


From Collegial Organization to Strategic Management of Resources: Changes in Recruitment in a Norwegian University

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Abstract

The article looks into the consequences for recruitment of Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's recommendations that universities should manage their resources strategically to foster excellence. Using institutional ethnography as described by Dorothy Smith in a sociology department in Norway, it shows how strategic recruiting for excellence resulted in nominating candidates who were not able to teach the sociology program. Operationalizing potential for excellence as the number of (international) publications in the last 5 years resulted in nominating candidates with narrow fields of expertise who had been offered favorable conditions to publish internationally. When academic quality is translated into the number of international publications in the last 5 years, it undermines the policy of gender equity in academia by ruling out women who use paid parental leave to have children during their PhD period. The focus on publications in English also threatens to marginalize sociology's contribution to public debate and national policy.

Keywords

academic recruitment, university governance, gender, performance management, institutional ethnography

Introduction

Norway has changed from a poor underdeveloped country to a rich country with a well-functioning welfare state in the last 100 years. The success of Norwegian society is not based on the wealth and riches of some, but on the labor of the whole population, women as well as men. The mobilization and education of the mass of people, an “educational revolution”, characterizes Norwegian history (Slagstad, 2000). Together with a social democratic ideology of equality, this has resulted in an egalitarian society with relatively small income differences (Barth & Moene, 2012).

A central element has been a publicly funded universal education system that is free of charge and open for all. This has resulted in an equality-oriented organization of Norwegian universities where the main body of teachers—professors and associate professors—has the same duties and responsibilities and the same time allotted for teaching and research. The higher education system has expanded in the last decades to meet the qualification needs of a new generation and has been an important part of the democratic project of educating the whole population. Meeting the increased demand for higher education, has, however, resulted in tighter budgets, less funding per student, and more results-based funding (Stensaker, 2006).

Internationalization and the expanding European Union (EU) have made higher education a political issue for the

Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and resulted in recommendations to mainstream higher education (the Bologna process) regarding how to organize and fund the universities to make them more competitive in a European “knowledge market.” These recommendations have introduced principles in our higher education that are in conflict with the democratic mass university. OECD has proposed that the universities should manage their resources more strategically to foster excellence in research and increase quality in education “to be prepared for the challenges of the future.”

In this line of thought, universities are organizations that can be managed to reach stated goals, and the actions of managers or leaders can accomplish this. The universities are, however, institutions based on the expert knowledge of professionals who are supposed to be the best in their fields. The knowledge of the university is therefore not located at the top of the university hierarchy, but in the departments where knowledge is developed, and can thus hardly be

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“managed” from above (Sørhaug, 2004). Universities can, however, be given good conditions to develop. We have seen two different strategies in Norway to increase excellence in research: One is the establishment of temporary interdisciplinary centers of excellence, and the other the introduction of performance-based research funding (Hicks, 2012; Sivertsen, 2009). Both strategies have been met with approval by the academic community because they match the interests of staff for time to and funding for research.

In this article, I look into some of the consequences of the OECD-recommended strategies that have been implemented in a large Norwegian university, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). NTNU is the result of a merger between the national technical university and a general university in Trondheim. It was the first university in Norway to introduce principles of “professional” management and has also successfully adjusted to the changes in the state funding of the universities.

Being in a period of transition where founding fathers and senior professors in sociology had retired or were about to retire in the near future, my department was facing a period of major renewal. Inspired by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005) and a member of the sociology staff, my point of departure was the experience that recent recruitment processes resulted in the nomination of candidates who were not qualified or able to teach our program in sociology. Candidates who were nominated by the scientific evaluation committees (among many qualified) tended increasingly to be young with a publication record of many international publications, including those in prestigious journals. Their knowledge of sociology, however, was often narrow and confined to their special field or their (especially quantitative) method of choice. Foreign scholars were also likely to be nominated, having published in international journals (i.e., in English). Hardly any of our successful PhD students from the last decades were nominated, although many of them had several years of research experience, taught central courses in our sociology program, and/or developed relevant topics in other institutions of higher education. In a situation where we desperately needed to recruit qualified staff to teach our courses, the nominees were often not able to do so. In some cases, they were nominated with the argument that they would be candidates for special grants for excellence in research, and therefore not expected to carry a normal teaching load. My question is how and why we ended up in this situation.

Background

New Public Management (NPM) is part of a general trend of neoliberal economic thought that spread rapidly across the Western world in an attempt to slow down or reverse government growth by reducing the public sector in favor of private or quasi-private services and make services more effective through competition between providers. Hood (1991) has

described NPM as a marriage of opposites. One partner was new institutional economics built on public choice, principal-agent theory, and transaction cost theory. The other was the latest set of waves of business type managerialism with the notion of professional management expertise as portable and more decisive than professional expertise. NPM’s managerialism (Clarke & Newman, 1997) sees managers as central for the results of the organization. Their role is to be entrepreneurs, and they should be given the power and freedom to manage to meet the targets of the organization (du Gay, 2007). The proposed managerialism therefore requires high discretionary power to achieve results. Furthermore, better organizational performance is to be tracked by active measurement of performance and adjustment of organizational outputs.

