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Change in the University: A Result of Travelling Ideas?

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Abstract

This article explores the introduction of a “common market” of education, a large-scale institutional reform process that has influenced the organisation of teaching at the University of Copenhagen (KU) since 2009. The “common market” policy, I argue, is a result of intense negotiations between key players, their specific positions, and their interests rather than an example of a “travelling idea” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Ideas travel only if and when someone has a vested interest in them.

Introduction

Within universities, change is nothing new. The number, pace and scale of governed change processes, however, are a sign of our time. Change presents an opportunity to explore social processes that are of importance to teaching as well as research. Internal power dynamics are accentuated when change processes are initiated, and change can thus be seen as a prism that throws light on organising processes in a social and political space.

Market models have been used in many OECD countries in order to meet the complex demands made on their educational systems (<http://www.oecd.org/edu/country-studies/marketsineducation.htm>). In this article I explore the process through which KU introduced what was called a “common market” of education: the initial articulation of the idea in the top management team; the negotiations among the advisory council responsible for designing a practical model; the final model of implementation; the way faculties have managed “implementation”; and finally its reception amongst teachers.¹ It has been argued that ideas travel (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). To my mind, however, the point is not that they travel, but rather how they travel. Ideas travel only if and when someone has a vested interest in them. If someone “appropriates” (Levinson and Sutton 2001) an idea, i.e. interprets and modifies it to suit his or her own interest, a change process has been initiated.

My particular interest is in how negotiations over the idea could be implemented in practice. The discussions resulted in a number of “translations” (Latour 1993). A few strong players were able to convince the other members of the advisory council of the legitimacy of their point of view, and imposed their particular idea of what serves KU best, with consequences for all teachers at the university.

The article is partly based on ethnographic research within Copenhagen University and partly on experience gained through holding the position as head of study. It is not without problems to study one's own field of work (Carney 2006: 231). Carney questions whether it is possible to make a neutral analysis during a phase where the university is under “attack” (ibid.) Apart from this concern my own direct involvement with so-called “implementation” of the “common market” at different levels at the university raises ethical problems which are not easily solved. One way of tackling this is in altering of names and positions of interlocutors: a minor, although important, issue. The empirical material

consists of university documents (strategy papers, plans of action, contracts, and minutes) and interviews, formal as well as informal.

Change as translation

Czarniawska and Joerges have suggested that change can be seen as the result of a journey of ideas, a “story of ideas turning into action in ever new localities” (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996:13), and can be the result of both intentions and chance. My interest is not in the journey of ideas, but rather what people do with an idea in a given context, and why they do what they do. I follow one element of a transformational project from the project's beginning in 2006 until the spring of 2012, at which time the structural reform was still in progress, in a process characterised by conflicts between individuals, departments, and faculties. My focus is on the continuous *organising* (see Weick 1979, 1993, 1995, Wright 1994, Czarniawska 2007) that surrounds the project. Bakken and Hernes maintain a processual view of organisation, but are critical of Weick’s rejection of “organisation” as a relevant concept (Bakken and Hernes 2006). They do not dismiss the part of the process in which what is normally fluid freezes up, and therefore can explore how organising gradually becomes “organisation,” and then transforms back to organising again. From an ethnographic perspective, “organisation” does not capture what is really at stake, however, since there are always multiple, staggered efforts at organising going on simultaneously when many persons are engaged in a large undertaking. Even if an act of organising has become “organisation,” other acts of organising will still be in play, and the concept thereby becomes misleading. I prefer, therefore, to speak of how organising can lead to an “ontological dumping” (Hastrup 1999), by which I mean the concrete implementation of one of several possible interpretations. Such “dumping” would shape the ongoing organising, and possibly result in new efforts at organising.

Instead of conceiving the academic year and timetable structure (which make up just one aspect of the “common market” of education) as a neutral administrative technology that is “implemented” down through the organisation from KU’s top, I have chosen an analysis strategy which Reinhold conceptualises as “studying through” (Reinhold 1994, in Wright and Reinhold 2011). This strategy makes it possible to track how the ‘common market’ is rearticulated over time in diverse efforts at organising, and has retroactive influence on organising elsewhere in KU.

The shifts in meaning that the idea of a “common market” has undergone during the process of change can be considered “translations” (Latour 1993). The term “translation” means “displacement, drift, invention, mediation, creation of a new link that did not exist before and modifies in part the two agents” (Latour 1993: 6, in Czarniawska & Joerges 1996: 24). Translation in this sense must therefore not be confused with translation from one language to another. Czarniawska and Joerges have argued that it is the “translation process,” rather than the idea itself, that determines whether an idea becomes institutionalised (1996: 25). The concept of translation can help us understand why the rector's directive to implement KU’s academic year and timetable structure in the various faculties can produce such widely differing results. If one places the academic year and timetable structure into Latour’s translation model, it becomes clear that the outcome of the structural reform is unknowable:

The spread in time and space of anything – claims, orders, artefacts, goods – is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it (Latour 1986: 267, in Czarniawska & Joerges 1996: 23).

