

Palgrave Macmillan

The New Flagship University: Changing the Paradigm from Global Ranking To National Relevancy

DRAFT April 20, 2015

SECTION 2 – CHAPTER 7, 153-172

Scandinavian Flagship Universities: An Appraisal of Leading National Universities in the European Context

By Bjørn Stensaker and [Tatiana Fumasoli](#) - University of Oslo

Well over 50 years ago, and in the immediate post-Sputnik era, Clark Kerr saw America's leading universities as increasingly complex "multiversities," with ever a growing number of academic programs, a more active role in socioeconomic mobility and economic development, and as the drivers of knowledge production and innovation (Kerr 2001: xi). This vision of the multiversity has since become an international model, fueled by a tremendous growth in the number of students in most nations and a remarkable investment in research and development. Research-intensive universities now find themselves as the focus of increased expectations and political interest worldwide.

The interest of politics, society and economy in higher education has benefitted research-intensive universities, providing them with additional funding and abilities to grow in academic programs and attracting talent. At the same time, this has been accompanied in many countries by an increasing institutional autonomy. Such far-reaching reforms have assumed that public research-intensive universities, provided with greater authority to act strategically, become more competitive in the global race for "scientific excellence." While universities have indeed developed strategic behavior, they have pursued well-defined objectives, which benefit the institution itself, but have not always been always aligned with national and regional policy goals. In this sense, public authorities have seen their control over higher education shrinking and have had to cope with unanticipated outcomes. Many European universities, along with their responsible ministries, are in a new era of reframing the expectations of performance and outcomes in the broader national and/or regional context. This development can be partly explained by the idea of the "world-class university" (WCU), which has become, in the last decade, an influential label reference point for universities and ministries alike aiming to shape the purpose of research-intensive universities (Salmi 2009).

While there is still a debate on what a WCU concretely is (Altbach 2003, Li 2012), it is clear that this idea has been stimulated by expectations that universities deliver efficient responses to the competition for reputation, resources and talent (Geiger 2004; Teixeira et al. 2004), and more specifically that the leading national universities improve their position on one or more global rankings. Driven by a great number of public policy initiatives focusing on the overall design and functioning of national higher education systems, the policy agenda (at least partly) reflects the ambitions of elevating the research productivity and boost prestige of a group of leading national universities – what are termed *New Flagship Universities* in this book.

In Northern Europe, several “excellence” initiatives and reforms have been launched intended to bolster these elite and internationally competitive universities (Schuetze 2007, Leibfried 2009), usually in combination with aspirations to build higher education systems capable of fulfilling a range of functions and roles in the modern knowledge society (Christensen, Gornitzka & Maassen 2014). Such initiatives include mergers of institutions, but also attempts to secure a more efficient division of labor between higher education institutions and greater integration of the whole system (Ritzen 2010).

The current political interest can be seen as a reaction to earlier reforms in the sector (Maassen & Olsen 2007). In past decades, reform initiatives in higher education have implied de-regulation as a way to create more dynamic higher education institutions (Gibbons et al. 1994, Etzkowitz et al. 2008), building new administrative structures intended to enable greater strategic approaches (O’Shea et al. 2007, Whitley 2008) and entrepreneurial universities capable of competing in the global higher education market (Clark 1998, Tuchman 2009, Wildavsky 2010). These reform efforts fueled the idea of the WCU – a university that is capable of transforming its traditional academic ethos to an entrepreneurial mode, where diversified tasks are taken on under one organizational umbrella, orienting itself on a global outreach, and handling the risks associated with the new global knowledge society (Power 2007).

In this chapter, we discuss to what extent aspects the *New Flagship University* model can be understood in relation to current developments in the Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, Norway and Sweden, that fit their own particular political and academic cultures, and histories. The leading national universities in these countries are characterized by being relatively old, comprehensive, research-intensive public universities funded largely by national governments, located in urban areas, and generally recognized central institution within society. Most of these institutions are transitioning to a broader understanding of their role in the socioeconomic development of their countries. On the one hand they have adopted global standards (e.g. rankings) and reacted to increasingly competitive environments, on the other hand they have balanced their traditional role, mainly oriented to research, with growing expectations of relevance in education as well as in outreach. Finally they have responded to demands of accountability by national public authorities. In analyzing this transition among the *Nordic Flagships*, we carry out a two-level analysis by considering: first, policy reforms at national level, second, the response and adaptation at four institutions – the University of Copenhagen, University of Oslo, and Stockholm University. Our framework for this analysis comes from a larger research project funded by the Research Council of Norway, the “European Flagship Universities - Balancing Academic Excellence and Socio-Economic Relevance.”