This “package” (Hood, 1991) was inspired by neoliberal thought and introduced internationally by right-wing governments. The United States and the United Kingdom were forerunners, followed by New Zealand and Australia, whereas Norway and the Nordic countries were lagging far behind (Christensen & Lægred, 1998). Social democratic parties in the Nordic countries defended their democratic welfare state and criticized Margaret Thatcher’s privatization of public services and dismantling of the state. Although the OECD (2003) acknowledged that the Nordic incremental and consensus-oriented model of governance based on egalitarian values, high level of trust, solidarity, and a large public sector had been successful, they suggested that this model should be abandoned “to prepare for the future.” Their recipe was to separate the regulatory role of the state from its role as owner and deregulate state monopolies to make competition the main goal and thereby improve performance, efficiency and effectiveness of public spending (Christensen & Lægred, 2007). A reason given by the OECD for the introduction of autonomous agencies was that managerial autonomy and accountability for results would improve performance (OECD, 2002).

A right-wing minority Norwegian government proposed in 2001 the policy advocated by OECD. After a struggle over the question of privatization or state control, a compromise was made with the social democrats that preserved the governing role of the state. It is not surprising that the right-wing government actively pursued the policy advocated by OECD, but more so that the social democrats accepted the devolution of responsibility for public services to independent agencies and competition among these to increase efficiency in line with NPM’s economic principles. Having a long tradition of governing the country in a socially and economically responsible way, the position of the social democratic party can, however, be understood as a pragmatic attitude among the social democrats toward the choice of forms of governance according to what serves the objectives of the government (Hermansen, 2004). The broad political acceptance of NPM-inspired reforms in the Norwegian educational system indicates that NPM ideas of good governance have become the norm in public government in Norway.

According to ideas based on the logic of principal-agent theory, the state had to separate its roles as regulator and actor in the market and govern indirectly, at arm's length, to make competition and market-like mechanisms effective. The result of the political compromise was therefore that public services, including the universities, were increasingly "set free" to govern themselves.

Restructuring the University

When the universities were offered the opportunity to govern themselves and decide what courses and programs to offer, the new freedom was accompanied by new forms of control: direct control of the quality of education offered by a regulatory agency to certify the institutions (Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanning [National Committee for quality in education]), and indirect control through competition for funds in pseudo-markets for their share of the state budget for higher education. Result-based funding is based on the institutions being accountable and able to document all relevant results (Clarke, 2005).

The new freedom also meant that their formal position and governance structure changed. Whereas the rector and the university board (the Collegium) used to be elected by staff and students to represent them, the new model introduced so-called professional board members appointed by the state "to strengthen the university's capacity for strategic management."

This reform was very much wanted and welcomed by NTNU. As a university built on a prestigious national technical university (established in 1905 as Norges Tekniske Høyskole [NTH]) with a long history of educating industrial managers (Sørensen, 1998), it had a long tradition of active cooperation with national industry to meet their needs for research, technical innovation, and qualified graduate engineers. This is a very different tradition from the academic freedom of the general university with which it was merged in 1996. Dominated numerically and ideologically by the technological faculties, NTNU welcomed the reform and the opportunity to decide themselves how to run their institution; the engineering faculties because they wanted a stronger involvement by industry to manage the institution better to meet their needs for innovation and candidates, but also the traditional academic faculties who saw an opportunity for more freedom and autonomy, less dominated by the old national technical university.

From Collegial Leadership to Managerial Hierarchy

The introduction of NPM's managerialism changed the management system of the university when control over the universities was delegated from the state to the university board. The new and more professional board appointed by the Ministry of Education was based on the principle of stakeholder organization (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007) with representatives from

society, in our case, mainly industry and business, in addition to students and staff. Since 2005, academic staff has been in the minority on NTNU's board, and student representatives have used their power as stakeholders (users or customers of the university) in alliance with the representatives from business and industry to overrule academic staff in the question of democratic governance with the argument that more control from management would discipline staff to provide good quality education.

The board decides how to govern the institution, and our university was the first in Norway to introduce appointed managers rather than elected ones. The other "old" universities still elect their rectors, deans, and chairs of department although they are under pressure by the current right-wing government to professionalize management. Important arguments in the discussion about academic leadership has been that strong and more professional institutional leadership is needed to promote quality in research and teaching as well as the assumption that higher education institutions cannot afford the traditional collegial academic leadership (Asking & Stensaker, 2002). Appointed managers would in this view be better suited for the new and more strategic role that NPM's managerialism prescribes (Clarke & Newman, 1997).

