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‘Enterprising’ at Kristianstad University, Sweden

**Cooperation between university and society through research: the Kristianstad
University Research Platform ‘Enterprising’**

In this paper I will discuss some issues concerning cooperation between academia and society in the context of the establishment of a cooperative research platform at Kristianstad University in Sweden. The platform aims at developing scientific knowledge and practical utility through cooperation between the university’s resources, mainly its faculty, and practise in society, be it individuals or organizations, be it private, public or voluntary organisations.

Swedish universities are obliged by legislation (Högskolelagen SFS 1992:1434) to perform academic education, research and cooperation with society. In the second paragraph of the law, the cooperative part is especially emphasised: “A university task includes interacting with society and informing about its activities, and furthermore, ascertaining that the research results achieved at the university come to public benefit.” (translation by the author).

To this regulation demands expressed by the government that a university should have ‘complete knowledge environments’ are added. While not being clearly defined, it could be interpreted to mean that a university should have education, research and cooperation with society that supports each other in a productive triangle, i.e., education is supported by research and cooperation, research is supported by education and cooperation and finally, cooperation is supported by education and research. In short, ‘complete knowledge environments’ could be termed the academic Trinity.

For this endeavor, Kristianstad University has organized research platforms in their main educational areas, learning, health and the third area being business and working life science. In the latter area a research platform has been established with me as responsible director 1st of September 2016. The aim of the research platform is to conduct research within the subjects of business and working life, in cooperation

with society, bringing value to both society and to the university, where the value for the university consists of scientific knowledge, development of the faculty and development of the education. The name of the platform is preliminary 'Enterprising', since it aims at creating praxis, i.e., scientific knowledge and practical actions in concert, concerning 'Enterprising'. Enterprising is defined as the creation and/or organization of resources with the aim of creating, developing or allocating resources.

The demands from the university on the platform cooperation are that there should be equal contribution of resources from the partners in the research project and there should be equality in benefits of the project

With these demands, some issues arise concerning cooperation that I present here.

The meaning of Cooperation

The platform is in Swedish termed 'Samverkansplattform', i.e. it contains the word 'Samverkan', which can be translated into 'cooperation'. But it is not a good translation. 'Samverkan' implies that partners are engaged in a joint project, but they do not necessarily share a common goal. For example, in one project, the academic partner studies interaction between organizations in an action research project, where they are engaged together with municipalities in developing a method for municipalities to manage the inclusion of refugees in society. The academic partner has the goal of developing scientific knowledge concerning public organizations' interactions, while the municipality has the goal of developing a method for inclusion. The partners both profit from the project and contribute to each other's goal attainment, they do not share the same goal.

Cooperation on the platform consists of joint resource contribution and joint work, but no joint output satisfying a shared goal. This implies that the efficiency of the project cannot be determined by evaluating the project towards one single goal, but has to be performed by relating the output to different goals.

With variety of goals, the projects runs the risk of having a Janus face, where it opportunistically put up one of its faces, at the right, proper moment, dependent on situation, be it academic or practice. Thus, there is a risk of opportunism, where

partners can exploit the Janus nature of the goals and make the project ambiguous in orientation. Because of the risk of ambiguity in cooperative projects of this nature, it appears to be important that the goals of the projects are defined ex ante, and in a very clear way that is easily monitored.

Benefits for the university with the research platform ‘Enterprising’

Research endeavors develop the teachers and the education through its creation of scientific knowledge. What is distinctive with the cooperative platform Enterprising is that the cooperation with society will bring today’s practical challenges and problems closer to the university. When engaged in scientific research, there is always a risk that the researchers will be engaged in L’art pour l’art, i.e., that internal theoretical questions and development becomes the dominating orientation. While it is important for science to develop its theories, a single focus on theoretical issues directs science towards scholasticism, with the risk of making the science less relevant. Thus, cooperation through ‘Enterprising’ will keep the faculty alert on social development and induce them to create scientific questions that are of actual societal relevance. Cooperation makes the university alert.

Costs for the university with the research platform ‘Enterprising’

Cooperation could come at a cost since it could induce faculty members to engage in ‘fashion science’ and to reduce their academic freedom. One example on the risk of fashion science is the pressure both academia and society experience today towards supporting the ideology of sustainability, i.e., the goal to have “...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Report, 1987:43). The university as an organization experiences a strong pressure to deal with sustainability. At the same time, many other organizations feel the same pressure and would therefore promote projects dealing with sustainability issues. These two forces put a strong pressure on the faculty to engage in sustainability issues, thus compromising their academic freedom of choosing freely their research topics and the academic value of being politically independent. This tendency towards infusing political goals in the university can, however, be counteracted by a strong academic governance of the

platform, including continuous debate and critique, aiming at avoiding Lysenkoism and Heideggerian gleichschaltung.

