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Academic co-operation in a bipolar world: where does SANORD fit in?

Tor Halvorsen

WHEN SANORD WAS FOUNDED, the hope was that it would contribute to the growth of an open and democratic dialogue between academics across cultures. SANORD was created by universities, is governed by universities, and aims to promote research between universities that would otherwise not happen or not be possible. SANORD also aims to enhance co-operative research-based teaching relationships, ideally drawing on the findings of SANORD-generated research.

In the following pages I discuss five reasons why such co-operation is difficult to achieve, but also advance five counter-arguments as to why those involved with the SANORD project should try to make the organisation fulfil the goals for which it was formed.

However, I begin by identifying some of the general societal trends that have penetrated the thinking of both the Nordic and the southern African regions. These trends create similar challenges for their universities, despite the different contexts within which they are situated.

Democracy and capitalism

In the early 1990s, Africa experienced a wave of democratisation (Hydén 1998), which paralleled the fall of the Berlin Wall, and what is seen as the political and economic liberalisation of Eastern Europe (and later Russia).

To many, not only in the West, this spread of democracy in both the North (Europe) and in Africa south of Sahara, including South Africa after 1994, symbolised the final victory of *liberal capitalist institutions*. What had emerged seemed to be a single global system for economic development. Some assumed

that globalised capitalism, in line with the new democratic developments, would in time lead to a democratic order worldwide. Behind this thinking lay the theory of *rational choice*. This theory builds on presuppositions about human behaviour to argue that the same human choices that promote the market economy also promote democracy. The theory has little respect for the old school of social thinking whose prominent figures (ranging from Max Weber to Joseph Schumpeter) had as their main research question exactly this: what is the link between capitalism and democracy when these institutions derive from different motives and require actions that are not easily reconciled? Building on these classics, Rueschemeyer et al. (1996) suggest that capitalism's options in times of crisis are not clear; it can tend equally towards dictatorship or democracy.

It is, however, rational choice theories that have hegemony at present. It seems to be accepted that *rational choice* motivates our actions in politics and in economics. We make political choices, as if we were consumers. And as consumers, we tend to see capitalism and democracy as one and the same, or as part of the same development. Put colloquially, the same factors that motivate our shopping motivate our voting. This view is proposed by Amadae in his book, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (2003), in which he discusses the global victory of this way of thinking.

But with the advent of the financial crises since 2008, and the domination of politics by the financial institutions, a new debate about the relations between economics and democracy has emerged, as predicted by Rueschemeyer et al. (1996). Developments in both Europe and southern Africa, where democratic institutions seem to be under attack, have led to a renewed questioning both of the hypothesis that capitalist development is the result of rationally motivated human choice, and the idea that capitalism necessarily strengthens democracy. As I write (in 2012), Greece is not the only case in Europe where 'economic technocrats' play the role of the proverbial 'House of Lords' whose task it is to discipline popular democracies. The World Bank, as all readers will recognise, plays this role in a number of African countries. Analysing the conflicts within democratic capitalism, Wolfgang Streeck argues that Europe's financial dramas are the result of democratic states being turned into debt-collecting agencies on behalf of a global oligarchy of investors:

> More than ever, economic power seems today to have become political power, while citizens appear to be almost entirely stripped of their democratic defenses and their capacity to impress upon the political

economy interests and demands that are incommensurable with those of capital owners. (Streeck 2011: 29)

The situation in southern Africa and, in particular, in South Africa is similar. As Marais (2011: 130) argues,

> Neo-liberalism continues to provide the organizing framework and ethical compass points for South Africa's transition. This is especially stark in relation to the state's obligation towards citizens.

Marais also argues that the state disciplines its people to become consumers of public services, rather than to act as 'debating citizens' who attempt to solve collective problems. And neo-liberalism, which justifies this by deploying its theories of 'rational choice', has not been consigned to the past but continues to prevail.

> A neoliberal development path was adopted, and has been maintained, because the balance of forces within the ANC alliance, and between it and corporate capital, favours such a course [of action]. (Marais 2011: 139)

So, the domination of the concept of rational choice seems to serve an ideology that permits economic interests to take precedence over democracy. This is particularly evident in southern Africa (Hydén 1998) where the competitive dimension of democracy has developed into a process of 'shopping' for votes – with party bosses rewarding voters and dispensing with public processes, such as debate and deliberation, through which citizens arrive at decisions and act upon these. These two understandings of democracy – *the voter as consumer of political promises* and *the constitution of a political community through discourse* – build upon two different understandings of human action. This is contrary to Amadae's (2003) argument that the social sciences and the humanities can build on only one view of human action, namely the one that leads to rational-choice liberalism. But it is Amadae's view that penetrates much of modern economic thinking and legitimises neo-liberalism.

