



# The making of the ‘excellent’ university: A drawback for gender equality

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## abstract

In the ‘era of global competition’, academic institutions are progressively managed as efficient organisations, with a strong emphasis on scientific productivity. This paper examines the impact of the prevalent discourses on ‘excellence’ and the increased use of private sector managerial techniques within academia on gender equality. This paper is based on data collected in an Icelandic academic institution, the organisational policies and practices of which reveal a strong emphasis on becoming an ‘excellent university’ through international recognition, while simultaneously taking much pride in being ‘at the forefront’ of gender equality. We argue that an increased focus on ‘academic excellence’ within the contemporary university, by means of New Public Management, maintains structural gender inequality within academic institutions. By comparing two academic fields, we show that the financial and managerial procedures and processes that direct resources are more favourable for research and teaching in male-dominated fields, which affects women and men working in academia. We do this to demonstrate the importance of including gender in the financial and managerial decision-making in academic institutions. We will introduce gender budgeting as an instrument to uncover the differential impact of budgeting on women and men in academia, in order to reconstruct resource distributions to promote gender equality.

## Introduction

In the ‘era of global competition’ (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007), internationalisation and marketisation have become essential to the managing and financing of academic institutions (Rothe et al., 2008; Välimäa, 2012). This trend is visible in the growing interest in various performance measures of

academic institutions, such as student surveys, module feedback and numerous commercial newspaper league tables and rankings. The most notable are the Global Ranking Systems – such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong University list (SJTU) – and the Times Higher Education Supplement rankings (THE). Through these lists, nations and academic institutions compete for status, with one of the main qualifiers being ‘excellence’. On this path towards excellence, academic institutions have been increasingly introducing private sector managerial techniques and ideologies, often referred to as New Public Management (NPM) techniques, which entail performance measurements in the name of efficiency and competition (Barry et al., 2012; Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Chandler et al., 2004).

By the means of NPM excellence is operationalised by quantitative criteria, such as publication rates, journal rankings, citation indexes and funding success rates (Butler and Spoelstra, 2014; Svensson et al., 2010). Excellence is generally seen as an objective and gender neutral standard of merit; however, research shows that academic excellence can also be an evasive social construct that is inherently gendered (O’Connor and O’Hagan, 2015; Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). Nations and academic institutions are attracted, or even compelled, to this competition, even though, as Marginson and Van der Wende (2007) point out, this global comparison of universities is designed around comprehensive research-intensive universities that are science-orientated and English literate.

In this article, we examine the extent to which the prevalent discourse on ‘excellence’ within academia and subsequent private sector managerial instruments have gendered consequences as they steer the distribution of funding. Such consequences are a drawback for gender equality. We approach the subject from the perspective of gender budgeting and apply gender impact analysis to the financial and managerial procedures and processes that are currently in place within an Icelandic academic institution.

Gender budgeting is a way of linking equality with the budgetary process. It starts with assessing the impact of the budget on women and men and proceeds to integrate a gender perspective into budget-planning in order to promote gender equality (Quinn, 2009). In using the term ‘gender’ we refer to both sex and gender, in the sense of sex being of the categories ‘women’ and ‘men’ and gender a system of socially-shaped cultural arrangements (Rubin, 1975). We draw on empirical data collected as part of a research project supported by the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme of the European Union. The project examines two out of five schools within the University of Iceland: the School of Engineering and Natural Sciences, hereafter STEM, and the School of Social Sciences, hereafter SSH. The gendered nature of the academic fields is apparent, with STEM being a

male-dominated field and SSH a more feminised field (i.e. in terms of gender proportions regarding students and academic staff and subject subfields). Within both fields, the organisational structures are gendered, with men occupying higher and more permanent positions and women occupying the lower and more precarious positions. Although we employed the first phase of gender budgeting in only two academic fields, we believe our approach can be extended to other fields represented in the university and to the larger international academic environment. In this paper, we explore whether institutional financial and managerial procedures and processes create inequalities, with the aim of encouraging the restructuring of the financial system in order to promote gender equality in academia. In order to do this, we put forward the following research question: Does the allocation of public funding within the university by means of the current organisational policies and practices have gendered consequences, and if so, how are they manifested?

Before we turn to the findings and discussion, we will first introduce the concepts of gendered institutions, NPM, and gender budgeting, followed by an elaboration of the specific context of the study. In this way, and throughout this part, we will critically examine elements that have so far been overlooked in the literature, topics that are worth investigating further, and how our research contributes to this field of study.