As Czarniawska and Joerges write, the translation concept distils central elements that are necessary to understand organisational change: namely, what exists already, and what is being created in addition to the relationships between people and ideas, ideas and objects, and people and objects (1996). The concept captures, as the authors write, “the coupling between arising contingencies and attempted control, created by actors in search for meaning” (ibid. 47).

The political process, which a reform project like the “common market” represents, is characterised by many battles. These conflicts have had varying outcomes, depending on the positions of the involved parties, their skill, and their incentive to prevail. Behind any given “ontological dumping,” there are negotiations between actors in different positions that afford them a greater or lesser potential for influence. It is therefore worth taking special notice of who manages to get their “translation” of the idea to take root—or as Wright would say, to “stick” (1994: 24)—and how they do it.

Initial Negotiations around the “common market”

... the beginning of the story is arbitrary, but we see a point in beginning just there, because it is a narrative, a story that we want to spin (Czarniawska og Joerges 1996: 22).

When asked how the idea of a “common market of education” emerged in the first place, employees at the University of Copenhagen offer different explanations. One of the eight Deans at the time explained that the “common market” was an attempt to make the 2007 merger between the University of Copenhagen, the Faculty of Life Sciences, and the Danish Pharmaceutical University meaningful. This explanation is supported by the University's first plan of action (*handleplan*), which states that senior management involved with the merger wanted to bring the university together, to give an internal as well as external impression of coherence via a common yearly cycle, and to allow students the flexibility to combine educational elements across faculty boundaries. Former members of the University's Strategic Council of Education (KUUR) explained that the “common market” was the product of the pro-rector of education at the time. Both explanations have some merit, and are not necessarily contradictory. There is a high probability that the pro-rector was a strong driving force behind the decision to create a “common market”. Regardless of their explanatory value, the explanations reflect a universal human need to create stories that make life's coincidences meaningful (Bruner 1990). In the second part of the article, I take the liberty to begin the story somewhere else.

Evidence suggests that the idea of a “common market of education” was first articulated by the pro-rector of education. A former member of KUUR has explained that, during the initial phase, he was critical of the term “the “common market” of education” due to its immediate association with the EU: “I was one of the people who criticised the fact that the baby was named the “common market”, it was a [pro-rector] thing ... why couldn't we just find our own terminology - and it is actually a market? ...”. The quote shows that KUUR's representatives did not agree on what the idea should be named. However, it was the pro-rector who won the battle of words. With the pro-rector as a natural member of the leadership team, as well as head of KUUR, the idea of a “common market” of education took root during 2006 and 2007 and resulted in one of the first tasks for KUUR.

KUUR was asked by the leadership team to draw up a plan for the realisation of the “common market”. The council composed terms of reference, and established an advisory council over the summer of 2007 consisting of five members. Of these five, the chair and one member of staff were from the so-called “wet” faculties (the natural sciences), one was a member of staff from a “dry” faculty (either the arts, theology, or the social sciences), one was a student from a dry faculty and one was employed in the university administration (KUUR 2007a). With this council in place, the negotiations could begin.

The advisory council was asked to examine structural and economic barriers to achieving the “common market”; to present economic principles related to STÅⁱⁱ income, and expenses related to inter-faculty teaching activities; and, finally, to propose common principles for a teaching and scheduling structure. Three months later, the advisory council had “translated” the task to six recommendations. They explicitly endorsed the goal stated in the terms of reference that “courses intended for students across faculties should be scheduled according to these principles” [i.e. a common academic year and timetable structure] (KUUR 2007b). Among the recommendations was a complex academic year and timetable structure that embraced block as well as semester structure.ⁱⁱⁱ The draft divides the academic

year into weeks reserved for teaching, exams, holidays and reading. The weeks are divided according to a table of five sections, A to E, with subdivisions 1 and 2. The idea was that a course located in section A can either run two hours per week throughout a semester (14 weeks) or four hours per week during a block lasting nine weeks. A student from a dry faculty (which organises courses according to a semester structure) as well as one from a wet faculty (which organises courses according to block structure) can both take the course as long as their other courses are not placed in section A.

The memo was discussed in KUUR fourteen days later. The meeting apparently made it clear to faculty representatives that it was important their voices be heard; consequently, two additional faculty representatives were included in the committee. The expansion of the committee is of interest here, because the new constellation of members influenced the translation of the idea, especially with respect to the academic year and timetable structure. More specifically, the new committee members included two representatives of staff, one from a wet and one from a dry faculty, and two student representatives from wet faculties. This meant that the general representation of the wet faculties was increased considerably. Hereafter the committee was composed of five staff representatives. Three of these represented wet faculties and two represented dry faculties. Of the three student representatives, two represented wet faculties and one a dry faculty. One of the newcomers represented a wet faculty which had not only introduced a block structure, but most importantly had also streamlined all degree programmes and courses to a common structure and time schedule. Whereas the first memorandum is concerned only with new educational developments and courses aimed at cross-faculty participation, the extended workgroup proposes:

to introduce *an obligatory common year and timetable structure which must always be the point of departure when planning*. There must, of course, in the practical implementation be great freedom to organise education and training tailored to the practical realities (italics added by the author).