Whereas *rational-choice* theories emphasise the voter as a consumer, an alternative understanding of democracy, which I build on below in my discussion of neo-liberalism, assumes that people do not have stable opinions and preferences. Instead, they are

> in flux and constantly being formed, reproduced, validated, tested, abandoned, adapted, revised, upgraded, and reflectively enriched in the light of new information and experience [thus] the process of opinion and preference acquisition is not exclusively an internal and monological one,

but always takes place in a communication and interactive dialogue with others. (Offe 2011:4)

So, the fact that democracy has been weakened by the veto posed by the global reach of economics, illustrates that economic governance and democracy can part ways. And given that democratic forces are still more embedded in the nation state, or are, at least, less global than the economy, the power of neo-liberal economics as a conditionality for national democracies is growing. But the global victory of rational-choice liberalism, which has been celebrated as successful globalisation, prevents many of us from problematising the international and global economy as an anti-democratic movement. Expertise (as represented by the neo-liberal global economy) vetoes national democracies. According to the many think-tank promoters of neo-liberalism, as analysed by Mirowski and Plehwe (2009), democracy is instead 'recreated' as a decision-making process worthy of global capitalism. As Streeck (2011) argues, democracy legitimises a state bureaucracy that transforms global pressure into national policies. This bureaucracy transforms public institutions, including universities, in line with 'new economic demands'. The state then secures quasi-markets – the services sector in South Africa being a good example – as the arena in which citizens can exercise rational choice.

Those who have expressed these ideas most forcefully point to its success in the United States and, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, have urged its global penetration as the only policy for 'handling public space':

> Any attempt to understand the phenomenal success of rational choice theory within the social sciences must acknowledge the interconnections between rational choice as a decision tool for government policy initiatives and as an explanatory device for predicting the outcomes of human action. (Amadae 2003: 28)

Thus the ability of national democracies to generate rational decisions is increased by the insights offered by what Amadae (among others) calls 'new social science' on decision making. These are based on the self-same epistemologies as decision making within global capitalism. As a result, a common 'explanatory device' is has been created and, happily for capital, the problem of how to democratise the global public space vanishes.

As the global economy has become detached from national democracies, it has also become concerned to detach knowledge institutions from nation-state democracies by, for example, transforming them into service-delivery-type institutions within the global market. This is most clearly expressed in the

negotiations within the General Agreements on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS is an agreement within the World Trade Organisation (WTO) that promotes free trade within service industries of all kinds. In line with new public-management ideals, public institutions are being transformed into private service providers, and the services sector has become the fastest growing part of the global economy (Tilak 2011). Typically, there is little, if any, concern about how knowledge institutions could enhance the creation of a global public space, or a global democratic discourse.

Neo-liberal ideas, based on theories on rational choice, which conflate democracy and capitalism, on the one hand, and theories of democracy as a way of giving meaning and ranking to our preferences on the other, also leads us to different ideas about knowledge and the role of knowledge-creating institutions. In this controversy SANORD, as argued below, sees itself as a tool for a broadening of democratic values, even when these may contradict the expertise of the global economy.

Knowledge for democracy and knowledge in times of neo-liberalism

The notion of knowledge as a science is a hundred or so years old. It became a tool of economic growth after the Second World War. Since then not only technology and market analysis but also decision making and education have become science based. The role played by knowledge in the process of capitalist accumulation is obvious, and the degree to which knowledge can be used as a means of improving competition, promoting innovation, changing the direction of economic priorities, as well as reproducing (or transforming) social relations within the economy, are topics that deserve analysis.

But knowledge as science, that is, research-based knowledge, has another role: that of critical reflection. In historical perspective, this is not just an auxiliary role; it is the primary purpose of knowledge. Universities have come to accept knowledge as a basis for dialogue and argument in order to support the goal of democratic development. Consequently, universities have become involved in all forms of opinion making, the formation of judgements, the shaping of preferences and, through discourse and social interaction, the presentation of opinions and arguments which are perceived as a voice of 'cognitive rationality'. So universities have become involved in shaping national democracies, not only by teaching citizens to vote in a narrow technical sense but, more importantly, by creating the basis for public discourse, and shaping opinions that may make voting meaningful beyond individual 'rational choice', particularly when democracy is under threat.

As drivers of global knowledge – knowledge knows no borders – universities

have been eager to exchange ideas and insights, results from research, and to encourage colleagues to move (relatively) freely across borders. As an international 'movement', they have become closely linked to the project of democratic development (Kalleberg 2011, but see also Vale 2010 on the idea of the *volksuniversiteit*). As a distinctive form of 'international organisation', spread across most of the world, and with tremendously increasing cross-border networking, universities have demonstrated how internationalisation can strengthen nation-state democracies and embed democratic processes internationally at the same time.

