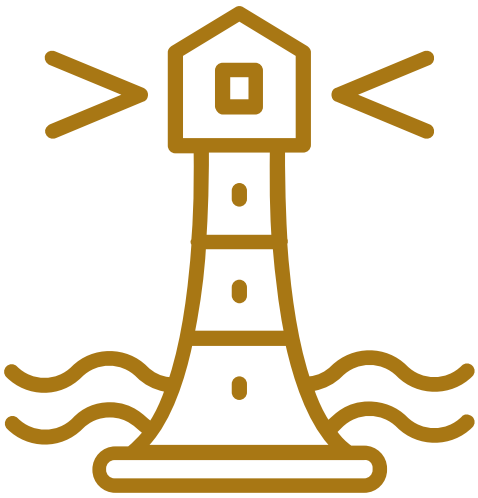
TILBURG SERIES IN ACADEMIC EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, CHARACTER

Beacons and Movements

About Universities

Professor Wim van de Donk

Edited by
Sander Bax, Gerwin van der Laan and Tessa Leesen



TILBURG UNIVERSITY

Beacons and Movements

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2 Introduction

Introduction

Beacons and Movements. About Universities

This special edition of the Tilburg Series in Academic Education presents the 2023 Willem Witteveen Lecture, which was delivered on April 13, 2023 by the Rector Magnificus and President of the Executive Board of Tilburg University, Professor Wim van de Donk.

Tilburg Series in Academic Education

The Tilburg Series in Academic Education was launched in 2017 to promote the educational vision and the educational profile of Tilburg University, which is built on Knowledge, Skills, and Character. Ever since, the Series has offered a platform to reflect on the challenges that higher education faces, has promoted academic education, and has highlighted initiatives that educators take to provide students with high-quality and innovative education. Previous editions in the series are:

- De Regt, H., & van Lenning, A. (2017). *Exploring an Educational Vision for Tilburg University*. Tilburg Series in Academic Education; Vol. 1. Tilburg: Tilburg University.
- Joos, P.P.M., & Meijdam, L. (2019). *Innovation in Higher Education: Needed and Feasible*. Tilburg Series in Academic Education; Vol. 2). Tilburg: Tilburg University. ISBN: 978-94-6167-385-5
- Leesen, T. & van Lenning, A. (2020). *Success and Failure in Higher Education: Building Resilience in Students*. Tilburg Series in Academic Education; Vol. 3. Tilburg: Tilburg University.
- Van Lenning, A. & de Regt, H. (2022). *Online Academic Education: What to Keep and What to Drop?* Tilburg Series in Academic Education; Vol. 4. Tilburg: Tilburg University.
- Bax, S., Laan, G. van der, & Leesen, T., (2023). *Breaking Barriers: Innovation through Collaboration*. Tilburg Series in Academic Education; Vol. 5. Tilburg: Tilburg University.

The Willem Witteveen Lecture

In his Willem Witteveen Lecture, Wim van de Donk reflects on the future of the university as a knowledge institute in today's disruptive world. Ever since its foundation in late medieval Europe, the university has been a bastion of truth-finding: a seamark. Today, however, the university is being challenged by an interplay of complex societal, cultural, and technological motions – waves – crashing up against the centuries-old institution, sometimes forcefully, at other times more gently and almost imperceptibly. Wim van de Donk examines how to safeguard the essential values of the university. What should the university's center of gravity be? What developments require the university to be vigilant? And where does the university discover opportunities? In his quest for answers, Wim van de Donk underlines the high relevance of interconnectedness, both within the university and outside.

Willem Witteveen enjoyed and excelled in using metaphors – hence the metaphor of the university as a seaport, which dynamically connects a wide variety of actors and stakeholders.

The annual Willem Witteveen Lecture is dedicated to the memory of Professor Willem Witteveen of Tilburg Law School, and founding father of University College Tilburg, who together with his wife and his daughter Marit, a student in the Liberal Arts and Sciences Bachelor's program at Tilburg University, died when flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine in the summer of 2014. Through the Willem Witteveen Lectures, Tilburg University commemorates and celebrates Professor Witteveen's keen sense of justice and his sophisticated intellectualism, which were both firmly embedded in the humanistic and academic traditions.

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Beacons and Movements

About Universities

Professor Wim van de Donk[1]

Willem Witteveen Lecture 2023

'It is both natural and unnatural to discuss institutions as if they embody an abiding, single purpose that provides a compass for decision-making. It is natural because complex institutions are otherwise unmanageable, adrift and open to all competing pressures. But it is unnatural for precisely the same reason. Highly differentiated organizations can be limited to key objectives only if they are inherently stable and unchanging. Universities are neither, which is why discussions today are more likely to focus on "changing roles" and "future challenges" that bypass the question of an institutional essence. Yet any discussion of "changing roles" inevitably invites a backward look.' *(From: Sheldon Rothblatt, The Modern University and Its Discontents. The Fate of Newman's Legacies in Britain and America)*

'The university has become a world of fiction. It is regularly said in university circles, though rarely aloud, that life in that twilight zone is not good and that the increased administrative burden yields relatively little benefit for the key tasks of the university. It is notable how little this type of comment is translated into effective promotion of interests or political action.' *(From Witteveen: Het schemerduister van de universiteit, 1992)*

[1] Prof. Wim. B.H.J. van de Donk is Rector Magnificus and President of the Executive Board of Tilburg University. He is giving this speech in a personal capacity. He would like to thank Corine Schouten for editing and Vertaalcentrum-VU for translating this publication into English.

Introduction

It is the beginning of July 2014. Angela Merkel meets Vladimir Putin at the soccer World Cup final between the host country Brazil and the Federal Republic of Germany. Putin is there because Russia will be the host country in 2018. For the umpteenth time there is talk of the importance of negotiating a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine. Russia annexed the strategically important Crimea peninsula in the early spring of 2014. Tensions are mounting. Pro-Russian units are operating in eastern Ukraine.

A month earlier – on June 6th, 2014, during the D-Day commemorations on the Normandy coast – Putin spoke to Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian president. That was of little avail, because during the meeting in Brazil reports emerged of the shooting down of a Ukrainian AN-26 military transport aircraft in the Luhansk region. At the very time when Putin was promising to sit down and negotiate a ceasefire.

Two weeks after the soccer match. When a report appeared on the internet on the afternoon of July 17th about the downing of another AN-26 near the village of Torez, between Donetsk and the Russian border, Igor Strelkov reacted immediately. Strelkov was the leader of the pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine, and proud of the prey that had fallen victim to their increased firepower: 'We warned them: don't fly through "our air".' (Myers, 2017: 537-528). But Strelkov, convicted as Igor Girkin and back in Moscow since the end of last year after trying to fight on the front with the Russians, was talking not about an AN-26 but about a Boeing 777. The aircraft in which Tilburg professor and Senator Willem Witteveen, his wife Lidwien, and his daughter Marit were on their way to their holiday in Kuala Lumpur.