The memorandum continues:

The basic idea is that the organisation of the academic year and courses, whether in a block or semester context, *will always be determined by the basic guidelines described below*. However, the general structures - to the extent needed - can be adapted locally if the adjustment does not prevent inter-faculty collaboration (KUUR 2007c, (italics added by the author).

The quotations show that the expansion of the committee has had a significant effect on the “translation” of the idea, which is evident in the advisory council's recommendation regarding the academic year and timetable structure. The data indicate that the representative who could refer to his (relatively powerful) faculty's experience with a common course structure has had a significant influence on how the advisory council should interpret their task. With the arrival of new representatives, the assignment of the council was “translated” again. A few words were changed, and suddenly the relevance of a common course structure was not limited to inter-faculty courses, but applied to *all courses* offered throughout the University. This translation involves a radical educational reform. In other words, there was a major shift in the group's interpretation of the purview of the course structure.

As a consequence of the memorandum, KUUR recommended that the leadership team should introduce a common academic year and timetable structure beginning in summer 2009 and suggested “extensive consultation” before developing a “plan of action” (KUUR 2007d). The matter was submitted to the faculties in mid-January 2008 with a deadline two months later:

It is considered necessary to establish a common framework for the planning of the academic year and timetable of the University in order to make it possible in practice for students to take courses in several faculties/ educational programmes (KUUR 2008a).

Two and a half months after the consultation period, KUUR announced that the faculties should begin implementation of the common academic year and timetable structure (KUUR 2008b). The Council held a meeting with the administrative directors of studies, focusing on the best way to ensure “implementation” and communication of the project. The minutes outline some “knots” [sic] (for example, the traditional autumn break which coincides with public school holidays had been moved from week 42 to week 45), but contain no concrete suggestions on just how this major structural reform could be implemented in practice (KUUR 2008c). Instead, various elements of communication are discussed, including the production of a brochure describing the “common market” subprojects in “non-technical language” (ibid.). The dissemination of the vision, and in particular “free trade between the faculties,” was considered an essential aspect of communicating the “common market” to the rest of the university. The planned transfer of responsibility for communication to the faculties caused concern. Two topics were discussed, one of which was ensuring ownership of the “common market” by faculty managements, while the other was a suggestion that the faculties should arrange a full-day dialogue with staff. In order to ensure project progress after responsibility had been transferred to faculty managements, it was decided that the “common market” should be regularly addressed at KUUR and SAK (administrative directors of studies) meetings. During one such debriefing in September 2008, which focused on deviations from the common timetable, it became clear just how much difference there was (and is) with respect to how the project fared at the different faculties. This prompted the moderator to emphasize that “communication of the idea of the “common market” is a common management issue ...”(KUUR 2008d).

It is evident, even in the initial negotiations regarding the interpretation of the idea, that processes of organising take place in relation to the project and result in various translations, of which one is “dumped” (Hastrup 1999), concretely manifesting in guidelines for a common year and timetable structure. Available data clearly indicate that the strong players from three wet faculties played a significant role in determining which “translation” “stuck” (Wright 1994: 24). The description of the translation from idea to concrete action plans demonstrates that the preliminary negotiations have left their mark on everything from the name of the project to its scale. The composition of the final council meant that one “translation” of the idea—which included all courses at the University—ultimately won, and was “dumped” in a concrete management tool.

This description offers a clear picture of what an organisation really is: a complex constellation of human beings who struggle with diverse forms of organising, to make their particular understanding of what is appropriate “stick” (Wright 1994: 27). Negotiation of meaning is continuous, and determines the mobilization of actors in “continuous processes of organizing” (Pondy and Mitoff 1979, in: Wright 1994: 19). A metaphor that captures this complexity is “organisation as culture” (Morgan 1986, Wright 1994: 18).

A Third Possible Explanation of how the “common market” of Education Began

I have offered two possible explanations of who or what underlies the decision to introduce a “common market” of education. Both explanations begin the story at the moment someone first began talking about a “common market”. To my mind, however, the story of the “common market” of education begins before the university had a pro-rector of education, and before the merger that took place in 2007.

In 2000, the Dean of a wet faculty experiencing major problems with student dropout convened a professional development committee using state funds earmarked for educational development. Among the committee's initiatives in 2001 was a study day for all employees, which was dedicated to soliciting input from representatives of both the private sector and large public organisations regarding their expectations for the university. The intent of the committee was to prepare the ground for changes that were deemed necessary to reduce dropout rates. The following year, the committee recommended a structural reform, and in 2002, it was decided to introduce block structure. Since the

faculty already exchanged students with the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (KVL) at that time, it is not surprising that the rector of KVL decided to introduce block structure in 2003. By 2004, the block structure was a reality at the aforementioned wet faculty, closely followed by an initiative known as *Educational reform 2005* at KVL. Despite major protests amongst veterinary staff, the reform entailed a restructuring from semester to block structure (interview with the person responsible for the reform process, January 2012).

For this reason, only minor adjustments were needed to adapt the structure of the former KVL to the common academic year and timetable structure proposed when The University of Copenhagen, KVL and The Pharmaceutical University merged: assuming, of course, that the common structure did not deviate from the structure of the wet faculty in question and of KVL. It is therefore not surprising that it was representatives from the former KVL and the aforementioned wet faculty who became stakeholders in the advisory council appointed by KUUR to draw up a plan to realise the “common market”. Based on their experience with educational reforms and the common educational structure they had already adopted, their prospects of influencing the negotiations were indeed favourable.

