It should seem obvious from a European point of view that higher education and research fits tightly together institutionalized in the age old university institutions. It has, however, been observed that research on higher education and research on the research functions of universities are strangely unrelated in the literature.[1] Apart from this separation there can be distinguished between two mayor outcome debates on higher education and universities.[2] The debates on outcomes are firstly the debates on the ends of higher education for the individual and secondly the wider societal benefits of both research and higher education.

Considering the outcomes for the individual the discourse of reform in higher education tends to focus narrowly on employability and the relationship between higher education and the labor market. Considering the wider outcomes of research the dominant discourse is that the end of all knowledge production is that of innovation that privileges technology and applicative fixes of social kinds. Both aspects of the benefits of universities are thus viewed in strictly economic terms – often related to a functionalist interpretation of both the demands of the knowledge economy (not the knowledge society) and of the "outcomes" of higher education and university research. According to many scholars, including Habermas, the functionalist interpretation has proved hard to overcome especially in the field of research in higher education. Since Talcot Parsons and Charles C. Platt wrote their seminal work on the American university functionalist views of higher education has prevailed both in the literature but also in the self-understanding of many university leaders.[3]

The concern of this paper is therefore threefold. Firstly the critique by Habermas of the prevailing functionalism in the view of higher education and research will be outlined. Secondly a brief discussion on the outcomes of research will, thirdly, lead to a discussion of the contributions on both the individual level of higher education as well as the wider societal outcomes. It is the argument here that the two last discussions cannot be taken separately but that they meet in concepts like the public sphere, civil society, citizenship, empowerment, emancipation and wellbeing. It is also the aim here to overarch the current

dichotomies of either/or in the discussions on university reform. It is obvious that higher education and research also contribute to the knowledge economy but the argument in this paper is that this role is only one out of multiple social and cultural roles. Instead – this is a discussion on balances.

Habermas – the critique of functionalism

Habermas fights on two fronts in his critique of university reform and reformers.[4] One front consists of the "mandarins" of a conservative outlook that defend the classical idea of a unifying "idea of a university." As enemies of modernity these reformers seem to cling to outdated views of both society and institutions. This leads Habermas to adhere to some of the functionalist views – in a word he agrees to differentiation as against unity. But he certainly does not agree with the full-blown functionalism that considers both higher education and research as governed by norm free symbolic media in the vein of Niklas Luhmann.

Firstly on the front against conservative reformers like Karl Jaspers and Helmut Schelsky Habermas raises a critique of the idea of a university as a unifying force, which he considers to be based on an idealistic sociology. The university is NOT exemplary of a life form that shall permeate society as a whole. "Organizations no longer embody ideas. Those who would bind organizations to ideas must restrict their operative range to the comparatively narrow horizon of the life world intersubjectively shared by its members." Adhering to the ideals of Humboldt thus "belongs to those purely defensive minds whose cultural criticism is rooted in hostility to all forms of modernization."[5] He equates this stand with that of a "mandarin ideology" of the learned classes, a concept coined by the sociologist of education Fritz Ringer.[6]

As to counter this out-dated view the university is initially called a “functionally specific subsystem of a highly differentiated society” and Habermas states “The functional capability of such institutions depends precisely on a *detachment* of their members motivations from the goals and functions of the organization.” He even states that a functionalist interpretation presents itself as promising:

“A more distanced perspective derived from international comparisons thus yields a picture which practically compels one to adopt a functionalist interpretation.”[7]

Habermas critique of systems theory is well known. The problem he sees in connection to higher education is that systems theory presupposes that all modernized parts of society must take the form of a norm free subsystem of communication and that it a priori supposes that this covers all areas of societal action. This Habermas calls the “system-theoretical overgeneralization.” “The universities (have) by no means out grown the horizon of the life world in the style of, for example capitalist corporations or international agencies.”[8]

In Habermas’ terms a functionalist view entails a perspective where “the universities present themselves as part of a system requiring less and less normative integration in the heads of professors and students the more it becomes regulated by systemic mechanisms with disciplinary production of technically useful information and job qualifications directed at the environments of the economy and the planning administrative bureaucracy”[9]

It is not difficult to see the current discourses on higher education in this quote, in spite of a distance of a quarter of a century. Habermas’ general critique of functionalist sociology is therefore all the more relevant to apply to the present day discussions. Habermas’ insistence on a differentiation between instrumental and communicative action in his interpretation of society as a whole does also find its way into his views of the university. The distinction between life world and system that is basic to his view of society at large is also found within

this institution: “Processes of differentiation which have accelerated over the last two decades need not be brought under a single system theoretical description leading to the conclusion that the universities have now completely outgrown the horizon of the life world.”[10]

Hereby Habermas, in my view, delivers a more ecological view of a balance to be found also in university and higher education reform. The view is dismantling the idea of an unproblematic unity of all activities in the university, but is holding on to a view of a multiplicity of interplay between different aspects of the institutional life forms of a modern university.