However, with the growing involvement of the academic community in processes of accumulation that are governed by economic interests beyond the influence of the nation state, there is less space for the university's traditional calling – the development of critical discourses and informing public debate. Instead, as noted earlier, universities have been transformed into more or less privatised service-delivery mechanisms (as advocated by the WTO and GATS). For example, knowledge is made into commodities by patent systems, the Trade Related Intellectual Property Right agreements under the WTO, and by being locked up in agreements with transnational companies. Put bluntly, if universities start to behave as rational-choice actors, and if governments treat them as such within an internationally competitive context – as the present regime of ratings, rankings and rewards requires – the decisions made by universities will increasingly align with pre-set choices determined by the forces outside universities that define their success. The forces in question are the strong economic actors and the political elites – what Streeck (2011) has called the global oligarchs. The role of the university, as an arena that problematises strategic choices, and questions goals and decisions, is wholly insecure; and universities that aim to make broad public debate a vital part of public choice and participation are hardly valued.

The role of SANORD

In what follows SANORD is discussed in the light of the dichotomies between capitalism and democracy, national and international. The emphasis falls on the role SANORD could play as an international organisation that promotes a role for universities in inter-democratic discourses. The question is how cross-border, post-national and globally oriented networks of academics can strengthen the ability of citizens of nation states to formulate well-founded opinions about important issues of common concern, such as poverty, multiculturalism, economic oppression, public underfunding, private inequality, environmental degradation, unemployment and the like.

The formation of SANORD was inspired by hopes for a new, open, and socially just South Africa. After the end of apartheid, free and open academic co-operation across numerous borders were mobilised, and close political affiliations were quickly transformed into academic networks. Research co-operation also grew out of the interest expressed by leading academics in South Africa in gaining a deeper understanding of the Nordic development model. Typically enough, when I first met my co-editor for this book in 1995, it was at a conference in Cape Town to which he had invited me to talk about the Nordic experience. More specifically, the focus of the conference was on how to distribute power across society through democratic institutions, and particularly how to strengthen their discursive and deliberative roles (Halvorsen 1995).

In my introduction to this chapter I undertook to offer five reasons why SANORD will find it difficult to defend its place within the field of academic internationalisation, and also to provide five counter-arguments as to why we should try to make the organisation a sustainable alternative to the dominant model already described. The exercise of presenting 'for and against' arguments draws on the broader debate about capitalism and democracy explored above. Although this debate is one of the oldest in social science (Rueschemeyer et al. 1996), it is given new meaning by the emergence of academic capitalism, which has followed from the enormous success of neo-liberal economics – a phenomenon that seems to be, as argued above, on the verge of overruling democracy, both in Europe and southern Africa.

As noted, higher education and research has always had an international character, and in the past this was driven by the understanding that knowledge knows no borders. However, during the 1990s, the decade during which globalisation may be said to have peaked, internationalisation within the academic community suddenly gained a new and different meaning – we might call this 'new internationalisation'. The idea that universities should be linked internationally was sucked into the vacuum created by the end of the Cold War and by the victory of neo-liberalism and rational choice epistemology. For universities, this ushered in an age of increasing student and knowledge mobility, as a global search for so-called 'relevant knowledge', transformed thinking about where to go and who to co-operate with internationally. Steered by emerging global economic regimes, competition grew fierce within emerging academic capitalism for the best brains, the most reliable fee-paying students, more patents, intellectual-property rights, and the highest international rankings. Academic co-operation became an instrument through which to gain traction in competitions for 'academic honour' and resources,

where this 'honour' translates as a tool for further resource acquisition. Thus, for example, Nobel Prizes are no longer valued for their contribution to new knowledge, but are counted as guarantors of future income.

Shortly after apartheid ended, South Africa signalled that it saw education and research as a kind of public co-operation. For example, in 2002 Kader Asmal, who was then minister of education, moved to prevent private and for-profit higher education enterprises from establishing themselves in the SA 'market'. This is reflected in an important discussion document by Asmal entitled, 'The Idea of a South African University: Higher Education in a Transforming Society'.[1] Asmal starts out by restating the wholeness of the sector and asking: 'How do we understand the very idea of a South African University? What is its role in transforming society, and, how does SA keep the market at a distance?' He then goes on to state: 'Higher education is a public good, engaged in a social compact, which includes all our people'.