MH17, flight 17. On July 17, 2014. We celebrated the summer. Willem was planning to do so too: the manuscript of his beautiful, posthumously published book (*De wet als kunstwerk*)[2] had just been submitted. I remember the intense phone call from my then chief of staff and the journalists from Omroep Brabant. Because it soon became clear that many people from Brabant were on that flight. 48 of the total of 283 passengers. Willem, Lidwien, and Marit came down with them in fields strewn with debris. The fields of sunflowers that will stay forever etched in our memories. Just like the sad arrivals in Eindhoven.

Their passing still hurts every day, even as we mark the jubilee of our Law School, where Willem was a highly regarded and valued colleague. It is for this reason that I consider it the utmost honor to give this lecture in his memory.[3]

[2] Witteveen, 2014.

[3] As I said earlier, I am giving this lecture in a personal capacity, like the commemorative speech I gave (and which subsequently appeared in print) as part of the series of lectures in Willem's memory organized by Gabriel van den Brink (then professor of Social Administration at our university). Reading that contribution again, I was struck by the attention devoted to digitization, the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, and a broad education for our students. I will also devote attention to these subjects in this lecture (Van de Donk, 2015).

I have obtained some of the above details about the downing of MH17 from the book *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* by Steven Lee Myers, the Dutch translation of which was published in 2017. It was published shortly after the downing of MH17. It is clear that the author had been able to work on it just before submitting his manuscript. His impressive book makes painfully clear that for a long time there had been so many signals – both weak and clearer, more obvious signals – that something major and ominous like another war was imminent.[4]

The continuing war with which Willem's sad fate is linked is not a subject for this evening, although it should not leave our minds for an instant. The Putin book and Willem's death are nevertheless a warning of the vulnerability of certain beacons of thought, of the danger of missing or failing to take prompt note of initially sometimes weak, unclear, or confusing signals pointing to possible imminent and fundamental changes.

From that perspective – do we recognize weak signals of important developments well in time? -- I want to talk about the university. An institution in which Willem, that powerhouse of learned and inspiring imagination, felt completely at home.

About universities

After being fully back at our university for more than two years, the invitation to speak in his honor is also a good opportunity to reflect somewhat candidly on that institution that is so dear to me too. The university is an institution that is more essential than we sometimes seem to realize; for peace, truth, security, democracy, preservation of the rule of law, and the art of living together.[5] Of course, I should also mention innovation and technology. But certainly in that order. Every day I still enjoy the company of colleagues who care for our university with immense passion and commitment. Being there for our students, addressing new areas of inquiry.

But I also recognize in us what I find in the recent and remarkably critical literature on universities: that systemic worlds seem to have become more important than living worlds, that box-ticking sometimes impedes sparks of ingenuity, that bureaucratization and infocratization are spreading. That is nothing new.[6] But, to quote Anton Zijderveld, who died last year, the fact that *Zweckrationalität* sometimes clearly trumps *Wertrationalität* is one of the signals that we must not ignore (Zijderveld, 2011).

[4] See on those warnings the phenominal book by Christopher Clarke (*Sleepwalkers*) about the years leading up to the First World War in Van de Donk, 2016.
[5] See also, *inter alia*, Zehnder, 2023:79 and in Vervenne, 2012.
[6] The informatization in public administration research group, which operated at this university from the mid-1980s, and from which the Center for Law, Administration, and Informatization emerged, produced many PhD theses that strikingly anticipated what the introduction of digital technologies would mean for the governance of organizations and societies. I am thinking of the work of Frissen, Scheepers, Zuurmond, and Zouridis on infocratization and other forms of digital discipline.

The organization and the institution, both of which we inevitably are, sometimes get in each other's way.[7]

In his work, the sociologist Hartmut Rosa accurately and critically describes this alienation of living and systemic worlds, whereby processes of rationalization, differentiation, individualization, domestication, and commodification have brought an acceleration dynamic to the modernization trajectory. Or, to put it another way, these processes have turned the modernization primarily *into a dynamic of acceleration*, bringing radical changes for people, organizations, and societies. This acceleration dynamic jeopardizes the stability of social institutions and practices.

Technical acceleration is an important precondition for societal accelerations, fueling drivers such as competition and other forms of cultural and social acceleration (see Rosa, 2016). Digitization plays a crucial role here, embodying signals of potentially very important influences on how research and education are organized that can no longer be considered weak and impose themselves on us in a radical way. COVID-19 has merely accelerated what was already available. Digitization is a structure of possibilities that eagerly and greedily imposes itself on us.

Digitization processes constitute a new 'base plate' for the ways in which we organize our lives and societies. Digital technologies are a 'system technology', as the analysis by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) also shows.

> Advances in computerization and digitization are a key factor in the convergence of 'support' and infrastructure. Partly for this reason, they have a kind of 'systemic' influence that eclipses the members of the academic community more and more, including those who seek to bear administrative responsibility.

They also affect university organizations. Henri Mintzberg's configurative organizational theory – including the recently published edition – draws a distinction between what he calls the 'support staff' and the 'technostructure' (Mintzberg, 2023). These had already been on the rise within universities in recent decades, as part of a phenomenon of steadily increasing 'professionalization' of mostly traditional work (de Somer, 1981; Ruegg, 1992). The scaling up of universities was a decisive contributory factor. But what I believe we are observing is that these two parts of the organization are increasingly merging in the modern university under the influence of risk-regulation reflexes, the dominant presence of systems, and meso-policymaking structures and the associated accountability pressure. But advances in computerization and digitization are a key factor in the convergence of 'support' and infrastructure. Partly for this reason, they have a kind of 'systemic' influence that eclipses the members of the academic community

[7] There are sometimes 'reasons for sludge', which nevertheless deserve to be 'audited' every now and then (see in Sunstein, 2021).

more and more, including those who seek to bear administrative responsibility.[8] The meso-policy systems that promote further bureaucratization and the associated transaction costs of 'policy-based supervision' of education, research, and the other primary tasks of the university are, in my opinion, becoming excessive.

Naturally. A smart university is one that is prepared for the risks it faces. Such preparation is encouraged by external and internal supervisors who exercise continuous and ever-expanding control over large and small, known and unknown risks. But there are many risks now, with new ones being added every year. Ulrich Beck warned us that it is the consultants, authorities, umbrella organizations, and auditors who benefit. It sometimes seems that management, even if viewed essentially as governance, is now mainly a question of record-keeping. New records are constantly dreamt up in the – naturally mistaken – belief that the world will then be in order and under control. Or further checks can at last be carried out.... Measurement is not only knowledge but also a permanent invitation to make naturally well-intentioned interventions.

Concerns that are readily understandable in themselves, such as a focus on work pressure, geopolitically inspired concerns about knowledge security, and the heightened concern for social safety due to high-profile affairs, develop through all kinds of policy interventions that are often eagerly prepared by external consultants and coordinators, together with the associated officers, instruments, and – last but not least – budgets, steering committees and whatever else may be involved.