Since 2005, the rector of NTNU has been appointed by the board rather than elected, and deans of faculty appointed by the rector. Since 2013, the chairs of department are no longer to be elected by the staff, but appointed by the deans of faculty. Thereby, the traditional university democracy in Norwegian universities where academic leaders were chosen by their peers was dismantled in NTNU. This has turned the university system on its head, changing it from a collegial system where the decisions about research and study programs were taken by academics who had been selected on the basis of their scientific qualifications, turning it into an hierarchical organization where the line of command goes from the board and the rector through the deans to the chairs of department. The piecemeal introduction of the changes of governance has made these changes less apparent for the academic community, but the result is that now, the board makes the strategic choices, and rector, deans, and chairs of departments are appointed to ensure that the strategies are implemented locally.

The change from being elected representatives of the staff to managers appointed to govern the faculties and departments in the direction decided by the board offers managers new subject positions (Thomas & Davies, 2005) and constructs new management identities (du Gay, 2007) where they are expected to be proactive and develop strategies of their own for their department to contribute to the strategic goals of the university and the financing of their department.

Documentation of Production

The change from state institution to independent agent entailed that the university was made dependent on its success in the "market" for higher education (Christensen &

Læg Reid, 2007). The universities used to be financed by a grant from the state based on an agreed portfolio of programs according to the (historical) number of students. In 2003, a new model for financing the university was introduced to compensate for the increased number of students, partly based on results (the number of credits and graduate students that they produced). In 2006, this model was extended to research activities by a system for rewarding the number of scientific publications, the number of PhDs produced, and external grants received (Sørensen, 2010). Rewarding publications was appreciated by the faculties of the merged partners in NTNU because the traditional academic departments had, in contrast to the technical university, a long tradition of publishing in scientific journals.

To generate funds, all activities that count in the system for financing have to be registered, and new national electronic systems to document the production of students and credits in teaching have been developed (Fellesystemet [FS]). All publications have to be registered in a central system, Cristin, to generate income. The value of publications is higher if they are published in prestigious international journals or as books published by high-quality international publishers (Level 2) than in other international or national journals or publishers (Level 1). The system also awards different points for different types of publications. In the model, quality is not assessed directly, but relies on the journal or publisher's peer-reviewing and international status. Denmark has also chosen to implement the Norwegian system (Wright, 2014).

To sort the journals into their appropriate levels, a national system in each academic discipline was devised with an intricate system of judging and revising the levels of publications in each discipline, managed by the national academic councils for the disciplines (Sivertsen, 2009). By delegating the evaluation of journals to the national academic councils, the universities were made collectively responsible for the system and the system as such legitimized. Thereby, a peculiarity was also legitimized, namely that to be a Level-2 journal, a journal must have less than two-thirds Norwegian contributions. This means that, in principle, no national journals in Norwegian can be a Level-2 journal, irrespective of quality, and international publication at Level 2 in reality means publication in English.

In general, the changes in financing the universities—rewarding them for attracting students, producing credits, and publications—were met with approval in the social sciences departments. They had since 1990 experienced a rapid growth in numbers of students as a result of youth unemployment and were able to expand with new subjects. The system for distributing funds to the universities that was introduced was viewed as positive because it rewarded the activities and results that academic staff value, that is, teaching students and publishing research. Our departments were able to increase our share of the funds in the internal distribution in NTNU. The changes had, however, the effect that the technological

departments, having realized the importance of scientific publications, changed their practices and increasingly publish their results in international journals. Being a national technological university, they are often the only researchers in their field in Norway and their colleagues elsewhere are always international, and the common language is English. The result has been that NTNU overall increased its share of the higher education budget based on publications.

The same was the case for university colleges in Norway, and the overall number of scientific publications in Norway increased substantially with the new reward system (Sivertsen, 2009). However, the increased production of credits and publications in the universities did not automatically result in an increased budget for higher education. There being no fixed amount rewarded for the different results, the national budget for higher education is distributed according to the criteria set out above, resulting in more production in all universities for the amount that is allotted in the state's yearly budget. So we are, as the red queen said to Alice, running as fast as we can just to stand still financially.

Accounting for Excellence

Once in function, the new accounting systems generate local, institutional, and national accounts of university production. These are the basis for statistical comparisons at local and national levels, making it possible to monitor developments in the different departments of the university and across universities. By comparing results across departments and universities, it is then possible to “promote constant improvement” as NPM promises. Although the system is supposed to work on institutional and not on individual level according to the author of the system (Sivertsen, 2009), the systems for documenting production in education and research also function as performance management systems to control departments and individual academics. Producing up-to-date statistics, they have become powerful instruments for governing the universities and not least the self-governing of academics and departments, making the activities that are counted, count the most.