Asmal explores the idea of an African university – going back to the early 1970s and beyond South Africa with reference to Nigerian economist TM Yesufu who advocates a strong role for universities in national development and growth. Yesufu (1973) writes that universities must be committed to social transformation, economic modernisation, and the upgrading of the human resources of a nation. By anchoring its idea of a university within debates about African universities (that is, outside its own history as a European institution transplanted to Africa, but within African regionalism), Asmal laid the basis for the 'Africanisation of higher education'. He argued that the central issue for South African universities is to provide for the production of knowledge that recognises the African condition as historical and defines its key tasks as one of coming to grips with it critically. This means decolonising and Africanising higher education and thus providing a new paradigm and a new approach in knowledge seeking. Asmal went on to state that 'if it is democratic, inclusive and sensitive to historical realities, it will give rise to a notion of Africanisation that will necessarily repudiate racism and, along with it, the "racialised" notion of "African" inherited from the colonial period'.

Norway, for its part, at first shocked many by trying to use WTO regulations to open up a market in South Africa, but withdrew from this role when it was publicly criticised by Asmal and several Norwegian critics (Mathisen 2005). This context is provided to illustrate that SANORD was created in an atmosphere of strong publicly oriented values, despite the powerful influence of neo-liberal forces in both the Nordic and southern African countries – paradoxically, in this case, stronger in South Africa than in Norway (despite Asmal's position). Although the picture is uneven in other

regions: in India, for example, Norway collaborated with the liberal Anglo-American countries to push for global academic capitalism (Tilak 2011), 'public values' are the basis on which higher education institutions in both Norway and South Africa supports the goals of SANORD.

As we have seen, an understanding of higher education as part of the public realm is embedded in the organisations that created the basis of 'old internationalisation' and are now influential in shaping the present debates about the global knowledge regime. But 'new internationalisation' also has 'defenders' and 'rational-choice proponents' in strategic places. All over the world, governments are setting up and funding 'internationalisation offices' to foster growth in the neo-liberal higher education market. In Europe, governments joined forces to establish coordinating agencies, such as the Academic Cooperation Association and the European Association for International Education to promote European interests in competition with (the seemingly more successful efforts of) the United States.

However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the oldest such organisation, the International Association of Universities (IAU), which was shaped by 'old internationalisation'. The reason for this focus is the similarity in the values that lie behind the creation of both the IAU and SANORD. As a result, both face the challenge of how to promote democracy and foster critical knowledge in these times in which neo-liberalism dominates the global regime.

From the start, the IAU developed a global and co-operative approach to its work. Founded in 1948, and so a child of the post-Second World War period, one of the IAU's core values was the defence of academic freedom. Its purpose, was thus to secure the promotion of academic values worldwide. In a book published on its sixtieth anniversary, Dorsman and Blankesteijn (2008: 48) noted that:

> It is interesting to see how nearly all specific items of the [founding] Utrecht conference remained on the agenda during the following decades and in that sense the 1948 conference is still of topical interest. In 2008 after 60 years, another IAU conference took place in Utrecht discussing virtually the same themes: the debate has come full circle.

The purpose of SANORD is not to promote the EU as the most 'competitive knowledge economy in the world', nor does SANORD aim to be a European co-operation project like Erasmus Mundus, which is striving to become a successful brain gain initiative; nor does SANORD seek to co-ordinate the behaviour of national actors in WTO negotiations about GATS' educational

services. Rather, SANORD seeks to express a dimension of the co-operation that exists between two culturally distinct regions that have developed fairly free and open academic contacts, and believe that strengthening this contact may also contribute to widening the space for global public knowledge.

Since SANORD was established in the same spirit as the IAU, and because it shares the same goals of promoting academic co-operation for a better world, it seems proper that topics from the IAU's founding conference in 1948 – five in number – should guide this discussion (Dorsman and Blankensteijn 2008). The topics are first listed and then discussed in more detail below.

- The changing role of the university;
- Academic standards;
- Financing and providing basic services for higher education (with a sub-theme on the relation between higher education and the state);
- University education and international understanding (or the university as a force in world co-operation);
- Means of continuing international co-operation among universities.

The changing role of the university

It was clear to the participants at the IAU founding meeting in 1948 that the role of the university had to change, not only from being elitist in a selective way, but also in relation to being part of a '*Bildungsbürgertum*' – an educational bourgeoisie. This was necessary because, at the time, politicians in many countries were trying to capture higher education for the sake of their own agendas. SANORD faces the same kind of challenge, but this time from an alliance between politicians and the new global economic powers.

Arguments against the form of internationalisation that SANORD stands for from representatives of the alliance between politics and economics, is that SANORD presupposes both a type of co-operation and a form of university that no longer exist. It might also be argued that SANORD does not promote the new role of universities, the 'new globality' (Albrow 1995) that emerged after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The 'free universities', namely those that have been 'deregulated from state control and ownership', and 're-regulated by neo-liberal policies of reward and punishment' through ratings, rankings and rewards, are celebrated as part of a post-national environment.