All this can be seen as ongoing modernization, generally described by sociologists as progress. Even 'our Law' once bore that name as a kind of command. Since 1997, the university's administration has had its roots in the Modernization of University Administration Act, later replaced by the Higher Education and Research Act. This builds on the former act and strives for further modernization of universities. In practice, this amounts to the further development of the university as an organization to be managed, or to the further development of its management, some would say. There is nothing unusual about that *per se*. We live in a world of organizations. Management can be seen

[8] In his last speech as Rector of KU Leuven (still worth reading, partly because of the topicality of many issues he raises), Piet de Somer offered the following analysis back in 1981: 'We recognize that mistakes were also made, mainly due to a strong belief in Cartesian thinking with regard to the adaptation of structures to functions and people. The restructuring was rightly based on the assumption that the university had evolved from a kind of family business, in which everyone got involved in everything, to a complex institution, and that different functions require differentiated structures and competent technicians. Based on this reasoning, an almost complete separation was implemented between the administrative, technical, and managerial activities on the one hand and the academic activities on the other. The central administrative services thus developed as a parallel pillar. This division arose, as is often the case, as an overreaction to past conditions, where academics were entrusted with management tasks for which they had neither the training nor the aptitude. This marked a break with the tradition of the clerical university, when a philosophical or theological education was deemed sufficient to entrust someone with the control of finances, personnel, and building policy. This is not intended as a criticism of what our predecessors achieved; on the contrary, it is admirable that they were able to achieve so much with such scant resources and expertise. In more difficult circumstances than those we face now and with much scarcer resources, they maintained a university that was at least on a par with the other Belgian universities. As is demonstrated every day in our Catholic educational institutions, effort and dedication largely compensate for the shortage of technology and money.' (De Somer, 1981:8). Wise words that point to the importance of connection and balance, based on a realization that the university is shaped by the employees as a whole. Best is not always better, I say with a serious nod towards an agenda that, in our university too, should put contradictory and compartmentalized thinking into perspective.

as a form of organized learning in, by, and from organizations. And that learning is increasingly and sometimes exclusively about measuring and monitoring. Digitization is eagerly and greedily driving all of this. This technology is an intended option as well.

Learning as a spark generator

All that monitoring and managing is generally focused on the question of whether we are performing well. In other words, organizational learning, about matters such as compliance and achieving KPIs and designing planning cycles with different forms and properties. All that is not unimportant, of course, but it is sometimes at odds with genuine organizational learning.[9] As far as I am concerned, it is mainly also the type of learning that asks whether we are (still) performing well and whether we are learning to devote sufficient attention to that latter type of learning.

In other words, learning more as a generator of sparks than as a box-ticking exercise ('aanvonken' rather than 'aanvinken' in Dutch). That is a type of learning that is less instrumentally oriented, more strategic, and driven primarily by institutional and other values.

> The goals are increasingly determined by instruments, while the ability to listen to weak signals is sometimes lost.

That is not learning from rapidly proliferating dashboards, but learning that primarily also looks outwards and around itself. I know both are necessary, but since the former is so much more quantitative and easier to digitize, it has become very dominant. There is always an argument for introducing new records in times of digitization. And for analyzing algorithms. The goals are thus increasingly determined by instruments, while the ability to listen to weak signals is sometimes lost. Such signals generally start softly on the peripheries and in the margins; they are sometimes indeterminate, often a kind of noise. That becomes dangerous if they thus remain hidden from administrative view. [10]

The question is whether the universities' modern organizational future-analysis paradigm, which has become rather dominant in recent years, provides the most adequate tools. The first questions from our umbrella organization with regard to future discussions are, it now appears, inspired more by quantitative than by qualitative concerns. Spreadsheets dominate and utility questions set the tone. What does the labor market need, how many students are coming, and what shortages are there?

[9] See Van der Kolk, 2012 and the fine essay by Hans de Bruijn for the evaluation committee for performance funding in higher education (De Bruijn, 2016; Evaluation committee for performance funding in higher education, 2017).
[10] On this subject see also the analysis by David Peeters in his contribution to our Jonge Akademie collection (Peeters, 2022).

> The question is: should we not think more (or much more) about the future from the dimensions available to us as part of a more institutional approach to universities? That is the approach centered on the university's values (rather than goals). In other words, the beacons.

In light of the rather essential issue of what those 'shortage sectors' are and – in particular – who will decide that, we hear the insistent warning from Deriezewicz: '(...) if the future belongs to those who can invent new jobs and industries rather than staffing existing ones, then it belongs to people with broad liberal arts education. In today's world of economic fluidity and instability, where the old career ladders are falling down, where even the traditional notion of what constitutes a job is up for grabs, the necessary aptitudes (...) include breath, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, flexibility and the ability to continually learn, grow and reinvent' (Deriezewicz, 2014: 154). Our student Thijs van der Zande put it very succinctly here in our auditorium: what we come to do here is learn and grow. *It's all about weaving minds and characters*, to quote the title of our most recent strategic plan.

So the question is: should we not think more (or much more) about the future from the dimensions available to us as part of a more institutional approach to universities? That is the approach centered on the university's values (rather than goals). In other words, the beacons. The beacons have been there for centuries. And the same is true of the movements, incidentally. I would like to say something about both of these.

The beacons

The standard work on the history of the European universities by Cambridge University Press, which is fortunately also available in our university library, describes in detail how, over the centuries, they had to constantly anticipate movements in the dimensions relevant to them (see De Ridder-Symoens, 1992 and 1996; Rüegg, 2004 and 2011[11], but Axtel, 2016, Kirby, 2022, Musselin, 2022, and Zucca, 2022 are also relevant here). The sometimes detailed history (from the Middle Ages to the present day) devotes systematic attention to the relations between universities and secular and spiritual authorities, the way in which they were financed and administered, the position, selection, and mobility of teachers and students, teaching, and research, the dominant disciplines, curricula, and schools, and developments in admissions and mobility.

[11] Volume III, which cites the founding of Tilburg University on page 39.

> Core elements (...) are the secure beacons, with the highest caliber education delivered by passionate and learned teachers, connections between teaching and research, a broad education (Bildung), accommodation of new academic fields and disciplines, the development of the university as an academic community of 'scholars and students', and independent positioning (...) in which guarantees of academic freedom and critical thinking must be adequately assured. Each of those beacons needs to be monitored.

