

A students' perspective:

Universities as ivory towers or technology driven enterprises?

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J.G. Wissema (2009) stated “top universities that want to continue carrying out cutting-edge scientific research are seeking alternative funding as the cost of such research has risen above the budgets that governments can provide. As a result, leading universities across the world are seeking collaboration with technology-driven enterprises”.

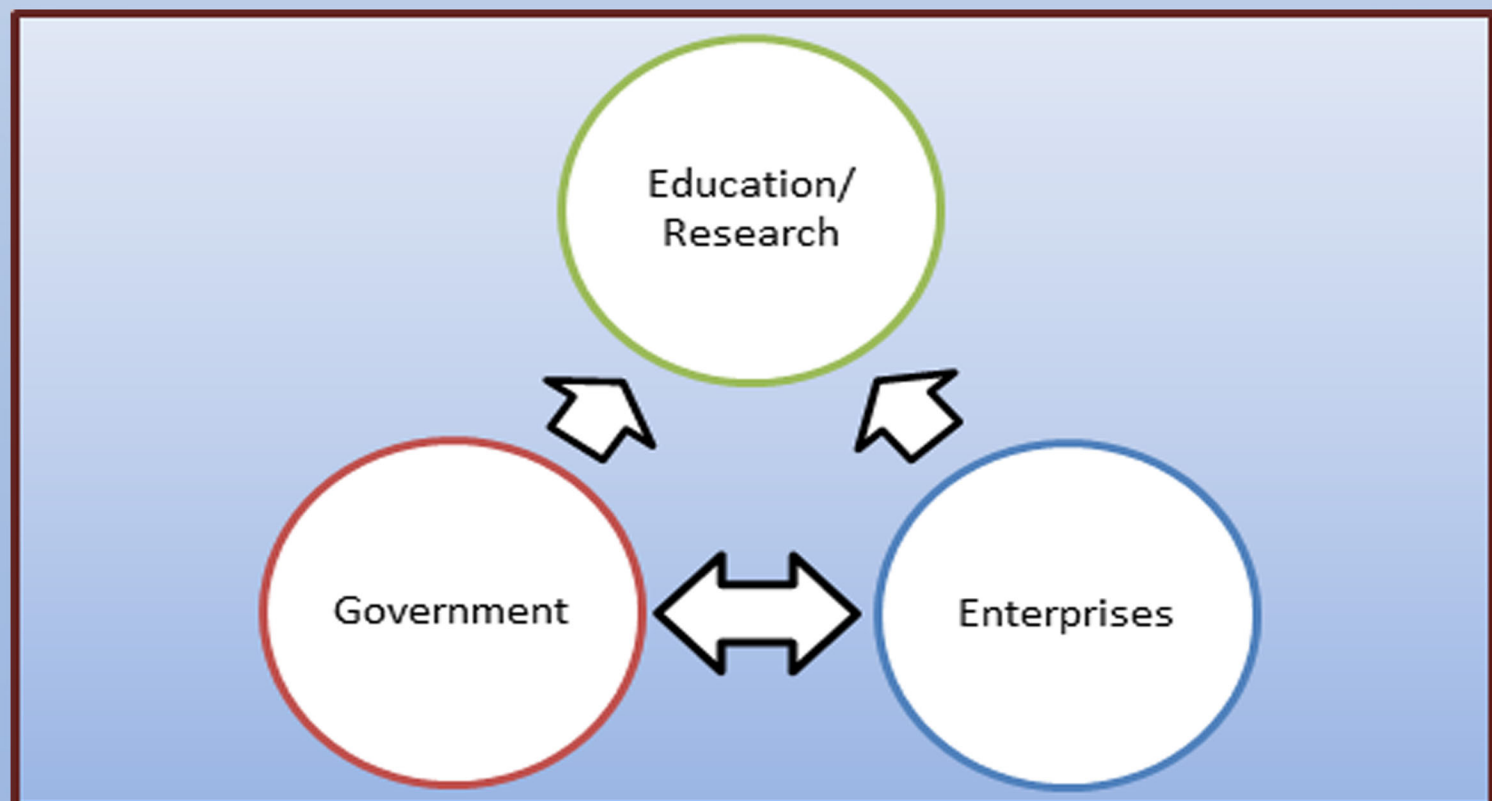
In the Netherlands, this is even governmentally organized since 2011 with ‘topsectorenbeleid’, designed to strengthen the Dutch strengths even more. Platforms are developed to bundle knowledge of universities and enterprises in order to be innovative. Wageningen University is a very good example of this cooperation in its specific field. However, the university does not want to be an ivory tower according to Rector Martin Kropff in his dies natalis speech on March 9 2012.

“WE ARE COMMITTED TO DELIVERING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH. BUT IN THE END WE ARE INSPIRED BY SOCIETAL ISSUES.”

Since research and education are highly intertwined in Wageningen, this policy driven development has consequences for not only the research but also the education. I have experienced this myself since confidentiality contracts were necessary for my Major Thesis at a company and in courses ‘society based cases’ were integrated.

Whether or not you agree with the national development of more and more influence of enterprises in the research agenda, it seems already beyond a point of no return, simply because there is no alternative by means of funding. It is important to be aware of this development to be in control of the situation and to have the perfect balance between an ivory tower and a technology driven enterprise at universities.

Financial influence on education and research



In this triangle the government and enterprises influence each other because the government invests in companies and companies pay taxes etc back. Both influence education and research by means of grants or governmental support from enterprises or companies respectively.



• DO UNIVERSITIES HAVE TO REWRITE THEIR CODE OF SCIENTIFIC CONDUCT?

• DO WE NEED AN INDEPENDENT SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY TEAM AT THE UNIVERSITY WHO PROTECTS THE RESEARCH AGENDA BY POINTING AT GAPS OR TOO MUCH INVOLVEMENT OF COMPANIES?

• WOULD IT BE A SOLUTION TO SCIENTIFICALLY STUDY THE WAY THAT ENTERPRISES INFLUENCE UNIVERSITIES AND PUT BOUNDARIES TO THAT?