



**UiO** : **Faculty of Educational Sciences**  
University of Oslo

**Good institutional governance in higher education:**  
the act of balancing academic, economic, organisational,  
socio-cultural and political objectives and realities

**Webinar**

**On Good Authority:**

Perspectives on Institutional Governance in Irish Higher Education

**NUI and IUA**

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*Prof. dr. Peter Maassen*



# What kind of University for what kind of Society?



## Institutional foundation of the University:

- Combining institutional defense against invasion of alien norms with adapting effectively to environmental changes and new societal expectations/demands

# **“HE Governance Reform Narrative”**



## **Global ‘modernisation agenda’ for HE promoting since 1980s that:**

- HEIs should develop into more integrated ‘organisational actors’
- Institutional leadership and management should become more professional
- Institutional autonomy should be accompanied by enhanced accountability
- Funding basis of HEIs should become more diversified:
  - Shift from public to private purse, including tuition fees
  - Increased competition for public and private funding of HE
  - “Universities should be funded more for what they do than for what they are” (European Commission 2006)
- HEIs should contribute more directly to economic competitiveness and innovation

## **Fundamental question:**

- How does the COVID-19 crisis affect the dominant HE reform narrative?

## **Global reform agenda pressures for change in HE governance, but it is important to acknowledge that:**

*University reform documents give little attention to the role of HEIs in strengthening democracy, developing a humanistic culture, social cohesion and solidarity, and contributing to a vivid public sphere.*

(Maassen & Olsen, 2007: 9)

### **Implicit, but key HE governance reform challenges:**

- How to stimulate the development of responsible ***and*** responsive HEIs?
- How to balance economic expectations with the academic, social, cultural, and political responsibilities of HEIs?

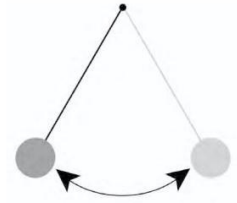
# How to Interpret Changes in Institutional Governance in Higher Education?

- Early 1990s: HE governance research suggests a converging trend in governance reforms
- Assumption: this trend implies that gradually all HE systems (at least within the OECD) will become more and more similar in their governance modes and practices (nationally and institutionally)





# Path dependency: Pendulum of national and institutional ‘filters’



## Reality check in 2010s:

- Instead of one homogeneous global reform trend (NPM inspired) with time lags in implementation, what we observe in HE is a growing international divide in institutional governance modes and practices. National and institutional filters affect, for example:
  - **Professional leadership:** Comparable to private sector leadership or firmly embedded in the public domain and academic traditions?
  - **Institutional autonomy:** Flexible room to manoeuvre or conditional autonomy? How about the living autonomy?
  - **Diversified institutional funding:** Continuous large, basic public block grants or privatization of institutional funding?
  - **Professional institutional administration:** An internally oriented support function, or an externally oriented accountability and reporting function?

# Four stylized visions on university governance and its main aspects

Source: De Boer & Maassen 2020 (inspired by Gornitzka, 2020; Olsen, 2007, 30)

<b>Vision on university governance</b>  <b>University governance aspects</b>	<b>1. Norm-steered academic community ("Republic of Science")</b>	<b>2. Instrument for national authorities</b>	<b>3. Representative democracy (negotiation based)</b>	<b>4. Service company in a competitive market setting</b>
<b>Role governance actors and bodies</b>	Minimal formal governance	Direct link between state authorities and university	Arena for internal (and external) interests	Assure economically defensible management; strategic decisions about profile and niche
<b>Leadership role</b>	Elected primus inter pares	Rules / procedures manager	Politician / negotiator	CEO / unit manager
<b>Authority through</b>	Academic competence and status	Formal positional authority	Resources / networks	Formal professional leadership mandates
<b>Role of the state</b>	Patron and protector of institutional sphere	"Principal" & regulator; control over university governance bodies and actors	Negotiation partner	Facilitator of well-functioning market
<b>Rationale for university autonomy</b>	The university as a value embedded institution	The university as a link in a hierarchical delegation chain	Mixed – Co-determination and interest representation	The university has to be 'set free' for being able to operate in a market setting

## Bath University (2017)

- Students: 17 000
- International students: 3 500
- Staff: 3 000
- Shanghai ranking: 501-600
- 6 ERC projects
- Budget: £260 million
- High tuition fees
- Vice-chancellor salary: £468 000



## University of Oslo (2017)

- Students: 30 500
- Intern. Students: 4 500
- Shanghai ranking: 60
- Staff: 6 600
- 42 ERC projects
- Budget £750 million
- No tuition fees
- Rector salary: £ 136 000



# **Three institutional governance levels**

- 1. National governance actors & bodies**
- 2. Central institutional governance governance and administrative actors & bodies**
- 3. Academic 'production processes' (education & research)**

# How do reform initiatives affect the relationships among governance levels?

- 1. Formal governance relations between national and institutional governance actors & bodies**
  - Towards a more executive governance mode
  - Increasing accountability expectations & demands
  - Growing density of involved governance bodies and actors
- 2. Organisation of and interactions among governance and administrative actors & bodies at central institutional level**
  - Formalisation, standardisation, specialisation and centralisation as key features of professionalised institutional governance/management
- 3. Governance interactions between central institutional governance actors & bodies and academic 'production processes'**
  - Formalisation, standardisation, specialisation and centralisation versus growing need for flexibility

# **University governance paradox**

**“The more university leaders take on and operate in line with the global governance reform agenda’s ideologies, the less effective they appear to be in realising some of the reform intentions, especially with respect to their academic production processes”**

## **Way forward:**

- Finding ways to combine the reform demands for more executive governance modes, and more standardized, formalised and specialised governance procedures and practices, with the need for more flexible governance approaches with respect to the primary processes of education and research



**Thank you very much for your attention!**

[peter.maassen@iped.uio.no](mailto:peter.maassen@iped.uio.no)

Research Group:

Knowledge, Learning and Governance: Studies in  
higher education and work (HEDWORK)

(<https://www.uv.uio.no/english/research/groups/hedwork/index.html>)