A lot changed through all those centuries, but a lot essentially remained the same. That is perhaps why universities – as permanent beacons anchored in a constantly evolving and modernizing society – are highly successful. Universities are clearly overrepresented in the pantheon of ancient institutions. They are the proud cathedrals in the landscape of teaching and research. Drawing on a large body of literature, Alexander Rinnooy Kan, an honorary doctor of our university, speaks of impressive staying power,[12] and says that the Humboldtian role model – in which the previously dominant focus on education was supplemented around 1800 with a key role for research – garnered around 18,000 'followers' all over the world and can rightly be called a success story. [13]

Core elements of that story are the secure beacons, with the highest-caliber education delivered by passionate and learned teachers, connections between teaching and research, a broad education (*Bildung*), accommodation of new academic fields and disciplines, the development of the university as an academic community of 'scholars and students', and independent positioning (neither the market nor the state is all-determining, the university being positioned as a public-private mix or 'civic institution' focused on public interests), in which guarantees of academic freedom and critical thinking must be adequately assured. Each of those beacons needs to be monitored: are the anchors still heavy enough?[14] Despite their 'staying power'[15] universities cannot – and perhaps never could – sit back and relax or rest on their laurels[16]. Universities, and higher education and research institutions more

[12] Kerr (in Axtel, 2016:2) once showed that of the 85 organizations that already existed in 1520 in a form recognizable today, as many as 70 are universities (and the others include the parliaments of the Isle of Man, Iceland, Great Britain, a number of Swiss Cantons, and the Roman Catholic Church.

[13] Kirby even cites a number of 30,000, of which around 1,400 appear in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. He provides a useful overview and shows the extent to which countries such as India and China are rising in terms of both numbers and quality (Kirby, 2022). Musselin also speaks of the university 'institution' that experienced enormous quantitative growth (she speaks elegantly of a *'pérennité et (...) emprise grandissante de l'institution universitaire',* but also of an institution that will have to adapt to major changes (see Musselin, 2020:559). This is also the case in the Netherlands, as analyzed in the recent report entitled *Focus op Professie* by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, which correctly refers back to a report by the Veerman committee, which already questioned critically whether that massive quantitative growth – fueled by university funding underpinned by the market-share philosophy, might undermine the universities' quality mission.

[14] On academic freedom, see for example Van Gestel, 2021. His argument is echoed by concerns recently expressed in the European Parliament: The Netherlands does not fare well in the relevant rankings, as recent reports by our European umbrella organization, the EUA, have shown.

[15] The term also encapsulates an ambiguity in that staying can also mean standing still. It was the same throughout history, and movement is important even in order to stand still.

[16] I believe the more detailed and very valuable interpretation and analysis of that 'one-liner' from our strategy offered by Catherine Robb in her fine contribution to our Tilburg Young Academy collection gives no cause to moderate that statement; on the contrary (see in Robb, 2022:8-9).

broadly, will have to deal with numerous potentially disruptive social, cultural, and technological changes. The recent debate on internationalization is writing on the wall for beacons and movements that until recently were considered permanent. Did we see it coming, or is it our unexpected disruptive moment?
Scanning and interpreting the movements around us is vitally important for that more strategic learning. I shall not consider AI in detail here, but it is clear that this latest offshoot from the trunk of smart digitization is, to put it mildly, posing a major challenge to many purportedly strong branches of academia. Talking of acceleration...

If we do not pay attention – and probably even if we do – a combination of new markets and new technologies will threaten the ways we have been accustomed to teaching, conducting research, and much more besides. As always, of course, there are opportunities and threats, but it seems that the time-honored law of dialectics applies here, that quantitative developments lead to qualitative leaps. That we are dealing with a new system technology, with disruptions that may affect our 'business' more than previous technological innovations.

“If we do not pay attention – and probably even if we do – a combination of new markets and new technologies will threaten the ways we have been accustomed to teaching, conducting research, and much more besides.

In this context, it is important to be aware that, perhaps to a greater extent than as result of largely hesitant and incipient European policy on higher education and research, the beacons will be set in the field of competition and market regulation policies captured in still relatively traditional economic approaches (see Bovenberg, 2023). Traditional market-regulation concepts also need to be fundamentally reassessed in line with the new game logics that digitization appears to entail, because those markets with big tech players appear to offer increasing opportunities for winners who take it all and make it almost impossible for entrants to do likewise.

Weak signals

Will we see in time what can influence, change, and even threaten the continued existence of universities in their current form? Quite apart from what we all think about this, what do we actually need to detect weak and still unclear signals in and around us and to do something about them? Furthermore, is the current form still suitable for the old standard? In other words, is the kind of university that some claim to be moribund really the kind of university we want to be, that we want to keep alive?

Universities have always had a tendency to turn inward. Ivory towers! They also have a reputation for being haughty. *Hofleveranciers van de zeven vinkjes* (Purveyors of the seven ticks) (Luyendijk, 2022). I believe the second image no longer applies, and that

the steady influx of students for whose parents the university used to be culturally and financially out of reach has led to a broad emancipation.

That has always been the case for our university: Cobbenhagen *cum suis* intended us more to be the university of the seven *sparks* than of the seven *ticks*. I still get angry about the judge who, during the courtroom discussion on the Catholic identity of our Nijmegen sister university, condescendingly asked: 'What exactly do you mean... Catholic emancipation? Can you explain that to us?'

Anyway, the first image, that of the ivory tower, will certainly be familiar to you. A description that, according to already hugely popular ChatGPT AI program, refers to a passage in the beautiful Song of Solomon, and to the long, beautiful neck of a Shulammite girl who danced for Solomon. One Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve is said to have popularized the idea of the ivory tower as a reference to intellectuals cut off from society. But when I asked for a reference I got another evasive excuse. The program started avoiding me when I persisted with my questions and found another error in one of the answers. It even got angry, despite saying it had no emotions. Is there anything else I'd like to talk about?....

But anyway, back to universities. Or rather, to the university.

Those in the know point out that since their inception they have operated near centers of power. Places of an economic, political, and ecclesiastical or monastic nature; near temples, cities, monasteries, and cathedrals. That applies not only to the universities born in Europe, but notably also to the often much older 'universities' that we can see as forerunners and predecessors.[17]

That context actually always gave them a somewhat conservative character. Or, one could say, an opportunity to take a rather sensible stance towards to the often excitable spirit of the times. They are resistant to chronocentrism and know the eternal value of striving for the true, the good, and the beautiful. They cherish the connection between students and their teachers. Universities are breeding grounds for value development and talent. Marc Vervenne, the honorary rector of our sister university in Leuven, put it succinctly: 'Truthful views and qualitative information are less robust than we like to assume, so we need institutions that collect, accumulate, protect, open up, and apply true and relevant information. Every society needs places in which to search for what seems most reasonable, or what is most probable: storm-free zones, places where the

[17] In a fine historical overview Rüegg shows the extent to which European universities flourished at the initiative of rulers of cities, churches, and monarchs (Rüegg, 1992, passim). See also in Zehnder, 2023, Haskins, 1923 and in the four-part volume on the history of European universities edited by Walter Rüegg at Cambridge University Press. This series also makes clear that, from the outset, the main ambitions were not only practicing science and educating students (the *amor sciendi*), but also preventing uncertainty among students and arranging and safeguarding certain privileges. 'University education – then as now – offered the average student primarily an opportunity for a prospective prebendal income.' (Rüegg, 1992:20). In earlier times too people spoke of *scientiae lucrativae,* which then referred to medicine and law (Ibidem, 24). See also in Kirby, 2022, and Zehnder, 2023.

pressure to perform or economic returns are insignificant, places where thinkers can experiment and even fail, where only what is right and true survives, environments where truth can be sought for truth's sake' (Vervenne, 2012:16).
I am happy to admit it. Sometimes I too am downright nostalgic and long for the university in which I started as a young researcher almost forty years ago. Some see their ideal university even further back in time, while others argue that the 'concept' is still developing and/or are developing a specific program to ensure that in our times too the essence of the university can be protected against intruding or engulfing calamity (see Cohen, 2020, see also Zucca, 2022).

