CHAPTER 4

PETER WEINGART AND SABINE MAASEN

ELITE THROUGH RANKINGS – THE EMERGENCE OF THE ENTERPRISING UNIVERSITY

ENTERPRISING UNIVERSITY AHEAD?

A little more than a decade ago, 1994, the Center for University Development (CHE) began its mission to organise the ‘revolution’ (Umbruch) of the German higher education system. In other European countries such as the UK and the Netherlands this process was already well under way. The German science system, being more hierarchical and less responsive to the public than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts and additionally burdened with the structural conservatism of a federalist regime, was reluctant and late in reacting to the introduction of numerical indicators, evaluations and rankings to universities and research institutes. Until then, the university system operated under the principle of equality mandated by the constitution for all Länder to assure equal living conditions between them, thus also to assure free mobility of students, and the Max Planck Society operated on the assumption that it produced world-class research. Hence, no need to move, so it seemed – despite first initiatives advanced by the German science council suggesting, as early as in 1985, that accomplishments of universities should be judged publicly and in a comparative fashion (Wissenschaftsrat 1985).

The shift only occurred when in 1989 the East German science system had to be downsized and de-politicised before integration into the Western system was possible. For the first time in Germany, formal evaluation processes were applied to institutions of science, albeit to those of the former GDR, but henceforth no credible arguments could be mobilised that would prevent their generalised use in the country as a whole. Thus, 1989 and re-unification marked for Germany, as did the fall of the Soviet empire for the Western industrialised countries, the end of the post-war ‘social contract’ between science and society. One of the latter’s central elements had been the institutionalised trust in the self-regulating mechanisms of science assuring the prudent use of public funds and the ultimate utility for the common good of their expenditure. The erosion of this leading principle gave way to a ‘new deal’ between science and society, basically resting on the idea of
universities becoming both efficient and responsible organisational actors, largely
governed by a managerial regime.

Since then a plethora of practices pertaining to ‘new public management’ have
been institutionalised in German universities. They make use of a rhetoric that owes
its concepts and rationale mostly to the world of business administration,
management schools and consultancies and focus on concepts such as
accountability, transparency, and efficiency – increasingly used in more and more
societal domains. Be it politics, administration, art, education or individual conduct
of life, there is virtually no domain left that has not been influenced by the ideas of
efficient management. Regardless of whether the object of management is an
individual or an institution, the main techniques are continuous (self-)observation
and (self-)intervention: As inner or outer conditions change, a new (self-)
intervention is called for. Today, management systems abound that offer help for
systemic inspection and the search for adaptive responses. From New Public
Management in administrative domains via evaluation systems in science to
individual self-management aids, managerial procedures currently pervade
contemporary societies (Power 1997).

Note that concepts of accounting and its corollaries are not just rhetoric, they are
also based upon techniques that ultimately produce the accountable entities they are
targeted at. This is true for individual selves who by way of self-management
techniques become capable of steering themselves and others in most flexible ways
(Foucault 2000; Bröckling et al. 2000), thereby turning themselves into ‘enterprising
selves’ (Miller and Rose 1995). This is also true for institutional selves such as
universities that by way of accounting and other managerial procedures become
capable of steering themselves and others in most flexible ways, thereby turning
themselves into what we call enterprising universities.

It is to the emergence of the new identity of universities that this paper would
like to make a contribution. In contrast to the use of related concepts such as
“Entrepreneurial university” (Clark 1998) or “the enterprise university” (Marginson
and Considine 2000), we consider managerial processes to be a prime indicator of
the new university and of the rearrangement of science and society at large for two
major reasons. First, the ‘entrepreneurial’ is not restricted to selected domains of
academic activity, notably to technology transfer, but rather about to become
characteristic of all academic processes (e.g., teaching, research, governance,
knowledge transfer, public outreach). Granted this perspective, the enterprising
university, secondly, becomes a prime mover in rearranging the relation of science
and society by way of counting and accounting. The ‘new deal’ rests on enterprising
the university so as to render it an efficient and responsible actor, always directed
towards the Common Good. While busy subjecting themselves to ratings and
rankings, evaluations and excellence initiatives, they seem to lose sight of the
contents: what exactly do they consider high quality Bildung, where should research
be headed? Are the answers really to be found in the multitude of mission statements
presented on the Internet by programs, faculties and universities? Indeed, in our
knowledge society, knowledge seems to be defined by (managerial) processes rather
than by (knowledge) politics.
Before considering the broader claims implicit in this topic at the end of this paper, we will elaborate our argument in four steps: First, we will show how the university is currently turning into an organisational actor. Secondly, we will refer to one example that, if largely implicit, popularises the idea of universities as organisational actors which are badly in need of entrepreneurial spirit: it is the idea of establishing elite universities announced by the German government, hotly debated in the media early in 2004. Thirdly, we will delve into a particular instance of public accounting, that is, into rankings. Both the discussion on establishing elite universities and the recent hype over rankings published in the media testify to the readiness with which a managerial regime has gained almost unquestioned evidence. The debate is more about what exactly we mean by elite university and how exactly to perform and communicate rankings than about the restructuring effects on science (and society) at large. The fourth section will therefore embed this example into some thoughts about the enterprising university in neo-liberal society, a society that is based on innumerable forms of auditing. Our final thesis is that the enterprising university as the core institution of science will also shape the contemporary ‘audit society’ science (Power 1997).

**UNIVERSITIES: ELEMENTS OF ORGANISATIONAL ACTORHOOD**

The emerging enterprising university is characterised by four elements of organisational actorhood:  
1. organisational accountability (evaluation procedures);  
2. the tendency towards defining own organisational goals (mission statements);  
3. the implementation of formal procedures and practices serving these goals; and  
4. the professionalisation of university management.

**Accountability:** Quality assurance practices like evaluation and accreditation are important indicators of the overall trend towards accountability. Among many others, the statement by the European University Association is prototypical: “Progress requires that European universities be empowered to act in line with the guiding principle of autonomy with accountability” (EUA 2001: 7). The growing importance of evaluations and accreditations is accompanied by the implementation of specialised organisations and associations. In submitting academic work to standardised techniques of counting and accounting, there is more involved than just organised scepticism and collective criticism. Rather, these practices reflect a broader societal trend towards what Michael Power has called the ‘audit society’ (Power 1997). The problems of formal measurements notwithstanding (as regards bibliometry, see, e.g., Weingart 2005: 197 and Gläser and Laudel in this volume), these techniques rapidly diffuse into academia. In so doing, the attribution of responsibility, which traditionally has been much more individualised, is now transformed into an organisational account. The university as an organisation has “to explain, to justify, to answer questions” (Trow 1996: 310).