The ranking of the Norwegian universities internationally has also become more important. The ratio between staff and students being an important measure in the rating systems, mass education systems such as that in Norway that rewards subjects that attract many students automatically disqualify Norwegian universities in competition with elite universities. Striving for excellence, in some areas at least, is still possible, and there is considerable prestige involved in being excellent (Hicks, 2012) and belonging to excellent networks. The universities are therefore working hard to develop fields and projects to be in the forefront of research. Excellence in research is, however, hard to measure across subjects and nations (except perhaps for Nobel prizes), so the count of international publications in prestigious journals is used as a proxy, together with international cooperation in research

(van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). The most recent development is to introduce direct financial incentives for acquiring external grants from international and national research councils as a way to increase research activities and generate funds for the university. To increase internationalization, most of the Norwegian research budget has been channeled through EU programs and the universities urged to compete for EU grants as a way to get their research plans quality assured. This was introduced by a right-wing government under the assumption that the projects awarded by EU programs are of superior scientific quality compared with those rewarded by national or Nordic research councils. Researchers who have received grants from EU programs seriously question this. To motivate the staff to meet the demands for EU grants, the university tries to fund projects with top rating from EU evaluating committees that are nevertheless not funded by the EU.

These strategies are to be implemented in the university, and the new management structure is designed to accomplish this. The main tool is to focus on selected areas where NTNU has a strong position internationally as well as on areas that are important for Norwegian industry and society, and then to strategically direct research funding, including PhD grants, to these areas. In the case of NTNU with its profile of science and technology, the strategic programs are mainly in the natural sciences and technology. The humanities and social sciences are, however, encouraged to contribute to the programs.

The restructuring of the university that created the universities as independent agents, or in the language of NPM, providers of higher education purchased by the Department of Education, has turned the academic departments into production units that have to produce the required results (credits, graduate students, publications, and research grants) and show “profit” in the market for higher education and research (i.e., share of state funds and other sources of income). The university organization with its appointed board and rector is in the business of managing the faculties and departments so that they do so in the most effective way, by closing down subjects and merging departments just like any business corporation. Academic concerns are directed toward the areas where they can increase their income and/or their academic prestige. Strategic management is the means of meeting these goals: to position the university in areas where they may become the best and develop and search for potential stars that may result in excellence in research. Local managers are designated to be entrepreneurs positioning their departments and faculties so as to attract good students, PhD candidates, and qualified academics with potential. Here, recruitment is essential as a strategic tool. How did the restructuring of the NTNU influence recruitment processes and criteria?

Method

To answer this question, I was inspired by a previous study of how performance management changed employment

relations in knowledge work (Håpnes & Rasmussen, 2011; Rasmussen & Håpnes, 2012) and Karin Widerberg’s (2014) analysis of the experiences of a professor’s work in a university department to re-read Dorothy Smith (2005) on institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnography is a manner of enquiry starting from the embodied position of the knower (Smith, 2005). It starts with the issues and concerns of the people who are the focus of enquiry to explore *from below* how the institutional order that governs them is put together. According to Smith (2005) “(t)he institutional ethnographer works from the social in people’s experience to discover its presence and organisation in their lives and to explicate or map that organisation beyond the local of the everyday” (p. 11). The aim is to extend the knowledge of how these everyday lives and worlds are embedded in and organized by relations that transcend them, relations that coordinate what we do and others do elsewhere and elsewhen (Griffith & Smith, 2014). Central concepts in this endeavor are texts and ruling relations. Texts enter into and organize people’s actions, making it possible to extend ethnographic studies into the translocal to explore the relations that rule as objectified consciousness and organization (Griffith & Smith, 2014).

Although starting from below and my position as faculty in sociology, I do not start from a position of the powerless or disadvantaged in the university system (Lund, 2012), but from the position of a professor with management experience and responsibilities, located in a department with a strong collegial and democratic tradition and a tradition of freedom of research. My position is that of an actor in the processes of the acceptance or active implementation of the changes in the universities from the 1990s. I have in the previous sections traced the changing criteria for recruitment by exploring the restructuring of our university and the way in which our department has met the changes. The restructuring changed the governance of the university, introducing measurement of performance and strategic management. I use my own experience as a participant on the board of the university in the periods 1996 to 1999 and 1999 to 2001 when the first changes were discussed and introduced, and from the management of our department (in 2005-2007 and at present) as well as general staff experience, discussions, and meetings over the last 10 years when the new structure found its shape and took effect in our university, NTNU.

