Department of Management Studies

Constructing Reputation in a University Merger

Hanna-Mari Aula

Aalto University

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Abstract

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis addresses the question of reputation construction in a specific situation, that is, a university merger. The purpose is to describe and understand the process of reputation construction, and to shed new light particularly on the complexity of the construction process. Reputation is considered to be based on those organizational characteristics that the organization and its stakeholders deem important and essential. This study considers universities as organizations which remain accountable to a myriad of stakeholders who all may have particular, even conflicting, interests and expectations. The empirical focus of this thesis is the merger of three existing institutions into a new entity, Aalto University. The Aalto merger is positioned in the setting of changing higher education in Finland and abroad.

In addition to an introductory essay, this thesis contains a series of four studies that approaches the complexity of reputation construction differently. The first study explores the dynamics of compliance and resistance of reputation construction. Focusing on the notions of becoming 'world-class', the study examines Aalto top management and communication experts' attempts to influence Aalto's reputation, and the way the reputation becomes reconstructed in media. The second study aims to make sense of the stakeholder polyphony and controversy in reputation construction. It examines the complexities in the attempts to adopt a new branding logic, in which multiple stakeholders are invited to actively contribute to the focal brand and obtain value from it. The third study explores the process of defining the organizational characteristics, involving multiple stakeholders in and around the university, who represent different ideas of what the university is. Developing the notion of university branding as a political game, this study explores conflicts and struggles in building and presenting a new Aalto brand. The fourth study examines the discourses produced in a university merger and the different accounts of university reputation that these discourses produce. The study explores the possibility of having multiple and competing accounts of university reputation, each suggesting different meaning for the university.

This thesis emphasizes the dynamic nature of reputation and its construction, and considers that discourse analytical approach suits particularly well to study reputation as a dynamic process. This thesis contributes to extant research that considers reputation as continuously reconstructed in discursive practices by showing that reputation - and its multiple accounts - develop and evolve in time. This thesis also contributes to higher education branding research by stressing the crucial role of the multitude of stakeholders who are involved and actively participate in defining and building the university brand. While the extant research acknowledges the complexity of reputation construction, this thesis addresses the issue explicitly and in greater detail.

Keywords reputation, branding, university, merger, higher education, discourse

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Tiivistelmä

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Tiivistelmä

Tässä väitöskirjatutkimuksessa tarkastellaan maineen rakentumista yliopistofuusiossa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kuvata ja ymmärtää maineen rakentumisen prosesseja sekä avata erityisesti niiden monimutkaisuutta. Maineen ymmärretään rakentuvan sellaisille tekijöille, joita organisaatio ja sen sidosryhmät pitävät tärkeinä ja keskeisinä. Yliopisto puolestaan nähdään organisaationa, joka on vastuuvelvollinen erinäisille sidosryhmille, joilla saattaa olla hyvinkin erilainen käsitys siitä, mikä yliopistolle on olennaista. Tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto koostuu teksteistä, jotka koskevat kolmen olemassa olevan korkeakoulun yhdistymistä uudeksi kokonaisuudeksi, Aalto-yliopistoksi. Aalto-fuusiota tarkastellaan osana muuttuvaa korkeakoulumaailmaa Suomessa ja kansainvälisesti.

Väitöskirja sisältää johdantoesseen lisäksi neljä erillistä tutkimusta, jotka kuvaavat maineen rakentumisen monimutkaisuutta. Ensimmäisessä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan, kuinka Aalto-yliopisto pyrkii rakentamaan omaa mainettaan, ja kuinka maine rakentuu uudelleen mediassa. Tutkimus tuo näkyville mukautumisen ja vastustuksen dynamiikan maineen rakentumisessa. Toisessa tutkimuksessa Aallon maineen rakentumista tarkastellaan yrityksenä soveltaa uudenlaista "brändäämisen" logiikkaa (service-dominant logic), jossa keskeistä on pyrkimys luoda vahvoja sidosryhmien arvostamia brändejä ja jossa yliopisto nähdään instrumentaalisesti hyödyn tuottajana sen sidosryhmille. Tutkimus osoittaa, että organisaation yhteistoiminnalliseen brändäämiseen liittyy ristiriitoja ja monitulkintaisuutta, ja että erilaiset tulkinnat yliopiston roolista ja identiteetistä johtavat kamppailuun siitä, mikä organisaatiossa on keskeistä. Kolmas tutkimus nostaa tarkastelun keskiöön uuden yliopistobrändin (Aalto) rakentamisen ja vanhan fuusioituneen korkeakoulubrändin (HSE) lakkauttamisen. Tutkimus tarkastelee brändäämistä poliittisena pelinä ja osoittaa, että sidosryhmien erilaisiin intresseihin perustuvat pyrkimykset määrittää ja esittää Aalto-brändi (eli ne keskeiset tekijät, joille maine rakentuu) voi johtaa konflikteihin ja kamppailuun vaikutusvallasta. Neljännessä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan Aalto-fuusiossa tuotettuja diskursseja ja niiden sisältämiä käsityksiä maineesta. Tutkimus osoittaa, että yliopistolla voi olla monia keskenään kilpailevia maineita, joissa organisaatio merkityksellistyy erilaiseksi.

Tämä väitöskirja korostaa maineen dynaamista luonnetta ja katsoo, että diskurssianalyyttinen lähestymistapa soveltuu erityisen hyvin maineen rakentumista käsittelevään tutkimukseen. Tutkimus osoittaa, että maineen rakentuminen on monimutkainen ja dynaaminen prosessi, ja että maine(et) kehittyvät ja muuttuvat ajassa. Tutkimus osallistuu keskusteluun yliopistojen brändäämisestä korostamalla sidosryhmien merkitystä ja osallisuutta yliopistobrändin rakentamisessa. Vaikka maineen rakentumisen monimutkaisuus on tunnistettu aikaisemmissa tutkimuksissa, tässä väitöskirjassa ilmiötä tarkastellaan aiempaa syvällisemmin.

Avainsanat maine, brändi, yliopisto, fuusio, korkeakoulutus, diskurssi

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To Aava, Saana and Pekka

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This thesis is the realization of a dream that first, tentatively, came to me two decades ago. I was doing my Master's degree studies when I woke up to see how fascinating the world of research can be. I found myself admiring all those well-read scholars who seemed so knowledgeable and wise. I could not image that a doctoral education would make me like them, but the idea of conducting my own research was tempting. Writing this thesis and defending it one day became my dream. It has taken many years to reach this point, but finally, I am almost there. For that, I owe thanks to many people.

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Writing a doctoral thesis is an enormous effort that, over the years, also comes to concern friends and family outside academia. I am lucky to have a wealth of dear friends and relatives who have brought balance into my life. I specifically thank Eeva-Maria, Minna, Jari, Anu and Jouni, the Engardt family, and the Ihanaiset team for listening, caring, and helping me relax. And my parents, Irma and Risto: Words do not suffice to express my gratitude for your life-long support and invaluable help with household matters and childcare during this project.

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Helsinki, October 2015

Hanna-Mari Aula

Contents

List of Publications

This doctoral thesis consists of an introductory essay and of the following publications:

1. Aula, H-M. and Tienari, J. (2011). Becoming "world-class"? Reputation-building in a university merger. *Critical perspectives on international business*, 7(1), 7-29. DOI:10.1108/17422041111103813.

2. Aspara, J., Aula, H-M., Tienari, J. and Tikkanen, H. (2014): Struggles in organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics: the case of a marketizing university. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 17(6), 522-552. DOI:10.1080/10253866.2013.876347.

3. Aula, H-M., Tienari, J. and Wæraas, A. (2015). The University Branding Game. Players, Interests, Politics. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 45(2), 164-179. DOI:10.1080/00208825.2015.1006015.

4. Aula, H-M. The meaning of a university – How reputation is constructed in higher education and market economy discourses. Unpublished essay.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Three existing and viable institutions – the Helsinki School of Economics, the School of Technology and the School of Art and Design Helsinki – were merged on 1 January 2010 into a single university that we now know as *Aalto University*. The explicit objective of the merger was to create a 'world-class innovation university'. It was argued that Finnish higher education and economic competitiveness was far behind the cutting edge of international comparison, and that a "top university" was needed in order to be able to rise to international challenges. The creation of Aalto University became a focal point in a comprehensive reform of the higher education sector that took place in Finland. As part of the reform, a new Universities Act came into force, turning Finnish universities into independent legal entities with new governance arrangements.

Aalto is not a one-off incident, but part of the recent institutionalized development across Europe. A wave of university mergers is sweeping over Europe, "driven by concerns over economic competitiveness, research quality and international reputation" (Labi 2011)[1]. Changes in academia across Europe are an integral part of national public sector reforms, which aim at consolidation through radical change such as mergers. At the same time, they are harmonized within supranational entities such as the European Union.

In effect, the role and the meaning of a university has become a subject of substantial discussion and debate (see e.g. Krejsler 2006, Wedlin 2008, Styhre and Lind 2010). While universities were earlier considered merely as a provider of teaching and research within formal and theoretical domains of interest (ibid.), they are today increasingly thought of as entities that operate in the intersection of different institutional domains (Stevens et al. 2008, Wedlin 2008). Universities are expected to more effectively and widely integrate with society, and to contribute to national economies (Deem et al. 2008). Organizational boundaries are blurring, and academic, governmental, and industrial organizations are becoming overlapping. Universities are increasingly defined and evaluated as producers of information and resources which are useful and valuable to others than the academic community itself (Marginson 2008).

1 http://chronicle.com/article/University-Mergers-Sweep/125781/. Accessed 4 April 2015.

At the same time, universities are being turned into organizations with greater managerial and financial autonomy from the state (Krejsler 2006). Universities are increasingly thought of as competitive actors with a need to position themselves strategically in a competitive academic field (Wedlin 2008). They are not only acting on, but also constituting a global market of their own, where students are considered as customers and education as a 'service' that can be promoted world-wide (Melewar and Akel 2005, Ng and Forbes 2009). Benchmarking private business and market, universities increasingly embrace competition and economic efficiency (Amaral et a.l 2003), and adopt and adapt corporate management ideas and practices (Engwall 2008). In this marketizing setting, universities are increasingly competing with each other, not only for students, faculty, funding, and other resources, but also for status and reputation (Wedlin 2008, Harman and Harman 2008).

As part of the current changes in higher education, university mergers have become increasingly common. The 'merger fever' (Cai et al. forthcoming, 2016) has not hit only Europe (Kyvik 2004) but also Asia (Cai 2006), Africa (Bresler 2007) and Australia (Harman 2000). A merger is not a new phenomenon in higher education, but it certainly is characteristic to the contemporary academia. A merger has traditionally been a government's tool to rationalize higher education sectors (Harman and Harman 2008), but it can also be interpreted as an adopted management practice to create stronger and larger producers of both educational services and research to enhance institutional reputation (Ursin et al. 2010) and competitive positions internationally (Harman and Harman 2008).

The current developments in higher education have made organizational reputation ever more important to universities. While many features of universities are hidden or they are otherwise difficult to be observed (Engwall 2007), prospective students, future employees, possible sponsors and other stakeholders create their understandings and base their decisions about the institution substantially according to its reputation. Reputation has also become a concern to more universities than before. As the market of higher education has become more open, also those public universities that previously operated within closed national systems – like the predecessors of Aalto University – have come to compete for resources. In the contemporary higher education, reputation has become a key concern for universities. Therefore, the question of how to build organizational reputation warrants increased research attention and closer examination.

1.2 The research gap

This research stems from a desire to better understand university reputation construction in the setting of a university merger. While higher education mergers have been studied quite extensively (e.g. Harman and Harman 2008, Cartwright et al. 2007, Skodvin 1999, Rowley 1997), research on reputation in a specific merger context is lacking. The few studies that address reputation in a merger context (Luoma-aho and Mäkikangas 2014, Davies and Chun 2004) have an empirical focus on other than a university or a business school organization.

The amount of literature on university and business school reputation in general (that is, without a merger context) is, however, gradually increasing. Combined with different conceptualizations of reputation, this literature can be divided into four streams of research. The streams differ in their ontological and epistemological foundations, and hence in the way how reputation and its construction become understood.

The first stream of reputation research calls attention to the competitive benefits of acquiring favorable reputations. The focus of empirical research in this stream is then typically on benefits (e.g. Brewer and Zhao 2010, Ressler and Abratt 2009, Nguyen and LeBlanc 2001) and threats (Scandizzo 2011, Suomi and Järvinen 2013, Suomi et al. 2014) of reputation, and rarely on socio-cognitive processes of constructing reputations. This research stream tends to consider reputation as a relatively sticky phenomenon (Fombrun and van Riel 1997). Although the possibility of reputational change is acknowledged, it is emphasized that reputations are valuable intangible assets particularly because they are inertial (see e.g. Fombrun and van Riel 1997). In this stream, reputation largely becomes considered as some sort of an entity that experiences a change rather than as a constantly evolving and developing process.