## **Gendered institutions, NPM and gender budgeting**

In 1992, Acker introduced the term 'gendered institutions' as an indicator that bureaucratic organisations are not gender neutral, despite their initial appearance as such. Following Acker, many scholars have developed the concept of the gendered institution (Adkins, 1995; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Pringle, 1998; Wajcman, 1998). Inspired by these contributions, Menéndez et al. summarised the meaning of the term 'gendered institution' as follows:

job design, career ladders, work practises, recruitment and selection methods, and the culture of organizations are invested with assumptions and expectations about gender appropriate roles; organisational structures and processes are thus 'gendered' rather than gender neutral. (2012: 4)

Academic institutions are no exception to this description. Many studies provide examples about the different manifestations of gendering within academic institutions, (e.g. O'Connor and O'Hagan, 2015), on excellence in academic staff examination, (e.g. Þorvaldsdóttir, 2004), on hiring and promotion processes within academia (e.g. Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012), and on the systematic underestimation and minimisation of women's qualifications in academia, the so

called 'Matilda effect' (e.g. Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013). Furthermore, extensive literature is available showing lower publication rates of women and the various explanations for this trend, such as fewer co-authoring possibilities for women (Lee and Bozeman, 2005; Long et al., 1993), quantitatively orientated scientific journals (Özbilgin, 2009), extensive teaching responsibilities (Suitor et al., 2001), unequal resource distributions of space, equipment and time (Xie and Shauman, 2003), and differences in level of research specialisation (Leahy, 2006). The gendered structures and processes of the academic financial system that create the inequalities manifested in the literature are worth investigating; however, they have so far been largely overlooked. By directing our attention to gendered financial and managerial procedures and processes that are often considered to be objective and gender neutral, we aim to further increase the awareness of gender inequality within academia.

According to Acker (2006: 452), gender inequality within organisations is a matter of visibility, which she defines as 'the degree of awareness of inequalities'. In this context, she explains that a lack of gender inequality awareness can be both intentional and unintentional. For the advantaged, it can be difficult to grasp the occurrence of inequality because they perceive the matter from their own privileged situation, which they presume to be the normative standard. Acker (2006) also discusses the concept of legitimacy within this same context, arguing that inequality in rigid bureaucracies is highly legitimate. Because the advantaged perceive their own situation as one they are entitled to, inequality is deemed legitimate. The academic system, with its ideology of meritocracy and notion of excellence, further underlines these feelings of entitlement. Heijstra, O'Connor and Rafnsdóttir (2013) examined visibility from Acker's viewpoint (2006) by analysing the perceptions of academics in Iceland with regard to the lower rate of women in full professor positions. The majority of male academics legitimised the situation by arguing that the rate of female professors will surely rise in the future, and that it is merely a matter of time rather than of indirect discriminatory practices. We suggest that gender budgeting can be a tool to unpack the normative standards, to question the legitimacy of inequality and to increase the visibility of the gender inequalities fostered by the managerial and financial systems in academic institutions.

In order to participate in the competition of 'global excellence', academic institutions are increasingly managed and financed in the spirit of an efficient organisation (Symon et al., 2008) and therefore increasingly run like corporations (O'Connor, 2014; Farnham, 1999; Gouthro, 2002). This trend has been described in terms such as 'McUniversity' (Parker and Jary, 1995), 'corporate university' and 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001). Because of the NPM performance measurements, academics are now required to

turn their work into auditable documents, which has led Power (1997) to label the university as an 'audit society'. However, various scholars have expressed their concern about this development and the consequences it may entail for the quality of scholarship. A study by Butler and Spoelstra (2014) on the relationship between the regime of excellence and critical management studies reveals that performance measurements are increasingly affecting scholars' research and publication choices. Willmott (2011) describes this situation as 'journal list fetishism': when the ranking of the publication, as measured by the academic journal lists, becomes more important than its scholarly content. Approaching the topic from a slightly different angle, Özbilgin (2009: 112) points out that the journal ranking system, which disadvantages women and faculty members of colour, contributes to discriminatory practices within academia because of its link with 'hegemonic structures of gender, race and class inequality and disadvantage, which plague the academic labor process and markets'.

Discriminatory practices within organisations – and within academic institutions in particular – have indeed drawn attention to gendered aspects of this process. Thomas and Davies (2002) have addressed the gendered nature of NPM and the way in which women respond to what they call the 'managerialist challenge' within the British higher education system. In line with some of the work on gendered institutions (e.g. Halford and Leonard, 2001) Thomas and Davies (2002) suggests that NPM reforms are carriers of a masculine discourse – which emphasises competition, instrumentality and individuality – that strengthens the gendered institution and does not benefit women. However, there are also studies that emphasise the potential benefits of NPM with regard to gender equality. For instance, Rothe et al. (2008) point out that NPM instruments enhance transparency, facilitate the monitoring of systems and can be utilised as a tool to raise awareness on the matter of equality. Subsequently, NPM instruments can be the starting point for gender budgeting.

Turning to gender budgeting, this has been defined by the Council of Europe (2010) as

an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality.

