Planning Research for the Future?

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Panel Discussion:
Are universities allowed and capable to plan their research?

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To what extent can or should universities focus and plan their research?

In my brief statement and the following discussion, I would like to present and elaborate the following claims (*Thesen*):

In times of restricted resources, universities have to **monitor** what kind of research will be funded, supported, and promoted at universities.

Moreover, universities and teaching/research staff are dependent of **assessment, monitoring and funding agencies** as well as of **impact and citation measurements.** These define or at least attempt defining relevant mainstream agenda. **Publishers and peer-review journals** also mostly orient themselves towards these criteria and co-construct these.

Universities also depend on the **acquisition of project monies** as the state - in many countries – does not fund research (and also the infra-structure) anymore; in any case, universities are underfunded (see developments in the United Kingdom, for example; or in Austria and Germany, two countries without tuition fees).

Furthermore, there are more and more **links with business and enterprises**; many bureaucrats and administrators expect research to be (almost immediately) applicable in practice and bring added value to business.

Simultaneously, it is obvious that the research conducted by staff should also influence their **teaching commitments** and thus, relate to at least some of the teaching and supervising practices.

However: planning of research agenda and strategies of research support should not intervene in to **innovation via, and creativity of, individual researchers or research teams**. By trying to fit research agenda to the tenders of funding agencies, needs of business, and so forth, creative and new ideas are in danger of being neglected because (almost) nobody wants to support high risk research.

Furthermore, the **streamlining and standardising of teaching requirements** leads to repetitive teaching necessities for staff; there is frequently neither money nor time for specialised high-standard classes anymore.

The – sometimes almost obsessive – **auditing and monitoring systems** lead to a waste of productive time: instead of **doing research**, staff members have to plan future strategies and write manifold strategy papers or report past agenda in various ways for various audiences.

I label these various contradicting pressures on researchers and research 'the triple-helix'. I would like to explore possibilities to keep the universities' and researchers' freedom and creativity, in spite of the multiple pressures outlined above (see, for example, Jessop, Fairclough, Wodak 2008; Wodak 2009).