The texts that I am following to unravel the ruling relations (Smith, 1990) that influence or decide the recruitment in our department take their departure from the experience of recent recruitment processes. These processes are analyzed using the reports from the evaluation committees, staff reactions, and our discussions and efforts to design processes for recruiting more suitable candidates.

I describe the processes of recruitment that made me and my colleagues realize that the rules of the game had changed and that new considerations dominated the recruitment policy. I follow two threads to understand how an autonomous and democratic department in a main Norwegian university

full of critical scholars seemingly lost their power over faculty recruitment without even realizing it. The data collection covers the period of two different chairs of department as well as two rectors and two deans.

Recruiting the Best Candidates?

The first process in 2011-2012 took place when, after several years of ban on hiring, our department was allowed to recruit faculty to replace retired founding fathers. Our first priority was someone who could teach sociological theory for master students, but also had experience with empirical research. Because university positions are attractive in Norway, there were many applicants, both national and international, which made us consider hiring two candidates. An evaluation committee of senior sociologists from Norwegian universities did a thorough job of evaluating the candidates looking at their total production and judging its contribution to sociological theory, nominating the best qualified for the position, three men and three women. Following normal procedures, a committee with student participation made a pedagogical evaluation based on trial lectures. The candidates were also invited to present themselves and their research for the staff. To decide which candidates to hire, the chair of department and head of administration interviewed the candidates. The interview was a new element introduced in the new management structure. The process in this case followed normal procedures, except for the interview by management, and staff members sat in on the candidates' presentations and trial lectures.

Because the committee had done a thorough job of evaluating the candidates, we expected that the top candidates would be hired if they did not disqualify themselves in their trial lecture or presentation. This was, however, not the case. The final nomination for two positions was done by the chair of department, and the order of the nominated candidates was more or less turned on its head. An international candidate was appointed based on the number of (international) publications in prestigious journals and a national candidate based on relevant research and pedagogical qualifications, both women. The international candidate never formally accepted the position and left after 3 months.

The recruitment process resulted in discussions among the sociology staff. One concerned the evaluation criteria that prioritized international publications in prestigious journals over being able to teach sociology to Norwegian students. The other concerned whether the final selection of the candidate(s) should be based on the ranking of the scientific evaluation committee (and trial lecture) or decided by the chair of department, who, in this case, did not belong to the sociology staff. We challenged the principle that the authority over recruitment should follow the formal hierarchical position that allowed the chair to disregard the ranking of the scientific evaluation committee. Where the decision used to be based on the evaluation of the scientific committee, supplemented

by the pedagogical committee, the process that we had experienced, showed that in the new university structure local management had attained a much stronger position and could decide who to hire, in line with NPM's managerialism that offer managers power and freedom to manage (Clarke & Newman, 1997). Strategic concerns clearly motivated management's priorities so that international research, international networks, and international publications were more important in management's evaluation, but teaching needs could also be considered, as in the case of the national candidate.

The next recruitment process went under our radar at first because the announcement was decided by the chair of the department and a senior professor in charge of research activities. It was based on the argument that here was an outstanding candidate in one of NTNU's strategic research areas that we urgently needed to recruit. This resulted in a very specific announcement tailored to the candidate's qualifications and experience. The candidate was a successful young man who had acquired a PhD in our department and subsequently a postdoc position working on an international project. In this process, it was very clear that the motivation for the chair of department was strategic: to recruit research talents with international networks and potential to be part of international research groups and to acquire international financial support. The candidate would consequently not be expected to take on a normal teaching load.

This process raised a discussion in the sociology staff about how decisions about recruitment should be made. We demanded democratic and transparent processes and no deals with senior (male) professors to secure their disciples. Having reached an agreement that open processes would be followed in the future, we thought that we were back to normal procedures with staff discussions around recruitment and selection criteria.

That this was not so was evidenced in the next recruitment process concerning two positions, one in quantitative and one in qualitative methods. Our department offer courses in quantitative and qualitative methodology for all our study programs (sociology, political science, social studies in sports and master in media and communication). It therefore seemed a good idea to seek candidates for both types of method in one announcement. The announcement resulted in many applicants. A majority came from our own institution, which made it difficult to put together an independent evaluation committee across methods. Being in the process of changing chairs of department and in the summer vacation, the administration put together a committee that set out to work. The announcement used a standard text from the faculty of social sciences, taking into account the university's strategy of internationalization and excellence of research. It stated that a relevant PhD was required and emphasized the relevance of the candidate's international publications "in the last 5 years." The importance of publications in the last 5 years was motivated by the wish to recruit young(er) candidates who were active

in research rather than favoring seniors who had a long career and many years of publications, but who might not be currently as productive. As such, it had been accepted by the staff as a way to recruit young and active researchers.

