

Welcome IARU President's Meeting, april 25th 2012. By Rector Ralf Hemmingsen.

Check against delivery

It is a pleasure to welcome you here in the University's Tapestry Room. Looking at the tapestries, I get this feeling of déjà-vu. Perhaps because the history of the tapestries resembles the discussions in today's workshop about the value of the university. Somehow somewhere, the university contains a hidden treasure which is unknown to the outside world. Sometimes, the treasure is even unknown to the university itself. Let me explain.

Around 1860, some-one - we don't know who, found the tapestries in the basement under this very building. They were tucked away in a box. No-one knows why they were placed at the university. And no-one knows how they ended up in a box. But it is assumed that they were put there to protect them from either the Great Fire in Copenhagen in 1728 or the English bombardment in 1807.

Based on an examination of the inscriptions, fabric and style it was - again assumed - that they were made in the Belgian town of Oudenaarde around 1670 by the weaver Pieter van Copenole. Intuitively you think that they must be worth a fortune. But how can you assess their value?

Of course you could ask Sotheby's for an estimate of their market value. They would be able to give us a ball park figure. But such an act is futile. Not only because the tapestries are not for sale. But also because their market price cannot be translated into their real value. I'm talking about the problem of quantifying quality. It reminds me of a sign that Albert Einstein had in his office at Princeton. The sign said:

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

Essentially, what we have done today at the workshop is to count what can be counted - not to count what cannot be counted. And so our result can only be described as a half-truth. Nonetheless, I think it makes good sense to give it a try. Not least because so many people, organisations and governments outside the university talk about the value of our activities. Let me just mention a good quote which serves to frame this trend. Some time in the 1970s, US ambassador to India, Pat Moynihan - a veteran from the Kennedy administration, was asked how you create a world class city. He said: *"Make a great university - and wait 200 years"*.

Nowadays, decision-makers across the globe follow that recipe. The only difference is that they do not expect to wait 200 years. You could say like

education expert Ben Wildavsky that the Cold War's arms race has been replaced by "a brain race", where cities and countries compete for talents and brain power because they consider them imperative to success in the global economy. As universities, we can only appreciate governments who try to win the brain race by acting like the slogan by the sports brand Nike suggests: "Just do it" - just make investments in research and education!

However, it makes good sense to step back and ponder *why* they should do it. It makes good sense to prove the hypothesis that universities make you rich. As we try to calculate the economic impact of universities, I think it is important that we are very careful not to violate the principles of sound scientific inquiry - comprehensive collection of data, investigation of caveats and due hesitation in the range of our conclusions. If we don't follow these principles, we may undermine the core value of the university.

I think today's discussions in the work shop suggests that we are on track. We don't just do it - we think about how to do it. Tonight, I have focused attention on one of our joint projects. But I am sure we will also have "valuable" discussions on the range of other issues that we will deal with in the next few days.

Thank you. I wish you a pleasant dinner.
Welcome to Copenhagen!