Before we consider these differentiated aspects of first research and then higher education this part of the paper should state the interesting affinity between traditionalists and functionalists that make Habermas’ two frontal attack feasible. In Habermas critique the functionalism is equated with a neoconservative viewpoint that “only uses traditions as a compensation for the easier flow of information streams between research and the economic-military-administrative complex.”[11] The compensation thesis is thereby seen as a neoconservative strategy to accept modernity as long as this modernity stays in the realm of productive and administrative life, and does not interfere with a compensatory traditionalism of life forms outside this realm.[12]

Habermas on wider outcomes of the research function of universities

Habermas sees the university as the home of research. He does consider the challenges towards this from what now often is termed Mode II knowledge production,[13] but asks polemically if these forms of research will not always be “parasitical.”[14] So research is

depending on the specific life forms of the university: “Scientific productivity might well depend upon the university’s form, in particular upon that differentiated complex interplay of research with the training of future students’ preparation for academic careers, the participation in general education, cultural self-understanding and public opinion formation.”[15] He even acknowledges the idea of the university as a norm to govern this life world: “The universities are still rooted in the life world, through this interpenetration of functions. So long as this connection is not completely torn asunder, the idea of the university is still not wholly dead. But the complexity and internal differentiation of this connection shouldn’t be underestimated.”[16]

Before we consider the implications of this complex interplay between research and wider impacts on society let us look to his discussion on research and science (*Wissenschaft*).

Fistly the idealism of the Humboltian model suggests the “unity of the sciences.” And secondly the Humboldtian model suggests “an oversimplified connection between scientific learning processes and the life forms of modern societies.”[17]

Habermas sees in both these statements a need for differentiation. The unity of sciences needs differentiation because of the internal differentiation between philosophy and the empirical sciences that has proceeded since the middle of the nineteenth century. The connection between science and the life forms of modern society must be differentiated. Because of a “plurality of powers of faith (*Glaubensmächten*) philosophy lost its monopoly on the interpretation of the cultural whole.”[18] Secondly this unity must be differentiated because science grew into a productive force of industrial society. Especially the natural sciences have been ascribed a technical function as against a world view producer.

But science is still an activity of the life world as it is organized as a communicative activity, which was already the view of Schleiermacher. With direct address against Luhmann, Habermas states: “because the activity of cooperative truth-seeking points to a public argumentation, truth – or let alone the reputation among the community of investigators – can never become a control medium for a self-regulating subsystem.”

These very brief points on research points to the fact that Habermas defends the normative aspirations of a life world of scholars. Faced with developments of neoliberal new public management these considerations become highly relevant. These reforms are exactly directed towards “control media” of a “self-regulating” subsystem of research such as bibliometrics and citation counting.[19] But let us leave the discussion on research seen in its own right to a view of the wider societal impacts of research and higher education.

The crucial argument is the interconnectedness of research and educational processes – that in spite of the differentiation processes of modern society are still valid.

Habermas on the wider impacts of universities

To sum up Habermas sees institutionalized in universities an interplay of research with:

I. 1)Training of future students preparation for academic careers (*Nachwuchs*)
II. 2)Participation in general education (*Allgemeinbildung*)

III. 3)Cultural self-understanding
IV. 4)Public opinion formation

What are then the appropriate understandings of these connections?

The Humboldtian idea of a university pointed to three wider impacts of research, in idealist terms coined as “unities”: The unity of science and teaching, the unity of science and general education and the unity of science with enlightenment and emancipation. As stated above Habermas sees a need for differentiation of these unities in view of the modern development.

Firstly the unity of science and teaching needs differentiation because of a differentiated labour market that demands highly skilled employees.

Secondly the unity of science with general education needs differentiation because the institutional structure was built on specialized bureaucratic functions rather than on general education.

Thirdly the unity of science with enlightenment and emancipation needs differentiation because of the social differentiation between academically trained elites and popular education. This means that the general enlightenment and emancipatory claims of the classical idea of the university in Germany were not met.