The Continuing Importance of National Higher Education Systems in the Era of Globalization

Previous studies on the history of higher education often focus on individual institutions and their rise to fame and influence (Martin & Etzkowitz 2001, Robbins 2003), however the expansion of higher education systems throughout the world triggered the development of system perspectives on the sector (Ben-David 1991, Clark 1983, Kerr 2001), including the role of nation states and their reform initiatives (Cerych & Sabatier 1986). In the last three decades, major reform efforts have focused on the de-regulation of the sector, on attempts to boost institutional autonomy, as well as on the development of new intermediate governing bodies in the sector (Enders 2004). All these initiatives have promoted the idea of the entrepreneurial university (Clark 1998, Etzkowitz et al 2000, Clark, 2004) that is embedded in the idea of the WCU (Salmi 2009, Brint 2005, Bonaccorsi et al 2010) and is closely associated with global rankings of institutions as the key benchmark for achieving the WCU status.

While the WCU model focused on research output and rankings, efforts to create greater managerial authority at the campus level have been at the center of national policymaking and thinking within higher education during the last decade ([Wildavsky 2010](#), [Stensaker & Benner 2013](#)). This said there is mixed evidence on how institutions are changing as a consequence. Christine Musselin (2005) has argued that although there have been transformations in institutional governance and the central leadership, fewer changes can be identified within departments, where teaching and research are conducted. Academics are generally conservative and seek to preserve or enhance their own self-interests, restricting the ability of the university management to be more strategic ([Whitley 2008](#)). Research-intensive universities are in particular decentralized and somewhat unique organizations – one of the reasons why Kerr labeled them “multiversities” with a vast array of programs and functions that often operate individually – and do not lend themselves to general theories of how to implement organizational change ([Jarzabkowski 2005](#), [Fumasoli and Lepori 2011](#), [Fumasoli et al., forthcoming](#)). The seemingly mixed effects of de-regulation of higher education, for instance with respect to diversity and division of labor between institutions ([Lbianca et al 2001](#), [Halffman & Leydesdorff 2010](#)), can be explained also by two central characteristics of present universities. On the one hand universities’ institutional embeddings involve resilience towards external demands ([Olsen and Maassen 2007](#)); on the other hand increasingly autonomous universities engage strategically within their higher education systems, thus affecting them in ways that are unforeseen by public authorities ([Fumasoli and Huisman 2013](#)).

Adding or reforming the mission of universities and constructing a new identity for is a huge a challenge ([Czarniawska & Wolff 1998](#), [Huisman et al 2002](#), [Stensaker & Benner 2013](#), [Stensaker 2015](#)) and is best described as an evolutionary than a revolutionary process ([Martin 2012](#)). This in part explains the growing interest of national governments in Scandinavian countries to push for more rapid changes in the programs and culture of their universities. While governance reforms in recent history have tended to emphasize a more arms-length state steering of the sector, including the development of new intermediate governing bodies, such as evaluation agencies, and more formula-based funding schemes ([Teixeira et al 2004](#), [Enders 2004](#)), there seems to be a growing interest in stronger coordination of the sector – at both European ([Maassen & Stensaker 2011](#)) and national level ([Gornitzka & Maassen 2014](#)). This reflects the general trend in public administration, where decades of New Public Management mantra are now followed by a re-balancing of autonomy and control in policy sectors and public administration ([Christensen and Læg Reid 2007](#)). Although excellence is on the agenda of many countries (see, e.g., [Leibfried 2009](#)), governments are also developing a broader policy strategy in which regional development, innovation, employability and social responsibility are emphasized ([Kyvik 2009](#), [Ritzen 2010](#)). This development seems to have triggered a renewed interest in the design and overall functioning of the national higher education system.