“Translating” the Directive to Introduce a Common Year and Timetable Structure at the Wet Faculties

The Stubborn but Inconsistent Approach

The conditions at one particular faculty make it possible to disregard the directive. This faculty has a number of degree programmes that prepare students for specific professional occupations; for this reason, almost all subjects are compulsory. In an interview with *Universitetsavisen* (the university newspaper) in Spring 2009, an administrative employee notes that, because students enrolled in two of the faculty's major degree programmes have such limited choice of courses, their students will not benefit from the “common market”. The employee goes on to say:

We need to carefully consider what we want to do in order not to change anything for the sake of change. There is no reason to bother students with reforms that will not benefit them (Johannesen 2009).

Internally, faculty management channelled the directive to the various heads of studies without further interpretation. With the appointment of a pro-dean of education in 2009, the “common market” became a theme of discussion. Asked about the “common market” directive during a meeting with heads of studies, the pro-dean remarked that “yes, we have to start working on that soon” (interview with one head of studies, January 2012). I do not know whether these were the pro-dean's exact words, but it is quite likely in a context where hardly any courses follow the common timetable. A head of studies from one of the few programmes that adapted their courses to the block and timetable structure commented on the meeting: “... it turned out that it was only the “goody-goodies” who worked on introducing the “common market” ... It was definitely my impression that no one else had bothered.” When this head of studies looks back on the process, she blames herself for not realizing that masters students do not have to adapt to the timetable structure, because fee-paying masters students only take courses developed specifically for their degree programme, and such courses are not open to other students. She adds in an afterthought:

But I find it difficult when an idea is presented from above, and you can see the sense of it, although it will be difficult... then it's hard not to say “sure, let's try” ... (interview, January 2012).

Via an administrative employee's interview in *Universitetsavisen*, the management of this faculty has made it quite clear to outsiders that the “common market” is not high on their list of priorities. In the meantime, the faculty management failed to follow up on the directive internally. They did not state

their intentions clearly to the heads of studies. They may have assumed that their ambiguity was an indication that the heads of studies did not have to take up this burdensome task. Since this was not made explicit, however, conscientious employees followed the directive despite the fact that it was meaningless with respect to the masters programmes.

From an outsider's perspective, it appears that no "translation" of the directive took place. The moment you enter the faculty, however, it is evident that actors have "translated" the ambiguous actions of the faculty management in different ways. While the management technology has been ignored by the majority, its agency has nevertheless affected particular players to such a degree that they did restructure the degree programmes they are responsible for, even though the changes were irrelevant and have even brought complaints from their masters students.

The choice to describe the faculty leadership's approach to the directive as stubborn but inconsistent arises because the faculty complained publicly about the irrelevance of the directive, while internally circulating it to heads of studies, who then had to bear its complexity on their shoulders (see Andersen 2008). Those who did follow the directive learned that it can be costly to follow an order.

The Critically Reflective Approach (1)

At one of the other wet faculties, the pro-dean of education asked one head of studies to be in charge of the "implementation" of the common educational structure. This head of studies was a member of the "common market" advisory council under KUUR, and had the necessary specialised knowledge to carry out the reform in a locally meaningful manner. Moreover, this head of studies had a feel for how politics is played at a faculty. First, she made sure that each department head considered and agreed on important points in the process plan she outlined. Next, she negotiated funding to support teachers responsible for restructuring courses.

Several members of staff found that it might be advantageous for MSc students to be able to take courses at other faculties. As teachers of students preparing for a specific profession, however, they did not find it advisable to introduce flexibility in the bachelor programme (interview with the head of studies, January 2012). The management decided, following these negotiations, to preserve the undergraduate programmes as they were, but to adapt the MSc programme to the common year and timetable structure. As indicated in an article in *Universitetsavisen*, management did not hesitate to make its decision public (Baggergaard 2008). The head of studies and staff, moreover, decided to develop courses tailored to students from other faculties. Now, perceived as an opportunity to organise research-based teaching for external students, the idea of a "common market" of education went through yet another "translation".^{iv} The approach of the faculty leadership was thus both critical and constructive, which meant that a majority of staff could relate to its vision.

The dynamic but single-minded approach

One head of studies from a third wet faculty reflects over the process that followed the professional development committee's recommendation in 2002 that block structure should be implemented:

There can be no serious argument that block structure is better than semester structure. There are good universities out there that use semester structure, and others, just as good, that use block structure. [Each] has its advantages and disadvantages. The message here is that the process has been just as important as the goal. That you can't just keep doing the same thing you did last year, but have to throw everything up in the air. This process has been unbelievably hard, tear-stained, and intractable, but it has been useful.

