

The Democratic Value of Higher Education

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Perspectives on the public responsibility of higher education

▪ Instrumental perspective

- Provide professionals to the (nascent) nation-state
- Tool for policy development and implementation
- Serving shifting political/societal/economic agendas

- Universities as transversal problem solver

- Main assessment criterion: Effectiveness

▪ Institutional perspective

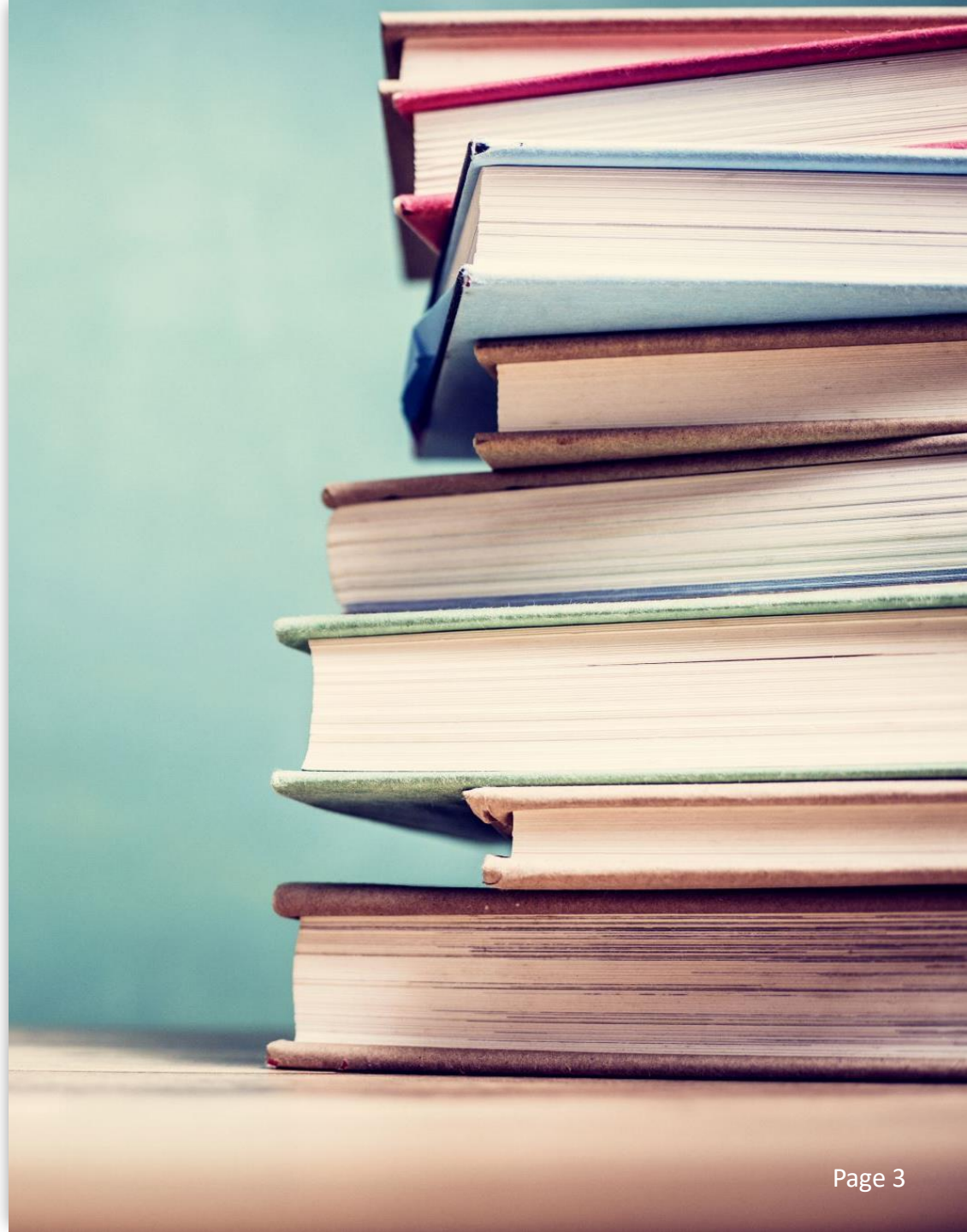
- Historical development towards institutional specialization
- Different “institutional spheres” each with its logics
- Pact with society to safeguard academic values and mission

- Inherent value

- Main assessment criterion: legitimacy

Three questions

- How can the current role of higher education in society be interpreted?
- How does the rise of the knowledge-based economy affect the democratic role of higher education?
- How does the democratic value manifest itself?



Prologue to farce or tragedy

“A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to farce or tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: and a people who means to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives”



The manifestations of the democratic role of higher education

“Knowledge transfer on two feet” with deep and long-term impact

- Expertise for state bureaucracy and public administration
- Long term generation of ideas and knowledge reservoir
- Critical function in public sphere and voice in “specialized public spheres”
- Use of knowledge in policy making



Institutional spheres: contestation and tensions

- When one sphere challenges another:
 - e.g. National security sector has the right-of-way
 - Reform- and crises-induced change of “knowledge regimes”
 - Trends and counter trends:
 - Technocracy claim claim – increasing power of the unelected
 - Expert-elitist claim – tension meritocracy and democracy
- Vs
- Scientisation of society and economy
 - Higher education as key institution in a democratic political order