Although gender mainstreaming has been criticised for reproducing neoliberal principles and policy agendas (Bacchi and Eveline, 2003), the literature on gender budgeting generally considers it to be a powerful instrument to improve unequal and unfair budgeting policies and processes (Budlender and Hewitt, 2002; Directorate General of Human Rights Council of Europe, 2005; Erbe,

2015; Quinn, 2009; Rothe et al., 2008). In addition to increased transparency, Himmelweit (2002) and Addabbo, Gunluk-Senesen and O'Hagan (2015) have argued that gender budgeting can facilitate the identification of opportunities for the redistribution of resources and enable the achievement of gender equality goals more effectively. Hence, gender budgeting can be seen as a feminist policy change that aims to 'dismantle hierarchies of power that privilege men and the masculine, and the sexual division of labour that devalues women and the feminine' (Htun and Weldon, 2010 in O'Hagan, 2015: 235) and 'seeks a more equitable distribution of resources between women and men' (O'Hagan, 2015: 235). In our research, by utilising gender budgeting, we identify the power hierarchies that dominate within academic institutions, and by doing so, we intend to promote gender equality.

Since Rothe et al. (2008) conducted transnational research in Austria, Germany and Poland, the knowledge on gender budgeting as a strategy in academia has been growing. In a recent publication, Erbe (2015) discusses the effect of gender equality with regard to two funding tools in 13 state-run universities in Germany: the performance-based allocation of funding and the target agreements. Her research indicates that external pressure, as well as linking the allocations of funds to progress in gender equality, increases the willingness of academic institutions to work towards gender equality. In their research, Addabbo, Rodríguez-Moroño and Gálvez-Muños (2015: 196) evaluate budgets and policies in two academic institutions in Spain and Italy from the perspective of wellbeing and gender budgeting in order to promote gender equality in the students' development of capabilities; that is, the 'individual's opportunities to achieve functioning' during their studying period. However, the focus in the literature is on how finances can be used to encourage gender equality in general within the academic system. In our study, we want to focus more specifically on budgeting and to take a step back and pay attention to the structural hindrances created by the managerial and financial systems that create and foster inequality. This approach aligns with Bacchi's (2009) line of reasoning by focusing on the following question: 'What's the problem represented to be?' Heijstra, Steinþórsdóttir and Einarsdóttir (2016) research on 'academic housework' and other academic activities that are poorly valued within academia reveals the importance of investigating financial systems through the lens of gender budgeting. A key dimension of a budget's impact is the amount of unpaid and often invisible work that must be done, and this counts no less in discussions on gender equality within academic institutions. However, in this study, we focus on the academic activities that are valued by the system, and we direct our attention towards the market-driven financial and managerial procedures and processes that are employed in academic institutions. In this way, we can uncover its

differential impact on women and men in order to reconstruct the academic financial system and to work towards equality.

This framework allows us to focus on the gendered aspects of contemporary academic institutions that have the mission of moving upwards in the global rankings. Building on this literature, we intend to illuminate the gendered consequences of financial and managerial procedures and processes utilised to reach the goal of academic excellence, in which we see a risk of drawbacks for gender equality within academic institutions. We do this to demonstrate the importance of including gender in the academic institution's financial and managerial procedures and processes. With this paper, we address the impact of NPM in academic institutions, and we draw special attention to the gendered aspects of the issue. This paper contributes to the literature on gender budgeting by adapting the technique to the academic context. Furthermore, this paper highlights the importance of directing attention to the gendered nature of academic fields when assessing the allocation of resources. Because the distribution of funding has long-term consequences for the work situations of academics and faculties, this paper promotes awareness of the larger picture. This is something that has been lacking within the literature. However, before we turn to this larger picture, we will first describe the context and the methodology of the study.

### **Context: The 'excellent' and 'gender equal' university**

The academic institution under study, the University of Iceland, is the largest in the country and receives recognition as the country's national university. It is a comprehensive research and educational institution consisting of five schools and 29 faculties, and it offers up to 400 programmes – which require no tuition fees – for approximately 13,000 registered students. The institution's organisational policies reveal a strong emphasis on becoming an 'excellent university' through means of international recognition, while simultaneously taking much pride in being 'at the forefront' of gender equality.

Since 2006, the University of Iceland has worked intensely towards the goal of becoming 'one of the leading universities in the world' (University of Iceland, 2011: 9; also see University of Iceland, 2006). It is explicitly written in its policies that this academic institution is putting great emphasis on research related activities, such as a higher quantity of publications within Thomson Reuters/ISI Web of Science (ISI) journals, increased collaborations with world-leading foreign universities, the strengthening of research centres, increases in funding from both non-government sources and competitive funds, increased numbers

of post-doctoral fellowships and the quintupling of the number of PhD graduates (University of Iceland, 2006; University of Iceland, 2011). The intensified emphasis on research related activities underlines the criteria of the global academic ranking systems, especially as presented within the SJTU (Marginson and Van der Wende, 2007).