**The definition of goals:** Today, the universities’ homepages abound with mission statements and visions. Their vocabulary regularly highlight ‘centres of excellence’,

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1 In the following chapter, we draw on a paper by Krücken and Meier (2006) who outlined those four elements that we find most convincing.
'national and international orientation', ‘life long learning’, ‘interdisciplinarity’ – in the effort to render the organisation accountable. Yet, what is the effect of only half-believed mission statements? On the one hand, they are designed to instigate organisational change, on the other; they are regularly only loosely coupled to day-to-day decision-making. This ambivalence notwithstanding, these statements should not be underestimated as arbitrary or non-functional. Rather, by mission statements, universities give (albeit ceremonial) testimony to what a higher education organisation today is expected to be. Moreover, this expectation is tightly coupled to evaluative and related practices: In Germany, for example, mission statements are of major importance for the accreditation of private universities (Wissenschaftsrat 2004).

The elaboration of formal structures: Next to the above-mentioned techniques to define self-set goals, the modern university creates formal structures so as to competently and efficiently deal with highly specialised tasks. These structures have two broad purposes: technical elaboration along cause-effect lines, and control. Universities today are equipped with offices and organisational subdivisions for international affairs, personnel development, controlling, gender issues, organisational development, psychological counselling, and technology transfer offices. They both testify to and manage tasks that only recently have become regarded a university’s responsibilities in need of offices with specialised areas of competence and staff with special training. Taking technology as an example, informal and personal ties between academic researchers and industry are now explicitly complemented by formal, organised links, while the responsibility for technology transfer shifted from the individual to the organisation.

The rise of the management profession: On the one hand, professors are more and more involved in a variety of rationalised administrative tasks, including personnel management, accounting, and quality control. On the other hand, whole new categories of professionals and related academic management positions are created. An important indicator can be seen in the emergence of specialised journals on higher education management like the “Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management”. Further indicators are specialised courses, programs and institutes dealing with higher education management. As Krücken and Meier succinctly put it: “Note that there are obviously two complementary developments taking place: with the management of education comes the education of management” (Krücken and Meier 2006: 256). The default option in much of this is the US system in which market-like institutions govern university forms and behaviour. The curiosity in Europe is that it is the state that artificially creates pseudo-markets in education, health, and other formerly state-regulated policy areas. This move requires organisations to become strategic actors in the new environment.

Summarising, on the operational level the new regime is supposed to enable the universities, at least ideally, to act like corporations, to be responsive and accountable to the public, and to manage themselves. The expectation is that they will act more efficiently with respect to their (self-) assigned tasks than if they continued to be directed by state bureaucracies. For the management of the universities, state controlled budgeting is cast aside in favour of autonomous budgeting and controlling mechanisms are introduced. Recruitment of staff is now in
the responsibility of the university. Departments and interdepartmental institutes become independent cost units. Finally, a new wage system was introduced that allows for bonuses tied to achievement (e.g. ‘national’ or ‘international recognition’ in the respective field).\(^2\)

University presidents and deans are granted much more power to hire and fire and to restructure departments. In Baden-Württemberg University presidents are officially called CEOs to signal that their universities are being managed like stock companies. To what extent it will change their behaviour is too early to judge. As universities are regarded in this framework of thinking to be like companies they are also expected to act like them, i.e. to position themselves on their respective markets and compete with their rivals. Two such markets are envisaged: one is that of students, the other is that of knowledge. For both good professors have to be attracted in order to teach and do excellent research. Far-reaching visions see the universities (or rather: a few of them) acting on a knowledge market where a major part of the university’s income is realised from patents and cooperative ventures with industry, even though this is only realised by very few of the US universities (Slaughter 1993, Mowery et al. 2004).

Two remarks are in place to contextualise these processes for the German case. In Germany, science and higher education policy is an arena the political attraction of which resides with the federalist structure of the country where the Länder have jurisdiction over the education system including the universities. It is an arena where political activism can roam freely because the consequences appear only much later when responsibilities can no longer be attributed. Also, it should not be underestimated that the academic community is, or rather was, the last privileged, prestigious estate-like group inducing envy in a mass democratic society which tolerates elite status only on condition of achievement and accountability. Legitimated by democratic egalitarian values and, in the current situation, by imperative budget constraints, the last privileges can be erased without risk.

On the basis of their neo-institutional approach, Krücken and Meier conclude that universities, while being organisations that routinely adapt to external expectations, the spread of global models of modern actorhood, as outlined above, will certainly generate a great variety of realisations, including ritual adaptation and symbolic politics at the level of the individual institution.

We assume that universities, which also in their past showed a high degree of openness towards their social environments will incorporate new institutional elements easier than those whose institutional history was mainly defined by a concern with purity and sense of elitism. (Krücken and Meier 2006: 254)

In this vein, they hypothesise technical universities as well as universities founded in an era of mass education to be more receptive to organisational actorhood. We agree: In our view, the presence of both the issue of elite universities and university rankings corroborate this thesis. Both debates give evidence to the fact that German

\(^2\) The drawback is that in order to introduce these measures at no extra cost to the state the income level had to be lowered so that increases can be paid. The lower of two levels – W2 and W3 – is now paid less than a high school teacher which caused the university teacher association to sue Bavaria for the unconstitutionality of this arrangement.
universities have, specific differences notwithstanding, already accepted the idea of organisational actorhood and its concomitant practices and techniques of extended corporate accountability and responsibility.

**BECOMING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTOR: ELITE UNIVERSITIES**

At the beginning of the German debate on elite universities, there was – not surprisingly – a diagnosis of crisis, a problem to which promoting excellence in academia seemed the obvious answer. When, early in 2004, the then minister of science and technology, E. Bulmahn, announced the launching of a competition among the German universities under a title that had apparently been invented by a PR – agency: “Brain up – Deutschland sucht die Super-Uni” (Brain up – Germany looks for the Super University), it had been accompanied by a scenario of brain drain, economic disaster, and dusty intellectuality considered to be hostile towards entrepreneurship. The mix of anglicised nonsense idiom and TV superstar castings was indicative of the short-winded nature of the initiative.