Hence, in assessing the role of *Scandinavian Flagships* and their expanded mission and performance expectations, we think that applying a national system perspective provides a better insight on on-going change in European higher education. Such a perspective goes beyond the individual organizational focus of WCU, and trigger different questions: How should a division of labor take place within a higher education system? How should resources be allocated to achieve the many ambitions directed at higher education? *Scandinavian Flagships* are part and parcel of a system, where the interplay of different forces is reflected in the multifaceted (at times conflicting) responsibilities such leading national institutions have towards society s. In the following sections, we shall provide some examples on 1) recent reform initiatives advocating a more systemic approach to higher

education, and 2) empirical evidence showing how leading universities in Northern Europe are fulfilling many of the tasks and responsibilities identified in the introduction to this book.

The following analysis is divided in two parts: the first outlines each higher education system and the reforms undergone in the last 15 years; the second part illustrates how flagship universities in each country cope with demands and expectations from their national public funding authorities.

Characteristics of Higher Education Systems and Reforms 2000-2014

Our sample consists of three Flagship universities in four Scandinavian countries: University of Copenhagen in Denmark, University of Oslo in Norway, Stockholm University in Sweden. This sample has been selected in order to illustrate how a systemic approach to higher education plays out in a group of similar European countries: small-medium size in terms of population, above-average GDP pro capita, well-endowed research and development systems as well as public higher education systems, high performance according to teaching and research compared to other European countries in the context of the Bologna process and of the European Research Area.

Table 1 Characteristics of Higher Education National Systems

	Inhabitants (million)	GDP pro capita (EUR 2013)	GERD¹ (2011)	HERD² (2010 OECD)	Universities	Other higher education institutions
EU	505,7 total	25'500	2,06	0,57		
Denmark	5,6	32'100	2,99	0,90	8	31
Norway	5,0	49'900	1,66	0,55	8	19
Sweden	9,6	32'700	3,41	0,90	14	16

Erawatch, accessed 16.04.2014

Denmark

In recent years Denmark has seen multiple reforms - at an unprecedented pace - in the higher education sector. The main aim of these reforms is to improve quality, develop strategic education, establish research priorities, and improve the relationships between universities and the economic and industry sector. The most important changes comprise the governance of universities, their missions the funding structures, the criteria for resource distribution, the linkages between science and society, and the scale and orientation of science dissemination, mainly to industry. The overall reform objectives can hence be summed up in three themes: quality, mergers and concentration, and interaction and synergy.

These reforms began with the implementation of a new University Act in 2003 and focused on university autonomy and the establishment of self-governing institutions, and on improving accountability and transparency. The Act abolished collegial and representative councils, replacing them with appointed leaders at all levels (rectors, deans, and heads of department). Furthermore the act introduced boards with a majority of external members and a chairman appointed by the Minister of Science. The reform aimed at strengthening university management, smoothening the decision-making process and implementation of

strategic targets, and advancing interfaces with society. In addition, the Act explicitly states that universities are obliged to communicate and exchange knowledge with the broader society. As a consequence the universities expanded and professionalized their science dissemination activities particularly by establishing new administrative positions and sub-units devoted to external communication, technology transfer.

This reform was followed by the 2007/8 mergers process, which resulted in fewer universities (8 instead of 12) and a concentration of publicly funded research (absorption or integration of 10 ministerial research agencies) in the university sector. The merger process between universities and governmental research institutes aimed at reinforcing institutional infrastructure, sharpening the profile of universities in an international perspective, improving quality of output and impact, as well as increasing international research funding. The concentration of research and higher education efforts on fewer institutions followed the concentration of research activities within particular thematic areas.

Mergers also aimed at increasing the professional synergy between closely related subjects. Another argument in the merger debate, seen from the perspective of the institutions, was that an increased size gives the university management more room for maneuver. By significantly increasing university budgets, the possibilities of prioritizing the funding and the usage of resources for strategic purposes increase as well - perhaps establishing structural differences in resources among bigger and smaller universities. At the same time the economic base for the universities has not only increased with the mergers, but has also become more diversified. Universities are no longer exclusively financed by the Ministry of Science, but also by other ministries.