These criteria were subsequently used by the committee as operationalizations of scientific quality to arrive at the nominees. Pressured for time, the work of the evaluation committee resulted in all candidates with a relevant PhD being judged as qualified, and furthermore, automatically qualified in the methods of their research, mainly their PhD project. However, as a result of the new system of financing the universities based on the production of publications, the requirements for a PhD dissertation in Norway had been changed from a monograph to a preference by the universities for three to four published articles with an introductory chapter of theoretical and methodological arguments and a concluding chapter that would bind the papers together as a coherent project. The result of this procedure was therefore that candidates who had done an article-based PhD were first qualified as having acquired a PhD, and then credited for their number of publications, including those of their PhD. The candidates who had written a monograph were only credited for their PhD which did not add to their international publications; they had no chance to be nominated. What counted, and was counted, was international publications, and they were in case of the nominees, often counted twice: first as part of the basic qualifications and then as the qualifying element.

Although briefly mentioned in the report, the committee did not attach much importance to whether the candidates had written or reflected about method use in their publications, or whether their methodology was well chosen and fruitful in their research. There was also no serious consideration of their experience in teaching methods courses, although staff were well aware of the importance of teaching skills in methods. It was evident that a count of international publications had been *the* method of selecting the nominees.

In spite of this, by following a process like the one described earlier with trial lectures, public presentations, and interviews, we were able to recruit two well-qualified candidates. The process had, however, been a shock for many of us. Seeing that well-qualified and experienced qualitative researchers who had written about methods and taught methods were not even nominated, whereas quantitative researchers with hardly any methodological reflections could be nominated simply on the basis of their having used advanced methods, demonstrated the problems of defining quality and competence as the number of international publications in the last 5 years. The evaluation of the candidates sent a strong signal to the applicants who were not nominated, that they/their qualifications were not good enough, and that they were not wanted by our university.

The new system of financing the universities based on number of publication points changed the practice of recruiting from valuing the quality of the total production of the

candidates to valuing the number of (international) publications in the last 5 years. This was used to decide who were eligible for nomination and who were not. The quality of the publications of the eligible candidates was subsequently evaluated, but the works of the candidates who were not found qualified were only dealt with summarily. By applying a criterion like the number of publications in the last 5 years, evaluation committees are able to decide quantitatively (and quickly) who are worthy of selection. Thereby, applicants may be ruled out without a qualitative evaluation of their merits. The quantitative approach is especially problematic in view of the use of the “salami tactic” where research findings are sliced into “the least publishable unit” to get the highest possible number of publications out of the data (Wright, 2014, p. 325), a good example of how performance-measuring systems are perverted in use (de Bruijn, 2006).

The new practice of emphasizing (international) publications in the last 5 years means that *speed* of publishing becomes decisive rather than the quality and the amount over time. Thus, recent PhD students, and especially those who moved directly to a postdoc after their PhD and had been able to research and publish full-time, had the best chances to be nominated. Experienced contract researchers and teaching staff with less time to publish and a not-so-recent PhD (more than 5 years ago) would be judged less qualified according to the faculty’s standard requirements.

Qualifications or Favorable Conditions?

In this case, it is difficult to separate favorable conditions from personal qualifications. The candidates who were most likely to be nominated were young men (and some women) often with narrow fields of research, using quantitative methods to analyze (international) data sets under supervision of well-established senior professors with networks who knew the state of knowledge in their field and the important journals in which to publish.

Postdoc positions being scarce and increasingly awarded to the university’s central strategic programs, the majority of the PhDs leave the university after having defended their thesis for teaching positions in university colleges or contract research posts. In these positions, the opportunities for international publications are much less favorable, especially if you are a new recruit. Those who qualify by teaching or contract research *and* publishing do so over considerably more years and will, if international publications in the last 5 years is used as the standard measure, invariably lose in competition with candidates who are able to move into a postdoc directly after their PhD (see also van den Brink & Benschop, 2012).

Thus, where the system of academic evaluation and review is supposed to be an objective review of the *candidates’* scientific merits and prospects, one could argue that it is a review where the candidates who have been offered the most favorable *conditions* for international publications win.

Hill, Secker, and Davidson (2014) argue in a recent article that if merit is to be taken seriously in the case of academic promotion, it is necessary to measure achievement relative to opportunity to take into account other activities and commitments that are of importance for the opportunity to research and publish.

Gender Aspects of the New Hiring Policies

In Norway, equal opportunity is a stated goal in academia as well as in society in general, and the policy is to encourage women to choose academic careers. Around 2000, there was even a national policy of establishing special professorships for women in subjects where there were no women professors as was often the case in science and technology. In the social sciences (as in the humanities), women are well represented at all levels in Norwegian universities.