This represents a clear break with the ideas that created the IAU; that is, ideas characterised by a worldview that saw academic co-operation as integral to mutual understanding, dialogue and academic competition in the sense of 'who has the best argument'. When the formative narrative is

that the university is a 'strategic actor' that must forge its own future, the centrality of the notion of dialogue in university and intellectual life, suffers. And if there is a growing autonomy, this is in relation to an environment that rewards knowledge outputs and gives status to the organisation delivering this knowledge. This shift in focus away from the academics who are at the centre of the research to the centrality of the organisation itself has taken place over the past twenty years. The shift has seen increasing calls for organisational 'accountability' at all levels and for evaluations based preferably on numerical measurements of outputs. The rankings, rating and rewards that emerge from this, or are made possible by these measurements, are in turn used to promote the organisation, in competition with others in the education market. At some, but not all, universities internationalisation offices have been drawn into this kind of competitively motivated promotion of, say, logos and symbols of success to generally enhance the reputation of the organisation. Most surprisingly, perhaps, has been the quick adoption of universities of the global ranking system that now seems to be a permanent feature of the higher-education landscape. It is interesting to note that the growth of institutional bureaucracies has never been stronger and this growth often occurs demonstrably at the cost of academics. As debates in Denmark show, not only does new public management create additional bureaucracy, but wage differences and the role of administrative oversight linked to highly rewarded positions undermine academic initiative and space for creativity (Harste 2011)

Social science theory sees these changes as shifts in form; that is, universities that used to be what the academic literature called loosely coupled organisations, anarchies or even 'systems of non-decision' or arbitrary decision (see below) are now all classifiable under the broader theory of 'rational decision making'. The paradox is that the management and organisational theory that created these categories (which seem a bit condescending) have legitimised the new regime, which boasts of its ability to make ordered and clear decisions thanks to rational choice theories of organisational behaviour. Given these new leadership strategies, universities are not only changing their organisational form, but also their content, thereby becoming an entirely different kind of organisation. As notions of universities' accountability towards society have changed, institutional goals and identities have changed too, from being centred on the nation state, to focusing on the post-national context. This is where the new governance impulses come from and it has led to a move away from the idea of a 'government of colleagues' to the notion of 'management-based' governance. Essentially, universities are now

institutionalised differently: academics become employees (effectively white collar workers), the organisation is run by managers, the 'products' are valued in terms of their contribution to users (and not to society as such), and the general institutionalisation of the organisation occurs within the sphere of economics as opposed to the socio-cultural setting occupied by the 'old universities'. SANORD's constitution, however, takes for granted the idea that the academic community must – and indeed will – decide on what is good knowledge, identify the most creative researchers with whom to communicate and work, and determine how to value the academic process itself. It is assumed that the academic members of the organisation will value input into scholarly debates sought by SANORD even if these do not fit the different ranking and rating bureaus' institutionalised classifications of 'good knowledge' or 'networks' that currently drive the neo-liberal university governance system and the competition it promises.

Rooted in history, universities must look back at the different academic traditions upon which present-day knowledge rests. Through this retrospective lens, what organisational and management theory calls 'anarchy', etc. stand out as some of the most valuable aspects of academic life: disciplinary continuity, consistency in theoretical reasoning, and the understanding that we – as colleagues across politically and economically created borders – build on each other's work over time and honour ethical commitments to the independence of knowledge. Ivar Bleiklie, who heads up the Transforming Universities (TRUE) project[2] on the implications of this thinking, argues:

> In the 1960s and 1970s universities were sites of important academic studies that made path breaking contributions to Organisation theory by developing concepts such as 'loosely coupled' Organisations, 'organized anarchies' and 'garbage-can models' of decision making (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; Weick 1976). The studies demonstrated how universities could be portrayed as a specific kind of Organisation, with loosely coupled, decentralized structures, weak leadership capacities to govern decision-making processes from the top down (Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Musselin 2007). Since then university reformers around the world have tended to base their reform attempts on an assumption that is diametrically opposed to that of these Organisation theorists: universities are not a specific kind of Organisation, they are just poorly managed. (Bleiklie 2009: 3)

The stable 'old' organisations have inspired SANORD's co-operation efforts more than the new 'organisation theory' that has – perhaps unintentionally –

legitimised increasing managerialism with its focus on ridding universities of bad governance. Using historical sociology to research academic discourses, and to understand and explain the basis of independent academic work, would probably have been more useful than introducing new managerial techniques that are anchored in bureaucracy.