Since the beginning of the millennium, policies driven by the government and supported by a vast parliamentary majority have aimed at intensifying university-industry interactions, technology transfer and innovation, supplying knowledge to the surrounding society. Innovation has thus been a priority in the enlarged Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation. Universities have been tuned in on the interaction with other sectors in society and the commercialization agenda through management and funding reforms. It has hence been emphasized that the university not only has to communicate but also to transfer knowledge.

In 2009 it was decided that university basic funding should be distributed according to number of students (45 percent weight), bibliometric measures of research output (25 percent weight), external grants (20 percent weight) and number of PhD awards (10 percent weight). The reform aimed at creating transparency about public spending and output orientation at universities. Even though only additional funding (which is just a small amount compared to the overall basic funding of the universities) is distributed based on the model, it appears to have significant impact on the behavior of academic staff and leadership at Danish universities in terms of generating outcome awareness and in terms of comparison possibilities of individual, group and department performance. Increasingly the ability to attract external funding is becoming part of the evaluation of academic staff and university sub-units.

Norway

The Norwegian higher education system has eight public universities with some 103,000 enrolled students in 2013. The system has undergone major changes since the Quality Reform Act of 2003, which granted institutional autonomy to universities that includes a reformed governance structure. In 2005, a law on public and private universities was approved, providing a common

framework for all Norwegian higher education institutions related to accreditation, funding and quality. The funding formula is structured around basic state funding (60%), students (credits, degrees, international students – 25%) and research (partly result-based -15%).

Norwegian universities remain part of the public sector and their staff – both permanent and temporary – are employed as civic servants as in all other Norwegian public sector organizations. Government policies and funding have focused on higher education and R&D as key mechanisms for social stability and economic competitiveness, buttressed by Norway's substantial income from oil reserves in the North Sea. In general, Norway has a predominantly positive, optimistic view of the role of higher education in society regarding equity and democratization, but also stronger external demands and expectations have arisen. Changes in the regulative framework, governance structures and structural arrangements of Norwegian universities have identified the need for quality improvements in higher education (student drop-out, delays before graduation, emphasis on student learning, and better follow-up of students), in research productivity, and the European integration related to the Bologna process in particular.

New institutional governance reforms aim at allowing universities more autonomy in shaping their organization and strengthen management capabilities, for example when it comes to the introduction and repeal of courses and study programs. Since 2004, a new funding formula places a strong emphasis on providing resources relative to performance, both in the realm of teaching (student credits) as well as research (publication points, through which departments receive funding according to number and type of publications of their academic staff). In the Norwegian system, greater autonomy is increasingly accompanied by accountability measures implemented largely by a compulsory national quality assurance system and the establishment of an independent quality assurance agency (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education - NOKUT). Accreditation of institutional status was introduced in recent years along with systematic evaluations of institutional quality assurance systems. New forms of student guidance, evaluation and assessment are intended to improve the supervision of students, reduce drop-out and interruption of studies, and to improve time-to-degree rates. As a result of the efforts, many influenced by the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Research Area, international dimensions across teaching and research have become increasingly important in the last decade.

Sweden

Currently, there are 52 institutions offering higher education in various forms in Sweden. The majority of universities and university colleges are public, subject to the same legislation and regulations as other public organizations in Sweden, as well as statutes, ordinances and regulations particular to the higher education sector. A number of universities and university colleges are self-governing and independent. These have greater freedom with regard to the governance and management of their affairs, but continue to operate on the basis of an agreement with the Government and are obliged to follow the statutes, ordinances and regulations relevant to the higher education sector as such. In the latter part of the twentieth century, there was a major expansion of higher education and the student enrollment grew enormously. New regional higher education institutions were founded throughout Sweden to widen access to higher education.

