



Universität Hamburg

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Beyond Units:

Governance and Non-Governance of University Commons

Session 2: University Units, Governance and Creativity

Symposium “University Governance: Impeding or Facilitating Creativity?”

HERCuLES Group of the Academia Europea, INCHER Kassel, Volkswagen Stiftung

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Point of departure: How can governance create universities which are more than the sum of their parts?

Universities as loosely coupled systems:

“set[s] of activities held together by common parking lots”
(Mintzberg/Rose 2003: 286)



Focus on the “parts”:

Single researchers and their creativity, effort and tenacity
(skills, talent, originality, elaboration, lateral thinking)



From individual rationality to collective action:
Governance as capacity to act collectively

From single parts to the collaborative nature of activities in universities

“But why should it [the university] be more than the sum [of its parts] in the first place?

Because, first, doing good research is - today more than ever - the result of cooperation.

And second, today’s academic system has grown so much that even the wealthiest [...] ‘comprehensive university’, will not be able to avoid setting a strategic course, specifically, deciding for or against policy options for the future. The ‘parts’ require rules on collective action to get things right.”



Rules of collective action

Kurt Imboden (2016: 678)
Head of the expert commission
evaluating the German excellence initiative

Governing collective action is one of the most important challenges within modern pluralistic organizations

Pluralistic organizations

- constituted by fragmented collectives, by multiple actors with diverse objectives
- great degrees of individual autonomy

*“tighten” up
loosely coupled
structures
rules, norms,
standards
peer control
joint decision-
making*

Collective action

- pursuit of a goal by more than one actor
- voluntary involvement
- provision and use of university-specific public goods through collaboration

University commons provide the strategic basis for pursuing certain activities under the shared roof of the whole organization

		Degree of excludability	
		High	Low
Degree of rivalry	High	1 Private resources encapsulated in service-level agreements	2 Pool resources shared services (e.g. open access support, legal services)
	Low	3 Club resources e.g. interdisciplinary graduate schools, research proposal expertise	4 Pure public resources strategic course (e.g. for a sustainable future), organizational culture, reputation

From voluntary collective action to organized collaboration?

Dilemmas of commons and implications for governance

Commons are not beneficial per se

(Buchanan, 1965; Hardin, 1998; Kollock, 1998; Samuelson, 1954; Ostrom, 1997)

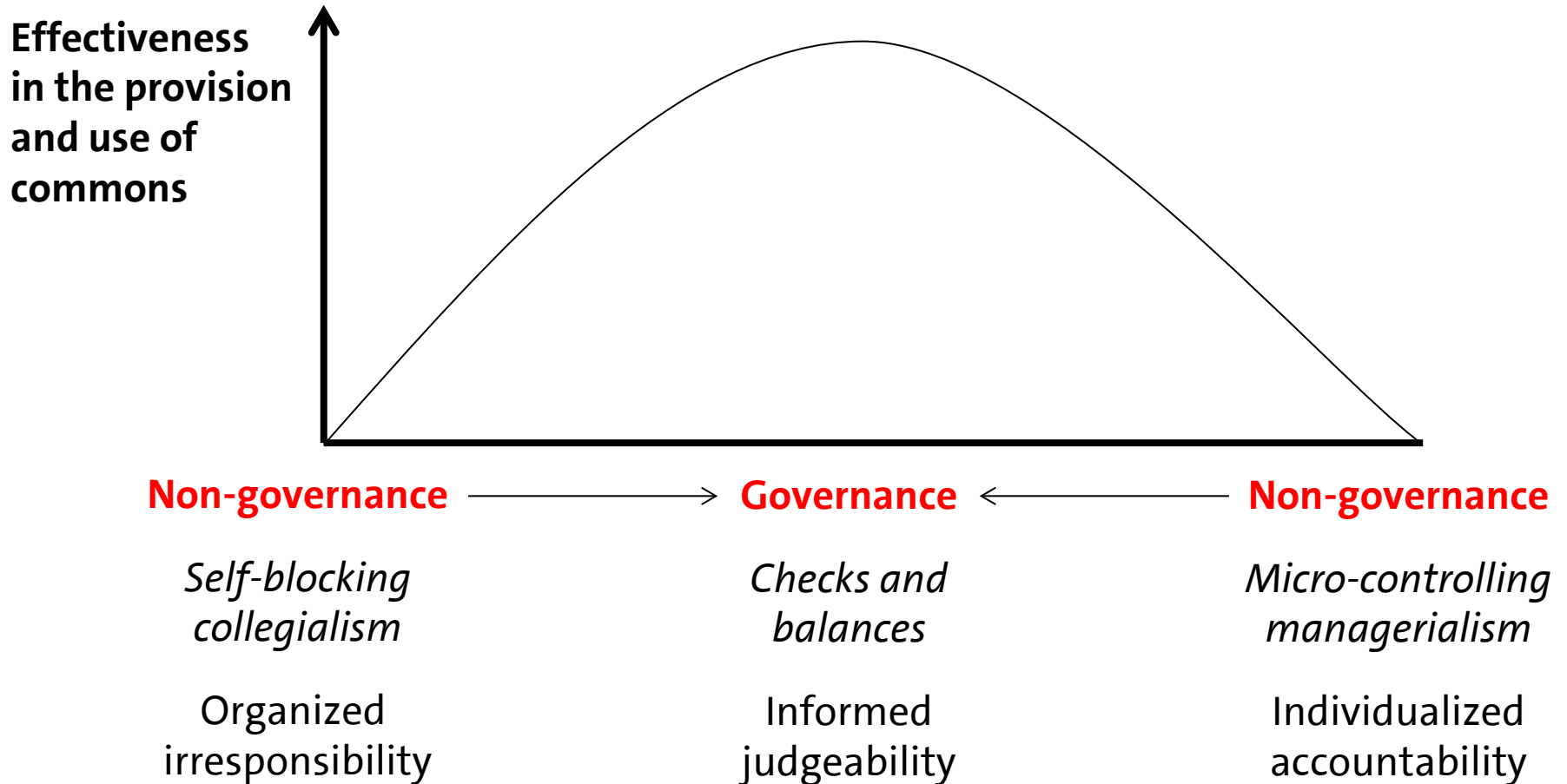
- Dilemma of over-use
 - Exploitation of pool resources
- Dilemma of under-use
 - Limited access to club resources
- Dilemma of under-supply
 - Social loafing when creating pure public resources

Governance: voluntary versus organized

(Frost & Hattke, 2013; Frost, Vogel & Bagban, 2016; Hattke, Blaschke, & Frost, 2016)

- Governance mechanisms are substitutive, not additive
 - Crowding out of voluntary contributions
- Effectiveness of governance mechanisms depends on the field of action
 - Contingency approach to governance

Discussion: How governance can create universities which are more than the sum of their parts



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