Among the participants in the professional development committee were several staff members who enjoyed broad professional respect, and had great influence. This meant that those responsible for the

implementation of the reform were backed up not only by the university administration, but also by powerful representatives of the academic personnel. Groups of teachers were asked to prepare reports for the board of studies regarding their courses, which would be used as a basis for decisions on the future shape of the degree programmes:

It was a question of mobilising the entire academic staff, to give them—in the best, friendliest, and most clichéd sense of the word—ownership of all this. It was incredibly important. This business of making decisions over people's heads, and asking them to act inspired after the fact—that won't work.

The work was not limited to structural problems and ECTS weighting^v, but plunged deep into substance. People discussed methods of teaching, including the learning pyramid and types of exams. The process was not without resistance, however. One employee who had responsibility for the restructuring recounts:

There was someone who wrote ugly things about me in the newspapers, in the university newspaper; they nearly threatened to beat me up. They were so angry with me. They thought I was in the process of ruining the whole...degree programme.

The process of change at the three wet faculties had important characteristics in common, despite the faculties vastly differing sizes. First, there were individuals in the upper management who were persuaded that change was necessary to secure the department's future (that is, to avoid mass firings). Second, the local management acted loyally with respect to the faculties. There was therefore no doubt that the decision to adopt block structure should be implemented. In some of the faculties the top administrators were either personally engaged in education, or took care to listen to employees further down the hierarchy with insight into what educational development requires. This meant that employees were given the opportunity to get support from pedagogical specialists, while the time needed to redesign their courses was built directly into their work schedules. I think it is safe to assume that the latter will always play an important part in how employees will greet a huge extra assignment. Nevertheless, it represents the exception rather than the rule at KU.

The data material shows that local “translations” of the directive are dependent upon the players who have taken part in the organising, and their arbitrary interpretation of how reform processes are best engineered. Whereas one faculty management on the basis of input from research staff chooses to bracket off the bachelor programmes another faculty management ignores the protests of research staff and goes ahead with their initial plan. The management acknowledges, however, the work involved and set aside resources for this purpose.

“Translating” the Directive to Introduce a Common Year and Timetable Structure at the Dry Faculties

At the dry faculties, the process went rather differently. The academic year and timetable structure did not, as noted, have its origins in a local initiative. The need to follow a timetable structure seemed vanishingly small in the minds of academic personnel at the dry faculties, because their relatively low number of classroom hours rarely prevented students from taking courses at other faculties. That opting out of a common timetable structure might prevent a student at a wet faculty from taking a class at a dry faculty seemed to be (and is in real numbers) a minor problem. Meanwhile, it was not the plan to implement the timetable structure itself that was perceived as a threat by the representatives of the dry faculties, but rather the risk that the semester structure might disappear altogether, as had happened at the wet faculties. In the early phase of KUUR, therefore, the dry faculties fought tooth and nail to preserve the semester structure:

there were always dry voices...saying we do not want block structure...we always said that we believe blocks drive modularisation to a completely undesirable degree. As a student, you have to be able to handle material more than just one block at a time. So we have never been in favour of blocks (former faculty representative to KUUR, interview January 2012).

In spite of the dry faculties' common concerns, they have, as we shall see, managed the directive very differently.

The Invisible Approach

As was predominantly the case for one of the wet faculties described earlier, one of the dry faculty's degree programmes also qualify students for particular professions. This means that the faculty's own students have no need for their courses to be adjusted to the timetable structure. The faculty kept a low profile ever since the directive was publicised, declining, for example, to be interviewed in *Universitetsavisen*. In the spring of 2012, when I was interviewing interlocutors involved in the process, it was not possible to get anyone at the faculty to speak to me about it. An employee in the study administration, in response to my repeated attempts to obtain an interview appointment, informed me kindly that the working group currently "working on it," believed "it would not be fruitful to discuss this until later [autumn 2012]". The employees at the faculty might have issued the rebuff because they honestly believed they had nothing to contribute to the discussion at that time. More likely, however, this curious anthropologist was seen as a threat to the faculty's "tactic" (De Certeau 1984) of holding a low profile.

The faculty has been occupied for years with a comprehensive restructuring of their degree programmes, in which traditional lectures are being replaced by participatory lectures or teaching in seminars. This task has demanded much of both the study administration and the teachers, so it is not surprising that the faculty has set aside the adoption of the common academic year and timetable structure, and abstained from "translating" the directive.

The hesitant approach

In an interview with the *Universitetsavisen*, the then pro-dean of another of the dry faculties insists that the faculty has a flexible degree structure in the spirit of the "common market".^{vi} Despite his opinion that there would be a cost to condensing teaching into blocks, he does not wholly discount the possibility that his faculty might implement block structure at some point. What exactly lies behind this view cannot be known with confidence, but it is possible that this pro-dean was inspired by the collaboration with representatives from the wet faculties in the "common market" advisory council.

A couple of degree programmes which collaborate with other faculties in Denmark and Sweden are organised in a block structure; but generally this faculty, like the other dry faculties, has preserved the semester structure. There had been no one until very recently who could see any point in adapting the faculty's teaching to the timetable structure. This was apparent in my conversation with one head of studies:

We are aware that there is an academic year structure we must adapt to, which includes a fall break that has to occur at a particular time, and semesters that must begin at a particular time. Beyond that, it isn't something we have addressed (interview, January 2012).