However, while subjected to much criticism, no one denied that universities were badly in need of reform and few denied that creating elite institutions was the wrong move entirely. Whoever expected ‘elite’ to be the non-issue one could have expected it to be after years of silencing or rather tabooing the very issue, must have been surprised. Although some commentators felt obliged to remind the readers of the ‘emotional quality’ connected to any mentioning of elite, this cannot be regarded as a major concern. On the contrary, the debate was rather pragmatic and straightforward. Especially, when the Federal government in early 2004 announced its plan to create ‘elite universities’ after the models of Harvard and Stanford Rectors of the larger universities such as Munich and Bonn rushed into the media with declarations that their schools were already ‘elite’, and that after 30 years of “mediocrity as the measure of all things” finally the support of excellence was in sight. The “visible development of excellence is something we hold to be urgently needed” said the president of the Rectors’ Conference and expressed what had suddenly become a broad consensus.

For the most part, the debate revolved around the question in which sense the notion of elite would make sense at all and that enhancing higher education for some (elite) should not dispense the government from improving the condition for higher education, at large. In so doing, the debate was not only just about elite but rather, thus our reading, it was about universities, already established as organisational actors, should now become specifically entrepreneurial actors. Notably three topics debated among journalists, academic and political stakeholders give evidence to this ‘turn’:

- **Bildung**: While some articles pointed to the fact that Germany lacked a shared idea of what Bildung is or should be, many called attention to the necessity of keeping up a broad concept. In their view, next to producing high-brow scientists, academia should follow a more sustainable and pragmatic path: A successful concept and practice of Bildung is when, in fifteen years from now, we still dispose of well-trained teachers, lawyers and physicians. A major
consensus related to the idea that neither education nor politics have the duty to produce quick economic solutions – they provide but the conditions for them. Those voices insisted on less specified curricula and research agendas. Others emphasised the necessity to develop a university that links Bildung more closely to entrepreneurship and creativity. Such opinions were mostly accompanied by more or less ironic comments. One pointed comment should therefore not go unnoticed: “It is weird that only those people talk about elite that themselves do not belong to this category” (Haase 2004). The topic of Bildung shows that given the diversity of perceived concepts and tasks related to higher education, this can only be realised by a highly diversified spectrum of universities that – in an entrepreneurial spirit – have to find their respective niche in the market.

- **Modalities of financing:** While it was generally applauded that the government set out to invest some money in a so-called excellence-initiative, almost all comments ridiculed the amount of 1.9 billion Euros only. This was generally not considered a sum that could have any effect at all. All the more so, as this sum was identified as having been saved from other academic investments, be it research or be it infrastructure. Most participants in the debate argued in favour of student fees. They were also eager to point out that in order to maintain equal access to higher education (given equal talents and skills) a complementary system of stipends should be implemented. More generally, authors hinted at the lack of a ‘scientific culture’ made of a densely woven network of alumni, sponsors, and public services that would contribute extra funds for ‘their’ respective university. The modalities of financing a costly system of higher education highlights the necessities of universities as entrepreneurial fund raisers who, by way of good performance and consumer relation, acquire additional means.

- **Autonomy:** The universities’ quest for autonomy epitomised their demand for strong, entrepreneurial actorhood. The general slogan was: yes, we, the universities want to have more autonomy. This, however, not only means ‘more money’. Equally important is ‘more room for decisions’. Notably, universities want to select their students themselves, as they attract better professors, and vice versa. In addition, students have to pay tuition, i.e. contribute their share to a society’s expenses for excellent education. Also, the salaries for professors, which, as yet, follow the civil service structure, have to be rendered competitive.

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3 1.9 billion Euros were supposed to be distributed among all universities applying for the status of an ‘elite university’. When, after more than a year of political in-fighting among the Länder, finally an agreement was struck and the funds could be released the DFG could not even tell potential applicants on the basis of what criteria their proposals would be evaluated. For weeks scientists and university administrations had to follow their intuition. In the end ca. 320 proposals were submitted for three funding programs. After two rounds of evaluations by an international review panel, the winners will receive about 20 million Euros for five years, a lot of money for German universities whose budgets have been cut piecemeal over at least a decade and more. However, it is necessary to recall that the initiative was designed to bring the German universities up to the status of the US ‘elite universities’: The models are Harvard, Stanford, and MIT. In 2005, Harvard had an endowment with a market value of 25.2 billion US$, followed by Yale University (15.1 billion), Stanford (12.2 billion), Princeton (11.2 billion) and MIT (6.7 billion) (Infoplease 2007). Their annual budgets can be calculated roughly from these figures by assuming a modest 7% interest.
both with respect to the academic and to the extra-academic market. Finally, universities should have the choice to compete freely on the knowledge market with their specific areas of competence, rather than being forced into a reform ‘from above’, again fixed by many regulations. As if this ‘compulsory autonomy’ needed explicit reiteration, the new law regulating the universities of Northrhine-Westfalia comes under the title ‘Higher Education Freedom Law’ (Hochschulfreiheitsgesetz).

These topics all clearly rest on the assumption that universities have to be endowed with strong actorhood, if an elite is to come about at all. However, in our reading, the term elite is but a hook on which both politicians and representatives of universities arguing for it hang their case:

As regards politicians, their goal is framed in a straightforward wish for “more Nobel prize winners” (Scholz 2004). Therefore politics should strive to invest notable sums into universities; the growing consensus being that each university should be supported according to its individual strength (Kraft 2004, see also conservative politicians such as Goppel 2004). Even politicians belonging to the Green Party who are generally sceptical about the idea of an elite university proper, advance the idea of fostering already existing strengths by helping to create networks of excellence between universities, extra-university institutes and firms (e.g. Sager 2004). An important task therefore is to differentiate among universities: “Times are gone when each university was able to offer everything” (Wulff 2004). Rather, the state has to provide the means for individual universities to compete with each other by setting their goals for themselves (e.g. Frankenberg 2004). With this set of arguments the university as organisational actor is established. Programmatic differences notwithstanding, all actors in politics as well as education spokespeople in major enterprises adhere to this notion (e.g. Becker 2004).