However, obtaining a position on one of the global academic ranking lists is not the only objective of the university; ‘excellence’ in all its diversity has become the organising principle of this academic institution’s policy in other activities as well. This is clear in the foreword of the 2011–2016 policy written by the rector, where it can be seen that the students and staff of the academic institution are ‘determined to strengthen the Icelandic community by achieving excellence in teaching, research, and innovation’ (University of Iceland, 2011: 3). The aim described by the rector is to become an excellent, innovative and highly ranked academic research institution, as well as an excellent teaching institution. However, as Marginson and Van der Wende (2007) have pointed out, even though academic institutions are competing internationally through those lists, the academic ranking system tends to favour small institutions that focus on graduate education and research rather than large national academic institutions. However, the academic institution is serious in its attempt to fulfil the objective of excellence. Reorganisations have taken place, and changes have been made to the wage and evaluation system, which can be traced back to 1989 (Einarsdóttir, 1998). A new emphasis has also been introduced through the evaluation system and an increased focus on rewarding academic staff research points for ‘excellent’ research practices, such as success in obtaining funding and high publication productivity rates, which impacts the position, salaries and opportunities of the individual scholar and the funding distributed to the researchers’ faculty or research centre (University of Iceland, n.d.-b).

The University of Iceland represents itself as being ‘committed to promoting equality and diversity in all fields’ and ‘striv[ing] to be at the forefront in all areas of equality’ (University of Iceland, n.d.-d). The visibility of equality work within the institution is in line with that ambitious goal. The institution employs an equality policy, an equal rights committee and a professional council that responds to gender-related, sexual harassment and other sexual violence issues. A full-time equal opportunities officer works alongside the equality committee and oversees equality related matters, and all five of the university’s schools have equality policies (University of Iceland, n.d.-d). Moreover, Icelandic legislation, such as the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men no. 10/2008, prescribes equal gender representation on public committees, councils and boards, which therefore also applies to the University of Iceland. Hence, equal participation is now expected by law, but not guaranteed. This is visible

within the University Council, which now has almost as many female as male representatives (University of Iceland, n.d.-a). Furthermore, a woman was elected rector of the university in 2005, a position she occupied for 10 years. When she ran for office, it was the first time a woman had stood for rector in the almost century-old history of the institution, and gender equality gained momentum through the symbolic value of a female candidate. Her candidacy was closely connected to gender equality, primarily because she was seen as a role model for women, but her focal interest was on 'excellence', especially on the goal of making the University of Iceland a 'world leading research university' ('Rannsóknarháskóli í fremstu röð', 2005). Still, it can be argued that right under the surface, traditional gender perspectives prevail at this university, a pattern that is also observable in Icelandic society (Bjarnason and Hjálmsdóttir, 2008; Gíslason, 2009; Heijstra and Rafnsdóttir, 2010; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Rafnsdóttir and Heijstra, 2013).

Pétursdóttir (2009) has described the situation in Iceland as an 'aura of gender equality', referring to the belief that equality reigns, despite practical evidence indicating otherwise. Having an equality policy, equality rights committee, an equal opportunities officer and a gender equal University Council and University Council committees – not to mention a woman as head of the institution – enhances the 'aura of gender equality'. This idea of equality reigning derives, in the first place, from all the formal equality work that is in place at the university. This implies that there is a certain level of what Acker (2006) termed 'visibility' and awareness with regard to the inequality issue. Although there is evidence that many academics are not familiar with the exact content of the equality policy (Arnalds et al., 2012) or show little interest in the matter (Heijstra et al., 2016), there is a certain overall perception among academics that these policies have been implemented within their work organisation. Second, an aura of gender equality can appear from the gender representation at the highest managerial level of the university. Having formal equality work and a woman as head of the institution may provide the image of a gender equal institution, in which it is achievable for women to climb to the very top. However, women in top positions, working in environments that are dominated by men, have been labelled within the literature as 'token women' that are put in place to present a more positive image of the situation (Gheaus, 2015). This means that a token woman, such as a female rector within a male-dominated administration, may conceal the visibility of gender inequality.

## Methodology

Inspired by the study of Rothe et al. (2008), this article derives from a multi-method study of a contemporary academic institution in Iceland. Like those of other countries, the Icelandic academic system is currently under transition. This is reflected by an increased emphasis on managerialism, in which research and innovation have been closely linked to the goal of economic growth (Jóhannesson, 2013). A comparison between seven European academic institutions has revealed that this particular academic institution has maximised the operationalisation of reaching the goal of 'excellence' (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2016). This is why the research context in this current study is deemed particularly meaningful; it may facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the 'global competition' phenomenon, as is apparent within contemporary academic institutions.

For this study, we rely on multiple sources of data that were obtained by means of multiple data collection methods. Both our data sources and collection methods are commonly discussed in the literature with regard to triangulation purposes (Denzin, 1978), but they are also invaluable when outlining and scrutinising opaque and complex systems, such as the allocation of funding within academic institutions. Ussher (1999: 43) describes this research situation as follows: 'It is only when we put the different pieces of the jigsaw together that we see a broader picture and gain some insight into the complexity'.

The pieces of our own research jigsaw include data on student numbers and academic staff with or without tenure and/or temporary contracts for the years 2008–2013. We use descriptive statistical measures to analyse these data, and we do the same for the statistical data on academics' research points for 2013, research points by publication outlet for 2013, ISI-journal publications of academic's between 2008 and 2013, and data on European grants that were obtained between 2008 and 2014.