So, in case you did not know, anarchistic co-operation between academics, flowing from a number of loosely coupled creative projects, that are both disciplinary and cross-disciplinary and which provide meeting points between cultures that are otherwise worlds apart, may not always create rational decisions but is more useful now than ever before. In particular, this kind of academic work helps us understand both how theories evolve within a context, and how they are transformed by the meeting of new contexts. Globalised ideas about the universal victory of 'rational-choice liberalism', such as those suggested by Amadae (2011) for example, find no defenders among those who are empirically sensitive to the limits of such universalism. SANORD stands out as an important counter to the exaggerated emphasis on universities as *strategic actors* in a global rankings game – a game that is only possible in a framework that accepts universalised ideas about 'good knowledge'. Within this game, a process of standardisation seems to be ongoing, not only related to the standards set by evaluation systems but also to the standardising effect of competition. Happily, SANORD does not fit any of the contemporary evaluation criteria. It therefore escapes many of the demands on the organisation to adjust to 'global' standards. Rather the kinds of co-operation it fosters, the networks it builds and the knowledge potential it offers promotes variation rather than standardisation. The variety of academic cultures and the plurality of topics meeting each other within the SANORD agora is creating new knowledge. Thus SANORD does not seek to continuously adjust to the new governance system that funnels all academics into the same research areas so as not to lose out in the global competition for resources.

Academic standards

The issue of 'academic standards' has become highly politicised because they have become external to the academic community. This is most clearly expressed through the focus on the idea of 'excellence' which is a particular way of organising research in centres within universities where the decision as what is excellent – and what is not – is provided by a political/academic selection process. Universities make arenas for research centres that seek to distance themselves from teaching. Thus they are not judged 'excellent'

through how they renew and invigorate a field of knowledge, but by living up to preset expectations about results, in line with a pre-determined promise made in an application to become 'a centre of excellence'. For universities to improve their position in the international rankings system, it is necessary for them to have centres of excellence *and* to make these into nodal points of international co-operation. Only excellent centres that work with other even more excellent (or highly ranked) centres are thought to truly enhance the status of a university. Fostering centres of excellence has become a strategic imperative for a new kind of university management which, ironically, often has no intrinsic idea about how to evaluate or foster the development of new knowledge (which, after all, is a creative process and therefore cannot always be known beforehand). The reality is that managers may have an understanding of how funding and governance may create an organisation that looks like it is 'excellent', but, in fact, this is often based on a template.

Another category used to indicate the new and external ways of governing knowledge is the issue of 'quality'. Indeed, a veritably global quality-assurance industry aims to protect the 'consumers' of higher education. Quality assurance is said to secure value for money and, together with rankings, is thought to make selection easier for potential customers. Like banks and credit institutions can buy their ratings (AAA+ at best) from private assessment bureaus that they more or less own, so too can also education businesses buy their quality evaluations from private quality assurance agencies. The purpose is of course to secure better competitive positions. This is particularly prevalent in the MBA world, but it is spreading to the rest of the higher education system. But, whether quality assurance is publicly or privately authorised, it often acts as a form of 'window-dressing' to make external powers reward quality that has been pre-packaged for them in ways that they recognise and appreciate.

SANORD is, of course, not a product of the hype around the idea of 'excellence', nor is it part of quality-assurance profiling aimed at 'enhancing' the quality of teaching programs or staff based on external criteria. So, SANORD is out of sync with the criteria for 'good internationalisation' developed in Europe. Instead, SANORD can be seen as reaction to the kinds of internationalisation and prioritisation of resources that both the drive towards 'excellence' and the criteria of 'good internationalisation' represent. SANORD's goal is to seek out broad co-operation wherever there is initiative and originality, whether or not these are selected by external forces – such as ministries, research councils or other funding bodies. SANORD's mandate is to foster co-operation created by mutual interests, whatever the topic. This rests on the idea of learning one from the other, and of researching together, rather than being located in outcome-

oriented groups selected by standardised criteria of what makes a good researcher and what is acceptable knowledge. Pierre Bourdieu might have said that these kinds of centres deliver work according to a taste that is ritualised, that they miss out on the originality of creative processes (Hess 2011). SANORD's goal is to counter the elitism proposed by new approaches to university management. It aims to accomplish this via its North–South orientation, its combination of research with or without reputation, and in its internal academic criteria for what is good and what should be counted as new knowledge.

On occasions when the IAU has taken the initiative to ignite a global debate and to discuss anew the value basis for internationalisation, many of the arguments strongly support the SANORD model. Indeed, within this debate SANORD may be ahead of its time (IAU 2012) The 1948 IAU founding meeting invited participants with very diverse experiences, thus cutting through both the East–West and the religious–secular divides in a body that was then standing at the edge of the Cold War. Although few recommendations were made regarding the role of funding as a key to the future of universities, academic freedom was then, as today, considered the critical issue. Two conditions around funding emerged as important – first, to keep the influence of funders at a distance and, second, to make sure that funding improved the general economic situation of the university. For example, even if the state is the funder, it needs to legally legitimise and safeguard the academic freedom of the university to conduct research in any and every place.