The same is true for university presidents and other scientific stakeholders. They are united in celebrating the effects it has on the universities. The president of the Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat) is quoted: “I observe a revolution (Aufbruch) like never before”, Heidelberg university’s president sees “a new world”, and the science minister of Rheinland-Pfalz is enthusiastic: “The depressive mood is gone” (Spiewak 2005, 45). While all agree that Germany cannot, in earnest, strive for a Harvard university, it should and can advance a diversified choice of excellent institutions in teaching and/or research. If there is any viable role-model in the US, some call for a reorienting their vision from Harvard to either public universities such as the University of Wisconsin or the State University of New York (Weiler 2004). Many scientists call for the implementation of networks of leading institutes for which professional schools would provide a suitable format (Weiler 2004). The diversification of the university system also implies a partial decoupling of the Humboldtian unity of teaching and research (e.g. Bode 2004), as well as the need to adapt the funding system to the pace of scientific development: thus far, it has been far too rigid, sometimes binding research for 10 to 20 years (Käs 2004). Here again, all nuances between the positions notwithstanding, the university as organisational actor is established. Governance, funding, diversification – the university is the major agent. Politicians cannot do more but provide better conditions, either directly
by way of increased financial means, or indirectly, by granting universities the autonomy to select their students and to levy student tuition.

The general message conveyed by the media is that it is impossible to create an elite university by design; it rather evolves – if at all. An evolutionary model would capitalise on strong research centres that developed from third party funds, productive cooperation among institutes of existing research organisations, academic programs and on competition among those centres. The necessary precondition is: Improve the framework for science and research, notable financial resources have to be invested. As some budgets have not been increased for more than 20 years vis-à-vis rising costs for staff and technical infrastructure as well as ongoing inflation some fields (e.g. molecular biology) are doomed to insignificance (Hönig 2004).

The implicit assumption of this discourse is that ultimately the university system has to be reformed so as to create individualised organisational actors endowed with means to govern themselves on their respective markets, orienting themselves towards academia, the economy, and the general public: voilà the entrepreneurial university.

The main characteristics of the entrepreneurial university are its efficiency and its responsibility, both intimately tied to each other by way of transparency: Namely, differences in quality between universities, i.e. between their products have to be made visible to their ‘customers’. Students (who are misleadingly called that) are supposed to be informed about the quality of teaching. Likewise, the ‘customers’ of the knowledge production side of the universities, i.e. primarily companies, are supposed to be informed about the quality of research. For this purpose (and, as frank bureaucrats will admit, to get lazy professors spoiled by their civil service lethargy up and running) evaluations have been introduced in order to create differences between universities where similarities and equality has been the principle. Evaluations, in turn, are the tool to create rankings.

While universities, for a long time, insisted on receiving more resources in order to improve their performance, and politicians reacted by asking for more ‘value for money’, a certain immobility prevailed. However, with the political demand for transparency and the introduction of rankings, things changed. But it was the media, not the universities themselves that responded first to this call for transparency: Rankings of teaching and research (among German, European, and/or international universities) became news value, whether the universities liked it or not.

DISPLAYING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTOR: UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

When the first university ranking was published in 1993 by the news magazine Der Spiegel, it received harsh criticism for methodological flaws. But it started a competition among the media to publish similar rankings. Since then all kinds or different rankings have been produced both nationally and internationally. They

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4 In 1999 a media campaign about lazy professors (“faule Professoren”) fired up the debate over a new wage system for the universities which would be based on achievement oriented compensation (Kaiser 1999).
have become a fad, and a source of income, for example for the semi-official CHE that, although a private company under the auspices of the Bertelsmann Foundation, has the backing of the Rectors’ Conference (HRK). Above all they have become the chief instrument of inducing competition among the German universities and, thus, to provide them with the requisite information of their relative standing, thereby enabling them to devise strategies how to structure themselves, in which areas to invest and which to abandon, which lines of research to pursue, which students to target. The initiative came at a crucial point in time: The universities were under severe stress for financial support after years of coping with deficient funding. Their desperation made them ready to enter into a competition in which they hoped to gain an advantage with their respective strengths. Even before the campaign for the ‘elite university’ had officially been announced several universities declared on their websites to belong into that category.

If rankings are published, the comparative information is made accessible to the interested public, notably students. Yet, although CHE’s primary goal is supposedly to provide information to new students about various disciplines at German universities it also aims ‘through comparison to produce transparency of supply and achievement in the higher education sector’ and to ‘motivate universities to achieve specific profiles’ (Berghoff et al. 2005: B1). The most important purpose of rankings is thus to compare similar units or organisations according to specific criteria (indicators) in order to enable them to position themselves and adapt their behaviour if they want to achieve a higher rank.

The crucial condition for rankings to be effective is that they can inform an organisation so as to adapt its behaviour accordingly. As an instrument for efficient, knowledge-based governance it needs to refer to dimensions that the organisation (here: a university) can influence. There are, however, a number of problems associated with the construction of rankings that should be dealt with first before considering their effects. They mostly concern the appropriateness of the chosen units of analysis.

- **Complexity?** First, universities vary considerably in size and internal structure. Large universities are more complex than small ones, their different departments almost inevitably vary in quality, and they are more difficult to direct. As organisations they comprise different functions – teaching, research, knowledge and technology transfer – the respective quality of which may or may not be correlated.

- **Meaningful entity?** Secondly, it is at least problematic to assume that a university as a whole can act like an industrial firm. University presidents will argue that they are in a position to make the requisite decisions but the power of department chairmen and professors is well known (even though it varies between academic systems and over time). For historical and political reasons the universities are more like an organisational shell for professors working in very different disciplines and having very different interests. (This is true at least in continental Europe and post-war Japan). Their role cannot be reduced to that of middle management underlings who can be hired and fired *ad libitum*. For researchers the status of their department is more relevant than that of the
university as the attribution of reputation happens primarily within the
discipline and not across disciplinary lines. Loyalty to and interest in promoting
the image of the entire university is limited since it contributes to reputation
within the relevant community at best in very indirect ways. The reputation of
departments clearly rests on the reputation of its prominent members. They gain
their reputation predominantly from research, an activity fraught with
uncertainty as success depends at least in part on factors outside their control. If
funding fads shift, if researchers move or retire that reputation may change quite
rapidly. Consequently, the reputation of different departments at one university
may vary widely.