The Parliament and government have overall responsibility for higher education and research, which means that they make decisions about performance targets, guidelines on how to achieve them, and the allocation of resources. Education and research fall under the scope of the Ministry of Education and Research. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education is the central government agency responsible for matters concerning higher education, but under legislations passed in 2011, universities and university colleges are separate government entities and make their own decisions about the content of courses, admissions, grades, organizational structure, internal allocation of funds (undergraduate levels) and other related issues. Under this law, more freedom was sanctioned to Sweden's universities and university colleges to perform better in a highly competitive international sector. Among other changes, the reform provides universities and university colleges with more power to determine their own internal structures. Two principles must always be observed: decisions that require an expert opinion must be made by two people with scientific or artistic expertise, and students are entitled to representation when decisions relating to education or student issues are made.

Research in Sweden is financed and promoted primarily by the Swedish Research Council. The Swedish Higher Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance specify that all education at universities and university colleges should be based on scientific principles. Education should provide knowledge and skills in relevant areas; ability to make independent critical assessments; ability to identify, formulate and solve problems; preparedness for changes in the student's professional life.

A new quality assurance system is being introduced in conjunction with these recent reforms. Universities and university colleges with higher quality degree programs will be given increased funding and an evaluation is carried out by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. Policies enacted since 2008 have attempted to separate the funding for teaching and research in an attempt to concentrate funding in a few top universities, to change in legal status of higher education (HE) institutions into public corporation (as in Finland), to enhance system diversity through institutional profiles, to strengthen institutional leadership and management. Furthermore there is a majority of external members in the board of universities, (HE) institutions are responsible for quality assurance, and the cessation of staff as civil servants has become effective since 2011. The minister has also promoted voluntary mergers amongst HE institutions, and a various HE institutions have/are considering such strategic moves.

Reform Ambitions of Scandinavian Flagship Universities

The four selected Flagship universities share many common features: they are all located in the capital, hence they have relatively high student enrollments in national context; they have on average slightly more than two thirds of their budget funded by public authorities through block grants; and they all score in the top 100 of the Shanghai ranking.

Table 2: characteristics of Flagship universities

	Country	Founded	Students	Staff FTE	Revenue EUR	Block grant %	Shanghai Ranking	Alliances
University of Copenhagen	Denmark	1479	36 891	9 087	1 108	67,5 (2010)	42	IARU - International Alliance of Research Universities, UNICA

University of Oslo	Norway	1811	26 923	6 066	817	73,0 (2011)	69	UNICA – Network of Universities from the European capitals
Stockholm University	Sweden	1878	29 448	4 932	458	68,0	82	UNICA

- Staff includes academic, administrative and technical
- Figures 2013 if not specified
- Change rate to EUR on finance.yahoo.com 29.8.2014

University of Copenhagen

The University of Copenhagen is a self-governing unit under the state and the Ministry of Science. The board of the university is the highest authority, it has the task of ensuring the interests of the university and determines, among other things, the guidelines for university organization, its long-term activities and development. The board has a majority of external members (6) and five internal members. Board meetings are held relatively often, about 8 times a year, and the university's senior management attends them also. The meetings are open to the public.

Until 2004, the university was traditionally led by a Rector and a Consistory when the Consistory was replaced by a "Board of Governors." The Rector and Pro-rector are appointed by the board to head the university management. The Deans are nominated by the Rector and appointed by the board to head the faculties. The deans appoint the head of departments. The Rector appoints the academic councils, one in every faculty, after recommendation from the deans. The board appoints a university director after a recommendation from the Rector. The director is the head of the central administration. Faculties and departments have their own individual administrations, although the general economy is overseen by the central administration.

The management at UC is responsible for establishing guidelines and procedures to ensure that due financial consideration is exercised in the administration of the institution, and that the information contained in the Financial Statements and Management's Reviews on targets and performance is documented and adequate for the activities of the university. The UC leadership reports to the Ministry of Science with which the board of the university has entered into a Development Contract. This contract formulates the university's objectives and intended progress for a fixed period of time.