Address everyone in society, not only those with resources.

The demand to cooperate with equality of resource input implies that partners have to have resources that can match the resources of the university. Some organizations have these resources and they and their problems can therefore be present at the platform. Poor organizations, such as some sports organizations and voluntary organizations, cannot match the resource requirements. They have, however, their problems and challenges that should attract the platform's interest. Research of a university should not be guided by the resources of an organization, but by the academic interest of the potential project. This is a problem of the platform, and we have, as of yet, only one solution to offer. That solution is the capacity of the university to attract funding from a third source, which can cover the poor partner's resource contribution and make it equal to the contribution of the university.

The university being a cooperative node

The platform of 'Enterprising' has started with projects where there are partners that present the practical problem and supply fairly equal amount of resources. It is, however, both conceivable and desirable, that the projects attract additional resources from third partners, such as research funds and other similar funds. As presented above, external funding could be one solution to the problem of poor organizations. But it also put up a vision of the platform as being an arena of cooperation, i.e., a node of cooperation where the university, research funds and other funds that can supply different resources, and individuals and organizations come together and cooperate. Thus, the university does not only supply researchers capable of cooperation in research, but also establish the university through the platform as an arena of cooperation.

Praxis as a research orientation in an organization saluting academic freedom

Academic freedom (Gibbs, 2016) implies the right of the researcher to freely pick both research question and method. With the value of academic freedom, no-one can interfere in a scientific project, and the project cannot be governed by any group or

individual, except the academic researchers. The academic freedom, and a lack of cooperative orientation, described earlier, create a tradition of isolation from practice and create values that judge cooperative projects as of lower scientific value and a waste of researcher's time. Sometimes it can also be degraded to be considered as 'consultancy'-projects, i.e., selling demanded conclusions instead of created scientific knowledge.

A change of attitude is needed among faculty, to foster an orientation where cooperation is considered, not as a limitation, but as an opportunity for scientific research. This change of attitude is a long-term engagement where frequent promotion has to be performed, including presenting projects that can build the reputation of the platform as being scientifically robust and adhering to the principle of academic freedom.

Speed of establishment of the platform

To establish a cooperative research platform implies to settle a research orientation of praxis among faculty. It also includes establishing a network of contacts with individuals and organizations in society. Since society is accustomed with an isolated university, the society needs to be informed about the university's interest and engagement in cooperative research projects. This could be accomplished through, for example, reporting through mass media about the orientation, but more efficiently, to meet with individuals and organizations that can communicate the orientation further into society. Thus, to establish a platform in society puts demands on investments in relationship with societal actors. Additionally, to only show an interest is to create a low quality signal of commitment. A stronger signal, carrying more credibility, is to be able to present running projects and successfully performed projects. The platform needs projects that deliver utility and that do it in a manner that can be reported to the public.

Thus, to establish a platform of cooperation involves many activities that belong to marketing, especially promotion, and that constitutes in a credible way a long-term investment. A platform cannot be established on a semester or two. Not only does it need time to foster a cooperative spirit at the university, but it also needs to become

viable and produce a credibility that makes external partners willing to engage and invest in projects.

Governance of a cooperative research platform

While research projects within the platform have to be governed by the researchers due to the principle of academic freedom, the platform as such can and should be governed by both parties. Following research concerning board of directors, one would ideally create a governance team that can perform functions of monitoring, service provision, decision making and conflict resolution (Collin, 2008). The group should consist of individuals from both academia and practice. They should be strong in their capacities, thus being good researchers and practitioners. But since they come from two distinct different institutional milieus, they have to have capacity to understand, or at least, accept the different views that will be naturally present in all projects. It can be assumed that individuals that adamantly and one-sided promote their respective orientation will not be able to develop cooperative ideas and to acknowledge values outside their orientation. Thus, individuals have to have a cooperative and consensus oriented attitude, i.e., conflict resolution capability would be the most general and distinguished capacity of each member. This strong demand on one single function capability implies that individuals have to be carefully selected and cannot be elected. The other functions of the board do not have to be shared, but can be supported by individual members. For example, one individual with ample experience of project evaluation could be selected with the aim of contributing to the monitoring function. Resource provision, for example providing access to network, especially access to society, could be another criteria for selection.

The crucial governance question will therefore be, who is to select the members of the governance board? My proposal is that an election committee is organized, consisting of two representatives from both academia and practice, that are given the duty to create a governance board with the capacity to direct the platform of 'Enterprising'.

‘Enterprising’ as a cooperative platform where academia and practice meets, for joint work and joint benefits, is a challenge for both parties, with its pros and cons, but with a profit at the end that makes it worthwhile.

References:

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