- **Relevant dimensions?** Thirdly, the issue is which dimensions are measured and
entered into the ranking. Almost all rankings are multidimensional. Ranking
entire universities they try to capture their standing as research institutions and
as teaching institutions at the same time. Research quality is usually measured
in terms of publications and citations or some combination thereof (e.g. CEST).
Quality of teaching is sometimes ranked by the student/teacher ratio or by the
number of places in computer labs (which are measures of the conditions of
teaching!), but also by subjective judgments from students, professors and
personnel managers (e.g. CHE). It is obvious that a president and his
administration cannot influence in a meaningful way the number of Nobel
Laureates that their university is to have in the future (this indicator is used in
the ‘Shanghai ranking’, see SJTU 2003). Even the judgments of personnel
managers escape their strategies because these opinions are often based on past
(personal) experience, coloured by biographical contingencies and rarely on
systematic comparison.

- **Experts?** This leads to the problems of ‘who ranks’. The use of ‘experts’ to
evaluate universities or even just departments, as is the case in the Times
Higher Education Supplement (THES) ranking (THES 2004), has been proved
to be fraught with problems. If experts have a large ‘cognitive distance’ to the
fields or units to be evaluated (personnel managers (!) as in CHE’s rankings),
their judgements do not correlate with the more reliable bibliometric indicators
at all (van Raan 2005: 7).

Summarising, the multitude of indicators each of which measures, in highly
simplified form, only a particular fraction of the activities that take place within the
organisational framework of a university, cannot provide a coherent picture of such
a complex institution, let alone rank any number of them along a meaningful scale.
Rankings are partly meaningless if they compare units that are incomparable. For
these reasons many agencies justifiably shy away from ranking entire universities
and, instead, only rank departments.

But evidently, the temptation to rank universities is great because they, rather
than departments, are the focus of identities for policymakers and the media.
Universities can be identified with cities or regions like soccer teams. They are
about to become ‘brands’ to which their environment (staff, students, alumni, the
region, etc.) can relate, provided there is public relation. That is why university
rankings have become news value, and the media have embarked on a competition
for rankings. Such sudden public attention has forced the universities to follow suit. After a long time of resistance they now have succumbed to the pressure. Suddenly they strive for a place on the top with an enthusiasm as if great fortunes could be gained from this exercise. With this we now turn to some of the effects that rankings, methodological and/or ideological critique notwithstanding, exert.

To begin with, the Technical University of Berlin (TUB) is an interesting example in that it takes pains to not appearing as mere object of rankings but rather proactively ‘sells’ the results. To this end, the TUB has published in its press service a list of rankings and listed its respective position. Compiled in a table this not only gives an impression of the plethora of rankings but also of the variety of places that this university has achieved in each of them (table 1).5

Table 1. Selection of rankings, indicators and position of the TUB (source: TUB 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>TUB’s Ranks</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Times Higher Education Supplement 04</td>
<td>Subjective judgments of researchers, student/teacher ratio, citations, share of international students and professors</td>
<td>18 nat’l 60 world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai Jiao Tong University 2004</td>
<td>Nobel Laureates, publications in reputed journals, citations</td>
<td>18 nat’l 202-301 world6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEST ‘Champions League’ 1994-99</td>
<td>Publications (absolute)</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Magazine 2004</td>
<td>Student/teacher ratio, external funding, reputation; only by subject</td>
<td>5, 6, 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFG – funding 2003</td>
<td>Funding in 99-01</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt ranking 2003</td>
<td>Attraction of university by number of fellows who chose university 98-02</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHE ‘Research Universities’ 2005</td>
<td>Percentage of ‘strong research departments’ among total number of departments. ‘Strong’ = external funds, patents, PhDs, publications</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Manager Magazine’ 1999</td>
<td>Opinion poll among largest German companies (a) and consultancies (b) which universities they would give preference in computer science</td>
<td>(a): 6 (b): 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Capital’ Magazine 2003</td>
<td>Poll of personnel managers of the 250 largest German companies, by subject: economic engineering, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, economics, business administration</td>
<td>3, 5, 9, 17, not ranked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For sources of rankings see the notes to figures 2 to 5. In one case, the CHE ranking, the position of the TU is not mentioned in its press release but instead the ranks in specific subjects are given. This is not accidental. The authors must have found rank 34 not very attractive to report. Instead they boast with results such as a 7th place in PhDs etc. This style of reporting is typical as we shall see below.

6 Class of ranks 202-301.
It is evident from this selection of indicators that the measured dimensions are divergent, they pertain to a diverse array of activities, and the results of the respective rankings reflect this diversity. The following figures 1 and 2 illustrate the same effect for a number of universities both in national and international rankings.

*Figure 1. Positions of selected universities in national rankings* \(^7\)

\(^7\) Sources: Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung (2002, 2003), Berghoff et al. (2003, 2004), and DFG (2003a).
Both figures show the differences in ranks for each university individually depending on the ranking and, thus, the indicators used. Where a certain stability can be observed the ranking is the same but in a different year (e.g. Shanghai 2003/2004; CHE 2003/2004 (Berghoff et al. 2005)). For some universities even the inter-ranking comparison produces similar ranks. This is typically the case for the very top research universities such as Harvard, Stanford, MIT, Oxford and Cambridge. This seems to indicate that these are institutions of a kind that does not exist in Germany (nor anywhere else in Europe except in the UK).

Finally we look at two German rankings for two consecutive years (2003 and 2004) to see how ranks of particular universities have changed. The expectation is that neither on the dimension of research (figure 3) nor that of the number of Humboldt fellows (figure 4) choosing a particular university would result in dramatic changes within such a short time period. Instead, we observe such dramatic shifts in 2 out of 8 in the case of research, and in 3 out of 8 in the case of Humboldt fellows. In the case of TU Munich and University of Göttingen their upward move can only be an artifact of the ranking method. The shifts in the Humboldt ranking are most likely due to common short-term fluctuations of the number of visitors that make such a ranking highly questionable.