He said further that the heads of studies were told at one of their meetings in which the "common market" was discussed that "it was in fact mostly about when the fall vacation would be, and when the semester started. That was more or less the only thing that it was about for us...".

The Critically Reflective Approach (2)

At a third dry faculty, the faculty leadership decided in collaboration with a head of studies early in the process to “set the BA aside.” In other words, just as at one of the wet faculties, they kept the bachelor's degree programmes unchanged. In addition, it was decided to preserve courses in the MA degree programme that were only open to students pursuing that degree:

We decided quite quickly that we could concentrate on the courses other students can take. So all the courses that have free rein, that are open to open-university students and credit students, these are placed in certain structures and have ECTS so that they harmonise with the “common market” (faculty representative to SAK, interview January 2012).

Adapting the relatively few courses that are open to external students to the timetable structure has been unproblematic, since the faculty already observed a tradition of midday lunch breaks, and had never scheduled instruction on Friday afternoons.^{vii} In 2008, the faculty leadership expended much effort to inform the academic personnel about the common semester start time as well as the fixed exam weeks:

We were very thorough about that: we hung up lots of signs and wrote messages. But it was just something that was incredibly far from the minds of most academic personnel...

What really caused trouble among the academic personnel was the year-structure's rescheduling of the fall and winter vacation weeks. It is still this issue they remember, if someone should be so unfortunate as to mention the “common market”: “And I'm sure, you know, if you ask the academic personnel today, they will laugh and say, it's that thing with the vacation weeks...”. For the same reason, the phrase “common market” is rarely mentioned in the administration's communication with staff. In practice, it only occurs in relation to the semesters’ start dates, and in connection with concrete revisions to the curriculum:

Of course it comes up in connection with curricular revisions. Of course it's first and foremost about professional courtesy, but if you have to fit this and that in, then we'll also have a look at the “common market”, and try to harmonise there, if possible.

This faculty leadership's management of the directive has important similarities to one of the wet faculties' management. At both faculties, they took a critical look at how to administer the directive in a way appropriate to their department, based on thorough knowledge of the degree programmes in question. Rather than uncritically “implementing” the directive, the two faculty leaders translated the management tool to a question of adapting only parts of the degree programme, and only insofar as it was academically meaningful to do so.

The Rule-Abiding Approach

As with the third dry faculty described above, the fourth kept a low profile with respect to public pronouncements about the “common market”, with the exception of a comment to *Universitetsavisen* in winter 2008 stating that the faculty would implement the academic year and timetable structure as described in the directive.

In contrast to the approach at the wet faculties, here the responsibility to “implement” the directive was given over to the department heads at the faculty after one of the heads of studies sketched the idea of the “common market” for department heads and heads of studies at an expanded administrative meeting. With this delegation of authority, it became the individual heads of studies' responsibility to interpret the scope, arrangement, and completion of the task in practice. In contrast to the wet

faculties, and similar to the first dry faculty above, the faculty leadership chose—to use Andersen's word—to *overload* the complexity to the next level in the management hierarchy (2008).

At a faculty characterised by highly independent departments with strong academic profiles, the faculty leadership did not question to what degree the variations in curricular structure and ECTS-weightings could be sustainable in the long term for its individual departments, their potential collaborators, and their students. The leadership was only concerned with the year and timetable structure, which required that courses' ECTS values must be divisible by 2.5. The faculty leadership's management of the directive consisted of passing it on to the departments, without “translating” the directive into something that could be meaningful for the whole faculty (see Bundgaard 2012).

Divergent Modes of Management in an Organisation like KU

The management approaches analysed here witness to an unequal power relationship between the faculties at KU. While the wet faculties openly declare their intentions^{viii}, be they to ignore, implement, or partially implement the “common market”, the dry faculties either keep a low profile or announce that they are on board—but without following the decision up with resources to hire pedagogical consultants or to allocate planning time to the academic personnel. In one case, this kind of announcement is supplemented by a comment that sows doubt regarding its actual objective. An ambiguous message can be interpreted as an attempt by the faculty leadership to keep KU's highest leadership at bay. In the meantime, however, this ambiguity causes unrest among the employees and has negative consequences for the working environment at the faculty.

How Teachers Received the Common Year and Timetable Structure

Employees in “professional organisations” often greet projects to introduce change with scepticism (Caluwé & Vermaak 2003: 14). In this respect, KU resembles other organisations. Structural reforms consume time and energy, and it is not always obvious what an individual employee stands to gain from them. It would have been remarkable, then, if the academics at KU had demonstrated enthusiasm for the plan to institute a common instructional structure. A certain scepticism with regard to the “common market” has also characterised the teaching community at KU. The degree and the duration of this scepticism has varied by faculty and reflected the reforms' different contexts. The most distinct difference is to be found between the dry faculties and the wet faculties. At the wet faculties there were teachers who were frustrated about the reorganisation and some still are. After initial protests, however, they generally made their peace with the leadership's decision, and the comprehensive restructuring of course offerings was set in motion. This is in stark contrast to the dry faculties, where resistance was not only widespread but also persistent, and where, as a result, the year and timetable structure has not been implemented in several places.