The second stream of reputation research argues that reputation is formed on the basis of specific attributes that are expected to generate university or business school reputation. These attributes are considered to be universal and shared by the particular social identity category, e.g. universities (Whetten and Mackey 2002). The attributes are also treated as fixed and predetermined. Focusing on examining these reputational attributes, empirical studies in this stream have produced a number of different frameworks and models to define and measure reputation (e.g. Arpan et al. 2003, Rindova et al. 2005, Vidaver-Cohen 2007). Vidaver-Cohen (2007), for example, suggests that a business school reputation is generated by eight attributes: organizational performance, product, service, leadership, governance, workplace, citizenship, and innovation. A well-known manifestation of such models is university and business school rankings.

The third stream of reputation research understands reputations to be perceptions and interpretations that observers hold about an organization and that are based on organizations' typical and repeated actions, indicating a particular character of an organization (Clark and Montgomery 1998) such as quality that is considered particularly important in this research stream (Milgrom and Roberts 1986). The past actions of a university organization determine the principle character traits of the institution that its stakeholders come to experience, and eventually shape the reputation that the university develops with is stakeholders (Fombrun 1996). Organizational actions (Shapiro 1983) and other factual indicators can be used as signals to indicate a particular organizational character. Higher education institutions have been found to use collaboration with reputable organizations (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001) and rankings (Wedlin 2006) as signals in indicating their quality to the market and thus in building their reputation.

Fourth, to enhance their reputation, universities world-wide have initiated brand-building activities. Today, "all" self-respecting universities are 'brands' with carefully crafted branding programs intended to make them more visible, attractive, and positioned within a global higher education market. A developing literature (e.g. Drori et al. 2013, Chapleo 2010, Wæraas and Solbakk 2009, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007) examines this timely empirical phenomenon that is argued to be driven by the marketization of universities (Melewar and Akel 2005). The existing studies on university and business school branding typically focus on external brand image (reputation) within students and prospective students, emphasizing the role of their perceptions in defining and assessing the organization (e.g. Alessandri et al. 2006, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, Yang et al. 2008). Hence, extant literature tends to reduce the multitude of university and business school stakeholders down to one group, namely students, and to treat the process of branding and reputation-building as linear and unproblematic.

This thesis emphasizes the dynamic nature of reputation and its construction. Reputation is considered as a complex and constantly evolving process (Coupland and Brown 2004, Aula and Mantere 2013) in a particular context such as a university merger. This thesis builds on an identity-based understanding of reputation, according to which reputation is considered to be based on characteristics that the members of an organization and its relevant stakeholders deem important. Universities remain accountable to a myriad of stakeholders such as students, financiers, employees, the academic community, employers and business community, the State, alumni, media, and the general public, each of which may have particular—and even conflicting—interests and expectations. The identity-based understanding of reputation allows us to acknowledge all stakeholders who may have a say about what the university is and what it should be. It also recognizes the uniqueness of organizations (see e.g. Whetten and Mackey 2002). This thesis shares the idea that reputation is constructed in discursive and narrative practices (Lawrence 1998, Vendelø 1998, Coupland and Brown 2004, Middleton 2009, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010). Such a view emphasizes the possibility of having multiple accounts of organizational reputation that may compete with and borrow from each other (Coupland and Brown 20004), and that evolve, develop and change across spatial and temporal contexts (Burr 2003). This thesis pays special attention to examining the complexity of reputation and polyphony in its construction. Tensions and contradictions are likely to arise when particular understandings of a merged university are constructed in contemporary higher education, which is characterized by wide-spread and fundamental changes.

1.3 The aim of the research

Set against the background provided above, the aim of this thesis is to increase our understanding of university reputation and its construction. Consequently, the main, overarching research question that has driven this thesis can be formulated in the following manner:

How is university reputation constructed by different social actors in the context of a university merger?

To answer the overall research question, four studies have been conducted. The first study examines Aalto top management and communication experts' attempts to influence Aalto's reputation, and the dynamics of controversy and conformity of the constructed reputation. Focusing particularly on the notions of becoming 'world-class', the study aims to answer the following questions:

• *How is the notion of 'world-class' used to distinguish the new university from its domestic counterparts and to present it as an attractive global actor?*

• *How does the reputation of the new university become (re)constructed in different fora and vis-á-vis different stakeholders?*

The second study aims to make sense of the stakeholder complexity, polyphony, and controversy in reputation construction. Considering (re)branding as a means to build reputation, this second study treats Aalto as an example of a university rebranding initiative, which aligns with a contemporary market-oriented and service-dominant (SD) logic (cf. Merz et al. 2009, Vargo and Lusch 2004). The study illustrates the complexities in the attempts to adopt a new branding logic, in which multiple stakeholders are invited to actively contribute to the focal brand and obtain value from it. The research questions of this study are

• *What kind of diverse stakeholder actions and struggles characterize the branding dynamics of an emergent service-dominant actor such as a university, and how are they linked to broader cultural, political, and economic forces?*

• *How do stakeholders perceive the identity of an organization attempting to align with a contemporary (SD) branding logic?*

The third study aims to shed light on the university branding processes involving multiple stakeholders in and around the university, who represent different ideas of what the university is. Developing the notion of university branding as a political game, and illustrating this with the case of Aalto University, the research question of the third study is formulated as follows:

• *To what extent does university branding involve organizational politics, and how is that politics played out?*

Finally, the fourth study examines the discourses produced in a university merger and the different accounts of university reputation that these discourses produce. Emphasizing the possibility of having multiple accounts of reputation, each suggesting a specific meaning to a university, the paper joins the increased discussion and debate on the meaning of the university institution in contemporary changing higher education. The research question of the fourth study is formulated in the following manner:

- *What discourses do social actors draw upon in a university merger, and what kind of organizational reputation does this mobilization produce?*

1.4 The structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises an introductory section and four research papers. The introductory section, Part I of the thesis, consists of six chapters, and addresses a variety of theoretical and methodological issues. In the first Chapter, I have aimed to establish the scope and purpose of the whole research project. I have presented the research gap that this thesis aims partly to fill.

Chapter 2 presents the wider societal and institutional context of this research – the context in which the studied university reputation is constructed. In this chapter, I discuss the recent developments in higher education that have increasingly brought to the forefront questions concerning university reputation and branding. I also provide an outline of mergers in higher education institutions, which, in this study, refer to universities and business schools. In addition, I present the studied case, the merger of Aalto University, which can be seen as an illustrative example of the time. In reviewing the literature on contemporary developments and mergers in higher education, I incorporate the Aalto case into the discussion, and reflect on the literature with the help of the Aalto case where applicable.

Chapter 3 addresses the core issue in this thesis – reputation. While in Chapter 2 the term *reputation* was used in a generic sense, in this Chapter *reputation* is opened up and sliced into its component parts. I discuss the different meanings and conceptualizations of reputation, presenting the various perspectives that researchers have taken in studying reputation and its construction. I also discuss how the conceptualization of reputation steers the empirical focus of reputation research, and report how university and business school reputations have been previously studied. Towards the end of the Chapter, I present a discursive approach to reputation, which, in varying degrees of strictness, governs the four studies included in this thesis.

Chapter 4 outlines my empirical work. The Chapter presents methodological choices, and the empirical materials used in the four studies. I end the Chapter by describing and reflecting on the research process.

Chapter 5 comprises summaries of the four sub-studies that have been included in this thesis, and which form the bulk of the research project.

Chapter 6 explicates theoretical contributions of this research, and discusses the practical implications. Discussion on the further research avenues concludes Part 1 of this thesis.

Part II consists of the research papers that report the four studies included in this thesis. Three studies have been published in the journals of *Critical perspectives on international business, Consumption Markets & Culture*, and *International Studies of Management & Organization*. One study is reported in an as yet unpublished essay.

2. Changing higher education

Reputation has become increasingly important for higher education institutions such as universities and business schools. Universities and business schools are increasingly competing for reputation (Wedlin 2008). They participate in the "rankings game" (Corley and Gioia 2000), initiate brand-building activities (Curtis et al. 2009), and engage in organizational restructuring such as mergers (Harman and Harman 2008), in order to build their reputation. In contemporary higher education, institutional reputations are purposefully and actively built, developed, and protected.

The empirical focus of this thesis, the merger of Aalto University, is an illustrative example of our time. The current developments in changing higher education are clearly present at Aalto University – and have been during the making of Aalto. There is increased pressure from the Finnish government to integrate Aalto more widely into society, and hence to get Aalto to contribute to the national economy more effectively. There is ongoing comprehensive reform of the Finnish higher education sector in which the merger of Aalto University had a special role. In addition, universities in Finland have been turned into organizations with more financial and managerial autonomy from the state, which has resulted in greater strategic and competitive thinking within Aalto. As a consequence, Aalto – like other higher education institutions – have initiated brand-building activities. Moreover, Aalto University has the explicit aim of becoming a 'world-class university'. These different developments are closely interrelated.

In this chapter, I discuss these contemporary developments in higher education. The aim is to outline the wider societal and institutional context of this research, that is, the context of the changing higher education scene. The aim of this chapter is also to provide an outline of mergers in general, and mergers in higher education, specifically. In reviewing the literature of higher education and mergers, I include the Aalto case in the discussion and aim to reflect the literature on the case. The term *reputation* is used in a generic meaning in this chapter. The concept of reputation will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

2.1 Integrating universities with wider society

First, the point of departure in changing higher education is the claim that universities are under radical transformation across the Western world (see Krejsler 2006), and that these transformations are influenced by a certain vision of globalization and the emergence of a knowledge economy (Clark 2001). Economic growth and global competitiveness are increasingly driven by knowledge, which pulls the role of universities to the focus (Salmi 2009). As nations aspire to become more competitive in the increasingly important field of knowledge creation, many governments desire universities – the knowledge creating institutions par excellence (Krejsler 2006) – to better contribute to their national economies (Deem et al. 2008). Universities are expected to be better integrated with wider society. They are expected to become more closely engaged with business and industry sectors, and to work in new innovative ways to meet demands from the public and from society (Wedlin 2008, see also Starkey and Madan 2001S, Deem et al. 2008). There is growing pressure for universities to make research results available and applicable outside universities, and to enable the commoditization of scientific discoveries (Wedlin 2008).

The relationship between universities and wider society, particularly industry, has been approached from various perspectives in literature. Some commentators discuss the issue under the concept of 'entrepreneurial university' (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, Rothaermel et al. 2007). In this discussion, the entire university institution becomes reconceptualized as an 'entrepreneurial hotbed' where productive and mutually rewarding public-private partnerships are developed (Styhre and Lind 2010). In an entrepreneurial university, economic development is considered as universities' new and essential academic function. As Etzkowitz (1998, 833) argues, "the entrepreneurial university integrates economic development into the university as an academic function along with teaching and research. It is the 'capitalisation of knowledge' that is the heart of the new mission for the university, linking universities to users of knowledge more tightly and establishing the university as an economic actor in its own right". Examples of entrepreneurial activities include patenting and licensing, creating incubators, science parks, and university spin-offs, and investing equity in start-ups (Rothaermel et al. 2007).

Other commentators examine the university-industry collaboration under the formulation of Mode 1 and 2 (Gibbons et al. 1994). This discussion is based on the arguments that the role of knowledge in society is changing and that there is new kind of knowledge creation needed alongside the more traditional disciplinary framework (Harvey et al. 2002). The fundamental questions here are *what* knowledge is produced and *how* it is produced. This vision led Gibbons et al. (1994) to predict a change in knowledge creation (in universities) to which they refer with the shift from Mode 1 (M1K) to Mode 2 (M2K). M1K refers to what we have traditionally understood as a scientific approach to the knowledge creation system. It is based on a clear demarcation between the public and private sectors. Universities' role was to provide discipline-based education and skills to studens, and to carry out research that they believed was relevant within the particular discipline in the long run. Much of this knowledge was driven by curiosity, and produced with the intention that it should be used by other academics who also control the quality of knowledge. In turn, within the context of Mode 2, distictions between public and private knowledge creation have become blurred. Universities are increasingly involved in consultancy, and industry has become a significant participant in scientific research. Knowledge creation has shifted towards interdisciplinary research in the context of application, with emphasis on problem-solving. While in Mode 1 knowledge is created among the academics of a certain discipline, in Mode 2 knowledge derives from collective processes of networking, negotiation, and interpersonal communication between academics and the wider public in order to tackle more complex problems of society. (Gibbons et al. 1994, see also Starkey and Madan 2001, MacLean et al. 2002, Harvey et al. 2002). Although Modes 1 and 2 remain contested (Bresnen and Burrell 2012), the change in knowledge creation has trigged discussion on university research practices, particularly on basic research and its relation to applied research, and their underlying values and ideals (Ylijoki et al 2012).

Nonetheless, a new conceptualization of the university is widely seen to be taking place. Rather than solely being a provider of teaching and research within formal and theoretical domains of interest (Styhre and Lind 2010), universities are increasingly considered as entities operating in the intersection of different institutional domains (Stevens et al. 2008, Wedlin 2008, Styhre and Lind 2010). As a consequence, organizational boundaries are getting blurred and overlapping, not only academic and industrial but also governmental organizations. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (1997) use the concept of "Triple Helix" to describe university-industry-government relations and to argue that "rather than being sub-ordinated to either industry or government, the university is emerging as an influential actor and equal partner" with industry and government in creating economic growth and social development (Etzkowitz 2003, 295). This is seen to increase the similarity in research conducted in academic, industrial and governmental research institutes (Ylijoki et al. 2012). Ziman (1996), in turn, speaks about "post-academic science" and claims that Mode 2 type of research (Gibbons et al. 1994) leads to the replacement of traditional academic values and norms by market-oriented ideals (Ylijoki et al. 2012). This is seen to convert university research into industrial type of research where the aim is to pursue private goods instead of common good and publicly available knowledge (ibid.). As the current form of instrumentalism in the changing academia, universities are increasingly defined as producers of information and resources which should be useful and valuable to industries, companies and society – and less representative of the virtues defined by the academic community itself (Marginson 2008).

As the interaction between universities and other areas of society has increased, the presence of stakeholders that are traditionally considered external to universities seems to be getting stronger. Universities are of interest to many stakeholders who all may have different ideas of what universities are and what they should be. The establishment of Aalto University is a good example of this. There was a myriad of stakeholders who all had a say about the Aalto University merger and who actively took part in the debate around the establishment of the university. Finnish business and industry were an active force behind the merger, publicly supporting and lobbying the merger idea, and promising at a very early stage of the merger negotiations that they would provide as much as 40 per cent of the required private funding through the influential Federation of Finnish Technology Industries and the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK). Representatives of both organizations were among those seven central business and technology foundations, associations, and employer organizations in Finland who, together with the Finnish Minister of Education and Culture, signed the charter of Aalto University. The Confederation of Finnish Industries also became responsible for the fundraising campaign (2008-2011) of foundation capital for Aalto University. These external stakeholders nominated the first Aalto Board – which, however, needed to be re-elected a year later by the university community itself, as required by the new university law (Yliopistolaki 558/2009, 24§). The Board comprised corporate executives, academics and policy-makers. All seven members came from outside the university and they all held a doctoral degree. The CEO of Kone Ltd was chosen the Chairman of the Board. Also Aalto University's first Rector (President) came from outside the merging universities. Her background in Finland is in biotechnology and at the time of her appointment she was Vice Rector of the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2014, she was chosen to serve as the President of Aalto University for a second five-year-period.

2.2 Reforming the higher education system and establishing Aalto University in Finland

A second development in contemporary higher education is the aim of national government policies to modernise and render a more efficient national higher education system. As a concequence, higher education sectors have been reformed in many countries such as UK, France, Denmark, Sweden and Finland (see e.g. Krejsler 2006, Grove 2011, ICEF Monitor 2014, Pinheiro et al., forthcoming). Instead of summarizing them all here, I use the Finnish higher education sector and its recent reforms (see Välimaa 2007, Aarrevaara et al. 2009, Tirronen and Nokkala 2009, Tomperi 2009, Kunelius et al. 2009, Rinne et al. 2012) as an illustrative example.

Initially, Finnish higher education was an elite system with a small number of students (Välimaa 2012). The expansion of higher education began after World War II, and grew most intensively between the 1960s and 1980s (ibid.). The Finnish system was built on the idea of social justice for all, which in education meant that all Finnish citizens had equal educational opportunities regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, wealth, or geographical location (Nevala 2002). Education was considered as a tool to mitigate social evils and to smooth the developmental differences between different regions of the country (ibid.).

Finnish universities became publicly funded and state-owned (Kivistö and Tirronen 2012).

During the 1980s societal atmosphere began to change (Heiskala 2011). Instead of emphasizing national wellbeing, equality and democracy, the focus in Finnish politics turned towards internationalization, markets and competitiveness. Backed by the emergence of a knowledge based economy and globalization, Finnish higher education policy became an integral part of the national innovation policy, in which the universities' role was merely instrumental: to enhance national competitiveness. (Heiskala 2011) The new Finnish higher education policy is parallel to the policy of the European Union, which emphasizes the future vision of more autonomous but also more accountable universities, and expects universities to reform their management and decision making systems, and to focus research and education into specific strategic areas (Kivistö and Tirronen 2012, see also Maassen 2007). In 1999, Finland signed the Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area establishing the general framework for the harmonization of the European higher education degree system (MinEdu 2015). During the recent decades, discussion on concentrating educational and research operations has increased, and the Finnish higher education system is being compared with the best universities in the world (Välimaa 2007). Consequently, the concept of a world-class university has been adopted in the Finnish higher education policy.

The shift in the national policy-making paved the way for the most radical change in the Finnish higher education sector. The change can be characterized as a transition from the "egalitarian welfare state university system" into a "competitive post-welfare state university system" (Kivistö and Tirronen 2012, 78). The Finnish government and the Ministry of Education initiated two significant policy reforms: *the New Universities Act (*Yliopistolaki 558/2009*)* and the *structural development of the higher education sector*.

The New Universities Act came to force in 2010. The Act aims to enhance universities' operational potential in the international operational environment. The Act legislates on universities' mission, administration, funding and steering as well as on issues related to research and teaching, students, staff and faculty. The universities' main mission – education and research – remained the same. The change concerned the legal status of universities, and the effect of the change in university governance and funding. The Act turned Finnish universities into independent legal entities, increasing their financial and organizational autonomy from the State. Universities had a choice of becoming either public corporations or private foundations. Universities will no longer be developed as part of state administration, but in terms of their own mission. As universities take the place of the State as an employer, they are able to pursue independent human resource policies. The government continues to guarantee sufficient funding, but in addition, universities can apply for competed public funding, and they can use the revenue from their business ventures, donations and the return on their capital to finance their operations. (MinEdu 2009a, MinEdu 2009b) Although the steering of universities by the State administration reduced, the relationship between the State and the universities remains close; the government will continue to decide on national educational policy also in the future. Moreover, the Act gave the possibility that universities could charge tuition fees from students from outside EU/EEA countries. The new law changed the composition of the university boards so that half of their members in 'public corporations', and all members in 'private foundations' can be persons external to the university community. (Pekkola 2009)

At the same time, the Finnish Ministry of Education prepared *structural development of the higher education sector*. The aim of the reform was to enhance the quality, impressiveness and international competitiveness of the universities, and to reduce the number of universities, to clarify their academic profiles, and to make the units bigger and more influential (MinEdu 2009c). National higher education systems have been evaluated both nationally and by the European Union and OECD (e.g. MinEdu 2005, OECD 2006, OECD 2009). What was needed in Finnish higher education, according to these reports, was top-quality research and teaching in nationally important focus areas, increased internationalization and interdisciplinarity, and greater financial and operational autonomy for universities (MinEdu 2007). The Finnish higher education system was also stated to be exceptionally extensive and spread out (Valtioneuvoston kanslia [Prime Minister's Office] 2004).

Consequently, the number of universities in Finland was reduced from 20 to 14 between 2008 and 2014 (Ursin et al. 2010, MinEdu 2014). This reduction was accomplished merely through mergers that have, in general, a long history in higher education reported in the various higher education literature (e.g. Goedegebuure 1992, Skodvin 1999, Harman G. 2000, Eastman and Lang 2002, Harman K. 2002, Locke 2007), and that are internationally being used as the national government's essential tools to rationalize and restructure higher education sectors, and to create larger and more comprehensive institutions (Harman and Harman 2008). In Finland, altogether four university mergers were conducted, and one of them was the 2010 merger of Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology, and the School of Art and Design Helsinki into what is now known as Aalto University. The passing of the new Universities Act was a crucial precondition for the merger that was given a special status in the Finnish higher education sector reform. The aim of merging three existing and viable universities in the capital area was to create a 'world-class innovation university' that would serve the whole of Finnish society. It was argued that Finnish higher education and economic competitiveness was far behind the cutting edge of international comparison, and that a top university was needed in order to be able to rise to international challenges. In 2013, Aalto University was the second largest university in Finland with 19 683 degree students, 5 171 faculty and staff, and with operative expenses of €420 million (Aalto University 2015). The Aalto merger represents a tightly integrated formal merger (Mbinda 2009) where the degree of autonomy of the participating institutions tends to be low (Harman and Harman 2008). The merging three parties came under a single body with one central administration (Botha 2001). All assets, liabilities and responsibilities of the three merging institutions were transferred to a new entity. Mergers with a unitary structure are virtually impossible to reverse (Eastman and Lang 2001).

The Aalto merger can be considered as a consolidation, as none of the three parties had explicit dominance over others. Consolidation is typically set against a 'take-over' of one institution by another (Harman and Harman 2003). Consolidations tend to be more complex than takeovers because they often involve difficult issues such as a choice of the new institution's name, the new academic structure, and the portfolio of courses to be offered including possible rationalization of the courses (ibid.). As for Aalto's name, the merged entity was given a new name, abandoning the names of the three merging universities. The name *Aalto University* was introduced in May 2008. The naming contest had been held, and the name *Aalto* was chosen as "a tribute to one of the internationally best-known Finns – Alvar Aalto – and to reflect the concept, spirit, values and goals of the new university"[2]. Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) was an architect and designer who gained legendary status in Finland. Alvar Aalto had studied architecture at the Helsinki University of Technology (HUT) in the 1920s (Aarrevaara et al. 2009). He had also designed HUT's main building and current campus, which later became Aalto University's main campus.

Speaking of dominance, it is claimed that one of the merging parties always tends to have or take a dominant role during the merger process (Skodvin 1999). The power of a dominating organization is typically based on financial strength, market potential, organizational reputation, a dominant executive management team, or – as many studies on higher education suggest – the size (student body, faculty and staff, budget etc.) of the institution (Eastman and Lang 2001). However, as the study of van Vuuren et al. (2010) shows, dominance is not necessarily a matter of observable and rational fact but something that is experienced in the organization. Van Vuuren et al. investigated a South African university merger between a historically 'white' and a 'black' institution and were surprised to find that employees from both parties claimed to be the dominated group.

In the Aalto merger, *the Helsinki University of Technology* (HUT, established 1908) was by far the largest of the three merging universities. However, in 2011, it was divided into four schools: *the School of Chemical Technology, the School of Electrical Engineering, the School of Engineering*, and *the School of Science*. *The School of Art and Design Helsinki* (TaiK, established 1871), in turn, was the smallest of the merger partners but the largest university of its kind in the Nordic countries. In 2012, TaiK was integrated with the department of Architecture, detached from the School of Engineering. Together, they formed a school that was named *the School of Arts, Design and Architecture*. The third merger partner, *the Helsinki School of Economics* (HSE, established 1911) was slightly bigger than TaiK and the leading business school in Finland, having achieved "Triple Crown" status in 2007 when it managed to achieve three

2 Available at http://www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/the-name; accessed 20 November 2009.

international accreditations (AMBA[3], EQUIS[4], AACSB[5]) for business schools. In 2012, the name of the school was changed into *the School of Business*. Thus, today Aalto University consists of six schools that are approximately the same size. Each school is led by a Dean and hosts a different amount of departments.

In all, Aalto University can be seen as a manifestation of the new Finnish higher education and science policy. The reforms of the Finnish higher education system and the establishment of Aalto University are generally justified by supranational evaluations and assessments, and developments in other European countries. In a historical perspective, this recent reform of the Finnish higher education sector can be considered as the most significant one since the massification of higher education in 1960s – 1980s. (Tirronen and Nokkala 2009, Kivistö and Tirronen 2012)

2.3 Development of universities as organizational actors, and creation of a higher education market

In addition to the transformation of the university-society relationship and the reform of the higher education sector, a third development in the current higher education is the changing character of the university as an organization, accompanied by the transformation of the university sector into a market of its own (Wedlin 2008). It is claimed that universities are being turned into organizations with greater autonomy from the State (Krejsler 2006). Universities are increasingly thought of as competitive actors with a need to position themselves strategically in a competitive academic field (Wedlin 2008). Universities are not only acting on, but also constituting a global market of their own (ibid.) where students are considered as customer and education as a 'service' that can be promoted world-wide (Melewar and Akel, 2005; Ng and Forbes, 2009). Universities are increasingly competing with each other, not only for students, faculty, funding, and other resources, but also for status and reputation (Wedlin 2008, Harman and Harman 2008).

In positioning themselves in the market of higher education, universities need to consider, for example, whether to promote basic or applied science, teaching or research, and a practitioner-based or an academic curriculum (Fombrun 1996, Brint 2005). These strategic choices can be seen in universities' reputation (Fombrun 1996). In his study of American research universities, Brint (2005) identified two strategies that were used to build a university reputation for excellence. Brint noticed that some universities indicated preference in pursuing success in established academic disciplines, being attuned to disciplinary rankings, while others indicated interest in following the so called "new direction" (p.25) and making innovations in the intersection of the disciplines. What is significant here, according to Brint, is that these two strategies are in sharp contrast with each other. He argues that a choice between the two strategies is not an issue for the wealthiest universities in the world (as

3 Association of MBAs. www.mbaworld.com.

4 European Quality Improvement System. www.efmd.org/efmd.

5 Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Schools of Business. www.aacsb.edu.

they can both be), but for universities below that level, it is a matter of choice. The chosen strategy has significant implications for the university as a whole. It comes to define the organizational structure, the type of faculty that is hired, and the measures how organizational success is evaluated (Fombrun 1996, Brint 2005).

As organizational actors, universities in general and Aalto University specifically, are increasingly adopting and adapting corporate management ideas and practices (Engwall 2008). Benchmarking private businesses and markets, universities increasingly embrace competition and economic efficiency, and operate through specific control techniques (Amaral et al. 2003). Within universities, efficient use of resources is closely monitored (Hartley 1995, Krejsler 2006, Marginson 2008), decision-making authority is centralized into the hands of Presidents and Deans (Dearlove 1997), and many faculty members perceived that they are losing their self-determination (Räsänen 2008).

This new governance logic, characterized by a focus on profitability and top-down management processes, can be observed throughout the higher education system (Alajoutsijärvi et al. 2015). It is suggested that the logic is driven specifically by business schools (e.g. Locke and Spender 2011, Washburn 2005), which have developed and disseminated the management concepts considered as global "lingua franca" in modern society and higher education (Engwall 2007, 9). While management education was a rather limited field in the first half of the last century, today, business schools have a significant presence around the world (ibid.).

Universities and business schools have also taken on more formal organizational structures and, for example, established business-like communications departments and strategies, engaged in strategic planning, mission-statement production and implementing marketing and branding activities (Wedlin 2008). In addition, they have started to develop distinct images in order to gain competitive advantage (Louro and Cunha 2001, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007). According to Ivy (2001), these images are particularly important because they are likely to impact on students' willingness to apply into a specific institution. In a market where students are considered as customers (Melewar and Akel 2005), the basis of brand development is to attract students and to differentiate an institution from similar others (Aaker 2004, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007). There is an opposite view, however, according to which branding is seen as a myth or a symbol that is used to demonstrate conformity with institutional environments (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977). From this viewpoint, it is more important to be similar to others than to differentiate and to exploit unique features (Waeraas and Solbakk 2009). Referring to Belanger et al. (2002), Waeraas and Solbakk (2009, 453) state that there is a clear tendency for universities to present themselves as "the best, "world-class" and "leading".

In Aalto University, intensive branding became visible in 2009 when a new visual identity was introduced. A design contest had been held. There were two suggestions competing in the last stage; a more traditional and a more experimentative one. A committee chaired by the President of Aalto eventually decided on the latter, an entry called 'Invitation', designed by a graphic designer and graduate of one of the merging schools, TaiK. The new visual identity was greeted with mixed feelings. At the same time, the new one-brand strategy was announced. The old school brands as well as their old names were abandoned. The brand hierarchy was built, and the school brands were aligned with the university brand. According to Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007), the processes of harmonization that are increasingly taking place in higher education focus on the visual identity, values, vision and mission of the university, but may be more rhetoric than actual change. Brown and Goonawardana say that managers believe "that they should seek to develop a coherent and consistent brand identity for the university, deliver the brand identity uniformly across all stakeholder groups to create a favorable reputation and undertake the key processes of harmonizing the brand and communicating a homogeneous brand to achieve corporatization" (p. 944).

Another significant element of the *Aalto* umbrella brand is the joint mission, vision and values of the new university. In 2008-2009, as part of the preparations for the merger, the staff of the three Schools had the opportunity to take part in discussions where the mission statement, visions and shared values of the new university were worked on. Encouraging participation in joint meetings as well as on-line discussions and surveys characterized this stage in the merger process. *Aalto*'s strategy, in turn, was worked on in a similar way in 2008-2009. The table below presents how the mission, vision and values were communicated in autumn 2009[6] and in spring 2015[7].

Table 1: The mission, vision and values of Aalto University in 2009 and in 2015.

	2009	*2015*
Mission	*The Aalto University strives to change the world through top quality interdisciplinary research, pioneering education, surpassing traditional boundaries, and renewal. The Aalto University educates responsible, broadminded experts with a comprehensive understanding of complex subjects to act as society's visionaries.*	*Aalto University works towards a better world through top-quality research, interdisciplinary collaboration, pioneering education, surpassing traditional boundaries, and enabling renewal. The national mission of the University is to support Finland's success and contribute to Finnish society, its internationalisation and competitiveness, and to promote the welfare of its people.*
Vision	*The best connect and succeed at Aalto University, an institution internationally recognized for the impact of its science, art, and learning.*	*The best connect and succeed at Aalto University, an institution internationally recognized for the impact of its science, art, and learning.*

6 http://www.aalto.fi/en/about/strategy/. Accessed 24 April 2010.

7 http://www.aalto.fi/en/about/strategy/. Accessed 4 April 2015.

Values	- *A passion for exploration* - *Courage to influence and excel* - *Freedom for creativity with a critical mindset* - *Duty to be caring, tolerant and inspiring* - *Building on ethicality, equality and openness*	- *Passion for exploration* - *Feedom to be creative and critical* - *Courage to influence and excel* - *Responsibility to accept, care and inspire* - *Integrity, openness and equality*

In addition, universities funding base is in change. As governmental funding is decreasing across European countries (Weber and Duderstadt 2004), universities are increasingly relying on external, often private, sources of finance (Wedlin 2008). From Aalto's total annual funding of 418 million euros in 2013, 66 per cent (275 million euros) was governmental support and 26 per cent (109 million euros) was research grants from the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation (TEKES), the Academy of Finland, and the European Union (Aalto University 2015). Many public universities, such as Aalto, are also being privatized. While the three merging universities were state-owned, Aalto University is governed by a private foundation, established in June 2008.

2.4 Merging for reputation

In parallel with other developments in higher education, a change in merger practices and aims has been observed. Harman and Harman (2008) have noticed that since the early 1990s', merger efforts, particularly concerning public institutions, have increasingly involved various combinations of government and institutional initiatives. They note that existing institutions, often with governmental support, have started to look for suitable partners to merge with, and consider that typically there is a strategic and competitive motive behind. Merging for "mutual growth" (Martin and Samels 1994) aims for academic excellence, financial health, administrative efficiency, economies of scale, stabilized enrolments, synergies (Eastman and Lang 2001), international competitiveness (Harman and Harman 2008), better position in university rankings (Rowley 1997), and enhanced status and reputation (Ursin et al. 2010).

In turn, private universities, which are more flexible in a strategic sense, have used mergers as an instrument to solve problematic situations like threats of closures or bankruptcy (Harman and Harman 2008). A merger is not as common among private institutions as it is among public universities, however. In the US, where the number of private universities is relatively big, the frequency of mergers in education has not increased at the same pace as in Europe and Asia (Cartwright et al. 2007, Harman and Harman 2008). Interestingly, the US higher education sector is developing in completely different directions in terms of institutional collaboration, as was initially anticipated (Martin and Samels 1994). Instead of mergers, universities and colleges are building strategic alliances, being thus able to preserve individual institutions' distinct missions and identities and still to combine their respective strengths to take advantage of market opportunities (Martin and Samels 2002).

The initiative to merge the Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology, and the School of Art and Design Helsinki into Aalto University seemed to come from the merging institutions themselves. The Rector of the school of Art and Design Helsinki is generally credited for first publicly voicing the merger idea. This took place in 2005 in the Rector's opening speech for the new academic year. Such mergers are considered voluntary and considered more successful than forced ones (Skodvin 1999). It may however, be difficult to say where the line between a voluntary and a forced merger is. As Harman and Harman (2003) note, there is often some sort of external threats or some degree of governmental incentive, pressure or direction behind a merger. In the Aalto merger, the Rectors of the three merging universities were not immediately supportive of the merger idea. It was quite the opposite, in fact. After the initial merger suggestion, the Rector of HUT publicly raised his doubts about the rationale of a full merger. The Rector of HSE, in turn, was carefully ambiguous in his public statements. Maybe because of this, the three Rectors drifted away from the merger idea and instead suggested a joint research institute that would bring together talent from the three universities to carry out well-resourced, innovative interdisciplinary research. Meanwhile, representatives of the Finnish business community continued to actively promote the full merger idea in public. Eventually, political decision-makers dismissed the three Rectors' institute idea, and commissioned an inquiry to look into the possibilities of deeper collaboration between the three universities. The Inquiry Report was prepared with a fast schedule, and made public only three months later. The report supported the merger idea and layed out the rationale for conducting the merger. The Ministry of Education and Culture began preparations for a full-scale merger, and the business community continued their active promotion work. Soon after the Inquiry Report, the three Rectors came out in a body, and publicly expressed their shared vision to merge (HS 5 March 2007).

In recent years, university mergers have become increasingly common around the world (e.g. Kyvik 2004, Cai 2006, Bresler 2007, Harman 2000, see also Pinheiro et al. forthcoming). This is quite surprising as the reported success rates for mergers are low in general. Acknowledging the difficulty to evaluate the success of a merger (Meglio and Risberg 2011), it has been estimated that 40 – 80 per cent of mergers fail to satisfy the original intention behind the merger (Goldman 2012). One possible reason for low success rates is that resistance to change in higher education institutions and their members tends to be particularly strong (Eastman and Lang 2001). This may be due to dispersed power and diverged goals and agendas in universities (ibid.). Even in mergers that rest on mutual interest and shared vision, power shapes merger outcomes in profound ways; when the difficult questions of control, identity, mission, property, and prestige become engaged, equality tends to give way to dominance (Eastman and Lang 2001). Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006) argue that the success of a merger depends on how the employees perceive the way the process is handled, and emphasize the importance of communication and transparent change processes.

Indeed, mergers are complex social processes as they bring together different people in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity (Tienari and Vaara 2012). They are found to be time-consuming (Skodvin 1999), and costly and 'messy' (Rowley 1997). They are known to bring profound challenges for leadership and management (see Locke 2007), and they are connected to different problems, stress and fear, creating tensions throughout the organization (Cartwright et al. 2007). Merger related problems are found to have long-term effects on the academic development of the new institution (Skodvin 1999). This is a noteworthy point in the contemporary global market of higher education where individual institutions tend to pursue mergers with competitive and reputational reasons (Harman and Harman 2008).

2.5 Creating world-class universities

A fifth, and final development in changing higher education presented here, is the increased number of attempts to create 'world-class' universities. This specific development captures well the other developments described above. As research universities play a critical role in training professionals and researchers needed by the economy, and in producing new knowledge for the use of a national innovation system, many governments may feel pressure to build universities that operate at the cutting edge of intellectual and scientific development (Salmi 2009). Such universities aim to be globally competitive and leading (ibid.). The term 'world-class university' as such is not particularly new, but universities' increased competition for reputation can be seen to have triggered the use of the term (Deem et al. 2008). According to Salmi (2009, 3-4), the term 'world-class' has come to be used not only "for improving the quality of learning and teaching" in higher education but particularly "for developing the capacity to compete" in the global higher education market "through the acquisition, adaptation, and creation of advanced knowledge".

In recent years, the notion of a world-class university has become a concept much used by governments, universities, and other actors in society. According to Deem et al (2008, 84), the idea is firmly embedded in the higher education policies and strategies of different nations and supranationals such as the EU. The paradox of the notion is, however, as Altbach (2004) notes, that "everyone wants one, no one knows what it is, and no one knows how to get one". Altbach considers that "we are in an age of academic hype in which universities of different kinds in diverse countries claim this exalted status--often with little justification."

In the past, world-class universities, such as the Ivy League universities in the US and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the UK, grew to prominence as a result of incremental and long-lasting progress and with considerable autonomy in terms of governance, definition of mission and direction. The outside world conferred them as world-class on the basis of subjective qualification, mostly that of reputation. There were no direct and rigorous measure to show their excellence. Today, however, the role of the government in creating and nurturing the growth of world-class universities is crucial. National governments typically grant special privileges and/or funding to universities aspiring to be 'world-class'. For example, in China, the authorities have allowed Beijing University and Tsinghua University to select the best students from every province before any other university. (Salmi 2009) The government of the Russian Federation, in turn, has granted additional funding to two new merged institutions to enable them to recruit highly qualified staff and equip state-of-the-art information systems (Holdsworth 2008). In Finland, the merger of Aalto University greatly influenced the content and form of the new University Act, and accelerated its preparation and completion. The government of Finland also secured substantially larger relative funding to Aalto University compared to other universities in Finland. The Government also prepared to invest 2.5 euros for each euro of private donations only to Aalto University first, but later needed to extend this to concern other universities, too.

World-class universities are increasingly recognized in part for their superior outputs such as leading-edge research published in top scientific journals, and in the case of science-and-technology-oriented institutions, contribution to technical innovations (Salmi 2009). These characteristics are clearly emphasized in Aalto, as is examined and discussed in the research papers included in this study (Part II). The strong focus on international criteria for excellence has, however, raised concerns for the role of universities in their national (higher education) systems (Deem et al. 2008).

Taking stock of international cases, Salmi (2009) has identified three strategies that governments can use in their attempt to build world-class universities. First, governments can upgrade a small number of existing universities that have potential of excelling. Accordign to Salmi, this strategy has been followed by China, for example, since the early 1980s. Second, governments can establish new universities in which they invest heavily. Countries intending to follow this strategy include Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and India. A third, and the most important strategy to build a world-class university in terms of the current thesis, is to merge two or more existing universities and to transform it into world-class. This strategy has been used particularly in some Western countries such as France, Denmark, the UK, Russia (Salmi 2009) – and Finland. Salmi (2009) considers that the merger strategy provides an opportunity to change the leadership and to attract new staff, although existing staff may resist the change. He counts that the costs of the merger strategy are neutral compared to two other strategies, and that the merger strategy is more likely to work if the legal status of the merged institution is different from the existing ones (ibid.).

A challenge, in turn, is to create a shared academic culture (Salmi 2009). Many scholars have pointed to the challenge of bringing internal coherence to the merged institution after an actual merger (Bruno and Bowditch 1989, Martin and Samels 1994, Harman K. 2002, Norgård and Skodvin 2002). According to Harman and Harman (2003), this is particularly relevant when historically and symbolically non-complementary cultures are merged. They (2003, 37) note that, "even when institutions seem to be highly compatible and able to achieve profitable merger synergies, they often possess underlying cultural difference that can seriously impede integration". As cultural elements are deeply embedded in academic institutions, like in any organizations, they have a great influence on institutions' every-day activities (ibid.). A special cultural challenge occurs when divergent campus cultures are merged in order to create coherent educational communities (Harman K. 2002). Cultural dimensions in higher education mergers have been increasingly investigated within a social identity framework (e.g. Brown and Humphreys 2003, Kavanagh and Ashkanasy 2006, Van Vuuren et al. 2010). The social identity perspective depicts a merger as a confusing mix of continuation and change (Van Vuuren et al. 2010). Studies employing a social identity framework report that in a complex change situation, such as a merger, people's understandings of themselves and their organizations change (ibid.). Brown and Humphreys (2003) open up possibilities for more critical inquiry sensitive to organizational power relations, politics and discourse in their interpretative narrative study of a merger of two UK-based colleges. They found that while senior managers told a narrative of epic change, subordinate groups on both sides authored recognizably tragic narratives.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have set the scene for this research and reviewed the literature on contemporary changes in higher education. I have discussed ongoing changes at institutional and societal level, sector level, and organizational level. At the same time, I have reflected on Aalto University and aimed to provide an overview of the empirical focus of this research. The case of Aalto University is also described in each of the individual research papers forming the second part of this thesis (Part II).

Along the way, I have discussed the role of mergers in this changing setting. While acknowledging that a merger is not a new phenomenon in higher education, I have tried to show that it is clearly characteristic to our time. University mergers have become increasingly common during the recent decades (e.g. Kyvik 2004, Cai 2006, Harman G. 2000, Bresler 2007). While mergers have traditionally been used as tools to restructure higher education sectors (Harman and Harman 2008) and as a means of organizational change (Goldman 2012), today they are increasingly considered as a means of enhancing institutional reputation (Ursin et al. 2010, Harman and Harman 2008).

Merger studies with an explicit focus on reputation are rare, however. The few existing studies are merely interested in the transformation of the merging organizations' reputations into a new entity. Apart from theoretical considerations (e.g. Saxton 2004), there are few empirical studies on the issue. Davies and Chun (2004), for example, conducted three case studies to examine the consistencies in the reputations of the merging organizations with the new entity. Specifically, they studied how employees of the merging organizations perceive their original organizations and how they perceive the merged entity.

The findings of the studies suggest that the reputation of the merged organization cannot be considered as the average between the two merging organizations. Particularly the perceptions of those who had been employed after the actual merger differed significantly from the perceptions of those who had been working in the merging organizations before the actual merger. Davies and Chum consider that the difference is largely due to the great emotions that people experience during the merger process. Luoma-aho and Mäkikangas (2014), in turn, examined reputational change in two public sector mergers. They sought to find out how not only employees but also other stakeholders perceive public sector organizations and their functions before and after an organizational merger. Luoma-aho and Mäkikangas (2014) found only minor changes in the perceptions, meaning that organizations' reputations remained similar to what they were in both pre-merger and post-merger situations in both of the studied cases.

To my knowledge, however, there are no studies that directly address reputation in the context of a university merger. Having a research focus on the merger of Aalto University, this, then, is the empirical gap that the current thesis partly fills. Reputation as a theoretical concept will be discussed in the next chapter, together with empirical studies concerning university and business school reputation.

3. Studying Reputation

Research interest in reputation has increased significantly during the recent decades (Deephouse and Carter 2005, Barnett et al. 2006). While extant research has substantially focused on the benefits of reputation and on showing that reputation matters, our knowledge on how organizational reputations are formed and built is much more limited (Aula and Mantere 2013). Studying reputation and its construction is not a straightforward task, however. Reputation is a complex concept that is conceptualized in many different ways in the literature.

In reputation research, the 21st century has been described as "a formative phase of the research, characterized by attempts to bring theoretical coherence and rigor to the subject area" (Lange et al. 2011, 153). Lange et al. (2011) refer to the fragmented stage of reputation research which is pointed out by several researchers (e.g. Fombrun and van Riel 1997, Barnett et al. 2006, Mahon 2002). Reputation has been subjected to research in different disciplines and research areas (e.g. economics, strategy, sociology, marketing, accounting, and organizational studies), with different perspectives and emphasis in empirical research (Mahon 2010). What makes the field even more problematic is that researchers seem not be aware of (Barnett et al. 2006), or they make little or no reference to, research being conducted in other than their own disciplines (Mahon 2010). This has led to an extensive diversity of definitions, conceptualizations, and operationalizations of reputation, and eventually to the fact that it is not always clear what is meant by reputation (Mahon 2010).

In this chapter I aim to shed light on the concept of reputation. In the first section, I examine different perspectives on reputation and discuss how it is understood from these perspectives. At the same time, I review empirical reputation research particularly concerning higher education institutions. In the second section, in 3.2, I explore the concept of reputation as it is understood in this thesis. There, I discuss the dynamic nature of reputation and its construction, and the identity-based understanding of it. I also examine the discursive approach to study reputation, as this approach recognizes the dynamic nature of reputation, and the constructivist position of such an approach.

3.1 Conceptualizations of reputation

Four conceptualizations of reputation have been identified in extensive literature reviews: reputation as (intangible) *asset* (Barnett et al. 2006), reputation as *generalized favorability* (Lange et al. 2011), reputation as *being known for something* (Lange et al. 2011), and reputation as *awareness* (Barnett et al. 2006) or *being know*n (Lange et al. 2011). I discuss these different understandings of reputation together with the variety of perspectives from which reputation research has been conducted. For the purposes of this thesis, I have distinguished strategic, sociological, economic, and marketing perspectives. Other perspectives exist, too[8], but this categorization proved to be appropriate in terms of illustrating key characteristics of different conceptualizations of reputation in respect to reputation research concerning higher education institutions. It is important to note, however, that the perspectives discussed here are not rigid categories. Although they may differ in their ontological and epistemological foundations, they can borrow from and build on each other in some respects. In other words, they are partly differentiated and partly overlapping.

3.1.1 Strategic perspective: Reputation as an asset

In the strategic management literature, reputation has specifically gained ground in the research-based view (RBV) treating reputation as an *intangible asset* (Barnett et al. 2006). Reputation is then understood as something of value and significance to the organization (ibid.). The value of reputation, like the value of any intangible resources, is seen to stem from the fact that it is rare and socially complex, it is difficult to trade and imitate, and it significantly contributes to performance differences among (business) organizations (Rao 1994, 29). Barnett et al. (2006) note, however, that as reputation as an *asset* captures the value idea, it may be more consistent with the idea of the consequences of reputation rather than with defining reputation itself, and thus differs from other conceptualizations of reputation. As an asset, reputation becomes typically expressed as comparative and evaluative statements such as *good – bad*, *favorable – unfavorable*, and *high – low*.

In this strategic perspective, reputation is seen to be based on organizational actions in the field and the way how organizations interact with their stakeholders (Fombrun and van Riel 1997). The perspective emphasizes the stickiness of reputation and the fact that reputation accumulates during a long period of time. As it takes time for reputation to be formed in the minds of observers, it is considered to change slowly. In this perspective, there is often a managerial point of view, although it is acknowledged that reputation is externally perceived and that it cannot be directly controlled by organizations themselves (Fombrun and Shanley 1990). As Aula and Mantere (2013) note,

[8] Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) categorize perspectives into the economic, strategic, marketing, organizational, sociological, and accounting views. Mahon (2002) specifies strategy, social issues, marketing, corporate communications, and public relations. Rhee and Valdez (2009) distinguish economics, marketing, accounting, and management perspectives.

organizations can only partly influence their reputation, for example, by active communication with the organizations' interest groups. Reputation change is considered to be generated by the organization itself or driven by an external trigger (Kraatz and Love 2006). Then, reputation becomes understood as some sort of an entity that experiences change.

In empirical research, strategic scholars tend to focus on financial implications of reputation (Fombrun and Shanley 1990, Rindova et al. 2005, Deephouse 2000, Fombrun 1996, Roberts and Dowling 2002), competitive benefits of favorable reputations (Srivastava et al. 1997, Milgrom and Roberts 1982, Ferguson et al. 2000), and reputation risk (Aula 2010, Aula and Mantere 2003, Murray 2003, Suomi and Järvinen 2003). In research concerning specifically higher education institutions, the focus tends to be on the benefits and threats of reputation. Extant research has shown that reputation is important both for the institution itself and for its students, as the institution's reputation affects students' decisions in choosing a specific university (Soutar and Turner 2002, Brewer and Zhao 2010). As the actual quality of an educational program is difficult to evaluate in advance, and as the value of education can often be known only after graduation (Engwall 2007), it is easier for students – and other stakeholders – to make judgments about the educational program according to the organization's reputation (Engwall 2007, Jevons 2006). High-reputation institutions are thus more attractive to students than low-reputation institutions.

Institutional reputation has also been noticed to affect student satisfaction and loyalty to the institution (Alves and Raposo 2010, Brown and Mazzarol 2009), as well as students' retention decisions (Nguyen and LeBlanc 2001). Moreover, reputation has been noticed to affect the success of the students, because the "reputation of a university is based on its capacity to screen candidates and ideas, thus guaranteeing that the graduates and publications that it produces can be trusted" (Engwall 2007, 6). According to Hugstad (1983), the institution matters because education has a significant role in creating networks and increasing social mobility. The social interaction with fellow students and the opportunities for close contacts and life-long friendships may make a huge difference in later professional life (Engwall 2007).

In addition, high-reputation institutions have better opportunities to select best applicants than low-reputation institutions (Engwall 2007). Extant research has also shown that an institution's favorable reputation may attract high-quality faculty and other employees (Ressler and Abratt 2009), foster alumni support (Arpan et al. 2003), and help to build institutional collaboration (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001) and to acquire external funding (Schatz 1993, Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001). For example, in their study on the alliances of European business schools, Baden-Fuller and Ang (2001) noticed that schools that have the best reputations for business school research attract the most US collaborators. They also found support for the connection between good organizational reputations and access to requisite resources; most reputable business schools tend to charge highest fees and to receive some of the largest donations. In a similar vein, Schatz (1993) has earlier suggested that a good reputation increases an institution's confidence to raise fees in the following years.

The extant research on the risks of reputation (e.g. Scandizzo 2011, Suomi and Järvinen 2013, Suomi et al. 2014) in higher education seems not as extensive as studies on benefits of reputation. Suomi and Järvinen (2013) examined reputation risks in higher-education services. Specifically, they studied the perceptions of Master's degree students in two different universities. They found that the risks are both internal and external to the university, arising from the educational programme and its content in one of the universities, and from the surrounding society and environment in the other. They conclude that the most significant risk to a university's reputation is the gap between students' expectations and experiences of the educational programme, and the quality of teaching.

3.1.2 Sociological perspective: Reputation as 'generalized favorability'

Scholars, who study reputation from a sociological perspective tend to understand reputation as *generalized favorability,* consisting of an overall, generalized assessment of the organization's favorability, attractiveness or esteem (Lange et al. 2011). Citing Fischer and Reuber (2007), Lange et al. (2011, 159) suggest that this conceptualization of reputation entails that perceiver judgments about an organization are based on "aggregated multiple organizational attributes" rather than on "a given audience's expectations for specific organizational outcomes". Accordingly, Rindova et al. (2005, 1033) define reputation as "a global impression, which represents how a collective – a stakeholder group or multiple stakeholder groups – perceive a firm" – or any other organization. Reputation thus forms "as a result of information exchanges and social influence among various actors interacting in an organizational field" (Rindova et al. 2005, 1033-1034).

The understanding of reputation as *generalized favorability* builds on the sociological concept of organizational status (Fischer and Reuber 2007), and emphasizes the multiplicity of actors involved in the process of constructing reputation in interacting with each other within the field (Fombrun and van Riel 1997). Certain actors, such as institutional intermediaries and high-status actors are considered to have superior ability to access and disseminate information by virtue of their institutional roles or structural positions, and therefore their role is considered particularly important in an organization's reputation-building process (Rindova et al. 2005). The extent to which an organization is widely recognized in its organizational field, and the extent to which it stands out relative to other organizations in the same social identity category (e.g. universities), are seen to be important elements in constructing organizational reputation (ibid.).

In the sociological perspective, reputation is often conceptualized in relation to *status* (e.g. Rindova et al. 2006, Deephouse and Suchman 2007) and *legitimacy* (Deephouse & Carter 2005, Deephouse and Suchman 2007). While reputation reflects achievement and self-presentation, status reflects ascription and group mobility, and legitimacy reflects conformity to various social guidelines (Deephouse and Suchman 2007). The status of an actor is considered to be derived from an actor's affiliations within the networks and the position of its partners in status hierarchy (Podolny 1994, Rindova et al. 2006). The role of affiliations seems to be emphasized in some sociological models of reputation that suggest that the position in the status hierarchy helps to determine which organizations will develop reputations for quality and which will not (Benjamin and Podolny 1999). It is most likely that organizations with high-status affiliations can build a reputation as a quality actor, but organizations with low-status affiliation cannot. In other words, where an actor is located in the social structure of a market, and who the actor affiliates with, may strongly influence the perceived quality of the actor within the market. (Benjamin and Podolny 1999) Compared to reputation, status thus emphasizes the relationships of an organization with other actors in the field. As Rindova et al. (2006, 55) note, unlike reputation, status derives not so much from observations of, or direct experience with, an organization, but rather from observation of an organization's affiliations with network partners, and the centrality of the organization within its networks.

In turn, the relationship with reputation and legitimacy is central among organizational sociologists, who tend to see reputation as an "outcome of legitimating processes" (Rao 1994, 29) or "indicators of legitimacy", that is, "aggregate assessments" of an organization's performance "relative to expectations and norms in an institutional field" (Fombrun & van Riel 1997, 9). Legitimacy is a core concept in organizational institutionalism (Deephouse and Suchman 2007), prominent in the sociological study of organizations (Whetten and Mackey 2002). Institutional theory is used to examine how organizations gain legitimacy and cultural support within their institutional contexts to construct reputation (Walker 2010). In practice this means that in building reputation, organizations must consider the specific environmental context in order to make its reputation-building efforts useful. According to Walker (2010, 376), institutional theory allows the identification of the "substitutability of a product or service as an important variable" and its influence on organizational reputation to be predicted.

Broadly understood, Suchman (1995, 574) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Legitimacy thus focuses on the degree to which an organization's products, services, activities and structures are considered as socially acceptable and desirable because they comply with field norms and broader societal expectations (Rindova et al. 2006). Legitimacy affects the way how people act towards organizations and how people perceive them (Suchman 1995). It is more likely that legitimate organizations receive support and resources from their stakeholders, and are perceived more meaningful and trustworthy than illegitimate organizations. According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy can be depicted either as a set of constitutive beliefs or as an operational resource. The former emphasizes how beliefs become embedded in organizations while the latter stresses how legitimacy can be managed to achieve organizational goals. Deephouse & Carter (2005, 329) maintain that reputation and legitimacy have similar antecedents, social construction processes, and consequences. The difference between the two, they say, is that legitimacy emphasizes similarity, whereas reputation highlights comparisons and difference among organizations. King and Whetten (2008) suggest that reputation could be viewed as an extension of legitimacy. According to their 'social actor conceptualization', reputation and legitimacy are connected through an organization's adoption of particular social identities. Accordingly, reputations can be built either by differentiating social identities (being different) or by achieving ideal performance standards within a given social identity group (being better).

Bitektine (2011) explores the concepts of status, legitimacy and reputation as different forms of social judgment that stakeholders can render with respect to an organization. He argues that each form of judgment seeks to answer a different question concerning the evaluator. He distinguishes cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy, and argues that cognitive legitimacy judgment answers the question of "Does the organization belong to any familiar class or category?" while sociopolitical legitimacy judgment answers the question of "Does the organization have the right to exist?", and "Is the organization beneficial or hazardous to me, to my social group, or to the society in which I live?". Status judgment answers the question of "Where does the organization fit in the ranked order of similar organizations?", and reputation judgment of "How will the organization perform/behave in the future relative to other organizations in the set?" (p. 173).

In empirical studies, a sociological perspective tends to be a dominating approach to reputation when the research focus is on universities and business schools, and specifically on their reputation construction. While higher education institutions have more traditionally been examined through the concepts of status and legitimacy, reputation has more recently become one of the key concepts, perhaps because of the ongoing changes in higher education and increased competition in the field. Scholars who understand reputation as *generalized favorability* tend to focus on either organizational attributes generating reputation or on comparative rankings (Fischer and Reuber 2007). This seems particularly the case in reputation research that concerns higher education institutions. Therefore, these two research areas are discussed separately in their own sub-sections in the following.

Studying organizational attributes generating reputation

The study of organizational attributes generating university and business school reputation is an essential theme in reputation research concerning higher education institutions. In such studies, reputation becomes understood as something that is formed on the basis of a set of organizational attributes that are assumed to enhance reputation. Vidaver-Cohen (2007), for example, suggests that the attributes generating business school reputation are organizational performance, product, service, leadership, governance, workplace, citizenship, and innovation. By assessing the attributes, we get the *generalized favorability* (Lange et al. 2011) of an institution, that is, reputation.

Studies attempting to identify reputational attributes have generated a number of different frameworks and models to define university or business school reputation. Arpan et al (2003), for example, built on the work of Kazoleas et al. (2001) and developed a scale to measure university reputation. In their study, Arpan et al. identified three attributes that affect reputation, and each attribute consists of a different amount of sub-attributes: academic (nine features), athletic/social life (six features) and news media coverage (two features). Rindova et al. (2005), in turn, studied reputational attributes in the context of U.S. business schools. In their study, Rindova et al. combined two different perspectives to reputation: the sociological and the economic perspectives. They aimed to provide greater conceptual clarity about what reputation is, how it is built, and how it influences organizational economic outcomes. Rindova et al. (2005) came to suggest a reputation model that includes both the *perceived quality* dimension emphasized in the economic perspective and the *prominence* dimension emphasized in sociological perspective. According to their mode, business school reputation is built on *perceived quality* measured by GMAT, and *prominence* measured by the features of media rankings, faculty publications and faculty degree prestige. In her conceptual framework for business school reputation research, Vidaver-Cohen (2007) builds on existing reputation models, attempting to develop a more advanced model of structuring reputation. She combines organizational quality dimensions (eight features) with external (institutional forces, third party judgments) and internal (signaling strategies) moderators, as well as with observer (stakeholder expectations) mediators in constituting the structure of reputation (four features).

The idea of these models is to provide a deeper understanding of the content of reputation. In addition, they provide a tool for organizations to manage, develop and change their reputation. These models and their different variations are also used in university and/or business school league tables (to be discussed next).

Studying university and business school rankings

For comparative rankings (Fischer and Reuber 2007), Shrum and Wuthnow (1988, 885) use the term *reputational status* representing "subjective evaluations of relative standing or desirability". Rao (1994, 30) uses the term *certification contests,* which create status hierarchies and build reputations for organizations. The idea is that success in the contests legitimates organizations and validates their reputation "because of the taken for granted axiom that winners are 'better' than losers and the belief that contests embody the idea of rational and impartial testing" (Rao 1994, 43). Despite the fact that rankings may cause artificial distinctions between corresponding organizations, they enable organizations to score favorably in relation to competitors (ibid.).

The idea in these rankings is to measure the 'goodness' of organizations such as universities or business schools with certain predetermined criteria, and to rank the institutions in accordance. There is a multitude of different rankings using divergent variables. As Vidaver-Cohen (2007,282) notes, "hundreds of measures now exist to rank schools in countries around the globe – providing evaluations of overall quality and identifying areas of unique programmatic competence (see UNESCO-CEPES, 2004)". Doing well in rankings can also be seen as a means to build organizational reputation.

Nevertheless, rankings have, and have had, a great importance for and impact on, higher education institutions. According to Fombrun (1996), rankings have brought the idea of reputation management into academic institutions and taken business schools, in particular, into a new era, characterized by "more balanced attention to both research and teaching; growing dependence on external fund-raising and image management; and more intense competition among schools for status and reputation" (p.242). Particular significance has been given to the ranking of business schools' MBA programs published in *BusinessWeek* in 1988 (e.g. Fombrun 1996, Peters 2007, Wedlin 2006). As Fombrun (1996) explains, this ranking appeared at the time of a shrinking pool of applicants for MBA training in the US. Not only the timing of the ranking was crucial, it was also the first time anyone asked the schools' *clients* what they thought of their educational experience. The results, as Fombrun (1996, 241) states, "took everyone by surprise". As the results were reported around the world, the influence of the ranking was significant. Soon after, more or less all business schools were running similar kinds of strategic programs designed to build their reputations. (ibid.)

BusinessWeek began a trend in which rankings started to spread outside the academic setting, and move into general newspapers and business magazines (Wedlin 2006). A competing magazine, *U.S. News and World Report,* launched a rival ranking that sought to balance the perceptions of both academics and practitioners (Fombrun 1996). As for *Financial Times*, it established an international MBA ranking in 1997 as a counterargument for *BusinessWeek*'s and *U.S. News and World Report's* US-based rankings (Peters 2007). Today, there is a wide variety of rankings which are typically undertaken on the initiative of media companies, often in collaboration with educational institutions (Engwall 2007).

The importance of the rankings has grown significantly as the demand for evaluation of academic institutions has increased and their modes of governance have become more market-based (Engwall 2007). Global rankings are seen as an important quality assessment of institutions (Wedlin 2006), and a "hegemonic measure of competitiveness" within the education industry (Corley and Gioia 2000, 320). It has been argued that rankings and open competition have forced business schools to focus and to think more strategically (Gioia and Corley 2002). Success in the rankings yields important benefits and attracts sponsors and other stakeholders.

Despite their popularity, rankings have been subjected to strong scholarly criticism. One line of criticism concerns the mechanism of how rankings function. Several studies have shown considerable stability in the lists and pointed to the fact that rankings use criteria that favour universities already on and/or ranked high on the list at the expense of those that are not listed and/or are falling down on the list (Corley and Gioia 2000, Policano 2007, Morgeson and Nahrgang 2008). According to Peters (2007), this "snow-ball effect" (Corley and Gioia 2000, 327) stems from the fact that many of the used criteria in the rankings are resource dependent; schools moving up on the list get increased resources, and continue moving up in the future, but the schools moving down on the list may lose (additional) resources, and keep falling. Moving down on the list has also proved to be a threat to an organization's institutional identity (Elsbach and Kramer 1996).

Another line of criticism concerns the methodology used in the rankings. The statistical validity and the weightings given (Peters 2007) may cause biased representations of the schools' actual quality (Gioia and Corley 2002). In each ranking only selected factors are measured and many important criteria for a schools' success are left out. As Gioia and Corley (2002) point out, sometimes it is not even clear what is beeing measured; the list is presented as a 'business school ranking', but in practice it is the school's MBA-program that has been assessed. Cornelissen and Thorpe (2002) add that an institution's reputation is often measured only in one or two interest groups, leaving many relevent groups out. Based on his study of law school rankings, Stake (1998) has argued that rankings make the schools look more different in quality than they actually are, and developed a web-based 'game'[9] to demonstrate how a change in the criteria and their weights affects the ranking order (Gioia and Corley 2002).

The third, and the final line of criticism concerns the "rankings game" (Corley and Gioia 2000). An increasing number of business schools and universities are eagerly mastering their quality index. As a consequence, university resources are allocated according to the requirements of the list, not necessarely according to their main academic function (Gioia and Corley 2002; Policano 2005, Morgeson & Nahrgang 2008). Moreover, control over the criteria is often in the hands of the publishers, and thus academic institutions' activities and resource allocation are for the most part being steered from outside (Corley and Gioia 2000). Also, because the ranking criteria differ from list to list, schools and universities may react inconsistently in their attempts to master the game. (ibid.)

Yet despite these fundamental methodological and other problems, rankings seem to continue to be used in efforts to build theory about how academic institutions' reputations are formed (Vidaver-Cohen 2007). Rankings have become an important quality-index that is carefully monitored by the institution's interest groups (Corley and Gioia 2000). However, the importance of one single ranking has diminished because of the large number of different kinds of rankings (Policano 2007), which all can bring very different results (Bradshaw 2007). For example, *the Helsinki School of Economics* (today Aalto University School of Business) was ranked in 18th place in the Financial Times *European* Business Schools ranking, and in 9th place in the *global* Eduniversal ranking in 2009. Researchers have called for developing more advanced systems to study reputation (Morgeson and Nahrgang 2008) and even suggested abandoning rankings altogether (Policano 2007).

9http://monoborg.law.indiana.edu/LawRank/index.html. Accessed 20 June, 2013

3.1.3 Economic perspective: Reputation as 'being known for something'

A conceptualization of reputation as *being known for something* implies that the organization has a particular attribute of interest or value to the perceiver (Lange et al. 2011). Then, according to Fischer and Reuber (2007, 57), "an organization's reputation constitutes an assessment of a particular attribute or characteristic: An organization has a reputation *for* something, such as having high quality products (e.g. Milgrom & Roberts, 1986) or being an aggressive price predator (Smith et al. 1992)". In this economic perspective to reputation, an organizations' ability to produce quality products and/or services is considered a specifically important organizational element (Milgrom and Roberst 1986, Shapiro 1983). The economic perspective emphasizes the external point of view and considers that reputation is perceptions and interpretations that external observers hold about an organization (Fombrun and Van Riel 1997, Clark and Montgomery 1998). These perceptions are based on an organization's typical and repeated actions that indicate a particular character of an organization (Clark and Montgomery 1998).

In game-theory in economics, reputations are considered functional, generating perceptions among employees, students, sponsors, alumni and other stakeholders about what the organization is, what it does and what it stands for (Fombrun and Van Riel 1997). Game-theorists describe reputation as a character trait that functions like a clue that helps other actors to predict an organization's future behavior (Weigelt and Camerer 1988, Clark & Montgomery 1998). Game-theorists distinguish organizational 'true types' and 'strategically built types', and the type that determines reputation can, but not necessarily, reflect the 'true' nature of the organization (Weigelt and Camerer 1988).

In signaling theory in economics, in turn, a signaling function of reputation is emphasized (Shapiro 1983). Reputation is then considered as a signal that sends a certain message to the market. Reputation as an information signal can be strategically used in attempting to affect the perceptions held about an organization and, for example, to increase the reliability of an organization (Fombun and van Riel 1997) and/or to decrease uncertainty arising from information asymmetry (Greenwood et al. 2005). For example, if the quality of an organization cannot directly be observed or there is uncertainty about organization's ability to provide quality products or services, an organization can use e.g. ties with high-quality actors as a signal of its quality (Benjamin and Podolny 1999). This is where the economic perspective and the sociological perspective significantly overlap.

The signaling function is particularly important for new organizations in their attempts to build reputation. As new organizations often lack the relevant performance record (Rindova et al. 2007), they can 'borrow reputations' from established actors (Beatty and Ritter 1986) or 'generate reputation by association' (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001, Lerpold 2003). Accordign to Rindova et al. (2007), organizations can build reputation by investing in a variety of relevant signals (e.g. Petkova et al. 2008) such as levels of financial performance (Roberts and Dowling 2002), positive media publicity (Rindova et al. 2007) and belonging to a high-status group or network (Stuart et al. 1999, Benjamin and Podolny 1999, Ferguson et al. 2000). In their study of the interorganizational networks of young companies, Stuart et al (1999) found that young start-up firms which face great uncertainty about their quality, typically try to associate with well-known venture capitalists and investment banks to endorse themselves.

Signaling the function of reputation is essential also to higher education institutions whose many organizational features are hidden or otherwise difficult to be observed (Engwall 2007). In their study of business school alliances, Baden-Fuller and Ang (2001), for example, found that European business schools aimed to build alliances with reputable American universities in order to signal to the (student) market about their educational and research excellence. Baden-Fuller and Ang (2001) identified three strategies that European business schools used in building reputation in association: First, some schools recruited heavily from the major US doctoral programmes. These recruitment efforts were targeted to top quality academics who would publish, and who often had developed research collaboration with their supervisors or colleagues. The recruits were to bring their network contacts to their new university, and thus to assist internationalization of their home universities. Second, some European universities provided funding to local PhD students to go to the US schools to learn the trade and then haul them back again. Although the costs and time lags were considerable, the returning academics brought with them close connections to US researchers, which often resulted in joint articles. And third, specifically in those European countries where the pay level was low, professors possibly held joint appointments in the US, allowing them to exploit personal connections. (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001)

The categorization of universities and business schools into academic and practitioner type institutions can be seen to be built on the conceptualization of reputation as *being known for something* (Lange et al. 2011). For example, Fombrun (1996) has studied American business schools, and positions them on the continuum based on their educational programme. At one end of the continuum are schools that lean more heavily towards a *scholastic model,* and at the other end are schools leaning towards a *practitioner model*. According to Fombrun, the reputation of schools favoring the scholastic model is based on the academic content of their programs and an organizational culture that is dominated by a publish-or-perish mind-set. These schools hire research-oriented faculty whose main interest is creating knowledge rather than imparting it. Fombrun noticed that organizational reputation tends to rest on very few scholars who attract the majority of the attention and then manage to achieve celebrity position. He notes that, as this kind of extraordinary scholarly success is rare, universities and business schools aim to build reputations by investing junior faculty and hoping that one day they will become "stars", or by recruiting "superstars" from other schools. In turn, business schools leaning towards the practitioner model, tend to hire faculty who have pragmatic interests in creating usable knowledge for students, and to build strong ties with the business sector. These schools may, however, suffer from a lower standing in the academic community. Fombrun (1996, 244-245) concludes that a school's relative position on the educational continuum defines the type of faculty that is hired, orientation (international – local) of the school, organizational structure (departmental – program-based), culture (research intensive – teaching intensive) and curriculum (knowledge-based – case-based). They, in turn, come to determine the principle character traits of the school that faculty and students come to experience, and eventually to shape the reputation that schools develop with their stakeholders.

These findings get partial support in the more recent study of Suomi et al. (2014) on reputation management in higher education. Having a multidisciplinary Masters' Program as a case study, Suomi et al. (2014) identify four dilemmas that challenge reputation management in a university: whether to maintain one's own organizational culture or to change it by developing mutuality; whether to excel as a teacher or as a researcher; whether to strengthen the status of the regional university or to stay under the umbrella of the parent university; and whether to promote regional development or to get on an international track. The identified dilemmas suggest different character traits for the university, building different kinds of reputations. The findings of the study also provide insight for recognizing areas of possible reputation risks in universities.

3.1.4 Marketing perspective: Reputation as 'being known'

The forth conceptualization of reputation identified in the literature is reputation as *being known* (Lange et al. 2011). *Being known* can be understood as what Barnett et al. (2006) call *awareness*, referring to an organization being generally known without any judgmental reference. According to Lange et al. (2011) *being known* refers simply to the fact that an organization is well known; it is either generalized awareness or visibility of an organization or the prominence of an organization in the collective perception. When reputation is seen to reside in the level of familiarity with or knowledge of the organization, and not to include judgment or evaluation of any kind, it can well be built by organizational marketing and branding (Lange et al. 2011).

In this so called marketing perspective (Fombrun and van Riel 1997, Mahon 2010, Rhee and Valdez 2009), the understanding of reputation builds on a strategic view, and is extended to include the branding of products and services (Mahon 2010). Reputation is considered as a valuable asset – "goodwill" – referring to brand names, corporate logos or customer loyalty (Herbig and Milewicz 1995, 24). In the marketing perspective, *reputation* is often labeled as *brand image* referring to the perceptions that consumers have about an organization's products or services (Fombrun and van Riel 1997, 7). Keller (1993, 3) defines brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory", where brand refers to "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler 1991, 442). Branding, in turn, can be considered as a "systematic effort to develop and present the organization as one unified brand (Christensen et al. 2008, 64). Strong university brands such as Harvard, MIT, Columbia, Oxford and Cambridge are considered to promote their reputations as brand names (Curtis et al. 2009).

As branding has become increasingly common in the contemporary field of higher education, research on university and business school branding has gathered momentum and attracted researchers' attention. What is characteristic to the extant research on university branding is that it tends to focus on the external brand image (reputation) of an institution within a single stakeholder or 'customer' group such as students or prospective students, emphasizing the role of their perceptions in defining and assessing the brand (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, Melewar and Akel 2005, Yang et al. 2008). Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007), for example, view a university brand as the name through which the study programs and other educational service packages of the university are marketed to prospective students. In their study of university-student relationships, Yang et al. (2008) find that students' perceptions of the quality of educational as well as auxiliary service programs constitute key components of a university's reputation and image. Holmberg and Strannegård (2015), in turn, explore how business school students use the school's brand for self-branding. Holmberg and Strannegård show how the school can be a focal point for students' self-branding and how the branding vocabulary used at the school is adopted by students.

According to Schultz (2005), the branding literature in general is dominated by models and frameworks for organizational branding execution. Such tools have also been developed for effective branding in universities, too (e.g. Curtis et al. 2009, Naudé and Ivy 1999). Other studies on university branding address issues such as the communication of university brands (Belanger et al. 2002), brand positioning (Gray et al. 2003), branding policies such as visual elements and brand-architecture (Baker and Balmer 1997, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007), and brand identities (de Chernatony 1999, Lowrie 2007). Some studies examine and discuss critical factors in building and developing successful university brands (Chapleo 2005, 2010), and different understandings of branding in universities (Chapleo 2004). More recently, the use of visual self-representations (Delmestri et al. 2015) and universities' mission statements (Kosmützky and Krücken 2015) have been examined as a means of building university brands.

While the dominating view in extant studies is to consider branding as a linear, a-problematic and inside-out managed process, some recent studies have drawn attention to the complexity of university branding. In their study of a Norwegian university, Waeraas and Solbakk (2009), for example, sought to define the essential characteristics of a university from a traditional brand perspective, but had to conclude that "a university may be too complex to be encapsulated by one brand or identity definition" and that it does "not speak with a single voice" (Waeraas and Solbakk 2009, p. 449). Drawing upon critical discourse analysis, Lowrie (2007), in turn, explored the emergence of brand identity and discovered that discourses of policy and university marketing activity give rise to an undecidable and antagonistic university identity. As opposed to scholars who employ traditional views of managing brand identity, the conceptualization of brand identity "escapes any singular definition and is beyond limitation to or alignment with any positive and particular notion of identity" (p. 997). Such findings have raised questions about the branding of higher education institutions altogether. It has been argued that brands of higher education institutions are inherently too complex for conventional brand management techniques to be appropriate (Maringe 2005, Jevons 2006). According to Chapleo (2010, 172), Bunzel (2007, 153) questions the effect of university branding all together by claiming that "there is little evidence to show that a university branding programme really creates a change in perception or ranking of a university".

The views on branding in higher education fall broadly into two schools of thought (see e.g. Drori et al. 2013, Wæraas and Solbakk 2009). Some scholars consider branding as a tool to create differentiation from similar others (Aaker 2004), while others see branding as a myth or a symbol to demonstrate conformity to their institutional environments (Meyer and Rowan 1977). For universities, brand-based differentiation allows universities "to distinguish themselves by declaring their distinction and proclaiming their reputation", and thus to enhance university recognition important in competition (Drori et al. 2013, 142). In the other view, in turn, it is more important to be similar to others than to differentiate and to exploit unique features (Wæraas and Solbakk 2009). Citing Belanger et al. (2002), Wæraas and Solbakk (2009, 453) note that there is a clear tendency for universities to present themselves as "the best, "world-class" and "leading".

In this thesis, branding is considered as a means to build reputation. Acknowledging that branding is typically understood as an attempt to present the university in a single expression as if the organization were one "body" (Christensen et al. 2008), this thesis takes the notion that "a university may be too complex to be encapsulated by one brand or identity definition" (Waeraas and Solbakk 2009) seriously. In the following, I present the conceptualization of reputation as a dynamic process which allows us to treat not only reputation construction but also brand building as an evolving process, and to capture the polyphony and heterogeneity of a university brand**.**

Table 2: Summary of the key characteristics of strategic, sosiological, economic and marketing perspectives to reputation.