The movements

I understand and endorse that. There are quite a few movements that sometimes hit our beacons hard. An example is the competition for student numbers and money, fueled by the (neoliberal) *zeitgeist* and the financing models rooted in it, economization, monetization, and infocratization (to name a few dominant phenomena in the literature; see also the relevance of the work of authors such as Hartmut Rosa and Michael Sandel). Students, who even in our university are sometimes referred to as 'customers' and sometimes behave that way – do you find it odd to address them in that way? – kindly ask us to take their busy main activities into account when arranging our classes. Classes served by home delivery, just like meals... But of course using a digital and sustainable shared scooter....

> How can we explain to the generation that has long since replaced linear radio and television broadcasts with podcasts and online instant streaming and consumption of 'content' that real education is not mere consumption but intensive learning and studying together?

I admit it right away, when scholarships were abolished and halls of residence were built purely as unnecessarily expensive single-person flats, we brought that about ourselves. But apart from that, there is also the almost constant temptation of digital instant technology. How can we explain to the generation that has long since replaced linear radio and television broadcasts with podcasts and online instant streaming and consumption of 'content' that real education is not mere consumption but intensive learning and studying together? That it requires real encounter, dialogue, and interaction? That our students are not consumers but members of our academic community whom we educate in their future responsibilities, both inside and outside academia. And who also involve us, their teachers, in their learning and development.

Our students, who are therefore so important in the councils of schools and the university. Rest assured, I am well aware that you are not consumers, but very active and committed members of our Tilburg academic community. Our solidarity sets limits to the growing fluidity and volatility of relationships posited by Zygmunt Bauman.

The tone of many publications on the future of universities is critical and downright concerning. They speak of excellent sheep, a university on the brink of 'institutional death', university administrators as captains on Titanics... all in all, a disheartening picture. There are question marks, questions about our future, and exclamation marks. The picture on page 21 shows part of the crop that I took in.

Many of these more or less recent publications, including one from our own Tilburg Young Academy, make clear that a probing discussion is needed on the future of the universities and the wider environment of the higher education and research system in which they operate. That is good, because that discussion is now on the agenda, although I do have concerns about the way it might be conducted. The *Fit for Purpose?* collection on futures of universities makes a case for more openness and connection with our environments. That is positive, and requires a proactive stance and a type of organization that also makes those connections possible. That is not always easy, and the processes required to achieve it are not always as dynamic as those environments expect. Sometimes their impatience is unjustified: care and independence require time. But sometimes I understand their impatience, and I also see it in my colleagues. Surely sometimes we indulge too much and too easily in a comfortable sense of gradual change. Change, yes, but rather evolution than revolution, we say. Does not this preference stem too much from a position of power that we take for granted? Karl Deutsch once defined power as being able to afford not to listen or learn.[18] Zehnder speaks of the sometimes rather egocentric behavior of universities and the insistence on autonomy as an all-too-simple defensive shield against new questions and repertoires of engagement with environments (Zehnder, 2023: 163). Autonomy is never meant to be isolation, and curiosity-driven research – to quote the new Dean of our School of Catholic Theology – does not mean that research is 'disconnected'.

[18] 'To have power means not to have to give in, and to force the environment or the other person to do so. Power in this narrow sense is the priority of output over intake, the ability to talk instead of listen. In a sense, it is the ability to afford not to learn' (In Deutsch, 1963)

Our mission

My assessment is that there is every reason to take a good look around us: we owe it to our position to actively seek out developments that affect us, that challenge us.

Forms of digitization and the forms of commercialization that they facilitate, especially if higher education is also seen as something that should be largely subject to European free-market rules, make it increasingly likely that parts of the 'market' will be occupied by new entrants. Students have already asked me if I was familiar with masterclass.com...

I have now looked at that site, and our university has nothing to fear for the time being. But it is one of the many signs that the digital 'home delivery' offer of other providers (sometimes also adorning themselves with the name university) will continue to grow in the field of higher education. Keep an eye out for phenomena such as 'unbundling' and 'micro-credentials', about which former Utrecht rector Bert van der Zwaan, among others, wrote after a worldwide exploration in his book with the uplifting title *Haalt de universiteit 2040?* (Will universities make it to 2040?) (Van der Zwaan, 2017). The newcomers' revenue model is the loss model of the old guard who fail to pay attention or see every change merely as a threat. Schumpeter is never far away.

My assessment is that there is every reason to take a good look around us: we owe it to our position to actively seek out developments that affect us, that give us a mission.

Since politicians are still working with data from well before 2040, we may have time on our side. Nevertheless, the fact that the serious subtitle of his book – *Een Europees perspectief op wereldwijde kansen en bedreigingen* (A European perspective on global opportunities and threats) – invites us to ask serious questions about universities (and more broadly our system of higher education and research in a Dutch, European and even global context) is very appropriate. Incidentally, this does not only involve forms of technological disruption. Rapid changes in the social climate, which we see working through our parliament, also require attention and analysis. What are the algorithms of discomfort?

Simply dismissing these questions by referring to established traditions and purportedly secure positions will probably be insufficient, as will a business climate that essentially remains a confirmation climate. Disruptions occur, and not only in the literature. Do we take sufficient note of what historians, political scientists, and paleontologists such as Stephen J. Gould teach us about the conditions in which systems that have sometimes long remained stable suddenly enter turbulent and radical change processes (Gould, 2007)? Of examples in which insidious or acute changes in necessary and contingent conditions for existence sometimes lead to the sudden end of beacons that were previously deemed secure? What can we learn from institutions that believed they had no reason to fear for their stability and survival?

Our umbrella organization recently announced in a press release that the current higher education and research system was not 'futureproof'. Its origins lie partly in the discussions that have been going on for years and the exploratory study initiated by our Minister of Education, Culture, and Science.

That press release, incidentally, suggests that we at least know what that future is or could be, or that there is consensus among us about some more or less clearly articulated desiderata about that future. That remains to be seen. But in any event, the discussion in under way.

Discussion in a wider circle

For the time being, that discussion is taking place within rather limited coalitions of acquaintances mainly comprising administrators and businesses. In somewhat closed councils of experts, as our recently emerited colleague Theo Camps once described them. The contributions, reports, and other national and international publications are now too numerous to manage, at least for someone who has to prepare a lecture like this amid all the bustle of running a university. It was nevertheless important (and sometimes very inspiring) to consider a few in depth. My colleagues in higher vocational education have already made an excellent start (see Committee on the positioning of higher vocational education, 2022). The ministry is also broadening out the discussion.

That seems appropriate and consistent with a social undercurrent of growing and less exclusive involvement in important matters.