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Figure 2: Positions of selected universities in international rankings⁸

Figure 3: Ranking of research universities (Source: Berghoff et al. 2003, 2005)

Figure 4: ‘Humboldt’ Ranking of universities (source: Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung 2002, 2003)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>DFG-approvals</th>
<th>Scientific staff 2000</th>
<th>Third party funding in total</th>
<th>Centrality in networks of DFG-funded coordinated programmes</th>
<th>Number of DFG reviewers</th>
<th>Number of AvH visiting researchers</th>
<th>Number of DAAD scientists and academics</th>
<th>Number of DAAD students/graduates</th>
<th>Participation in the 5th EU-Framework Programme</th>
<th>Publications in international journals (CEST study)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aachen TH</td>
<td>R 1-10</td>
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<td>München TU</td>
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<td>Freiburg U</td>
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<td>Frankfurt/Main U</td>
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Figure 5 DFG Ranking 2003 (ranks 1-20 only, source: DFG 2003b: 133)
A particularly cogent example of how rankings become disinformation is the DFG funding ranking (figure 5). It is not only inaccessible but also combines very different dimensions apart from extra-mural funds received by a university from the DFG (only!). Although these results are only a selection of the rankings that have been published it is obvious that their diversity reflects, first of all, the media’s (and some of the funding organisations’) interest in reporting on the exercise. The rankings do not contribute to increased transparency of the performance of universities nor have they improved their capacity to act strategically (see Hornbostel 2001: 140).

Given this result, one should, however, not jump to further conclusions: Despite their problems regarding methods, meaningfulness, and potential for (self-) governance, rankings are far more than just window-dressing for those who excel and ignorable asides for those who ‘lose’. First of all, they have, to a considerable extent, strengthened the competitive spirit among universities. As van Raan states: “Rankings strengthen the idea of the academic elite, and institutions use the outcomes of rankings, no matter how large the methodological problems are, in their rivalry with other institutions” (van Raan 2005: 5). But without clear criteria about what to compete for, or the power to act accordingly, competition takes a turn into public communication only.

At this point, the university as entrepreneurial actor comes in: In their entrepreneurial capacity, guidance for (self-) governance is what rankings indeed provide due to the fact that universities respond to the public responses rankings generate, or rather, to the responses; universities imagine the public to have. In this perspective, rankings are an instantiation of imagined publics (Gisler et al. 2004). Thus, universities are primarily engaged in reacting to rankings in the media, trying to sell success, to explain failures, and to promise improvement. Their hope is, of course, that reflecting success in the media will ultimately reach their relevant publics: policymakers and students.

It is because, unlike in the UK where the ‘research assessment exercise’ is firmly institutionalised and operating, in Germany the rankings have not (yet!) been followed up by political measures, the universities have been left to use the results for their own public relations. This is illustrated by the selective interpretations of rankings issued by the university press offices. We take only the CHE – Research ranking of 2004 and reactions to it. CHE ranked the universities according to the share of departments that are ‘strong in research’ of all departments. Although the universities are supposedly not ranked as entire units but by subject, the report comes out with a graph and a table ranking the universities as a whole. (Only the lowest group is listed alphabetically). ‘Strength in research’ is measured in terms of ‘extra mural funds,’ number of publications, citations per publication (only for the natural sciences) and number of PhDs. Universities are entered on the basis of the number of departments (or rather ‘disciplinary units’) considered ‘strong in research’ as percentage of all departments entered. This is how some universities reacted to the ranking 2004.
Table 2: University reactions to rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>CHE rank 2004 (no. of strong/no. of assessed departments)</th>
<th>Share of strong departments</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TU Munich</td>
<td>1 (4/5) 80%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chemistry, physics, electrical engineering and information technology, engineering</td>
<td>This is the result of fundamental structural reforms. Our next goal is the international top class. MIT and Stanford are the benchmarks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMU Munich</td>
<td>2 (9/12) 75%</td>
<td></td>
<td>English, biology, economics, education, history, law, pharmacology, physics, economics</td>
<td>We can be proud of this top position … we can strengthen it further. We must carry out the necessary structural reforms to be ready for the international competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Bonn</td>
<td>3 (7/10) 70%</td>
<td></td>
<td>English, history, Law, pharmacology, physics, chemistry, economics</td>
<td>One must always look upon rankings with care but that we are more and more often on one of the first positions is a confirmation of our efforts to develop the University of Bonn into one of the research universities of international rank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Freiburg</td>
<td>7 (7/11) 63.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td>English, biology, history, law, sociology, physics, economics</td>
<td>The university has stabilized its position in the top group … After third positions in the past two years Freiburg has moved to second place in their crucial CHE rankings of ‘top position by scientist’ (relative indicators).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Cologne</td>
<td>16 (4/11) 36.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economics, law, sociology, BWL</td>
<td>University of Cologne makes a very good standing – unfortunately biology and physics have been ranked falsely – as a result of the CHE not having the crucial data for these fields … if one took these data into account the university belonged to the top 10 German universities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: press releases taken from university websites.
The pattern is anything but surprising. The universities that come out on top declare this as justified and deserved. Those that end up on the lower ranks pick out detailed information that can help to paint a brighter picture and/or they question the methodology of the ranking altogether. (To be sure, the methodology is not quite clear even where it is explained; see Berghoff et al. 2002). In the eyes of CHE these rankings are addressed to established and young scientists and scholars (ibid.). In actual fact they contain little information that could prove to be helpful to them. How are they to translate a university’s top or bottom position into concrete action? Instead, the rankings are a media event and are used as a way for universities to position themselves in a race watched by the (imagined) public. So far (as of early 2006) none of the rankings have been elevated to an official status consented by science policymakers and universities alike. However, in spite of a lack of coercion after years of resistance and critique even on the side of the policymakers and science administrators suddenly the new neo-liberal rhetoric of competition, evaluation and market orientation has taken a firm hold of academia. It has to be noted that the rhetoric initiates and legitimates a sweeping institutional change that goes far beyond the practical, useful, and doable. This can only be explained with the increasing practice and plausibility of the ‘entrepreneurial university’ that is part and parcel of the all-encompassing audit culture, to which we will now turn.