In addition, we rely on governmental and institutional documents, such as fiscal budget information, agreements between the University of Iceland and the state, and the university's policies, annual reports, and information received from the institutions central administration that was available on the university's inner website regarding teaching/research performance measurements and job descriptions. Altogether, we consulted around 100 of written documents.

However, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016: 181) have pointed out, 'because documents generally are not produced for research purposes, the information they offer may not be in a form that is useful (or understandable) to the

investigator'. Although the documents examined were illuminating, some aspects of the system were still opaque to us at this stage. Therefore, we continued our data collection by conducting five fact-finding interviews with key administrative players of the academic institution. The interviews lasted between 40 and 75 minutes, and they were transcribed and utilised as jigsaw pieces to map the university's funding allocation system in all its complexity. At this stage, the researchers felt the data collection had reached its saturation point (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which made further data collection redundant (Hennink et al., 2011). We applied a qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012), in which we focused on assessing the gender impact of the institutional financial and managerial procedures and practises with regard to the male-dominated STEM and the more feminised SSH fields. The objective of the gender impact assessment was to compare and assess the trends resulting from policies. Gender impact assessments take multiple pieces of information into account, including existing gender differences in participation, distribution of resources, norms, values and rights (European Commission, 1998). The results of our assessment are discussed in the following chapter.

## Findings

Equality work is still a separate and independent project at the University of Iceland. Gender is not mainstreamed in the financial and managerial decision-making procedures and processes, despite the fact that this is required by the Act of Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men no. 10/2008. Although the university's policy mentions equality and diversity, it does not specifically mention gender equality or the equal rights policy. The University of Iceland's policy for 2011-2016 has 40 performance measurements (University of Iceland, 2011), all of which are represented as objective and gender neutral, which indicates that there is a clear emphasis on NPM. The managerial instruments used to reach those performance measurements do not mention gender, nor are they related to gender equality work (University of Iceland, n.d.-b; University of Iceland, n.d.-c). However, a gender impact assessment of the financial and managerial instruments reveals that there are hierarchies of power within this academic institution that privilege men and the masculine and devalue women and the feminine. The evaluation of work is tailored around the conditions and the needs of male-dominated fields, in which tasks – both related to teaching and research – are more valued and rewarded than these same tasks when performed within more feminised fields. This becomes apparent from the gendered conditions and how the financial system is designed and directs resources, from the state to the academic institution; from the institution to the academic schools and within the academic schools. We will discuss the manifestation of these

biases in the following paragraphs, starting with the gendered academic conditions and followed by gendered financial and managerial procedures and processes.

### *Gendered academic conditions*

The University of Iceland has wrapped itself in an aura of gender equality, but our findings reveal that this academic institution is highly gendered. Gender segregation is prevalent within this university, despite the fact that women have constituted more than half of the university's students for the past three decades (Ministry of Culture and Education, 2002). A horizontal division is apparent; the majority of academics and students in STEM are men, whereas in SSH the gender representation is more equal among the academic staff and the majority of students are women. As Table 1 reveals, there is also vertical segregation, with men dominating permanent and full-time positions and women occupying the more precarious positions of temporary and often part-time contracts. The more precarious positions – those of adjuncts and sessional teachers – are most often teaching positions with little room for research. These positions entail low wages and temporary employment contracts with few legal rights and benefits. This division also applies to the two academic schools; however, the gender segregation is more obvious in STEM. We thus conclude that STEM is a male-dominated field and SSH a more feminised field.

	UI		STEM		SSH	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Deans	60%	40%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Heads of faculties	70%	30%	85%	15%	85%	15%
Full professors	70%	30%	85%	15%	60%	40%
Associate professors	60%	40%	60%	40%	60%	40%
Assistant professor	45%	55%	60%	40%	55%	45%
Adjuncts	40%	60%	35%	65%	45%	55%
Sessional teachers	40%	60%	65%	35%	40%	60%

Table 1: Academic position in UI, STEM and SSH in 2013 by gender

The gendering of academic fields is also reflected by the worth assigned to the disciplines, with the male-dominated fields receiving considerably higher funding for teaching than the more feminised fields. The academic institution is mainly financed with public funding, and about two-thirds of the institution's funding deriving from the state is based on teaching agreements. The state has formed a classificatory system for the amount of funding the institution receives for a single full-time student – a price tag – depending on their discipline. The annual funding from the state for STEM students is 60-100% higher than the annual funding for SSH students (The 2015 Fiscal Budget).

The academic institution has full autonomy over the funding it receives from the state; the institution receives one appropriation that the governing body distributes between teaching and research. The decision-making is in the hands of the financial committee, whose members are the deans of the five schools and the chief executive officer of the university. Even though the academic institution has full autonomy over the internal distribution of public funding, it tends to follow the price tags put forward in the classificatory system formed by the state. From the interviews with key administrative players, it becomes clear that this is not set in stone and that the state's funding formula can be tampered with by the finance committee, e.g. some disciplines have been moved up to a higher price category. It is not clear which disciplines get this special treatment within the allocation of funding. Generally, according to the classificatory system, the faculties in SSH are in the lowest price category, although, as a key player revealed in an interview, the financial committee upgraded the only 'male-dominated' faculty in SSH to the STEM price category.

