

## **SCIENCE POLICY (IN ESTONIA)**

### **Preface to the special issue of TRAMES**

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Estonian science policy has been actively developed throughout the entire period of regained independence. During that time significant reorganising has taken place in four major areas: restructuring decision-making, reorganising research establishments, reorganising funding and reforming higher education. As a result of such reorganisations Estonian science environment has become more stable, including the scientists and the funding of science.

At the same time science funding is insufficient and fragmentary. Decision-making and dividing money between different fields of science and projects are not always transparent to the public. Various interest groups in science have emerged, e.g. huge public law universities with their institutes on the one hand and state research institutions on the other. In some science policy questions, the opposition rather stands between big universities and institutes regardless of where the latter belong. Hence the interests of universities and their institutes can often be in opposition as well.

The impetus for the current special issue of Trames was the article titled “From parts to whole” by Jüri Engelbrecht, president of the Academy of Sciences. It treats the various aspects of research policies based on the recent ALLEA studies “National Strategies of Research in Smaller European Countries”. These studies involved both the member and candidate countries. The experience of different countries is analysed and the best practice indicated. The research policy in Estonia is described in greater detail. Jüri Engelbrecht finishes his article with ideas leading towards general European research policy – from parts to whole.

The editors introduced this article to various influential persons who shape Estonian science policy. We received plenty of promises to comment on professor Jüri Engelbrecht’s article and express their own ideas on science policy matters. In the course of putting the special issue together the Estonian science political situation changed dramatically. As a result, several authors who had agreed to

provide their contributions, decided not to express their science policy opinions openly (not even as a scholarly text).

By early 2003, most of the employees dealing with science matters at the ministry of education, now ministry of education and research, had left their job. Among them was also the head of the policy department responsible for science administration. (In the meantime, the parliamentary elections took place, a new coalition came to power and a new government was formed. The new minister of education and research has started to assemble the ministry's science department, and the new vice-chancellor of science has taken up his job.)

Granted support by a departing high-ranking employee, the rectors of four big public law universities tried to totally discredit the currently operating system of science funding. Breaking several laws of the Republic of Estonia, the target financing plan presented by the Estonian Council of Scientific Competence was changed. The funding of all research topics was cut by 3-4%, and the saved money was allocated to several new areas suggested by the rectors. However, these new and "urgently necessary" topics for the universities had been previously rejected by the Competence Council because of their insufficient scientific level or people concerned.

As this action caused an acute sense of dissatisfaction among the Estonian scientists, the rectors, represented by the council of rectors, hoped to dissolve the Competence Council and start distributing the funds themselves. That type of funding would be disastrous as competitiveness and quality criteria would simply vanish. For the institutes standing outside universities the sort of science policy which entrusts the funding to the university rectors, would also be no less than a catastrophe.

The activities of the council of rectors of the public law universities forced the research institutes outside universities into action as well. Thus, on 27 February, the council of research institutes was founded that aims to develop science, further the relations between its members, and encourage and facilitate co-operation between universities, university institutes and other research institutions, regardless of their legal status.

The work of the council of research institutes keeps to the principle of maintaining the science funding system in Estonia that is based on competitive target funding. Replacing that with funding without any control mechanisms would lead to the decreasing level of science.

Currently an international assessment of the Estonian R&D funding system is being carried out, which aims to conduct a review of the current R&D system in Estonia, review the objectives of the Estonian R&D Strategy 2002-2006 'Knowledge-based Estonia', analyse the best practices in R&D funding worldwide, and finally propose an efficient, transparent and accountable R&D funding system for Estonia.

The editorial board of TRAMES is grateful to all the authors who, despite the present storms raging through the science funding systems in Estonia, nevertheless presented their views on science policy (in Estonia).

The article by the Göteborg university professor Aant Elzinga, “Some current changes in the conditions of research” reviews some of the changes in the research landscape in Western countries that have prompted a rethinking of science policy and the shift from the so-called linear model of innovation to conceptualisation in terms of networks and partnering. This review is framed in a more general discussion of OECD science policy doctrines. In conclusion it is found that the new network models of science policy are deficient in that they tend to exaggerate certain features in limited segments of the current policy-making landscape, but in doing so they at the same time reinforce images and policies dictated by macro-economic forces of globalisation. Professor Aant Elzinga tries to correct for this lack of critical thinking.

Rector of the University of Tartu, professor Jaak Aaviksoo, known to the Estonian public as an eternal rebel, presents here a critical article “Estonian R&D policy—still to be defined“ gives an overview of the state-of-the-art of the Estonian science (R&D) system, analyses its functioning in the national socio-economic framework and identifies the bottlenecks to be overcome. Professor Jaak Aaviksoo is convinced that Estonian science is well fit to adjust itself to these new demands if they emerge and able to contribute to national economy and the society at large.

Professor at Tartu and one of the editors of our journal, Jüri Allik, submitted his article “The quality of science in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania after the first decade of independence” provides an analysis of bibliometric indicators of the quality of science in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania during the last ten years. Professor Jüri Allik concludes that the inadequate amount of money and the ignorance of the political elite concerning the role of science in a modern society are the most pressing problems for the further development of science in all three Baltic states, and particularly in Latvia.

In his paper, “Towards modern STI policy-making in Estonia”, Mr. Marek Tiits, the permanent secretary of the Research and Development Council of Estonia, which is an advisory board to the government, discusses if Estonian science, technology and innovation policy should be led by any longer-term clearly spelled out objectives, which would result in the consolidation of efforts in science, economy, and society at large. Mr. Marek Tiits also aims to initiate a debate on what could be the bases for such a shared vision on Estonia’s future.