

Planning, Competition, and Science

In the context of the general planning euphoria of the late 1960s and 1970s, research planning also landed on the political agenda. Moreover, over the past 15 years it has enjoyed a regular revival. This stands in sharp contrast to today's general political debates in which the possibility for comprehensive social planning has been viewed with marked skepticism. Research planning today is thought of, above all, as top-down organized competition. Mobilization within and among universities, resulting from such competition (the Excellence Initiative, for instance), has led to a new wave of planning euphoria. Whether this development can be sustained or whether it will suffer a fate similar to that of its predecessor remains to be seen. In this presentation, I will argue that the unconditional expansion of competition as a control mechanism undermines its own success in the long run.

In this presentation I will elucidate and discuss the benefits and drawbacks of research planning. To this end, a typology for the external governance of science will be presented. What this reveals is that the present dominant forms of governance, in addition to some of their more remarkable advantages, also display a succession of disadvantages. These detriments become all the more visible and significant, the more that the scientific system aligns itself unidirectionally in accord with such forms of governance, and the longer that it applies them over time. In the end, there can be no best solution to this problem: the different aims of good science policy cannot all be maximized at the same time. I draw this presentation to a close by making a reflective plea for competition – namely, for competition between the *instruments* of science policy.

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