Efforts are underway to achieve some common measures, and an ‘institute of quality control’ (IfQ) has been founded under the umbrella of a consortium of the DFG, Humboldt University, the Berlin Science Center, and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, but it is not clear when and if at all the IfQ will be in a position to create a unified ranking system accepted by the Länder and the scientific community alike.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>CHE rank 2004 (no. of strong/no. of assessed departments) share of strong departments</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Rostock</td>
<td>No rank (0/11) 0%, listed in bottom group</td>
<td></td>
<td>This follows inevitably from the methodology as the smaller institutions cannot have the large absolute numbers. One cannot compare a gorilla with diligent ants and declare the gorilla the winner only because it weighs more. The results will be taken seriously …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Univ. of Hohenheim</td>
<td>66 (1/2) 50%</td>
<td>BWL</td>
<td>The ranking proves the university to be one of the strongest research ‘lighthouses’ in the region together with Stuttgart university. According to CHE definition Hohenheim takes a position in the top group of the 12 particularly strong universities in Germany.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The universities that come out on top declare this as justified and deserved. Those that end up on the lower ranks pick out detailed information that can help to paint a brighter picture and/or they question the methodology of the ranking altogether. (To be sure, the methodology is not quite clear even where it is explained; see Berghoff et al. 2002). In the eyes of CHE these rankings are addressed to established and young scientists and scholars (ibid.). In actual fact they contain little information that could prove to be helpful to them. How are they to translate a university’s top or bottom position into concrete action? Instead, the rankings are a media event and are used as a way for universities to position themselves in a race watched by the (imagined) public. So far (as of early 2006) none of the rankings have been elevated to an official status consented by science policymakers and universities alike. However, in spite of a lack of coercion after years of resistance and critique even on the side of the policymakers and science administrators suddenly the new neo-liberal rhetoric of competition, evaluation and market orientation has taken a firm hold of academia. It has to be noted that the rhetoric initiates and legitimates a sweeping institutional change that goes far beyond the practical, useful, and doable. This can only be explained with the increasing practice and plausibility of the ‘entrepreneurial university’ that is part and parcel of the all-encompassing audit culture, to which we will now turn.

10 Efforts are underway to achieve some common measures, and an ‘institute of quality control’ (IfQ) has been founded under the umbrella of a consortium of the DFG, Humboldt University, the Berlin Science Center, and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, but it is not clear when and if at all the IfQ will be in a position to create a unified ranking system accepted by the Länder and the scientific community alike.
ENTERPRISING UNIVERSITY IN THE AUDIT SOCIETY

To echo Bill Readings’ (1996) *The University in Ruins*, the ‘grand narrative’ that traditionally defined the function of the university has shifted from the Kantian concept of ‘reason’ and the Humboldtian idea of ‘culture’ to the modern technobureaucratic idea of ‘excellence’. The University of Excellence is less concerned with issues of scholarship or disciplinary knowledge than with ‘output productivity’, ‘Best Practice’, ‘Quality Assurance’ and ‘value for money’. The contents of teaching and research matter less than the fact that it be excellently taught or researched (Readings 1996: 13).

Brenneis et al. (2005) rightly maintain that the university of excellence has not simply replaced the earlier models of the university. Rather, as they show by analysing the Draft Strategic Plan of the University of Auckland (a typical document of the accountable organisation), both models co-exist. On the one hand, there is the classical model of a university as a community of scholars, an institution that imparts universal knowledge in the traditions of the cultures and common human values it reflects; and an institution that educates students as responsible and contributing members of, and future leaders of, their societies. On the other hand, there is the more market-oriented and neoliberal model which pictures the same university as “a leader in innovation and the creation of knowledge and development of intellectual and social capital, contributing to the advancement of human condition generally and the increase in wealth and living standards in their local society in particular” (University of Auckland’s draft strategic plan 2003, quoted in Brenneis et al. 2005: 4). In other words: Today’s university is now expected to succeed with paradoxical goals of fostering the creation of a sort of managerial elite while training a mass of students to underpin the industrial requirements of a nation operating in a competitive global economy dedicated to ‘wealth creation’ and the exploitation of patents and other forms of intellectual capital (see Smith and Webster 1997: 1).

A striking example for incorporating the classical model into the neo-liberal one in Germany is the ‘Zeppelin University’ (ZU), a recently founded private university. On its homepage ‘about us’, we read:

Zeppelin University defines itself as an individualized, international and interdisciplinary educator of well-rounded decision-makers and creative innovators in the fields of business, culture and politics, as well as a multi-disciplinary research institutions exploring issues relevant to society (…). Our objective: the uncompromising pursuit of academic curiosity and excellence (…) equal emphasis on the development of personality and the acquisition of an excellent academic qualification by balancing today’s relevant management and communication tools (‘doing tools’) with decision-making abilities, methodical thinking and specialized theoretical knowledge... (Zeppelin University 2006)

While the ZU elegantly plays with academic and managerial quality, stylising their skilful combination as ideal education for future managers in ‘medialised’ knowledge societies, it also testifies to the ease with which the managerialist regime re-orders the prior one. Moreover, it hints at an important reason why it has been introduced and accepted so zealously on a larger scale: The scientific system already abounds with epistemic (e.g., organised scepticism) and non-epistemic values (e.g.,
orientation toward the Common Good) as well as with procedures of self-control (e.g., peer review). Against this backdrop, science is not antithetic, but rather highly receptive to the epistemic value of quality (that is, an allegedly new understanding thereof), to the introduction of more non-epistemic values (e.g., marketability of both university and their students) and to more forms of control (e.g., ratings, rankings) demanded by the techno-bureaucratic model. In particular, the appeals to audit and quality cannot be rejected:

First, the current reform of the university towards an entrepreneurial entity, driven by the imperatives of audit, is designed to subject universities to new regimes of economy and efficiency. The rationale for this is that, as public institutions and recipients of taxpayers’ money, universities must be made ‘more accountable’ to their various stakeholders’ and to the public. Most universities thus have adopted a managerial form of accountability geared to measuring and enhancing ‘productivity.’ Regular external and internal audits of research output and teaching quality have become the norm. We accept these in part because they are couched in the benign language of ‘transparency’ and ‘accountability’ that is hard to oppose without appearing Antediluvian. The scientific community cannot deny being accountable to the public, it cannot resist the demand for transparency, because pertaining to its internal procedures of peer review and quality control it lays claim to that value itself, and it cannot, least of all, reject the demand for efficiency and prudence in the use of public money. Audits are, thus, protected by a shield of the uncontested values of democratic governance.