As used here, freedom means 'legal, financial and material autonomy' (Dorsman and Blankesteijn 2008: 33). The notion of funding has since turned into a discussion about 'project requisition' and 'customer relations' legitimised by cross-disciplinary ideas about ' usable knowledge' or the value of 'robust knowledge' that needs to prove itself through use. Thus the new autonomy of the universities seems to be autonomy only to act in relation to the market for research funding, with the consequences this raises for forms of client dependency. If universities were interpreted to be suffering from poor management forty years ago, this must be even more the situation today as external funding sources decide not only what research should be conducted but also how and when. The university, as an institution building on *cognitive capacities*, as Parsons et al. (1973) argued it should be, has instead become an organisation searching to mediate so called 'robust knowledge' to its users, that is, knowledge that has proven to be useful. Even 'centres of excellence' that are supposed to build on the basic values of the university, are often partly owned and controlled by external organisations such as research councils, and legitimised by their relationships with particular users or clients.

The success of a university is thus measured mostly by its project-acquisition abilities. A strong indication of this is the tendency to create project-acquisition synergies that promote competition in line with 'useful knowledge' as determined by political or developmental priorities. Thus if, for example, European Union money is acquired through a research application, the national research council and the local university often automatically reward the applicants for having succeeded in the competition for funding. This enormous concentration of research money leads not only to the emergence of research oligarchs (with large numbers of unemployable doctoral and post-doctoral assistants), but also to the gradual homogenisation of academic culture and the concentration of academic power outside of the universities.

Of course, SANORD may be a source of collaboration related to project acquisition and, indeed, it should be. However, as a broad-based organisation promoting a variety of cross-border and cross-cultural links, it should primarily be an arena for generating independent knowledge and new ideas; it should be a place where academic ingenuity can blossom. As such it needs to be dependent on basic funding from member universities to make possible meetings between like-minded scholars and researchers; it should also be dependent on a funding system that is open to unexpected forms of creativity. The enormous growth of programs and projects pre-defined for specific research money does not easily fit the SANORD model of academic interaction which, as noted, leans on the ideas that shaped the IAU in 1948. And, again as noted, it is contrary to the contemporary trend of university funding policies.

University education and international understanding: 'the university as a force in world co-operation'

'Internationalisation strategies' are now considered essential in orientating universities towards improving their competitive position. Research money or bright students (and in some countries, rich students) are resources that a specific internationalisation strategy may help to attract. But co-operation with other universities is part of this strategy, too: especially a strategy for building reputation in order to gain access to the 'research front'. The purpose here is to climb the rankings ladder, obtain good evaluations and the like.

SANORD's goal, however, is more akin to the ideas of international *understanding* through which, in 1948, universities were considered integral to a world peace movement. And as institutions with their own histories, universities were often able to detach themselves to different degrees from commitments to the nation state in which they found themselves. This

'alienation from immediate concerns' often made co-operation with 'the stranger' easier, and assisted institutions in developing the common interests that new knowledge requires. The tendency now, however, is to see universities as integral to a country's foreign policies, particularly when these are aimed at promoting economic interests and co-operation. SANORD works against policies that try to 'use' national university systems for narrow purposes, as well as the strategic orientation that sees universities as agents in an increasingly internationalised competitive market. SANORD offers North–South co-operation that seeks to be independent of external rankings, ratings and foreign policy commitments. It seeks to promote understanding between two cultural regions; one marked by extreme forms of European imperialism with all the tragedies this implies, and one that has been more or less spared the influence of the big powers, and whose small democratically governed nations have largely retained their independence.

Means of continuing international co-operation between universities

The mechanism for continuing international co-operation among universities in 1948 was the creation of the IAU. It was open to all universities and 'university-like' organisations that emphasised research and teaching, and were willing to foster the crucial links between their institutions. The role of UNESCO in helping to create and subsequently support the IAU underscores the cultural orientation of the organisation.

Today, however the global knowledge regime is not dominated by IAU, because it bases its membership – as does SANORD – on individual universities. By contrast, the international university system is dominated by multilateral organisations, the power of which rests on the support of member states (Bøås and McNeill 2004). Their interests influence international co-operation between universities more than the ideas embedded in the IAU and in UNESCO. Martens et al. (2007) argue that the hegemony of the global knowledge regime is located in organisations like the World Bank, the OECD, the WTO and in neo-liberal economic ideology. Thus the world has at least two 'ministries of higher education'. If UNESCO embodies the official one, an alternative ministry resides within the World Bank which presently enjoys the strongest power of co-ordination over reform strategies for this sector in the so called global South. Undoubtedly an important supporter of this 'ministry' would be the OECD, which with its increasingly global reach aims to co-ordinate the reform of higher education and research, even outside its own membership. As the 2009 UNESCO/IAU World Conference (the second of its kind) showed me and other participants, UNESCO represents

an arena for debate and for the development of alternative ideas around what could be called (in contrast to the 'knowledge economy') the 'knowledge society' model, but with little or no formal influence on practices driving global trends towards the new university model (see also (Altback 2009).