However, Habermas can now positively list the functions of the university thus: “The university learning processes do not simply stand in an inner connection to the reproductive functions of the life world. Going beyond mere academic career preparation, they contribute to *general socialization processes* by introducing students to the mode of scientific thinking, i.e. to the adoption of a hypothetical attitude vi-á-vis facts and norms. Going beyond the acquisition of expert knowledge, they contribute to *intellectual enlightenment* by offering informed interpretations and diagnoses of contemporary events, and by taking concrete political stands. Going beyond mere reflection on methodology and basic theory, they contribute to the *self-understanding of the sciences within the whole of culture* by supplying theories of science, morality, art and literature.”[20]

As a broad impact on culture Habermas sees the university to have contributed to the development of the freedom and differentiation of research disciplines, and benefitted society with a certain “utopian” ideal of universalistic and individualistic values that has upheld a critical potential. This is seen as a specific trait of the occidental development, but also writers on higher education like Björn Wittrock states universalism and cosmopolitan viewpoints to be typical in the development of universities.[21] This leads to the following conclusion:

“The egalitarian and universalistic content of their forms of argumentation expresses only the norms of scientific discourse, not those of society as a whole. But they share in a pronounced way that communicative rationality, the forms of which modern societies (which are without *Leitbilds* from the past) must employ to understand themselves.”[22]

A brief turn to Habermas’ theory of communicative action will maybe enlighten these conclusions.[23] In this book Habermas differentiates between three processes of reproduction in the life world: cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization. He states these in relation to culture, society and personality.

Habermas mentions (at least) two concepts concerning the reproduction of the life world highly relevant to this discussion which are 1) the reproduction of valid knowledge (which not least takes place in the universities) 2) the reproduction of personal socialization patterns and educational goals for the individual (which are parts of education as a whole). These can be disturbed which results in 1) loss of meaning and 2) crisis in orientation and education.

Below this discussion will focus mainly on the second point. How can Habermas theory be applied to the discussion on the outcomes of higher education for the individual to counter a crisis in orientation and education?

Habermas related to current issues in the debate on higher education

Looking at the part of the debate on wider outcomes of higher education for the individual the knowledge economy discourse tends to focus on employability, a term that stands central in the Bologna process of the integration of higher education markets in Europe. However, this discourse is by no means specifically European but is global.

The employability discourse is highly market oriented and suggests a one to one fit of transferable skills from the learning situation to the job situation. The discourse is connected to a view of the individual that is reduced to the concept of the effective or competent person – or a highly instrumental view.[24] The construction of the effective person stands in contrast to the reproduction of personality as a life world construction now (maybe) to be found in the literature on empowerment, citizenship and capabilities – and in Habermas. The concepts of skills or competencies are understood as performative and system related whereas early modern German concepts of *Bildung* and *Mündigkeit* are what I call personality and life world related with a parallel to ideas of liberal education in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The competing concepts are indicative of views of the self. Gerard Delanty in his book on citizenship addresses the question of the person, or the self, in this way:

"Modernity was a discourse of the emancipation of the self, but the question of the other is being asked only now. The problem with self-determination in postmodern times is that there is no single self but a plurality of selves. In this move beyond the contours of the modern age we have to ask the question of the responsibility of the self for the other. The rethinking of democracy – which is a discourse of self-determination – that this entails will force us to re-establish a link with citizenship – where self and other find a point of reconciliation."[25]

I share with Delanty the view that a concern for the self as responsible should still, or again, be relevant in present discussions on citizenship and education. Not only postmodern writers but also the now dominant concepts of learning and transferable skills exclude personhood. This implies an amoral idea of the effective and performative individual. Can competencies and skills be other that means? Can skills be ends? Who decides the ends in a world of only means? My reading of this discourse tends to point to the direction of a crudely functionalist notion of usefulness of the individual. When all education is regarded only as learning towards transfer of skills into workplace competencies the reduction is full blown. A maybe too optimistic reading of this dilemma would be that the self (situated in higher education) takes care of itself – sometimes in spite of pressures of economic or systemic performance. But this does not, in my view, exclude the responsibility of educators and leaders of educational institutions to choose a balance between instrumentality and life world concerns.

In the continental debate on the university an oppositional concept to employability is the mentioned concept of *Bildung*. The concept implies in its neo humanistic version the coming into being of a whole person through activities of scholarly and creative pursuits. It has highly

normative connotations as both the goal of and the process of education or life-experience. Habermas critique indicates that *Bildung* builds on an exaggerated subject philosophical inheritance. But what is Habermas view of the learning subject? And how can we relate his thoughts on higher learning to civil society? Habermas himself in *The structural transformation of the public sphere* cites numerous connections between *Bildung* and the creation of a public sphere in early modern Europe. These historical examples both suggest what in the German debate is called the traditional marriage between education and money (*Bildung* und *Besitz*), but also points to the creation of a politically respected public sphere being a result of literacy, journal writing and thus education. The book is certainly split in viewing bourgeois culture and education as progressive and emancipatory forces or as simply reproducing class distinctions.[26]

Concluding words

I would suggest that we are now facing a crisis both in the reproduction of meaning, in educational goals and the reproduction of personality as Habermas theory suggests possible. Performative expectations to all knowledge production inhibit the reproduction of valid cultural knowledge. Goals of employability dominate any educational pursuit and the construction of the effective person stands in contrast to the balanced view of the personality as a construction now to be found in the literature on empowerment and citizenship. The concepts of skills or competencies are understood as performative and system related whereas concepts of *Bildung* and *Mündigkeit* capture a more balanced view of the relations between the individual and society. These questions need further clarification, but Habermas' diagnosis can be a path to this investigation.