Norway has a long tradition of independent social research institutions that have contributed to policy research that has been the basis for developing the welfare state and the Norwegian model of working life. When the universities expanded in the 1990s, there were therefore many well-qualified women who were appointed to university positions based on their merits in policy research and later, promoted to professors. Although educated in the 1970s where politically inspired research for change was more important than academic publishing, we, the women in the department, embraced the new ideology of international publications as a signifier of good or excellent research because we participated in the international sociological community and published in international journals. The quality criteria have therefore not been challenged as such, but there were concerns about the changing balance between the weight on publications (research) and teaching in connection with the recent recruitment processes. Universities being an institution for teaching academic subjects and teaching being a central duty for all faculty, the recruitment of international candidates without knowledge of the Norwegian language is a problem in sociology.

The Nordic welfare states are based on egalitarian values, a high level of trust, solidarity, and a high level of social welfare with a large public sector (Barth & Moene, 2012). This has resulted in a high employment rate for men and women facilitated by long paid parental leave for mothers and fathers and day care facilities for all children from 1 to 6 years of age (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). This has changed parenting in Norway, making it easy for women and men to combine parenting and full-time work. In academia, it has had the effect that women are able to qualify for an academic career through PhD positions and bear children before they are established in academia. International researchers who are recruited to Norwegian universities and research institutions give this as their main reason to work in Norway where pay is lower, but where they are able to combine academic careers with having time for raising children (Brandth &

Kvande, 2013). Using these welfare facilities, women PhD students in Norway often extend their PhD period with 1 year or more of parental leave(s). When academic quality is translated into the number of (international) publications *in the last 5 years* as the standard of the good or excellent academic (Lund, 2012), this has the effect of undermining the policy of gender equity in academia. Equity and diversity are also important values for universities, and excellence and equity have always been in tension in research policy (Hicks, 2012).

Searching for Excellence

The international rankings of universities have also become important as a measure of excellence for Norwegian universities since the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and Shanghai Jiao Tong University started to publish rankings of the supposedly best universities. In spite of low scores in these rankings, they have fostered NTNU's ambition to be internationally excellent (Sørensen, 2010). Through the recruitment processes, we saw that research potential and being a candidate for excellence in research with international networks and connections so as to be well positioned for international (i.e., EU) grants had become important in the university's recruitment policy. Excellence is effective as a political instrument because it has no specific content, and is therefore hard to challenge. It is impossible to be opposed to raising standards or enhancing quality (Weingart & Massen, 2007). Although research and publications generate only a small part of the total state funding, they are taken much more seriously than their financial effect should warrant. This can be explained by the prestige involved in the comparison and hierarchical ranking of the universities (Hicks, 2012).

That the selection criteria had changed so that the *prospects* and *potential* of the candidates seemed to be just as, or even more, important than the results of their work that was evaluated by the scientific committee can be understood as a way of recruiting for excellence. When the university also offers special start grants and extra resources for PhDs and postdocs for young and promising staff, combined with reduction in teaching duties, those who are selected are offered a privileged position with the best conditions to succeed. Recruitment therefore appears increasingly to be a question of university politics and strategic considerations. The new and central role of management in the recruitment processes that we saw in our department mirrors this.

This strategic role is based on the idea that it is possible to manage universities to achieve excellence by selecting the candidates with the best potential and giving them the best conditions. There is, however, no evidence that this will result in excellence or ground-breaking results. Such results are the product of hard work by dedicated researchers who believe in what they do, but there is no guarantee that they will succeed. There is certainly no guarantee that management is able to

predict who will or will not produce excellence, as witnessed by our local Nobel Prize winners May-Britt and Edvard Moser who were not selected as potentially excellent or offered the best conditions when they first came to NTNU. It was their dedication, stubbornness, and fight for their research agenda that ultimately resulted in resources and groundbreaking results.

In sports in Norway, we have seen several projects to develop talent by selecting the most promising young people at an early age and giving them special training. The results are meager, and the conclusion is that it is not possible to predict who is going to be a success (Augestad & Bergsgard, 2007). Therefore, rather than selecting a few to be candidates for excellence, offering good working conditions and opportunity for research for the many may be what ultimately results in good or excellent research.

A Sociology for People

Borrowing Dorothy Smith's subtitle from her book *Institutional Ethnography*, I will argue that the dissemination of knowledge from Norwegian sociological studies to the people of Norway is of crucial importance for the future and relevance of sociology in Norway. With a tradition of relevance for policy development and central in democratic processes of social planning and reforms, the status of sociology in Norway is dependent on our contribution to discussions about the country's social problems and their solution. The strategic importance that is placed on international publications in recruitment processes has consequences for sociology's contribution to national politics and culture (Hicks, 2012). If sociological research and publications are directed toward an international audience and not toward a Norwegian public, and if they no longer address Norwegian problems and political debates, sociology may be marginalized and become irrelevant nationally. To defend its position (and funding) in a situation where the political focus is increasingly on innovation and usefulness, it has to be relevant for Norwegian society and contribute to how we understand ourselves, our challenges, and opportunities.