With lower funding, the faculties have less leeway to hire full-time teachers to maintain an appropriate student/teacher ratio. In 2013, the student/teacher ratio in SSH was 43:1, whereas in STEM it was 21:1. Still, the University of Iceland aims to provide 'outstanding undergraduate education' (University of Iceland, 2011: 13). The development of the student/teacher ratio, which has been negative since the financial crisis in 2008, suggests that teaching may not be a priority at this university after all.

Following the crisis, educational expenditure cuts were extensive, and despite the cuts in education, the enrolment of students at the tertiary level increased significantly (see also Ólafsson, 2012). In 2009, the student/teacher ratio in SSH went up to 52:1, whereas the ratio was 18:1 in STEM. This disparity creates more favourable conditions in male-dominated fields, both for students and academics. In comparison with other fields, the students in the male-dominated fields may receive better education and more time with their teachers, and the academics have smaller teaching workloads. The academic staff with larger teaching

workloads have less time to attend activities that pay-off in the system, such as internationally visible research, which therefore can slow down their career progress. Hence, the conditions for progressing on the academic career ladder vary by academic field, and within the gender-segregated University of Iceland, these conditions are more likely to negatively impact women than men. Hence, the financial system is doing the opposite of promoting gender equality; it is maintaining the persistent gender hierarchy, which is a drawback for equality.

### *Gendered financial and managerial procedures and processes*

Bias is also apparent in the evaluation of the work of academics, which directs the distribution of public funding. Through the evaluation system, the work of academics is assessed, and academics receive research points for research, teaching, administration and services. In line with the academic institution's aim of becoming an 'excellent research University', the main emphasis is on research related activities, and the points rewarded are supposed to stimulate research output. This turns out to be at the expense of teaching related activities, even though it is stated in the most recent policy that 'teaching and research always enjoy the same priority' (University of Iceland, 2011: 13). A standard number of points is awarded annually to academics with teaching duties (University of Iceland, n.d.-c). The number of students that are attending classes is not part of the formula, though it is a known fact that the workload increases with more students, not in the least because of 'academic housework' (see also Heijstra et al., 2016). This is especially apparent within the SSH departments, where the student/teacher ratio is the most unfavourable.

Being a successful researcher entails positive effects in terms of promotion, salary, payment from productivity evaluation funds, sabbaticals and the allocation of research funds (Agreement on teaching and research, appendix 1, 2012; Regulation no. 263/2010; Regulation no. 569/2009; Regulation no. 605/2006; Regulations no. 971/2009). In addition, by building on the academics' performance in research, the university allocates financial resources to the researcher's faculty or research centre (University of Iceland, n.d.-b). 'Hence, low research activity is no longer a private matter of the employee, which only would affect him personally to lower wages, but low activity reduces the financial income of the respective faculty' (Agreement on teaching and research, appendix 1, 2012: 34). In 2013, academics in STEM received 20% more research points than academics in SSH (112 academics in each school). In STEM, 70% of the research points were for 'quality' research related activities, whereas these activities only accounted for 55% of the SSH research points (University of Iceland, n.d.-g). Subsequently, academics in STEM, mostly men, are receiving higher salaries and have more opportunities than academics in SSH.

Furthermore, male-dominated fields are receiving more public funds. What could explain this discrepancy is a bias in the evaluation system that rewards research and teaching in the male-dominated STEM more than in other fields.

This bias can also be observed in the assessment of research, which is largely based on the publication outlet, a factor that is more favourable towards STEM research than that of SSH disciplines. Research appearing in books and book chapters from 'prestigious' publishing houses and in high ranked journals on the ISI and European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH)-journal lists are most valued in terms of research points. Moreover, the evaluation system rewards multi-authorship, for which there is a strong tradition in STEM. If a publication has multiple authors, it generates additional points, up to a certain ceiling. The total number of points associated with a particular publication therefore becomes a function of the number of authors. Multi-authorship results in a higher number of points for the faculties. The publication, however, produces slightly fewer research points for each co-authoring individual than if the publication were to be authored by a single person (University of Iceland, n.d.-c).

Even though the evaluation system communicates the idea that quantity is more important than quality, the University of Iceland stresses its interest in increasing the number of 'high quality publications' (University of Iceland, 2011: 10). If an article is published in a 'superior' journal, the scholar can receive up to double the amount of research points. According to the University of Iceland, these 'superior' journals are *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* (University of Iceland, n.d.-f). All these journals primarily publish work from STEM and the health sciences.