Hesitant Application among Teachers at the Wet Faculties

Anthropological contributions to policy studies, among other things, explore processes of “appropriation” (Sutton & Levinson 2001), a concept which embraces a range of ways in which a policy might be received. There is, however, a tendency to focus on local actors who interpret or contest a policy rather than ones who simply apply it. An analytical concept which captures the kind of reception which has taken place at the wet faculties is “hesitant application”.

At the wet faculties, the decision regarding the structural changes was never up for negotiation, and the influence of the academic personnel was limited to course content. This involved discussions of how much emphasis individual elements of the discipline should have in a course or a curriculum. Since the outcomes of such discussions are essential to the work assignments of individual instructors, no employee could afford to ignore the decision process. Informal conversations and formal interviews with staff hint at an atmosphere of exhaustion. It was not the implementation of the shared teaching

schedule that bothered the staff, however, since it broadly resembled the structure that was already in use at several of the wet faculties. Resistance among the staff may have arisen from the introduction of the block structure, but it is now directed at the repeated mergers the faculties are undergoing. This aversion to reform is, as noted, not surprising. What is significant is that it is grounded in the enduring worry by a majority of teachers that various new structures will negatively affect not only research, but also the teaching and learning process for students.

A member of the academic staff at one of the wet faculties answered my question as to how he experienced the introduction of the “common market” at KU:

When you say “common market”, I think primarily of the block structure, which was of course implemented at [my faculty] back in 2005. At the time, we had a semester structure, and courses in many different sizes; but starting in September 2005, everything had to be converted to either 7½ or 15 ECTS courses, and that was not a decision that was up for discussion—it was just the way it was. Because of that, everyone was a part of the process, whether you thought it was a good idea or not. And the changeover was followed up with various workshops with a pedagogical consultant, whose job it was to prepare people to teach in the new context that was block structure.

In a supplementary comment he continues:

I remember a good deal of resistance at first, which is of itself not so strange in times of change; but there was also a curiosity with respect to what a change to eight weeks of intensive instruction could mean. One widespread worry surrounded to what degree our subjects...required time to be absorbed—in other words, a need for a longer phase during which what is learned can settle in, which is harder to achieve in a shorter teaching period. With that said, though, there was really no way around it, and so everyone took up the project, and the department allotted time for course development in our internal accounting of hours, so in that way our efforts also became measurable (email exchange, January 2012).

Apart from the teacher's worry about the consequences of shorter courses, it is worth highlighting three conditions revealed by this comment. First, this academic staff member and his colleagues do not question the management's right to make decisions. This may be a consequence of the new university law (2003), but may also have roots in traditional practice among employees. Second, the decision is followed up by workshops with pedagogical consultants brought on to support the teachers in their reorganisation of coursework. Third, teachers were allotted time to work on the task. These conditions only obtained at the wet faculties. Even though some members of the academic staff still object to the structural reforms, the block structure and the alignment with the common academic year and timetable are a reality at these faculties, where the leadership had settled on implementing the reforms. The term “hesitant application” captures the early criticism, but relatively swift acceptance, by the academic staff.

Opposition among the Academic Staff at the Dry Faculties

The dry faculties have not been affected by the restructuring to the same degree as the wet faculties, who have introduced block structure and undergone two rounds of mergers. Nevertheless, resistance to the “common market” has been most pronounced at the dry faculties. A partial explanation for this, as noted, is that opposition at the wet faculties had already been expressed at the time they adopted block structure, five years before the introduction of the “common market”. Even so, the difference between the degrees of resistance evident at the wet and the dry faculties is striking. Whereas staff at the wet faculties fell in line, numerous departments at the dry faculties have used what Mark Hanen (in Caluwé & Vermaak 2003: 17) calls a “pocket veto”: that is, they simply do not react to the directive to change.

Some of the opposition at the dry faculties can be explained with reference to the aforementioned hesitant and rule-abiding approaches that have given rise to uncertainty and anger, respectively. This is apparent, for example, in a contribution to *Universitetsavisen* with the headline "The common market is full of confusion", written by an associate professor at one of the dry faculties. The article describes how, in December 2008, a group of academic staff members asked their pro-dean for a meeting in order to clarify whether the dean's office intended to implement block structure in the long term (Larsen 2009). The meeting did not provide much clarification, so the staff had to interpret the leadership's intentions and make up their own minds as to whether or not it would be worth the effort to adapt their semester-based instruction to the timetable structure if block structure was going to be imposed later anyway. In the period that followed, the board of studies at the faculty had to take the burden of complexity on themselves (see Andersen 2008:42), interpreting what the consequences of the "common market" directive should be. Without this context, it would be difficult to understand the following excerpt from the minutes of board of studies meeting:

The board of studies discussed the block grants [sic] and the "common market", and how the structure of [our faculty] cannot accommodate that kind of division. The conclusion is that we can ignore the "common market", and can make plans next semester as though the "common market" is not there (minutes of a board of studies meeting at one of the dry faculties, spring 2009).