Exploratory work is also going on within our circle, indeed, various committees are at work within Universities of The Netherlands (UNL). That is good. After all, we can be expected to think carefully, including about our own futures. You heard that right: we can be expected, because running a university in particular requires the development of common directions, values, and objectives that are supported by the entire academic community. The question is whether the circle and the necessary framework for it need to be broadened somewhat, made more synod-like, in keeping with the times.

But what exactly is our circle? Let me return to Willem Witteveen to say something about that. I resort to a metaphor, which is a tried-and-tested formulation in discussions on governance according to Willem. It was through reading that I first got to know my future colleague Willem. He co-edited a book that I read as a student teaching assistant: *Het schip van staat. Beschouwingen over recht, staat en sturing* (The ship of state. Reflections on law, state, and governance). Willem began that book with a chapter entitled 'Dokteren aan het schip van staat' (Tinkering with the ship of state) (Witteveen, 1985). It is a wonderfully fascinating and surprisingly topical book about management and learning.

Willem wrote a chapter showing how constitutive or generative metaphors have been used for centuries in the analysis of management and governance. These are, I quote: 'forms of visual language that provide the framework for a discussion'. The ship of state, for example. Such constitutive metaphors, or other rhetorical techniques to which Willem likens it, such as comparisons, analogies, fables, and myths, are used to frame and steer discussions. The use of a metaphor may also help us to organize the discussions about the university, that beacon in a sea of movements. That starts with researching what a university actually is.

When I asked myself more precisely what the management of a university actually is and aims to do, the question quickly turned to the relevant level of aggregation. What does an executive board actually do, and how does that relate to the other actors within and outside our institution. What is important about connections at global, European, national, sectoral, local level?

"The use of a metaphor may also help us to organize the discussions about the university, that beacon in a sea of movements. That starts with researching what a university actually is.

Management is about direction and learning, but also connecting. The Executive Board is a board of connections. The full diaries of my Executive Board colleagues Paulina, Jantine, Hans-Georg, and now also Carolien reveal only a fraction of the many internal and external connections: with fellow universities all over the world, departments, the

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Dutch Research Council, LVVH, TNO, and that is based on just a few dates in the diary. An let us not forget the umbrella organization, the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, the Education Inspectorate, SURF, disciplinary and sector consultations. This pattern is repeated at the level of the deans and their schools. They are also in frequent contact with the directors, examining boards, organizations, and representative bodies, De Jonge Akademie, the Tilburg and national network of doctoral students. Should I also mention *Mindlabs*, *JADS*, *Brainport*, *Midpoint*, our colleagues in the Elisabeth-TweeSteden Hospital?

That diversity also exists internally. Happily, our beautiful campus is a hive of activity again after COVID-19. The many steering and working groups and the task forces are busily supporting the primary processes of education, research and, of course, helping to define outreach and impact in all sorts of ways.

“Some observers would be reeling from having so many actors, patterns, and processes. But they are an inextricable part of the university’s essence and characteristic of the university’s sometimes complex internal and external environment.

I could go on. The departments, the University Council, student associations, alumni, The Board of Governors, the auditor, the Lord Chancellor, the city council, the provincial council, colleagues from fellow universities, colleagues from higher vocational education, both here in Brabant and sometimes further afield. The list cannot be complete, because surely I am forgetting the editorial teams of the journals, whether ‘top-flight’ or otherwise. And what about the lateral sector planning resources and associated coordination meetings. And speaking of lateral input, we should not forget the many public and private organizations involved in ranking and other forms of reputation management.

And where in all this are the researchers, teachers, librarians, schedulers, data stewards, supporters of all shapes and sizes: the people who maintain our beautiful campus and our beautiful buildings? And they provide coffee, a terrific amount of coffee.

Some observers would be reeling from having so many actors, patterns, and processes. But they are an inextricable part of the university’s essence and characteristic of the university’s sometimes complex internal and external environment. And I say this in the knowledge that the boundary between what is internal and what is external is sometimes difficult to define, let alone record, however much some would like do so. That internal complexity stems in part from the extensive and inevitable multiplicity, ambiguity, and multilayeredness of the modern university environment. Surely we are familiar with Ashby’s ‘law of requisite variety’? ‘*Only variety can absorb variety’,* as Naughton once succinctly summarized the law.

The university as a seaport

It is therefore unsurprising that many authoritative observers of universities characterize them as 'complex systems'. They are characterized by: '... many interdependent variables that interact in non-linear ways, making attributions of causes and effects very difficult; strong feedback loops, chaotic behavior, defined by extreme sensitivity to initial conditions, fractal geometry and self-organizing criticality, a non-Gaussian distribution of outputs; and multiple (meta)stable states, where small change in prevailing conditions may precipitate a major change in the system' (Cleary, 2023:97).

At one of our meetings I sighed that in the Executive Board we operated like the board of a seaport. It is sometimes said that port authorities mainly exist on paper. Because they are authorities with 'firmly limited autonomy', trapped in 'extensive and long processes of layering, involving multiple incremental changes and adaptations' (...), 'subtle and stepwise changes' (...) 'benevolent or less so' (...) whose effects usually become apparent only over the longer term (Noteboom and Haralambides, 2022:333, 338). There is nothing new under the sun. With a nod to history I refer to what my colleague Dave De ruysscher recently said here about the position of a purportedly strong leader, a duke, count, or bishop (even just a 'networked agent') in relation to the economically strongly developing cities in the Low Countries: *'Il gêne, mais n'empêche pas'...'*.[19]

Seaports are characterized by forms of cluster governance (De Langen, 2015). Seaports (I once carried out research into the privatization of the pilotage service and have continued to follow the literature to some extent since then) are characterized by a large number of different operators, such as pilots, tugs and pusher craft, mooring operators, terminal operators, various logistics and transport operators, security services, shipowners, shipbrokers, stevedores, customs, repair yards and dry docks: in short, just sail into Rotterdam, or Antwerp. You will see, incidentally, that they are very different ports, despite all the similarities between them. The literature on the management of seaports shows that the quality of the management increases if the costs of coordination can be kept relatively low and if there is not too narrow a focus on costs alone. But let us talk about the economic benefits of the Maasvlakte and the Betuwe Line another time.

When I once argued somewhat overconfidently – referring to geopolitical challenges facing the region and Europe – for more cooperation between the ports in the Rotterdam and Antwerp Delta, and supported my argument with an observation I made using Google Earth (showing how small the distance between those ports actually is in kilometers), I was firmly but politely corrected by Marc van Peel, the Port Alderman at

[19] There he quotes Henri Pirenne on the ultimately limited power of dukes, counts, and bishops who, whether they wanted to or not, had to make room for the new bearers of economic dynamics, such as emerging urban elites. He said it in French, but I refer here to his inaugural lecture published in English (De ruysscher, 2023:21)). See that wonderful inaugural lecture on what we can learn from the history of the Low Countries about cities as 'networked agents'. This speech, with wise lessons on law, governance and economics, can also serve as a plea for more space to given to history in many curricula within our university.

the time in Antwerp. Subtly referring to Google Street View, he noted that similarities are often seen mainly when observing from too high a level of abstraction. And that cooperation also requires a more precise indication of the level of aggregation at which it takes us further, and where it hinders us. *Point taken.*

> Two key aspects appealed to me in the comparison between universities and seaports. First, the need to see and recognize the importance of diverse yet simultaneous connections to various types of internal and external surroundings and environments. (...) Second, the need for clear reflection on whether and how to formulate and select one's own more or less coherent profile and strategy at all those different levels of aggregation.