In 2013, the year for which we analysed academic publications in journals registered in the ISI database, we see that for every publication from academics in SSH, STEM academics have nine publications (1:9). In addition, two thirds of the articles published by STEM academics were in top 20% ISI journals, that is with a high impact factor, whereas high-impact journal publications only accounted for one third of the articles published by SSH academics (University of Iceland, n.d.-e). Out of all the ISI publications in the years 2008–2012, STEM scholars published 1,429 articles, whereas SSH published 142 articles. Overall, STEM scholars were 45% of the authors and SSH scholars authored 5% of all the ISI journal articles published from the University of Iceland, and together with scholars from the School of Health Sciences, STEM scholars authored 91% of all the articles published in ISI journals (University of Iceland, n.d.-e). The difference in publications may be partly explained by the fact that there is group of academic research specialists in STEM that mostly work on research and do

not have any teaching obligations. The opposite is the case in SSH, where there are not any academic research specialists, but instead a group of adjuncts that have predominantly teaching obligations (Regulation no. 605/2006).

What is more, the different traditions within the different schools when it comes to publications are not taken into account in the research assessment, which leads to biases between academics of different schools. None of the Icelandic journals or publishing houses are defined as prestigious or as having a high impact factor (University of Iceland n.d.-h), despite the fact that it is noted in the policy that 'the University [...] plays a unique role in the research of Icelandic culture and society and seeks to publish its research findings in domestic and international venues' (University of Iceland, 2011: 10). Nevertheless, this is not reflected within the evaluation system; international publications are generally more rewarded than domestic publications (University of Iceland, n.d.-c). This therefore creates a paradoxical situation: it is seen as an important part of the work within certain SSH fields to share knowledge with Icelandic society, but this same work is undervalued in the University of Iceland's evaluation and incentive system. This is also reflected in the research points rewarded to STEM and SSH in 2013 when said points are analysed according to the status of the journal in the evaluation system. For every research point received by SSH scholars (184 points) for articles in the top 20% of journals registered on the ISI and ERIH-A lists, STEM scholars (1,644 points) received nine (1:9). STEM scholars (1061 points) received 17% more research points than SSH scholars (904 points) for publications in other journals registered in the ISI database, ERIH-B journals and top Icelandic journals. However, the opposite is the case for publications in other Icelandic journals and in ERIH-C journals, in which for every research point received in STEM (155 points), SSH (330 points) received two (1:2) (University of Iceland n.d.-h).

For the University of Iceland, obtaining funding is of utmost importance, and through the incentives present at this university (both in the form of research points to the academic staff and rewards to the academic fields) a bias is created, because the male-dominated fields have more access to external funding than other fields (University of Iceland, 2011; University of Iceland, n.d.-b; University of Iceland, n.d.-c). Scholars who are successful in obtaining grants from competitive funds and funds from parties outside the university are rewarded with points that affect their monthly salary (Agreement on teaching and research, appendix 1; University of Iceland, n.d.-c). Furthermore, within a frame of annual limits for each project, the faculty obtains 20-60% matching funds, according to a rule for internal allocation of state funding. This means that the highest matching funds go to grants obtained in international competitive funds, and the lowest reward goes to grants obtained from non-competitive national funds.

Information on received grants – deriving from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme for the years 2008–2014 – reveal that STEM received funding for 29 projects (21 male and eight female project leaders), SSH for six projects (two male and four female project leaders) and collaborations between SSH and STEM for two projects (two male project leaders). Information was available on 27 of the STEM projects, with the total amount of grant money received reaching up to 7,898,100 EUR, whereas the four SSH projects obtained funding for 1,754,842 EUR (University of Iceland, 2014).

When looking past the different number of grants and amounts distributed to men and women and to STEM and SSH and concentrating instead on how this funding steers the distribution of public resources within the university (through the matching funds and the evaluation system), we observe that the system is vulnerable to inequality. STEM faculties that attain a grant will get additional funding as a matching fund from the academic institution, which is taken from the governmental appropriation. Other faculties that do not receive any or few grants, especially from international competitive funds, are therefore denied this financial compensation based on matching funds. In addition, the academic institution plans to intensify their managerial interventions to increase extramural funding, as stated in the university’s policy: ‘Salary and terms of employment will in greater measure take into account employees’ results in obtaining grants from competitive funds’ (University of Iceland, 2011: 9). According to this, grants will increasingly control the labour of academia.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this article, we examined how the emerging discourse on excellence within academia and the financial and managerial procedures and processes used to reach that goal impact the distribution of funding, with subsequent gendered consequences. We found that the process of making an ‘excellent university’, through gender blind and objective financial and managerial procedures and processes, results in a drawback for gender equality.

The financial system impacts the two gendered academic fields, STEM and SSH, differently and maintains structural gender inequality within the academic institution. The financial and managerial procedures and processes used at the University of Iceland favour male-dominated STEM subjects, both in relation to research and teaching. When it comes to research related activities, the evaluation system is built on STEM focused performance measurements and traditions, such as the amount of attained international competitive funding, publications in international ‘excellent’ and ‘superior’ journals and multi-

authorship on publications. When it comes to teaching related activities, the evaluation system undervalues the heavy workload that academics must put up with (such as academic housework), especially within the more feminised SSH faculties, where the student/teacher ratio is the most unfavourable and the annual funding from the state is lower than for STEM students. Because the evaluation system is directly connected to the distribution of funding and affecting different fields differently, this results in an unequal distribution of public funds within the university.