The development contract covers the objectives of the UC, organized around research, education and dissemination of knowledge to society at large. Within this frame the development contract lists a number of intended results in the future. As such these do not reflect the overall profile of the university but set out development trends within the university core areas. When it comes to research, the ministry of science fixes objectives regarding the expected production of journal articles, depth of internationalization, third party funding, research activities, and PhD enrollment and degree recipients. For teaching programs at the first degree level, objectives in the midterm address student admission and enrollment, dropout rates, study completion time, examples of the adaption of degree programs that align with the needs of the labor market, entrepreneurship, internationalization, high-quality teaching. Dissemination of knowledge lists objectives on cooperation with vocational schools, continuing and further education, participation and contributions to public debates, the dissemination of knowledge, and evidence of meaningful

cooperation with the business community. Finally, the university is requested to achieve objectives in the framework of research-based servicing of authorities, that is to provide its scientific expertise to the various ministries with regard to their specific needs.

In 2007, UC merged with the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and the Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences, as part of the merger reform initiated by the Ministry of Science. Through this merging, the UC contains one of the largest Health and Life Science Centers in Northern Europe. In 2012 the Rector and the board initiated a series of reorganizations. The Faculty of Life Sciences (LIFE) and the Faculty of Science merged into a new Faculty of Science. Similarly, the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, the Faculty of Health Sciences and the veterinary field at the Faculty of Life Sciences are merged into the new Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences.

With respect to internationalization, UC focuses on the recruiting the best of the future generation of Danish and international research talent. A Human Resources department has recently been established with a priority to build interdisciplinary talent programs for all staff and ensure inter-cultural competencies to meet globalization demands.

The mergers between the University of Copenhagen, the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, and the Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences have increased the scope for multidisciplinary research considerably. The University's strategy document "Destination 2012" states that the university has significant scientific diversity within education and research – a capacity that has been further strengthened by the mergers.

The university has a longstanding educational and research collaboration with other universities in the Øresund Region. The Øresund university network involves 14 universities in eastern Denmark and southern Sweden and provides researchers and students with improved access to expertise on both sides of the Sound. The Øresund Science Region forms an umbrella for research co-operation and operates through six research and innovation platforms integrating universities, industries and the public sector.

With the introduction of the 2003 University Act, universities gained increased autonomy, which they administered very differently. The University of Copenhagen started a reorganization process the last five years – generally a slow pace than found in other large Danish universities, such as at Aarhus University. Nevertheless, the University of Copenhagen is undergoing physical, structural and administrative changes, which are created both due to external and internal drivers. Changes are initiated and implemented both by the university leadership and as a consequence of transformations in the higher education framework and external pressures from society at large. The university leadership has leveraged the University Act of 2003, including allowing for mergers and establishing greater management authority by the Board and the Rector, creating much more centralized institution.

University of Oslo

The internal strategic planning process at University of Oslo has changed dramatically in the last decade. A five-year plan has recently been replaced by a ten-year planning horizon to reflect the long-term effort and investment required to improve university programs and activities. More so than in the past, the planning process involved internal and external stakeholders and was organized with an integrated approach to the core roles traditionally ascribed to the university, and linked to a new budgeting

process demanding performance results set about by a set of indicators. Further, each year, the board decides to dedicate to a special topic central to the strategy. For example, in 2011 focused on Teaching Quality; the following year the board focused on Internationalization, and in 2013 the theme was Innovation.

The new strategic plan also espoused the values of freedom and collegiality, supporting the core university values that include the pursuit of quality, social responsibility, community, concern for the environment; breadth and supporting cutting edge teaching and research, and the university's campus as a high quality and supportive learning space.

The following is stated as the overriding goal: "The University of Oslo will strengthen its international position as a leading research-intensive university through a close interaction across research, education, communication and innovation". UiO aims at increasing its contribution to academic developments internationally, as well as to the task of resolving the challenges facing society today. Some of the key objectives embraced in Strategy 2020 include: increased emphasis on quality in research and teaching; increased internationalization; greater interfaculty co-operation; improved follow-up of students and employees; better management; and a higher level of interaction between external and self-funded research. The strategic plan was structured around five objectives, that were used to build the strategic plans at sub-unit levels: promoting pioneering research, education and communication and be sought after as an international partner; offering research-based education equivalent to that offered by the foremost international places of learning, ensuring the research-based knowledge to solve the major challenges facing society in the 21st century, administering its aggregate resources proactively, providing good working and learning environments such that students and staff are able to realize their potential.

