

Worshipping at the Shrine of the
Knowledge-Based Society?
Irish university research policy in the epoch of
globalisation

24 October 2006

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Outline

- Myths of the Knowledge-Based Society
- The KBS and the national research strategy
- Irish social science and European 'excellence'

The real 1990s Irish success story

High levels of low final educational qualifications

1993-95 more men at work men with low educational qualifications than in all European countries except Greece, Spain and Portugal).

Continuing high levels of functional illiteracy amongst labour market **entrants**

Very low levels of continuing education

Research as consumption rather than investment

BUT 'volume production' of technical graduates for a small (in employment terms) but decisive sector of the economy



The problematic relation between education and economic growth

- Third level education **can** operate as ‘teen parking’:
 - » In Italy third level participation is **low** in prosperous areas like Emilia-Romagna, and **high** in areas such as Sicily
 - » If it’s easy for students to get jobs, **fewer** students do research degrees
- Graduates do not necessarily do ‘graduate’ jobs
 - » Re-analysis of US census data shows at most 20% of jobs can be classified as ‘symbolic analysts’ i.e. using analytical and conceptual skills (Brown & Hesketh, 2004)
 - » In most European countries at least 20% of graduates consider they are ‘over-educated’ for their current jobs (Lindley, 2002).
 - » Many young UK graduates in the service sector are in ‘non-graduate’ jobs (Mason, 2002).
 - » Increasing qualifications can just lead to ‘qualification inflation’...

Table VI. Occupational distribution of graduates employed in retailing, 1988 and 1998

		1988	1998
		<i>% of graduates</i>	
Occupational Code			
I	Professional and related supporting management and administration	18	
II-III	Professional and related in education, welfare and health; literary, artistic and sport	21	
IV	Professional and related in science, engineering, technology	3	
V	Management	36	
1	Managers and administrators		36
2	Professional		21
3	Associate professional		6
	Other occupations (mainly sales and clerical)	22	37
	TOTAL	100	100
	<i>Graduates as percent of total employment</i>	3.3	6.5

Source: Labour Force Survey.

Note: Occupational codes refer to CODOT major groups (1988) and SOC 1990 major groups (1998).

Source: Mason, 'High Skills Utilisation Under Mass Higher Education...(2002)

