

Of Crumbling Ivory Towers
and Rising Knowledge Hubs -
Opportunities and Limits of University
Engagement in a Globalized World

Sybille Reichert
NTNU Centennial Celebration
15 September 2010

Ivory Tower

- Originally an image of divine purity (Song of Solomon VII): „Thy neck is a tower of ivory“
- Today an image of unworldly scientists unable (and unwilling) to communicate their specialised knowledge to the outside world and to respond to its concerns =
- Has become the arch enemy of higher education policy in last two decades

Multiple Shifts to Relevance, Effectiveness and Cost Efficiency

- Massification of HE for rising demands of knowledge-based labour – rising costs, falling unit costs
- Students with more diverse qualifications
- Bologna's emphasis on employability and responsiveness to competence requirements of the labour markets -- Competence-based learning
- Concern with national/ European competitiveness and consequent emphasis on research for innovation
- Increasing awareness of global challenges requiring new forms of research orientation & collaboration
- New Public Management and the demands of performance-based resource allocation

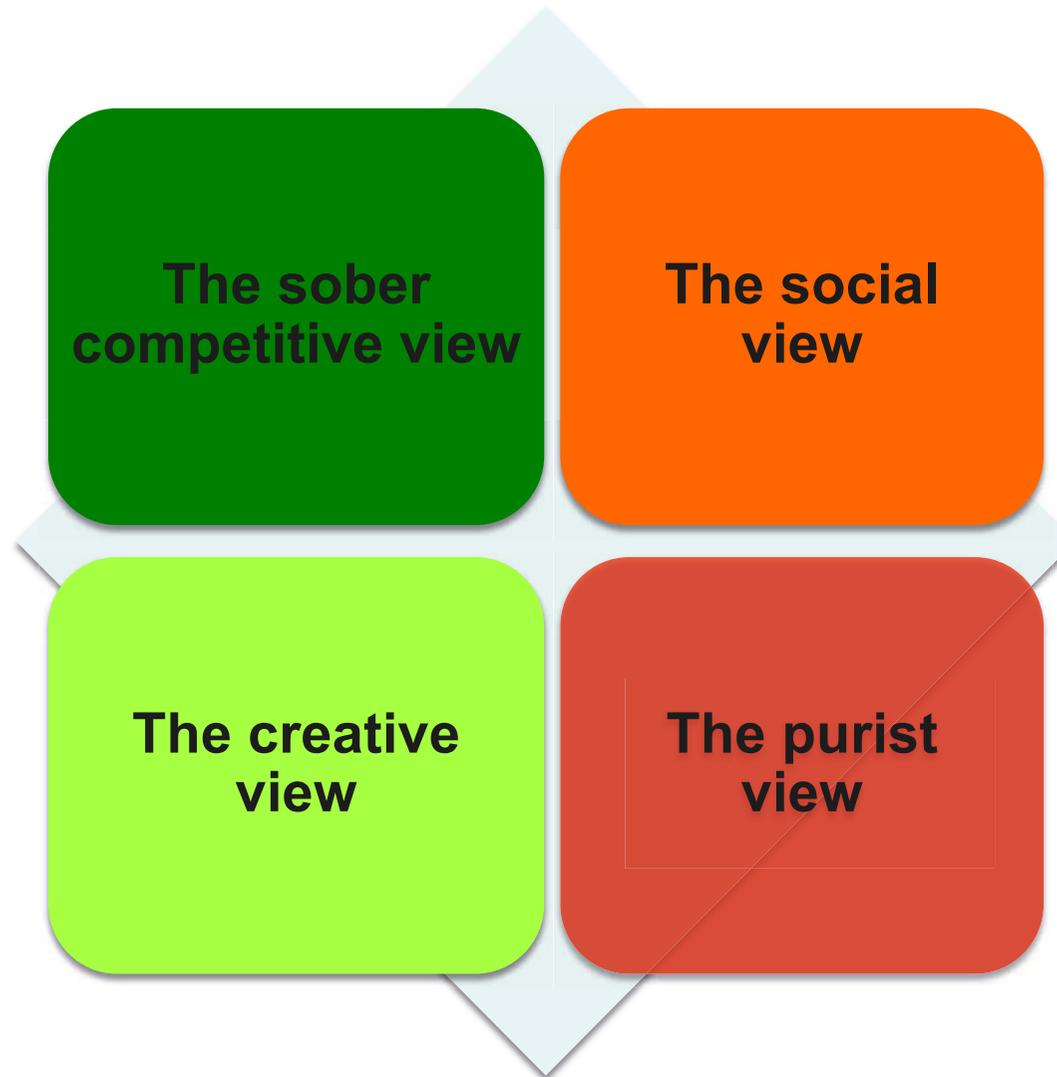
Great Expectations: Universities should...

- educate graduates to be critically minded, innovative, analytical, internationally adept, with good communication and team skills
- train and retrain people of different backgrounds and qualifications for diverse working contexts/ levels / life phases
- produce frontier research to compete internationally for best qualified researchers and research funds and help market knowledge environment to attract foreign investment
- produce applied research of relevance for regional and national innovation
- solve global environmental, technical, economic, social problems (climate, energy, hunger, health, mobility, access)

Great Expectations: Universities should...