Concepts of learning and transferable skills distort reproductive processes of the life world. They imply an amoral idea of the effective and performative individual. Social skills are present in the debate on competencies – are these ethical skills? Can skills be other than

means? Can skills be ends? Who decides the ends in a world of only means? This seems highly implicative of Habermas' idea of colonization. Economic man has overpowered all other views of the human kind. The balance between life world reproduction and system reproduction is to be found anew in the discussion on higher education and universities in society.

Especially as concerns the scientification of political life – the bureaucratization and technological approaches to top down social engineering calls for a research near general education that serves critical thinking to prevail in a civil society that must be just as "armed" with research based argumentations as governments and IO's are. Habermas' concept is that of a "radical democracy" – and in such a democracy the creative destruction of social capital through higher education is all the more necessary.[27] Higher education thus primarily should arm new generations, and older ones, with antidotes to the prevailing top down tendencies of governments and non-democratic international agencies.

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[1] Wittrock, Björn. (1985). Before the Dawn. Humanism and Technocracy in University research Policy. In Björn Wittrock & Aant Elzinga (red.), *The University Research System. The Public Policies of the Home of Scientists* (s. 1-10). Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.

[2] Brennan, John and Rajani Naidoo (2008) "Higher Education and the Achievement (And/or Prevention) of Equity and Social Justice" in *Higher Education* Vol 56. No. 3., pp.287-302.

[3] Wittrock, Björn. (1996 (1993)). The modern university: the three transformations. In Björn Wittrock & Sheldon Rothblatt (red.), *The European and American University since 1800.Historical and sociological essays* (2 ed., s. 303-362). Chippenham, Wiltshire: CambridgeUniversity Press. P.337

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[4] Habermas, J. (1986). Die Idee der Universität–Lernprozesse. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 32(5), 703-718. (References below are to this version, referred to as "IU"). For an English version see Habermas, J. "The Idea of the University: Learning Processes" in *New German Critique* No.41 (1987). Habermas' earlier writings on university reform (from the 1950ties and 1960ties) will not be considered here.

[5] IU p.704

[6] Ringer, F. (1969) *"The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890-1933,"* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

[7] IU p.705

[8] IU p.714

[9] IU p.706

[10] IU p.707

[11] IU p.706

[12] For discussions on the compensation thesis see Ritter, Joachim (2003 (1961)). Die Aufgabe der Geisteswissenschaften in der modernen Gesellschaft. In *Metaphysik und Politik: Studien zu Aristoteles und Hegel*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp and Herbert Schnädelbach, (1988). Kritik der Kompensation. In *Kursbuch* 91. Wozu Geisteswissenschaften? (Vol. 91, s. 35-45). Berlin: Kursbuch Verlag.

[13] Gibbons, Michael, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott, & Martin

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in Contemporary Societies. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

[14] IU p. 714

[15] IU p.707

[16] IU p.707

[17] IU p. 707

[18] IU p. 710

[19] For a discussion of the negative consequences of this development see Aant Elzinga “Evidence-based science policy and the systematic miscounting of performance in the humanities” at the blog: *humaniorasociety.wordpress.com*

[20] UI p.715

[21] Wittrock op.cit p.360

[22] UI p.717

[23] Habermas, J. (1987) *”The Theory of Communicative Action”* Volume 2 “Lifeworld and System: a critique of Functionalist reason” Boston: Beacon Press, pp.142ff

[24] For a debate on this tendency in the Denmark see Laura-Louise Sarauw (2012) “Kur eller kurmageri for humaniora? – konkurrerende forestillinger om fremtidens samfund I den europæiske Bologna-proces.” in J.E.Larsen and M. Wiklund ”Humaniora i kunskapssamhället. En nordisk debattbok” Malmö: NSU-Press.

[25] Delanty, Gerard (2000) *”Citizenship in a global age. Society, culture, politics”* Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, p.3.

[26] Habermas, J. (1962) ”Strukturandel der Öffentlichkeit” Darmstadt : Luchterhand.

[27] For this argument see Fuller, Steve. (2004) “Universities and the future of knowledge governance from the standpoint of social epistemology” in *Final plenary address at the UNESCO Forum Colloquium on Research and Higher Education Policy*, Paris (Vol. 3).