In 2012, a Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) has been established with a view to developing UiO's position as a leading international research university. SAB provides external and scientifically based feedback on the position that UiO currently occupies, and on what will be needed to reach the high ambitions embedded in UiO's Strategy 2020. The board has been also engaged in a discussion on how academic values and academic freedom can be protected. In a recent report from the SAB, the University of Oslo was advised to re-think how the diverse aims sketched out in the strategic plan could be implemented in practice and the key argument from the SAB was that a more flexible and diverse organizing of the university was needed to be able to respond to being a socially responsible, relevant, and academic excellent university – all at the same time. This recommendation was welcomed by the board and the institutional leadership and there are currently several initiatives taken to increase the university's capacity for such a diversified response.

Stockholm University

SU's strategic plan (2011-2015) sets the mid-term vision of the university, namely: "By 2015 the bulk of teaching and research activities at the university will be leading references nationally and recognized internationally". The document sheds light on the importance of academic professionalism and integrity as basic foundations for the strategic development of the university as a whole. The central urban location of the university is highlighted, with reference to its historical aim of becoming an open entity engaged with, and responsive to, the outside world. Reference to the teaching-research nexus and scientific excellence pointed out as major priorities in light of SU's mission. SU's four faculties are the largest in the country in their respective areas/disciplinary domains when it comes to enrollments. It is explicitly expressed in the plan that new strategic efforts are to be

undertaken when it comes to strengthen existing and potentially new areas of scientific excellence (national and international levels). Excellence, both in research and teaching, is to be achieved in tandem with openness and the promotion of equity goals, particularly within teaching. Insofar the “third mission” or external engagement is linked to the importance of active collaborations with other knowledge actors and public and private institutions located in the greater Stockholm region.

The university board is the highest governing body of the university, and is responsible for matters concerning the long-term profile and welfare of the university. It is composed of internal (staff and students) and external representatives (public and private sectors). The university central leadership is composed of the Rector, the Pro-Rector, two Vice Rectors (one for the natural sciences and the other for the social sciences and humanities), and the University Director, who heads the technical-administrative structure. In addition, there are a number of specialized roles that provide strategic advice to the Rector in key areas such as quality, environmental issues (sustainability), pedagogical aspects, and equality.

Quality is a central element across the board, in addition to equity dimensions (gender, ethnicity, etc.) insofar curriculum, students as well as (academic and administrative) staff. Internationalization of teaching and research and strategic cooperation across the higher education sector are also referred to as key priorities. In the realm of research, a special focus is attributed to the establishment of a “vibrant work environment” that is capable of attracting new research talents and help retaining current staff members. Amongst other aspects, the plan refers that staff should have part of their work time dedicated to their own research activities, including the direct involvement in international research projects (particularly at EU level) and, consequently, the development of international networks. Finally, the above report concludes by stressing the increasingly important role of the university in society/region. SU’s third mission includes securing working opportunities for students, ongoing contact with alumni and participation of both staff and students with knowledge transfers to the broader society.

An annual follow-up of progress in each of the various areas is to be undertaken. As a result, internal plans, goals and ambitions are to be revisited and revised accordingly. The current operational cycle sheds light on seven key strategic goals, as approved by SU’s board in December 2010. The above plan is organized around three distinct parts. In the first part the goals and objectives regarding each one of the three main functions – teaching, research and service to society – are outlined. In the second part, the general guidelines framing the work around quality and quality assurance mechanisms are presented. Finally, the last part includes a number of quantitative figures (for 2011-2012) in order to provide a general picture when it comes to university dynamics and its economic situation. The goals per specific area of activity are as follows Teaching: (a) Increasing international exchange at all levels of education; (b) varied and student-driven teaching and examination procedures; (c) active participation of students in matters pertaining to improving education and learning environments. Research: (a) a higher percentage of international researchers and doctoral students; (b) good social and economic conditions for all doctoral candidates. Impact in society (third mission): (a) good conditions that make it possible for students to enter the labor market either as an employee or as an entrepreneur (own business); (b) good possibilities for students to undertake practical training and examinations work outside HE.