The overarching issue of 'co-operation and mutual understanding' that emerged after the Second World War has been replaced with one dominating value, namely: how knowledge can contribute to economic innovation. The integration of universities in the 'innovation economy' has gradually been streamlined by quantitative measurement systems developed since 1996. The key factor in the transformation from qualitative to quantitative understandings of knowledge, or from human development and nation-state identities to human capital and global capitalism, has been the essentially moving target called *best practice* (Bøås and McNeill 2004; Carroll and Kellow 2011; Martens et al. 2007). This is part of the new kind of governance conceived within the OECD (Trondal et al. 2010). Hegemony in the production of numbers and statistics has shifted from UNESCO to the OECD. Best practice, as now statistically interpreted by OECD, also creates uniformity, convergence and commitments, and most of all conformity. If there is a 'war' between faculties, disciplines or academic cultures, it is no longer fought on grounds of epistemological criteria or *cognitive rationality*, but on measurements of output. And this is of course how the politicians like it to be. Ruling via measurements of best practice contributes towards (as the World Bank and OECD see it) the transformation of society (or nation states) into a system of competing organisations, which, through tautology, seek to approach what is considered best practice within the confines of neo-liberal governance. As Keynesian economics and much else was left behind during the 1980s, the research university was reshaped in the image of the market.

It is not surprising that SANORD hardly fits the new global knowledge regime built around the idea of a university as an organisational actor constantly adjusting to a changing environment based on external evaluations. Instead SANORD represents a kind of practice that evolves from below, from the trust that develops between fellow researchers who seek to make society grow from little histories. These histories are important and valuable as cases for learning, if not action. But SANORD does not stand alone. A UN initiative to develop sustainable higher-education policies has been underway since about 2003. A global campaign with clear local commitments, the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programme attempts to link local actions with the fundamental global value of sustainable development and the related Millennium Development Goals. The UN declared the decade 2005 to 2014

the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, hoping to create a powerful movement of nations, communities, and households towards a more sustainable future. The programme is linked to a series of regional initiatives that will be followed by national and particularly local practice and policies that place the responsibility for sustainable higher education on higher-education institutions themselves (see McKeown and Hopkins 2004).

If this UN initiative is taken seriously, it will be difficult for universities in Europe to continue their search for 'excellence' without reflecting on the consequences of this on the environment and the use of resources, on the social redistribution of knowledge throughout populations, and on poverty and the redistribution, of the global power balance, and many other issues. This kind of approach to higher education has the potential to make universities in the South far more relevant for collaboration. Without knowing it, perhaps, SANORD has become an alternative to massive global capitalist ideas about how knowledge and competition should combine, and as such, it is an organisation that everyone concerned about sustainability and mutual respect should strongly support.

The 'Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa', that was adopted at a representative conference in April 2004, calls on African governments and other African role players

> to exercise caution on further GATS commitments in higher education until a deeper understanding of GATS and the surrounding issues is developed and a more informed position is arrived at on how trade related cross-border provision in higher education can best serve national and regional developmental needs and priorities on the African continent.[3]

So, plainly, it is not through trade with knowledge as a commodity or through private providers that Africa wishes to expand its system of higher education. The Accra Declaration supports internationalisation, but in line with a series of global values that have the potential to benefit regions other than the rich and dominant ones. First of all, therefore, it is necessary to remove obstacles to knowledge creation, knowledge exchange and knowledge application, and to base these instead on forms of co-operation and collaboration. In this respect SANORD stands out as an example.

A final word

It is challenging to expand democracy, both as a practice and as a value, beyond the nation state. This is particularly so when democracy as a value ranks after the universalism of neo-liberal economics. Yet universities, in line

with their own history, have a particular responsibility to face the challenge. Both the IAU and UNESCO, as well as a number of other UN initiatives, are supportive of such endeavours. SANORD has the potential to contribute to the ideas and values of democracy both within nation states and beyond, and it now up to SANORD to live up to its commitments in a world where, together and across borders, we create our preferences through the discourses we contribute to.

Notes

1   Discussion document presented by Kader Asmal to the Ministerial Working Group on Higher Education, 13 December 2003.

2   See TRUE – Transforming Universities on the UiB website.

3   The Accra Declaration was published by Association of African Universities and is available at http://www.aau.org.

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