depended for its funding on the government. It had no independent funds or ways of obtaining them. Thus decisions were always on

the condition that funding could be made available, and ultimately the only funding agency was the State. Otherwise, high tuition fees would have to be introduced, and there would have to be very large non-public research funding actors. In a welfare state with a public sector of a size larger than 50% of the total economy, this is impossible. Citizens are only willing to pay such high taxes if they perceive that they get value back, and this goes for private citizens as well as companies and other organizations. The creation of large independent foundations capable of funding research is also made extremely difficult. Thus those making local decisions in universities are not ultimately able to turn them into reality, because there is no overlap between the “owner” of the funds and the decision-makers. A British college with an endowment has to manage that, and make decisions according to what is possible, and can of course also receive public funding by doing a job of teaching and research. It can stay independent because it has means to do so. The same goes for private American universities. If they are public they are also to a large extent governed by boards representing the public. In this way the sense of democracy is dependent upon those that ultimately pay. According to this idea, if the university is mainly publicly funded, it is the interests of the public, not the interests of the faculty or students, that should govern it. Others assumed that internal representatives *would* express the interests of the public. These were two conflicting ideas of the collegiate body: that it would take care only of the interests of science – “Wissenschaft” as Humboldt would have it – or of its own more narrow interests. In many cases Humboldt’s ideas could be used to justify the more narrow interests of the faculty or the students. One reason for this was that Humboldt supported the concept of the independent university that was funded by the State. That he was not so keen on independence as was later assumed is seen from the fact that he thought that the State should have close control of the hiring of faculty.

The Danish system of university governance from 1970 to 2003 has been termed the largest experiment in industrial democracy. It was abolished both due to internal problems and to external changes in the conditions of the university. The system

proved itself bad at adapting both to the financial and the knowledge developments in the surrounding society. Without any close connection between its ownership structure, its funding structure and its decision-making structure, it was only able to function in a situation where it received increasing funding, had a benign public owner and could avoid hard and unpleasant decisions.

Working Papers in the University Reform Series:

1. Setting Universities Free? The background to the self-ownership of Danish Universities, Jakob Williams Ørberg, July 2006.
2. Trust in Universities - Parliamentary debates on the 2003 university law, Jakob Williams Ørberg, October 2006.
3. Histories of RUC - Roskilde University Centre, Else Hansen, November 2006.
4. An Insight into the Ideas Surrounding the 2003 University Law - Development contracts and management reforms, Peter Brink Andersen, November 2006.
5. Who Speaks for the University? - Legislative frameworks for Danish university leadership 1970-2003, Jakob Williams Ørberg, May 2007
6. 'After Neoliberalism'? - The reform of New Zealand's university system, Cris Shore, June 2007
7. Women in Academia - Women's career paths in the social sciences, in the context of Lund University and Swedish higher education, Susan Wright, October 2007
8. Will market-based ventures substitute for government funding? - Theorising university financial management, Dr. Penny Ciancanelli, May 2008
9. Measurements and Distortions – A Review of the British System of Research Assessment, Prof. Susan Wright, May 2008
10. Becoming and Being: University reform, biography and the everyday practice of sociologists, Ph. D. Student, Nicola Spurling, June 2009
11. Polishing the Family Silver. Discussions at Roskilde University Center in Advance of the 2003 University Law, Ph. D. Student Nathalia Brichet, August 2009
12. Forandringsprocesser i akademien. En empirisk undersøgelse af medarbejderperspektiver på en fusionsproces i anledning af universitetsfusionerne, Gertrud Lyng Ebsen, September 2009
13. Recent Higher Education Reforms in Vietnam: The Role of the World Bank, Que Ahn Dang, October 2009
14. The organization of the university, Hans Siggaard Jensen, April 2010