The Future of Scandinavian Flagships

Scandinavian Flagship Universities are key institutions in the larger reform efforts of the national systems of higher education to which they belong. While dimensions related to their ambitions clearly are close to the ideals of WCU and international benchmarks focused largely on research productivity, their strategic plans and their activities and ambitions demonstrate that they are attentive to a much broader public reform agenda. What our analysis illustrates is that the ideas of institutional autonomy and the efforts to turn universities into more strategic actors indeed can be found within the Scandinavian context, but that within the last years we have seen new reform initiatives underlining the broader responsibilities of Flagship universities. For example, in Denmark the relation between the Ministry and individual institutions now set out in contractual agreements, and regular dialogue between the ministry and academic leaders that include mission diversity and the role of institutions in the higher education system, their quality and relevance. The recent pattern of institutional mergers in Denmark and Norway reflect this broader interest and efforts at building the entire national system seem to play a stronger role in this region than in other parts of Europe where leading national universities are largely focused on their own prestige and performance.

Why is there this attention to the broader development of higher education in Scandinavian countries? Why do we sense a more strategic role by Scandinavian Universities about their role in building these systems, while also pursue reforms that form an adoption of the New Flagship model?

Historically, and in comparison to most of Europe in which is in the throes of a similar reforms, the Scandinavian countries perform and are viewed to a greater extent as a protector of higher education from commercial and other interest, and not as an intruder into academic affairs. Of course, this understanding is strongly related to the fact that national public authorities have been the main funders of higher education.

There is also a different *governance logic* operating within the Scandinavian region that is more collaborative than the *competitive logic* associated with WCU and ranking that dominates the political agenda in many other countries. We observe that *Scandinavian Flagship Universities* operate in a two-fold level: a systemic level, which is mainly national but also regional; and an international level where they endeavor as single academic organizations in a competitive arena, pursuing excellence and prestige through research and ranking. *Flagship Universities* must balance these apparently diversified missions of scientific excellence and societal relevance by exploring possible synergies with their many stakeholders. Here, it is important to note that this form of institutional autonomy is implying a sort of “negotiated autonomy” embedding the discretion of the Scandinavian universities into the broader reform agendas of the authorities.

Finally, higher education systems in the Scandinavian countries are relatively small, and although these countries have financial muscles and long traditions of scientific excellence, the characteristics with respect to size have made these countries also more aware of the need to plan the expansion of higher education and to coordinate different actors in the development of the sector. Here, small size is a considerable advantage as it also means that such coordination is simpler and personal contacts and trust more easily can be achieved. One might speculate whether these factors also make the Scandinavian countries more resilient to “global pressures.” While the Scandinavian countries certainly are exposed to and are very much part of the current globalization of higher education, it may well be that the domestic embedding of FU makes them more aware of the many competing

dimensions they have to take into account in their development. *Scandinavian flagship* universities want to be “excellent”, but it seems that the dialogue between national authorities and the university leadership puts this agenda into a realistic context.

This is not to argue that Scandinavian policy making in higher education is “better” than in other parts of the world, that the ways in which higher education is governed in the Scandinavian countries should be a model for others, or that *Flagship Universities* in the Scandinavian setting behave in a more innovative way when facing pressure for globalization. On the contrary, what we conclude is that higher education in many countries is still pre-dominantly a domestic affair, regulated and funded by national authorities, and where these authorities have a diverse reform agenda for higher education. In these settings, it seems more relevant to employ a system perspective of the development of the sector than the more narrow approach suggested by the concept of the WCU focused largely on research productivity and reputational surveys. While the idea of the New Flagships University is rather broad and may emerge in different forms, it still seems to be a more realistic way forward for many countries in their effort to build a higher education system for the future.

Acknowledgment: this chapter has been written in the framework of the “European Flagship Universities - Balancing Academic Excellence and Socio-Economic Relevance” funded by the Research Council of Norway (FORFI program, grant 212422).

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¹ Gross domestic Expenditure on R&D, European average

² Higher-education expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP