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Abstract

This paper examines the potential pitfalls for academic research associated with goal displacements in the implementation of goals and indicators of research commercialization. We ask why patenting has come to serve as the key policy indicator of innovative capacity and what consequences this has for the organization of academic research. To address these questions, the paper presents a case study from Denmark on, firstly, why and how the 1999 Danish ‘Act on Inventions’ introduced patenting as a central instrument to Danish science policy and, secondly, the effects the Act has had on Danish university organization and research practices. We trace why and how commercialization was introduced as an important objective in Danish science policy since the 1980s. The increased focus on patents is explained as an isomorphic adjustment to an international ‘science policy field,’ manifested in particular through OECD statistics, where patenting has come to serve as a key metric in international rankings. In a second step, we examine what effects the patenting requirements have had on organization and research practice at a Danish university. We show that in practice ‘number of

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patents' changed from serving as an indicator of innovative capacity to being a policy goal in itself, thus in effect producing a goal displacement that is potentially damaging for both academic research and innovation capacity of the surrounding society. As a consequence of this goal displacement, active scientists now increasingly engage in patenting primarily as a means to fulfill organizational targets and to increase their 'fundability,' rather than to promote commercial applications of their research. In conclusion, we discuss how these unfulfilled policy ambitions have led to a retrospective redefinition of policy goals rather than an adjustment of the actual policy tools. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)