Nevertheless, despite all the differences – which are deeply rooted in political history and culture and different visions of the role and meaning of a port economy – there are similarities. Manuel Castells saw the development of international airports as an indicator of advancing global connections (they are increasingly similar, partly due to technological and economic *Sachzwang*), and seaports and universities are sometimes viewed in the same way. I also sometimes hear arguments against or in favor of certain decisions within our university, referring to what is or is not possible or desirable internationally. This international interconnectedness is one of the factors that influences degrees of administrative freedom. It is no coincidence that all three (seaports, airports, and universities) are rather 'in the frame' at a time of growing geopolitical debates. Two key aspects appealed to me in the comparison between universities and seaports. First, the need to see and recognize the importance of diverse yet simultaneous connections to various types of internal and external surroundings and environments. Differences related to aggregation level (global, national, European, regional, local). And differences pertaining to the purpose of the connections. Second, the need for clear reflection on whether and how to formulate and select one's own more or less coherent profile and strategy at all those different levels of aggregation. This multiplicity of environments must affect the way in which the university is organized.

> As a university we are not so much a seaport, but at most a part of one. A few quays and shipowners together, who – with greater interdependence than we are sometimes prepared to see – operate within a much broader system of higher education and also research. (...) That is why I think it would be useful to engage in a discussion here in Brabant as well, and perhaps not wait until actions are taken at the system level.

Because Van Peel was right: Antwerp is a really different seaport than Rotterdam. The former, historically made up of many so-called 'nations', is closely tied to the regional economy. Container terminals are very important, as in Rotterdam, but the range of transshipment and trading activities is much richer and more varied. They are both

seaports, but they differ in terms of their links to types of infrastructure, freight and goods flows, depth, and size.

That observation actually invites me to revise the way in which I initially thought I could use the metaphor. The way we look at ourselves, in other words: as a university we are not so much a seaport, but at most a part of one. A few quays and shipowners together, who – with greater interdependence than we are sometimes prepared to see – operate within a much broader system of higher education and also research. The recently published report by colleagues in higher vocational education puts this firmly on the agenda, and fortunately the awareness is also getting through to our members. That we are part of a wider circle. That we are part of a system that in various respects did what systems always do: turn from systemic to sclerotic.

Regional docks

That is why I think it would be useful to engage in a discussion here in Brabant as well, and perhaps not wait until actions are taken at the system level. I can imagine that we, together with our colleagues at Eindhoven University of Technology and colleagues in higher vocational education (i.e. Avans, Fontys, the Design Academy, the HAS green academy, and BUAS), will examine whether we could create a few shared ships, quays, or docks, in which we can explore the task of preparing ourselves for the world of tomorrow, together with our students. What we will call it, and precisely what we will do with it, is still open. It is not easy to set up new initiatives in the gaps between existing organizations, but it must be done. Let us welcome students collectively in ‘colleges’; there will be a degree, but it will only gradually become clear whether it will be a more vocational or a more research-oriented degree. In the meantime, students and teachers in different fields of study will benefit from each other’s strengths.

But, if it is up to me, what we do will be driven by yet another mission that I can discern.

The way we are organized internally still bears the strong imprint of the way we have grown historically: in discipline- or subject-oriented groups and schools. We have also grown up: I recently concluded that we should actually set up a kind of Tilburg Tinder in order to be able to learn about each other’s work and specializations more effectively than we do at present. This could open up important and often missed opportunities for both fundamental and more applied research focused on social issues in our academic workplaces. Moreover, on close inspection, our curricula and research group structures are often insufficiently geared to what we see as increasingly important in the outside world, namely the ability to collaborate and integrate different disciplines. That is increasingly necessary to fulfill society’s knowledge requirements. Designing a transition in healthcare, energy, and safety systems requires combinations of knowledge that we often cannot yet provide because we have pigeonholed our knowledge. More

variety is needed, lest we defy Ashby. Both the horizontal and vertical integration of our working methods could open up opportunities for a stronger focus on society, which is increasingly asking that of us.

Universities are part of a long tradition in which excellent education, based on knowledge generated by scientific research, also benefits society. That does not apply in abstract terms, but specifically through the contributions to regional ecosystems, in which the vast majority of universities have part of their roots. Goddard and others have shown the extent to which the universities' role contributes substantially to strong economic development of regions, the kind of meso-economy that is still overshadowed by the attention paid to the macro- and microeconomy. It is also the ideal level onwhich to practice new interpretations of the concept of broad prosperity. I say this in the knowledge that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the Catholic economists who founded this university have never been caught applying a narrow conception of prosperity.

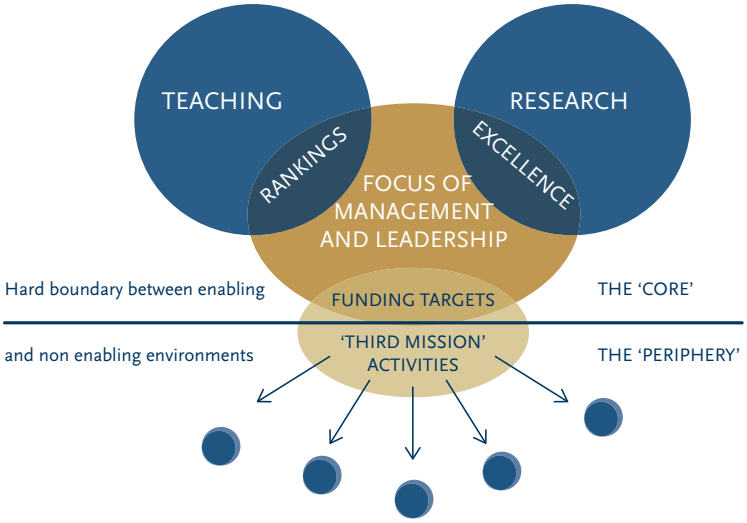
> The way we are organized internally still bears the strong imprint of the way we have grown historically: in discipline- or subject-oriented groups and schools. We have also grown up: I recently concluded that we should actually set up a kind of Tilburg Tinder in order to be able to learn about each other's work and specializations more effectively than we do at present. This could open up important and often missed opportunities for both fundamental and more applied research focused on social issues in our academic workplaces.