As for gender budgeting, it is crucial to ask ourselves whether there are logical explanations for these differences or whether they are caused by biases within the system. There is a highly legitimised argument, in the meaning of Acker (2006), that STEM subjects need more expensive equipment for research, and therefore e.g. research grants are considerably higher than SSH grants. We acknowledge that this may sometimes be the case; nevertheless, whether that argument justifies the higher matching funds from the academic institution is a vexed question.

Özbilgin (2009) describes this financial system as a form of discriminatory practice in academia because of the connection to the gendered hegemonic structure of academic institutions. By rewarding fields that are male dominated, the current financial and managerial procedures and processes increase indirect gender discrimination in academia. Male-dominated fields receive more funding, which has great impact on the conditions offered to the predominately male academic staff and students in these fields. This has direct consequences for women and men working in academia. Academics within the male-dominated fields not only receive more research points for their research publications (because of the STEM focused evaluation standards) but also have more time to do what is most valued in the system (because of a more favourable student/teacher ratio and less academic housework) than academics in other fields. This highly affects the academics' opportunities to get out of a precarious position and move up the tenure track, to gain financial benefits and opportunities within the academic institution, such as sabbaticals and research grants. Hence, by rewarding scholars in accordance with the current evaluation system and not taking into account the different circumstances within the academic fields, the financial and managerial procedures and processes benefit men and male-dominated fields and maintain structural gender inequality within the university.

Earlier, we referred to Pétursdóttir (2009), who describes aura of gender equality. Under this phenomenon, all seems well at first sight, but right under the surface, men and women still hold on to traditional gender relations. Having

an equal opportunities officer, equal participation of women and men in the University Council, an equality policy and a female head of the institution creates an 'aura of gender equality'. We argue that there is a certain level of visibility, in the meaning of Acker (2006), because of the female rector and the university's formal equality. However, while the rector was in office, she represented values that were highly connected to STEM. The same visibility is connected to the University of Iceland's formal equality work; there is a certain perception among academics that the equality policy has been implemented within the academic institution, although they may not even know the content of this policy (Arnalds et al., 2012; Heijstra et al., 2014). Furthermore, taking pride in equality and describing the University of Iceland as being at the forefront of gender equality work increases the invisibility of gender inequality within this academic institution. When inequality is visible, such as gender representation in the decision-making body and in academic senior positions, the situation is legitimised by pointing at the 'token women' (Gheaus, 2014), by arguing that gender equality is just around the corner and by stating that the situation will resolve itself in time. In this way, inequality becomes highly legitimised (Acker, 2006).

Inspired by Bacchi (2009), we frequently stopped during the writing process and asked ourselves 'What's the problem represented to be?' while working on this paper. Why is an academic institution in Iceland aiming to be one of the leading universities in the world, why is the institution taking part in the global competition, and why do we assess our university with international instruments, such as high-impact publications and citation indexes? Who decides that this is what the academic institution should aim for? Although the University of Iceland's policy is allegedly formed and shaped by the university itself, it nevertheless reflects international hegemonic discourses in academia. This development may be at the cost of gender equality, as we have shown, but we still see some opportunities. Because this analysis reveals that resources are not distributed in a gender equitable way, it creates an opportunity to readdress the inequity and reconstruct academic financial and managerial procedures and processes in order to obtain more balanced access to resources in academia. Further research is encouraged on the gendered implications and consequences of internationalism and marketisation on academia, for instance how these trends translate into research grant systems and impact the positions of academics in the first stages of their career and academics in precarious positions. Simultaneously, it is important to identify possibilities for advancing gender equality. With gender budgeting, it is possible to make gendered patterns and biases visible, revise what is valued and measured and what is not, reassesses what is 'excellent' within academia and integrate a gender analysis into financial and managerial decisions to identify possibilities for the redistribution of

resources to correct imbalances in women's and men's use of and access to resources.

Referring to Bacchi and Eveline (2003) – who point out that gender mainstreaming reproduces neoliberal principles and policy agendas – and inspired by Audre Lorde's essay, 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (1984), we have asked ourselves how neoliberal and gendered tools can be utilised to examine and change the outcome of neoliberal and gendered thought. In this paper, we have shown that by using gender impact assessments and critically analysing the academic institution's financial and managerial procedures and processes, we have demonstrated that there are gendered consequences and biases. Given that gender budgeting provides the university with more detailed information on the effects of their financial system, from now on, they will be better equipped to make informed decisions. By applying gender budgeting to existing financial and managerial procedures and processes, we believe we are offering a realistic and effective tool that will not only raise awareness on the matter of equality but also result in better governance by enhancing transparency and facilitating the monitoring of systems (Rothe et al., 2008). By re-shaping the current academic system from within, it seems plausible to get a step closer to transforming academic institutions and forming a better and more equal academic work environment.

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