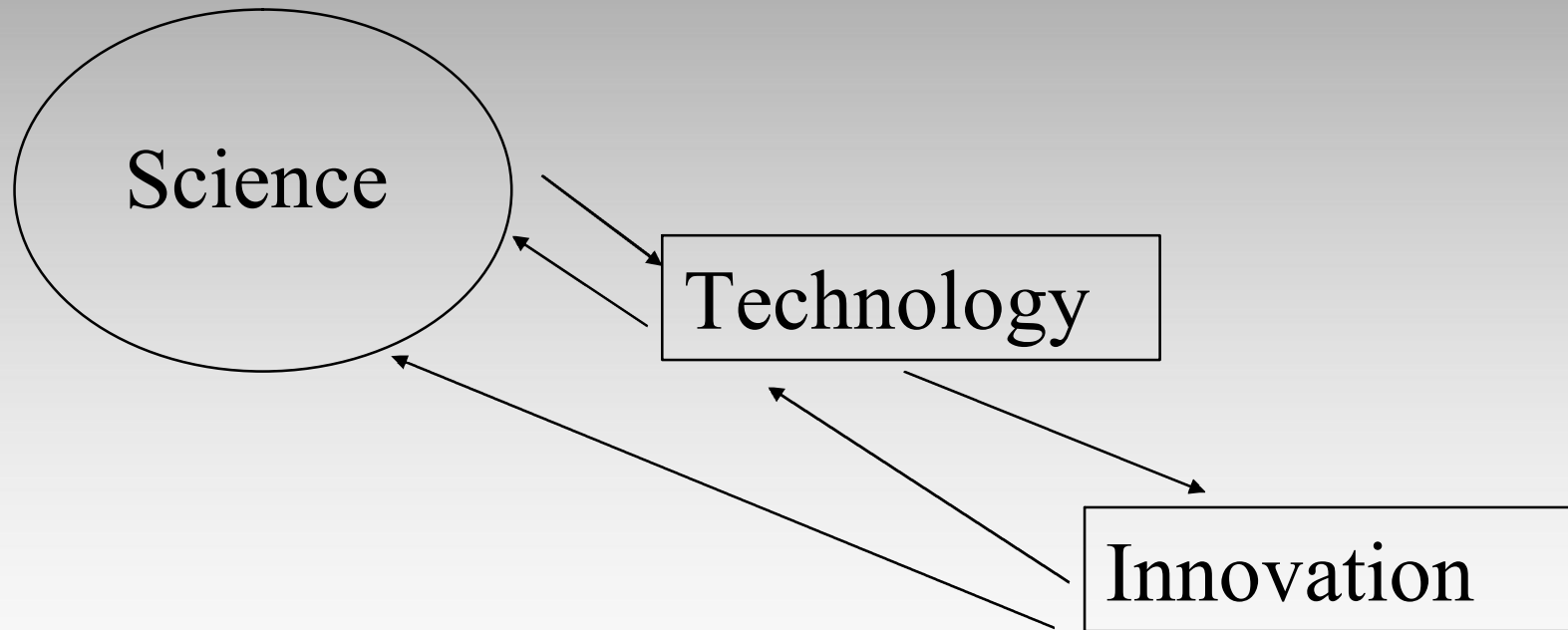


The USA as **the** Knowledge Based Society?

- » The world's leading research universities but...
- » Rising educational costs
 - Fees rising faster than inflation; college fees and health costs the major worries of middle America
- » **Growing** inequality of access:
 - 3% of students at Ivy League colleges from poorest 25% of families
 - No increase in Harvard's African-American intake despite massive expenditure
 - Children of donors increasingly getting favoured access (legacy lists')
 - Search for 'excellent' students means that entrance awards do not go to 'needy' students
- » Long 'tail' of educational *under*-achievement and popular *ignorance*
 - 'Three quarters of incoming high graduates were viewed as deficient in basic English writing skills' (FT 02.10.2006)
 - 68% of the population believe in the devil (Rifkin, 2004: 20)
- » US education mirrors the inequalities of US society
 - Some **very** rich and a large affluent 'service class' but at the same time stagnant or even falling standards for the majority and a significant excluded minority.
- » Alternative developmental models do exist
 - Finland combines egalitarian university access, high general levels of education, close university-industry linkages and leading science-based industry and services (Castells and Himanen, The Information Society and the Welfare State (2002)).



SSTI: A linear model of innovation?



A carpetbaggers' charter?

- Growing labour market for academic and scientific labour
 - » 'Excellence' creates winner take all market (who wants to hire 'second best')
 - » Growing income inequalities within academe
 - » The **risk** of De Lorean in academe
- Focus on 'excellence' by itself ignores questions of linkages and embeddedness – in both industrial policy and within academe itself.
- Lessons for academe from innovation policy
 - » Isolation leads to 'not invented here', restriction to one development path (the lemming syndrome)
 - » Disembedding leads to 'cathedrals in the desert' and no linkage to local innovation

Irish science and Irish society

- Almost no Irish research on science-technology and society
 - » No tradition or institution specialising in STS (Science Technology & Society Studies)
 - » ‘Two cultures’ – mutual disinterest between natural and social sciences
 - » No research even in the most ‘applied’ areas (e.g. scientific labour markets and careers)
- Growing disinterest in science **and** technology amongst school-leavers
 - » SSTI understands the problem in terms of a failure of ‘science communication’



Modes of Knowledge Production

- Mode 1
- Single locus of knowledge production
- Linear model
- Quality control through peer refereed publications
- No user involvement
- Mode 2
- Multiple knowledge producers
- Interactive model
- Multiple forms of quality control
- User involvement



User involvement in EU social science projects

TABLE II. Forms of user involvement

	User involvement in			(%)
	Initiation	Research	Dissemination	
<i>Linear projects</i>				
Academic	No	No	No	2
Informative	No	No	Yes	6
Applied	Yes	No	Yes	2
[Philanthropic]	Yes	No	No	—
<i>Interactive projects</i>				
Contact	No	Yes	No	6
Dissemination	No	Yes	Yes	32
Exploitative	Yes	Yes	No	2
Attached	Yes	Yes	Yes	33
Total				100
(N)				(74)



Back to the ivory tower?

- Innovation of EU funded social research
 - Push towards policy relevance
 - Different forms of user involvement
 - Learning how to do it ('user groups', 'policy conferences'...)
 - In some small way universities become a distinctive but integral part of European society
- BUT...
 - FP6 stress on 'excellence'
 - FP7 ideas driven research ('frontier research')
 - Abandon attempt to combine academic standards and societal connection