The board of studies at this faculty is not alone in ignoring the "common market". Other boards of studies at the dry faculties have also chosen to disregard the "common market", but without making their decision explicit. Many have chosen a more pragmatic course, however, in which courses that are open to students from other specialties are adapted to the timetable structure. In this way, the boards of studies are living up to the vision first articulated by the advisory council in 2007. This does not mean, however, that criticism of the structural reforms has died down at these faculties where the timetable changes address problems which the dry faculties did not have at the time.

The approaches to the directive taken by the dry faculties cannot by themselves explain the persistent opposition that any mention of the "common market" seems to provoke among the academic staff. The "common market" has become a synonym for a series of initiatives that has left its mark on the educational milieu since 2009. These initiatives are characterised by what one might call the "tyranny of numbers" (see Neyland 2013), and are experienced by the academic staff as a manifestation of the iron cage of formal rationalism (Clegg 1990 in Borum 1995: 12).

First, the changing strategic priorities at KU have resulted in inconsistent messages from the university's local leaderships. Whereas as a consequence of KU's first strategy for the dry faculties (i.e. allotting resources equivalent to only half of the "taxi-meter" amount), teaching represented a substantial expense that contributed to the eroding of the academic research time, the 2016 strategy and its resultant budget model promises that even the dry disciplines will have an economic interest in offering classroom instruction (obviously depending on the size of classes). The sudden interest in teaching is mainly prompted by the economic bottom line rather than by any academic consideration.

Second, student political organisations have persuaded politicians that they should receive more teaching per academic credit in order to achieve competitive professional proficiency. Pressure from politicians has led a majority of the nation's universities to require a minimum of 12 hours of instruction per week. This applies regardless of what subject is being studied or how many students are typically enrolled in a given course. In other words, the initiative focuses on numbers rather than academic considerations.

Third, at least two dry faculties are struggling with a lack of classrooms. For this reason, the respective faculty leaders have implemented efficiency improvement projects in order to optimise the usage of

teaching spaces. In the name of efficiency, instruction is arranged like pearls on a string, where more consideration is given to classroom use than learning curves. Teaching must be distributed evenly over the semester, which makes periods designated for data collection, for example, problematic.

Taken together, these initiatives, which are all built around measurable numbers, result in the disengagement of the academic staff. Whereas instruction should, in principle, be about academic content, many teachers are faced with the question of whether it is economically sound to offer a particular course; instructional schedules and numbers of hours come to the fore, while the content of the discipline is consigned to the background. One teacher's comment expresses what many colleagues are experiencing: "I can't really see the point of my work anymore. Everything is about the size of research grants, STÅ [taximeter money] and inflexible systems dictated from above. This isn't why I chose a university career."

Conclusion

The description of the "common market" as an example of a travelling idea reduces a complex process to its surface alone. This risks ignoring what the journey is contingent on: that is, to what degree one or more persons has an interest in appropriating the idea so it can best serve their own purposes. We have seen how the idea of the "common market" for education at KU stimulates organising; this results in two successive "translations", with very different consequences for the university as a whole. Whereas one is limited to inter-faculty educational initiatives, the other encompasses the entirety of KU's educational offerings. The shift is dependent on a small number of players who manage to push through their own idea of what will serve KU best. The players' ability to advance their points of view, along with their institutional background, has played a role in the outcome of the negotiations. At KU, it is not unimportant whether you represent a dry or a wet faculty. The translation of the working group presented at KUUR, where it was approved without comment, is "dumped" into KU's academic year and timetable structure and recommended for the rector's approval. Shortly thereafter, a directive is circulated regarding the implementation of the year and timetable structure. This does not end the battle of definitions, however; it continues undiminished, in the guise of new organising among local leaderships and academic personnel at the faculties.

As Qvortrup has said in another context, organisations "do not become creative by being exposed to continual leadership changes. Chaos does not give rise to creativity, but either more chaos, or its opposite: exhaustion and obstruction" (2011:8). The analysis of the material from KU can explain why leadership changes led to exhaustion. Repeated battles to define initiatives that have a critical influence on teaching steal energy and attention from the very teaching the initiatives were supposed, in principle, to benefit.

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Endnotes

¹ For an analysis of the different positions taken by central stakeholders at one specific faculty and the approach to management used see Bundgaard 2012.

ⁱⁱ The Danish “taxi-meter” system was introduced in 1994. The standardised taxi-meter payments are allocated only when a student passes an exam. The amount allocated for an exam passed at a wet faculty is more than the double of an exam passed at a dry faculty.

ⁱⁱⁱ The academic year at KU is divided into either two (semester structure) or four (block structure) units.

^{iv} It has frequently been the case at the University of Copenhagen that departments seeking to add a course to a central subject area would hire someone to teach the course within the department rather than allowing students to take the course at another department, where it would be part of a research environment.

^v ECTS stands for the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System. The purpose of the system is to make teaching and learning in higher education transparent across Europe: “The system allows for the transfer of learning experiences between different institutions, greater student mobility and more flexible routes to gain degrees” (http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm).

^{vi} These students have a relatively large number of elective ECTS in both the BA and MA degree programmes.

^{vii} The timetable structure dictates a lunch break from 12:00 to 13:00 and no scheduled classes on Friday afternoons.

^{viii} As we have seen this does not necessarily mean that the faculty management communicates clearly their plan of action within their faculty.