Secondly, in an analogous fashion this protective shield pertains to the norm of quality as well. Readings (1996) made the particularly important observation that it would be anachronistic to think of ‘excellence’ as an ideology. What makes it so effective as a political instrument is that excellence has no content; it is neither true nor false. Like other political technologies, ‘excellence’ presents itself as emphatically non-ideological – which is precisely why it is so hard to contest or challenge. Could any ‘reasonable person’ be opposed to raising standards or enhancing quality?

Both appeals to democratic governance and to improving quality seem to immunise the managerial regime of the emerging enterprising university from critique. Indeed, efforts to adapt the university to the exigencies of globalised labour markets, contracting budgets and new forms of governance deserve support. The critique we advance here is not directed against reform of the university nor should a past golden age of the university be implied against which the shortcomings of the present reforms are being judged. The critique is rather directed against the ritualisation of reform, against the mindless application of managerial tools the reasons of whose generalisability are feeble and whose consequences remain unreflected. It is directed against the irrationalities that indicate the transcendence of the aspirations originally initiating the reform, and it is directed against the all too well known fate of reforms, namely that the reformers don’t themselves use the models they insist their targets use. The consequences of the ranking and evaluation exercise craze become glaringly evident when principles of management are shown to be self-contradictory. Here are some examples:
• **Cost.** The managerial reform produces costs. On the one hand, an expanding bureaucracy administering the new regime – both within the universities and outside in the form of the newly established evaluation and accreditation industry – is concerned with implementing the evaluation schemes according to the textbook. But often it has no direct experience of the internal organisation of a university nor does it have the time and energy to reflect on secondary effects. Thus, it can be observed already that the most fundamental principle of all evaluative and controlling measures is violated regularly, namely that the cost of these measures must not exceed the gains. Hence, controlling the costs of academic controlling would be a worthwhile endeavour.11

• **New academic tasks.** Self-auditing, responding to recurring evaluation exercises, preparing project proposals for grant applications now take up a considerable share of the researchers’ time. In some cases, e.g. the EU funding for research, the task of preparing the requirements are so complex that member countries have set up specialised bureaucracies to help researchers. In addition, each university has its own staff overseeing the process. At the same time the success rate of grant applications to major funders has diminished, roughly from 50% in the early 1990s to 30% in 2004, with the tendency to decrease further as more and more applicants join the competition. (In some programs and in some foundations it is said to be as low as 10%). The real success is disputably not the achievement of better research but of increasing the time spent collectively on writing applications. Nowhere are these effects calculated as costs.12

• **Contradictory norms of knowledge production.** Growing market pressures on universities continue to exacerbate these imbalances, particularly by eroding disciplinary knowledge practices: With changes in the nature of knowledge production, faculties as well as individual researchers are spending more time working on interdisciplinary teams and workforces, doing community service projects and public scholarship. Interestingly enough, although the call for scholars to produce more ‘robust’, relevant, and publicly responsible research is tantamount to a novel norm for science, it is never the type of research considered to produce excellence. Transdisciplinarity, in this respect, is a highly time-consuming instance of joint knowledge production that researchers who wish to excel should rather refrain from (see Maasen and Lieven 2006).

• **Controlling what?** Management supports the new regime of audit because it provides a tool not only for measuring productivity but also for ‘incentivising’ and controlling the academic workforce (‘discipline and publish’ is how some academics – *pace* Foucault – describe this new regime of ‘constant visibility’ before the gaze of anonymous officials). The result is that university departments and even individual staff members must now be ‘benchmarked’

11 See the papers by Cozzens and Kneller in this volume discussing the relative merits of input versus output control.

12 This is at least true for Germany. In the US – several years ahead, as usual – the National Science Board has established a task force to think about devising an alternative to the current review system to allow for radically innovative research. The underlying conviction is, of course, that the present system creates pressures to do mainstream research only.
against each other and then ranked in competitive national and international league tables – what is more, the criteria for audit-based governance of research are vacuous because they are utterly self-referential: In order to attain the higher score’s of one’s competitors, the same strategies are being intensified: more publications in higher-impact journals, more extra-mural funds, more international contacts, but this does not answer the political questions which disciplines to favour, which topics to choose, which funders to apply to, in which journals to publish. A research system in which all actors are oriented toward the same external indicators runs the risk of losing its diversity and thus its innovativeness because the indicators are severely limited in their behavioural orientation function, and they trigger the same strategic reactions.

Indeed, perhaps the most perplexing characteristic of the desire to quantify and evaluate everything is that it short-circuits discussion and debate about quality and contents. It acts as a veritable ‘anti-politics’ machine (see Ferguson 1990; Scott 2001). While advocates of these reforms claim they have weeded out mediocrity and promoted excellence, critics argue that they have induced conflict and stress, undermined collegiality and intellectual freedom, and fuelled a culture of collusion and compliance (Shore and Wright 1999). ‘Elite’ is created by ranking, i.e. by (quantitative) procedure, not by content. Reflecting on this, Michael Power (1997), too, emphasises that in order to be audited, an organisation must indeed actively transform itself into an auditable commodity, structured to bring their procedures into line with the anticipated standards demanded by external assessors – scholarly, professional or lay. The impact of audit procedures on university culture is therefore to engender a coercive type of accountability.

In the audit society, Power argues that the rise of audit can be explained as a response to the uncertainties of ‘risk society’. Taking up ideas of social theorists such as Beck and Giddens, Power proposes that the audit explosion represents “a distinct response to the need to process risk”: a process designed to provide “visions of control and transparency which satisfy the self-image of managers, regulators and politicians” (ibid.: 143). What is needed, perhaps, is a more sophisticated understanding of the concept of ‘accountability’, one that distinguishes between its ‘democratic’ and ‘autocratic’ forms. While this call for ‘more politics’ may seem too idealistic, this need not be the case: We rather suggest applying the principles of accountability, efficiency and transparency to the exercise itself: Universities, as organisational actors, should act responsibly by way of taking account of the costs and gains of accounting first. More deliberations may prove more efficient than hitherto thought of. Finally, ratings, rankings, evaluations and elite, while highly functional for restructuring the system of higher education toward a more diversified and dynamic element of the knowledge society, are badly in need of more transparency themselves. And what could be more appropriate to the spirit of the new governance than self-application?
REFERENCES