- communicate expert knowledge engagingly to a non-expert audience
- compensate the high degree of specialisation in research & education with interdisciplinary networking
- produce applied research of relevance for regional and national innovation, collaborating closely with ind./ soc.
- solve global environmental, economic and social problems in global and regional networks of competence
- find organisational forms that foster and reward such connectivity
- prioritise investment in research areas with maximum competitiveness, visibility, connectivity

Conflicting Models of the University

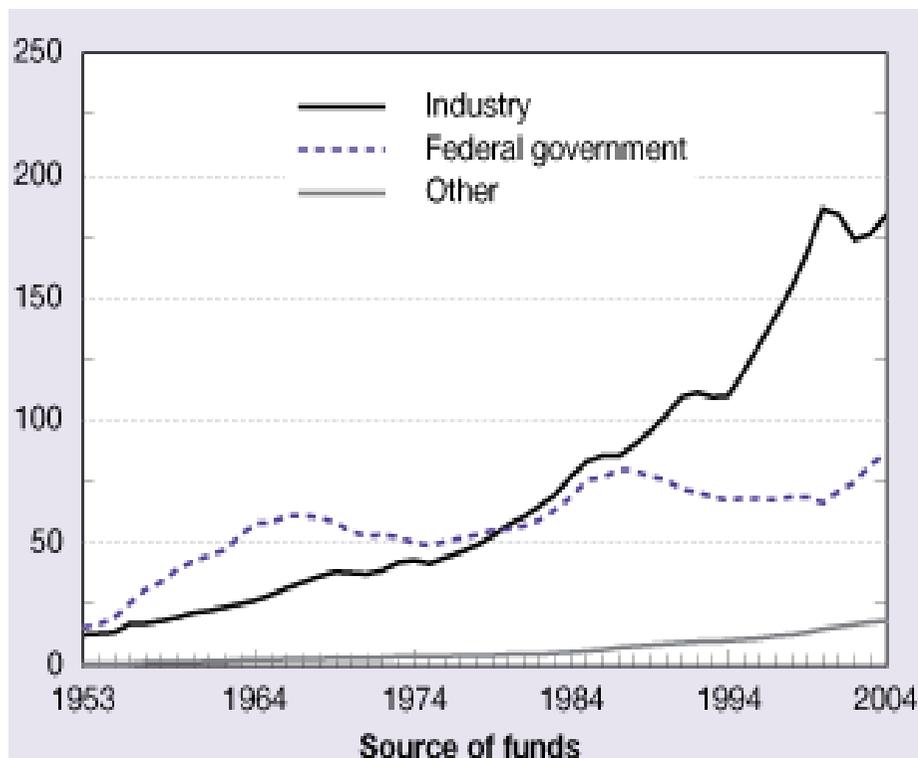


A University Academic should be:

- An international expert in his/her field, highly specialised
- Able and willing to connect with other fields and disciplines
- Willing to compete with international colleagues working 14 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Regularly uninterruptedly productive
- A good networker
- A good communicator, aware of the concerns of the extra-university world
- A good team worker
- A good teacher and learning coach, paying attention to the diverse individual needs, connecting diverse backgrounds into interactive learning environments

New Conflicts and Tensions

Ex. US: National R&D by Source of Funds



FFRDC = federally funded research and development center

SOURCE: National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Statistics, *National Patterns of R&D Resources* (annual series). See appendix tables 4-3 and 4-4.

Science and Engineering Indicators 2006

- Research results and tools restricted (securing IP) – constriction of open science, public access diminished, reduced spillover benefits to society
- Researchers' conflict of interest for privately funded research
(e.g. medical research funded by pharma)

New conflicts and challenges

- Public research funds: performance measures decisive (publications in high impact journals, citations) – Lack of stable, flexible funding for long term risky research with unforeseeable outcome: researchers' behaviour adapts.
- Push toward short term research, problem solving rather than development of new paths
- Loss of creative spaces or seclusion to develop breakthrough ideas

Spaces of seclusion and quiet ?

Cardinal Newman (2007):

„The common sense of mankind has associated the search after truth with seclusion and quiet. The greatest thinkers have been too intent on their subject to admit of interruption; they have been men of absent minds and idiosyncratic habits, and have, more or less, shunned the lecture room and the public school. Pythagoras, the light of Magna Græcia, lived for a time in a cave. Thales, the light of Ionia, lived unmarried and in private, and refused the invitations of princes. Plato withdrew from Athens to the groves of Academus. Aristotle gave twenty years to a studious discipleship under him. Friar Bacon lived in his tower upon the Isis. Newton indulged in an intense severity of meditation which almost shook his reason.... While teaching involves external engagements, the natural home for experiment and speculation is retirement.“

Science / Scholarship as Vocation?

Max Weber (Wissenschaft als innere Berufung 1919):

„A really definitive and good accomplishment is today always a specialized accomplishment. And whoever lacks the capacity to put on blinders, so to speak, and to come up to the idea that the fate of his soul depends upon whether or not he makes the correct conjecture at this passage of this manuscript may as well stay away from science. Without this stange intoxication, ridiculed by every outsider; without this passion, you have no calling for science and you should do something else. For nothing is worthy of man as man unless he can pursue it with passionate devotion.“

To change the world, universities should engage with the world, without becoming all too wordly

To meet the global challenges of the 21st century, research will have to solve problems and identify entirely new paths for future development

A socially engaged university will have to be highly responsive to the outside world, in dynamic dialogue with it –

as well as offer spaces of disengagement and detachment to reinvent the world.