This has two major consequences: first, that we need to continue to publish widely in Norwegian, both in academic journals and in popular journals and news media to the general public, and second, that we need to continue to address local and national problems. Whereas in the hard sciences knowledge can be thought of as global and general and applicable for all, in the social sciences, knowledge tends to be national and local in import (Mathews, 2012). If our findings are only, or mainly, published in international journals, that is, in English, we are denying knowledge of them to those who are most interested in them and could most benefit from them, a paradox in these times when "user interests" are deemed so important in other contexts.

Another problem is that publishing in international journals means that we have to align our problematics and our

understandings to the concerns of international journals (Mathews, 2012). Norway as one of the Nordic countries, differs considerably from continental Europe and even more so from the United Kingdom and the United States and other societies globally. Our social problems and the ways we manage them are different and therefore often not of interest for journals based in the United States and the United Kingdom. We are also often excluded in comparative (EU) research because they already have "one of those" (i.e., another Nordic country). To be funded by international grants (i.e., EU) and published in European journals (in the common foreign language English) will also entail aligning our research to EU's policy rather than to national policy and (more critical) international questions. Instead of widening our perspective, increased international publishing might result in a streamlining of concerns, theories, and understandings that might decrease our societies' ability to find solutions to tomorrow's challenges.

Norwegian journals of sociology and social sciences experience a reduction in submitted contributions in spite of the need for PhD candidates to have three or four published articles in their dissertation. Some of these journals are distributed to all members of the Norwegian Association of Sociologists (*Sosiologisk Tidsskrift* [in Norwegian]) and *Acta Sociologica* (a Nordic journal, in English). They do, together with other sociological and social science journals, contribute to the common knowledge and discussions among social scientists. With increased focus on international publications, there is a danger that these platforms for sociological discussions will be replaced by field-specific (international) discussions that do not relate their findings to sociology.

We can observe this in the PhD students' efforts to find international journals where their papers may be published. The chances are slim that they will be able to publish in general sociological journals or international leading journals in their field, and they may end up publishing their papers in journals where sociological concepts and analysis are not common and the critical review of social science contributions are lacking. We have already seen that publications in multi- or other-disciplinary journals that are of marginal interest sociologically have resulted in publications in international journals that have not been accepted in a PhD in sociology.

Paradoxically, the norm of article-based PhD may be what saves publications in Norwegian because it is difficult to publish in relevant international journals. To manage to publish enough papers for a PhD in sociology, students therefore often end up with a PhD dissertation based on a mix of national *and* international publications.

Conclusion

Returning to this article's question as to how and why we ended up in a situation where the recruitment processes did not produce staff who could teach sociology, we need to understand the university reforms in Norway. In contrast to

the centrally decided and radical reforms of the Danish universities (Wright, 2014), the reforms in governance of higher education in Norway were introduced piecemeal and as an opportunity to be decided by each university after they were set free from the Ministry of Education. The decision to appoint rector was taken by an NTNU board as yet still dominated by academic staff, with the support of representatives from the technology departments and the external members from business and industry. The other universities kept their elected rectors, deans, and chairs of department.

The history and tradition of NTNU as the national technological university with its close relations to Norwegian industry explain their willingness to reform in the direction of managerialism and representation on the board from industry and business. As “junior partners” and minority in NTNU, the humanities and social science departments had to adjust to their decisions. Because the growth in students was in our subjects, we were able to expand and increase our share of the budget. Result-based funding was not contested because it coincided with our values, and moreover, at the time of introduction, they favored our studies; the number of students increased, and we published in academic journals.

The changes in NTNU were also piecemeal. The rector, as before from a technology department, was consensus-oriented and followed the tradition of involving all levels in strategy processes. The effects of constructing the faculties and departments as economic actors who needed to act strategically to secure their survival were not manifest until the board decided to appoint deans of faculty, and in 2013, chairs of department. The new top-down chain of command destroyed the traditional university democracy and gave the faculty power to implement the strategies of the board over the departments that were responsible for producing the results. Governance changed from the invisible hand of result-based funding to the visible hand of implementing new strategies of recruitment for international publications and excellence in research.

The protests among sociology staff were triggered by the recruitment processes, but directed at local management. They increased when the power of the faculty threatened the department’s autonomy in questions of strategy.

When a new right-wing national government proposed concentration of the institutions of higher education where distributed university colleges around the country were to merge into large universities to make them more robust and increase their quality (excellence), the protests increased. The fusions are accompanied by appointed rectors, and at the moment, university staff are protesting and our unions are actively opposing government policy.

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