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*Funding policies and research values:  
strategies & needs – risks & prospects*

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

by

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- Background
- Rationale
- Expected Results



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI TRIESTE



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## BACKGROUND 1

TRENDS		CONSEQUENCES
Development of mass university	⇒	Extending or altering functions of higher education systems (HES).
Demand to support innovation and to foster graduates' employability	⇒	Growing openness of HES to its social and economic environment.
Growing pressures on resources	⇒	Urgent need to find new funding sources.
Explicit goals of national governments:		Responding national governments' policies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● reduce or cease direct public funding ⇒</li> <li>● decentralizing control (distant steering) } ⇒</li> <li>● promoting universities as autonomous corporate bodies } ⇒</li> <li>● assessing closer links between funding and performance ⇒</li> </ul>		involve stakeholders in research funding; new pattern of managerial control; increasing demand for "relevance" of HES (ranking); research evaluation and increasing role of external reviewers.

## BACKGROUND 2

RISKS FOR RESEARCH		RISKS FOR DIDACTICS
Vast amount of premature, unnecessary publications. Shift in academic priorities to production of producible 'units'.		To conceive education as transmitting pre-packaged knowledge;
To select the ability to deliver 'usable' results quickly; hence to plan 'successful' short-range products with narrow scope.		Proliferation of small didactic units, which risks fragmenting course contents;
Making <i>reported</i> peer-review the ultimate arbiter fosters conventionalism and conservatism, discouraging innovation and insight.		Course materials made easy to acquire and use in a short time;
Concentration on small incremental steps, avoiding comprehensive interdisciplinary work (difficult for panelists to classify), hyperspecialization fosters narrow, fragmentary reference frames.		General lowering of standards of evaluation for exams, dissertations, and grade inflation.
		<b>RISKS FOR THE UNIVERSITY'S MISSION</b>
		Shift in academic priorities: to demote teaching as an inferior activity, to neglect education for citizenship.
		Hiring, tenure, and promotion of academic staff is increasingly based upon collateral, 'quantitative' indications of 'quality', whereas these are (at best) supplementary to <i>actual</i> expert review of an individual's research and teaching.

## **RATIONALE**

“Modern mass universities are increasingly seen primarily through the lenses of costs, performance, number of students and exams. Protocols of benchmarking and statistical indicators applicable to the empirical and to the exact sciences are carried over to the humanities [...]. As a result, smaller fields and subject disciplines become marginalized, and in many instances are phased out altogether. Larger fields and disciplines that do not ‘deliver’ along the lines of the preferred ‘industrial model’ are stripped of research funding and reduced to rote teaching of ever larger groups of students. While the former development also affects certain areas of the natural sciences, the latter applies particularly to the humanities and social sciences. The result, is that in these latter fields the very basis of scholarly research, which should be the foundation on which rests the competent teaching of future generations, our citizens as well as our scholars and scientists, is relentlessly being eroded.”

(Source: Academia Europaea 2012: *Position Paper on the situation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe*)

1. Which strategies should we adopt for the future?
2. What do Humanistic Studies need?
3. What risks now confront research in the Humanities?
4. What good prospects are now available?

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

1. To improve awareness of distortions caused by exclusive use of the research funding model for natural sciences also for humanistic studies, in view of the need to reassess and to reinforce international standards of quality for humanistic studies;
2. To highlight the characteristics of researchers and the research they produce in the Humanities, regarding their distinctive objects, purposes, competence, methods, tools, economic costs and human resources;
3. To emphasize that the increasingly common policy of funding only team or group research projects also in the Humanities often fails to reward excellence and originality, and necessarily undermines niche-studies of high cultural value by individuals and independent researchers.
4. To point to successful models of allocating funds, to avoid relegating cultural heritage to silence and instead to foster dialogue with it.