The societal issues that are also emerging strongly on other levels can also benefit in those contexts from smart combinations of, for example, high-caliber econometrics, cutting-edge philosophy, shared insights into behavior from neuropsychologists and AI specialists, and much more. I do not need to point out the great importance of alpha and gamma technology, and I note that here too digitization is increasingly connecting the beta technology of light, atoms, and the like with questions of ethics and behavior. Those worlds sometimes still appear to be excessively separated within and between the academies, only meeting outside the boundaries, in the world we claim to serve.

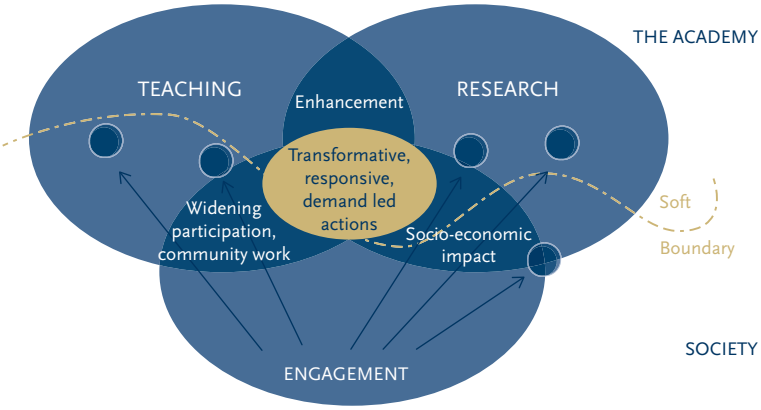
Soft boundaries

With his concept of the 'civic university', Goddard has provided an inspiring framework for the way in which the universities and academies that collaborate on a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary basis with external parties, where useful and necessary, should soften their internal and external boundaries (Cohen would say 'make them more porous': see in Cohen 2020:27) .

‘Traditional University’



‘Civic University’



From hard and rigid to fluid and soft boundaries (from Goddard & Vaillance, 2013)

Against the spirit of the times, investing in a kind of academic Schengen seems to me an urgent task given the importance of soft borders. In my opinion, that applies just as much to the rather binary boundaries that are sometimes drawn with our colleagues from higher vocational education. We have actually created a binary system for a reality that, at least in part, is graduated or even non-binary in nature.

Seaports are also training grounds for harmoniously connecting public and private orientations. For that reason too, they provide space for dynamism and variety. Larger seaports have room for both highly specialized and small ships, quays, and shipowners

operating in a predominantly international context, as well as sites for more regionally connected and focused activities. Under conditions of mutual recognition, appreciation, and connection, this arrangement can deliver strong results that, in addition to the intrinsic importance of growth of our knowledge, also make vital contributions to strong regions and smart solutions for societal challenges. For example, the presence of world-class mathematics and econometrics helps us to solve problems, including at city level, and even to enter the fields of poor health and poverty.

My impression is that such forms of mutual inspiration and cooperation require forms of facilitation and connection, such as those we design in academic workplaces, institutes, schools, groups, and platforms. We all know how necessary that is. One of our deans recently wondered aloud whether the division of our university into schools was still the most logical, while another wondered whether a focus on one or more SDGs could serve as a basis for establishing more or less temporary working relationships. Recognizing that traditions should not be seen as dancing around burnt ashes but as constantly fanning the fire of hope and progress, I believe this could work. But we must also take into account the fact that universities and academies are also built on the energy generated from the warm bonds of groups of people who build something together and therefore must also be able to build sustainability and commonality into that collaboration.

“Larger seaports have room for both highly specialized and small ships, quays, and shipowners operating in a predominantly international context, as well as sites for more regionally connected and focused activities. Under conditions of mutual recognition, appreciation, and connection, this arrangement can deliver strong results that, in addition to the intrinsic importance of growth of our knowledge, also make vital contributions to strong regions and smart solutions for societal challenges.

Here again: balance when dealing with opposites. Whether and how we can connect a more ‘specific’ and unique interpretation of our internal organization will also raise some questions: is the sometimes intrinsically centralistic and uniformizing *Sachzwang* of the digitizing and merging ‘support structures’ not too great already? Or will it actually provide opportunities for more internal variety and mobility?

I do not think everything stands or falls on total integration or national management of research and education. I know it. Some people say that universities only move if you shift money.[20] I believe the person who said it was referring to the internal organization; my impression is that people in our ministry increasingly want to see it that way.

[20] That is probably why our Minister devoted the additional resources we recently obtained to the promotion of more curiosity-driven research. However, the numerous demands that accompanied it in terms of accountability and management are reminiscent of what Extel wrote about how the universities of Oxford and Cambridge felt when they received large amounts of funds from Henry VII: ‘The bear hug in which he embraced the universities made it difficult for them to distinguish affection from coercion.’ (Axtel, 2016:45)

Movement from within

In my view, however, that money is not the core, and it should not be the new beacon. Real movement among universities requires intrinsic movement. It calls for mutual commitment, exchange, and the recognition and appreciation of a kind of individual profile of our universities, of our universities of applied sciences and academies, and of what they could do together. It would be good to have discussion about this, as long as it is conducted in the realization that such individuality can never be the result of decisions by an umbrella office in The Hague or particularly in the Randstad region that relies on spreadsheets and views forms of allocation and specialization primarily on the basis of a politically-driven orientation toward efficient labor markets and economic utility of universities. Universities are useful precisely because they do not have to consider that to be the most important thing. That has been the case for centuries.

“Real movement among universities requires intrinsic movement. It calls for mutual commitment, exchange, and the recognition and appreciation of a kind of individual profile of our universities, of our universities of applied sciences and academies, and of what they could do together.

Conclusion

As I mentioned earlier, the first work by Willem that I ever read was the chapter in the 1985 collection that he edited with Mark Bovens. It was entitled: ‘Dokteren aan het schip van staat’ (Tinkering with the ship of state). Referring to lengthy discussions and a large number or more and less inspiring reports about management and control (in which not only the maritime but also the medical sphere is a regular supplier of management-oriented metaphors), he sighs: ‘The ship begins to approach port, but this author retains the feeling, aptly described by the poet Hillenius, of a “growing unwillingness ever to arrive anywhere safely”. Further research is urgently required, to pull out another cliché. Moreover, it is difficult to place a full stop at the end of an article whose tenor is that social debates never end but are continuous, that there is no watertight separation between management activities and discussion about management, that in both the practice and discussion of management the participants try to achieve their goals largely by verbal, rhetorical means’ (Witteveen, 1982:48).

How recognizable these both are, the difficulty of placing a full stop and the strategic use of a metaphor. William would forgive me. He was also more comma-oriented.

So let me end – in a somewhat maritime vein – with a poem from that splendid collection by Dick Hillenius.

It is entitled: *Zonder wuiven* (No waving). In other words, rather in the same way that Willem left us.

No waving

Uncle Henry's cargo ships
will leave today
tugs are already pointing through the ice out of the harbor
I should pack now
but my juvenile brain has
dropped children in this greyness
they cannot go
walking branches give meagerly in sorrow
a gestured goodbye if it can free them
and I? do I prefer to suffer
in the fall of parting
from my dear fellows?

34 Literature

Literature

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