	Unders-tanding of reputation	*Typical focus in empirical research*	*Reputation construction process*	*Specific remarks*
Strategic perspective	An asset	Financial implications of reputation; benefits of a favorable reputation; reputation risk; reputation change.	Applies a variety of different unders-tandings.	Considers reputation as an 'entity' that can experience changes.
Sociological perspective	Generalized favorability	Organizational attributes that generate reputation; comparative rankings.	General evaluation of attributes that are seen to drive reputation; results in information exchanges and social influence.	Considers reputation as an outcome of the construction process, often expressed with a single figure.
Economic perspective	A special characteristic	Signals indicating an organization's reputation.	Reputation is built through an organization's typical and repeated actions.	Reputation crystallizes in a particular characteristic of an organization; emphasizes quality.
Marketing perspective	Awareness; (brand image)	Models for branding execution.	A linear and inside-out managed process.	Attempts to present an organization with a single phrase.

3.2 Understanding reputation as a dynamic process

In this thesis, reputation is understood as a dynamic, constantly evolving process (Coupland and Brown 2004, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010, Aula and Mantere 2013) in which the organization is constituted and reconstituted, and in which the organization itself as well as its all relevant stakeholders take part. The (re)construction falls upon those organizational features that the organization and its stakeholder groups consider essential.

This understanding is based on organizational identity, which organizational scholars consider to guide organizational actions (Fombrun and van Riel 1997).

The extant research has shown that shared values and a strong sense of identity guide the way for how issues are interpreted in an organizaiton, and what kinds of actions are taken on them (e.g. Meyer 1982, Dutton and Dukerich 1991). Identity – and image – are often focal points in organizational research, while reputation is being examined mostly in relation to them, and with the aim of making sense of the conceptual framework. Studies on identity and image can, however, inform us particularly about the dynamic nature of reputation.

Table 3: The concepts of identity, image and reputation (adapted from Brown et al. 2006 and Gioia et al. 2000).

Label	*Definition*
Organizational identity	Who are we as an organization?
	Mental associations about the organization held by organizational members.
	(Corporate identity = Consistent and targeted representations of the organization emphasized through the management of corporate symbols and logos; strategically planned and operationally applied internal self-representation.) [10]
Projected image	What does the organization want external others to think about the organization?
	Mental associations about the organization to be communicated to stakeholders (i.e. by branding); might or might not represent ostensible reality; singular image of the organization
Desired future image	What does the organization want others to think about the organization in the future?
	Visionary perception the organization would like external others and internal members to have of the organization sometime in the future
Construed external image	What does the organization believe others think of the organization?
	Mental associations that organization members believe others outside the organization hold about the organization.
Reputation	What do stakeholders think of the organization?
	Mental associations about the organization held by others outside the organization.

Organizational *identity* refers to those features of an organization that in the eyes of its members are *central*, *enduring*, and *distinctive* (CED) (Albert and Whetten 1985). It consists of the myriad of ways that organizational members perceive, feel, and think of themselves as an organization, and is typically expressed in informal statements about 'who we are' as an organization (Hatch and Schultz 2009). Since the early conceptualization of CED, it has been

10 See Hatch and Schultz (2009, 17-19) for a detailed description of the differences between corporate identity and organizational identity.

reiterated and revised in organizational literature (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich 1991, Dutton et al. 1994). For the purposes of this thesis, most important are the studies that have particularly pointed to the fluid nature of identity (e.g. Corley and Gioia 2004, Hatch and Schultz 2004, Gioia et al. 2000, Dutton and Dukerich 1991, Gioia and Thomas 1996, Elsbach and Kramer 1996). Gioia et al. (2000) argue that identity cannot be merely static in a sense that *enduring* implies, and suggest treating it as something that “shifts in its interpretation and meaning while retaining labels for core beliefs and values that extend over time and context” (p. 65). In a similar vein as people can have different identities for different roles and situations, organizational identity can vary with the context for which it is expressed (Gioia et al. 2000).

Organizational *image*, in turn, has been subject of many different conceptualizations and definitional debates (Gioia et al. 2000). In the purpose of defining reputation, *image* is traditionally used to refer to the way how organizational members believe outside constituents perceive the organization (Dutton and Dukerich 1991). This definition of image has later been relabeled as *construed external image* (Dutton et al 1994, Gioia et al. 2000) in order to distinguish it from *projected image* that emphasizes an organization’s (often top management’s) concern with communicating a desired image of an organization, representing essential features of organizational identity (Gioia et al. 2000). Projected image can also take the form of a projection of a *desired future image* (Gioia and Thomas 1996). Instead of communicating what the organization *is* at the moment, desired future image attempts to capture what the organization *wants to be* in the future. As the projected future image is often targeted to both organizational members and outside constituents, it may encompass attempts to manage impressions of an organization (Gioia et al. 2000). The study of Gioia and Thomas (1996) on the strategic change in academia shows that a projection of a future image can be consciously used as a means of changing the current organizational identity.

Several writers have pointed to the dynamic relationship between identity and image, arguing that changes in image are likely to affect changes in organizational identity (Gioia et al. 2000) and that the deterioration of image can be an important trigger for organizational action (Dutton and Dukerich 1991). A case study on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (Dutton and Dukerich 1991), for example, shows how disparity between identity and image can motivate an organization to take up actions that influence identity. According to Gioia et al. (2013), the study of Dutton and Dukerich (1991) demonstrates how Port Authority’s self-image as a high-class organization played an important role in the way how the organization dealt with the issue of homelessness, which they had previously considered as outside of its operations. In a similar vein, the study of Howard-Grenville et al. (2013) on a community’s identity resurrection draws our attention to the deterioration of reputation as a trigger to acknowledge an identity change. The study shows that the reputation of a city that used to be known as ‘Track Town U.S.A’ was first questioned in the local newspaper. This unwanted change in the community’s reputation served as a trigger to start recreating the community's identity as a Track Town.

The fluid nature of identity and image has also contributed to the study of branding that is also examined in the field of organizational research, less frequently however, in relation to reputation. Schultz (2005) applies the idea of a dynamic relationship between organization identity and image to brand identity, and argues that in that way brand becomes understood in terms of the relations between internal and external perceptions of an organization. According to Schultz (2005), the findings of the potential discrepancies between organizational image and identity discussed above have had direct implications for the practical execution of branding. As the perception held by organizational members concerning the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics (Albert and Whetten 1985) of their brand may not be shared by external constituents, branding is typically used in attempts to close this gap (Schultz 2005). Similarly, branding can be used to close the gap between the perceptions about the organization held by the members and the management of the organization.

In organizational research, identity and image are essentially treated as an internal conception, that is, perceptions held or communicated by internal organizational members (Gioia et al. 2000). An external view, focusing on perceptions held by outsiders, is expressed by the concept of *reputation* (Gioia et al 2000, 66). This distinction between internal and external stakeholders, however, may not be meaningful in contemporary changing higher education, where it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish who are internal and who are external to a specific organization (Kornberger 2010). Therefore, I would rather follow Fombrun's (1996) definition that reputation consists of both internal and external perceptions. As Coupland and Brown (2004) note, the notion of the boundaries of an organization have been problematized not only in organizational theory (e.g. Scott and Lane 2002) but also in communication studies (e.g. Cheney and Christensen 2001). Citing Cheney and Vibbert (1987, 176), Coupland and Brown (2004, 1341) argue that "the boundaries of organizations are 'managed symbolically' through 'the creative and evocative power of language' by members of organizations seeking to influence and to construct their external audiences". Thus, all the stakeholders of an organization, both internal and external, can be seen to be participating in the process of reputation construction.

So, an identity-based understanding of reputation refers to the organization-specific referents on which reputation rests. Compared to the way how reputation tends to be understood from e.g. the sociological perspective, there is a significant difference. In large-scale reputation studies such as rankings, organizational referents are considered universal, and they are expected to be shared by the particular social identity category, e.g. universities (Whetten and Mackey 2002). This also concerns the different frameworks and models that aim to define university and business school reputation, both discussed earlier in this chapter. The emphasis is on similarity and the outcome of the reputation construction process is a reputation of some kind. In turn, in the identity-based understanding of reputation, organizational referents are the features that the organizational members and its stakeholdres deem central and distinctive. Here, importantly, the emphasis is on organizational uniqueness. In the identity-based understanding of reputation, referents are also considered ‘open’ in the sense that they can vary across different organizations and times. As the study of Elsback and Kramer (1996) shows, many of business school characteristics that are implied to be important in specific rankings are different from those that the schools themselves consider focal and distinctive.

An emerging, albeit gradually developing strand of literature argues for understanding reputation as an evolving and developing process (Coupland and Brown 2004, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010, Aula and Mantere 2013). Reputation is then considered as continuously (re)constructed through text and talk in dialogical processes. As Coupland and Brown (2004, 1341) note, reputations are “not singular or unitary ‘things’ that can be simply observed and easily measured. Rather, they are emergent aspect of an organization-centered discourse”.

Reputation, constructed in the discursive and narrative practices, has been examined in various studies (e.g. Lawrence 1998, Vendelø 1998, Middleton 2009). Middleton (2009) and Vendelø (1998) use a narrative approach to investigate reputation in their studies. Middleton (2009) studied reputation management and employed Boje’s (2001) strategy of deconstruction to uncover the multiple meanings and relationships that were embodied in the studied texts. He argues that the use of narrative studies enables us to derive new understandings of reputation management – in his case, how the Salvation Army was able to successfully manage their reputation despite the very serious allegations against them. In his study, Vendelø (1998) used a narrative approach to study reputation-building in the software industry. He found that the companies produced narratives about their future performance to convince customers of their value and to legitimize themselves as competent actors in the field. Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja (2010), in turn, examine discursively constructed meanings for reputation among small business owner-managers, and identified different representations of reputation.

A discursive approach to reputation builds on social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1966), which can be thought of as a theoretical orientation to knowledge and social life (Burr 2003). Social constructionism has offered an alternative approach to the positivistic research paradigm that has been dominant in reputation related studies in management and organizational research (Siltaoja 2010). According to social constructionism, our sense of the real and knowledge about the world is constructed in social interaction and everyday practices (Burr 2003). In this construction process, the role of language is important. Language not only describes the existing world but constructs social reality through concepts, categories, and discourses that are not pre-existing objective facts but shared understandings among people (Gergen 2009). Social constructionist research is focused on critically examining how the objects of our knowledge, e.g. a university, are given an objectified reality through language and meanings.

If we accept that organizations are linguistic social constructions, and an organization an emergent phenomenon (Berger and Luckmann 1966), then organizational reputation is best regarded as continually (re)constructed in dialogical processes (Coupland and Brown 2004, Aula and Mantere 2013). As Coupland and Brown (2004, 1328) note, "there is no essential identity, image, or reputation that can be surfaced, but many accounts of them, which variously compete, resist, undermine and borrow from each other". Therefore, they say, the linguistic construction of organizational members and stakeholders are valuable resources for a type of reputation research that embraces dynamism and pluralism. The discursive approach to reputation allows us to go beyond studying achieved reputation *per se,* and to focus on the dynamic process of reputation construction. The discursive approach also enables us to address the issue of power, which has largely been ignored in the extant reputation research.

Social constructionism considers that knowledge is historically and culturally specific, and therefore understandings of the world change across spatial and temporal contexts. Meanings carried by language are thus always open and contestable. This notion has a significant implication for our understanding of social life and social change. (Burr 2003) In reputation studies, where organizational reputation is understood as a product of language and social interaction, this means that reputation will be constantly changing depending on the context – i.e. with whom the organization is interacting, in what situation, when, and for what purposes. The constructive force of language in social interaction ensures a fragmented, shifting and temporary reputation for all organizations. Set against these theoretical considerations, this thesis examines *how university reputation is constructed by different social actors in the context of a university merger.*

4. Methodological choices

This thesis adopts an *interpretative approach,* which is concerned with contextualized description, understandings and interpretation of the meanings given to social reality (Kakkuri-Knuuttila and Heinlahti 2006). Through a thick description (Stake 1995), this thesis aspires to provide plausible interpretation of the social phenomenon at hand, that is, how organizational reputation is constructed in time. This is a longitudinal research of a single case, the merger of Aalto University. The examined period is 2005 – 2014.

Furthermore, the present thesis is *social constructionist,* an approach discussed in the previous chapter. Social constructionism may be the dominant form of current interpretive research today (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). According to Chia (2000), social constructionism takes a critical stance towards taken-for-granted ways of understanding the social world and is against the idea that social phenomena, such as organizational reputation, have a straightforward existence independent of our discursively constructed understandings (see Hämäläinen 2007, 48). As Philips and Hardy (2002) note, the critical stance does not only include a concern for the processes of social construction that underlie the phenomenon of interest, but also typically focuses more explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround discursive processes.

In this thesis, the critical stance does not mean condemning, for example, the decisions taken by actors involved with establishing Aalto University. Instead, the critical stance implies a special emphasis on power relations, tensions, and struggles in constructing different understandings of the studied phenomenon, and on alternative discourses that provide very different means for making sense of and giving sense to a studied phenomenon. By challenging taken-for-granted knowledge (Burr 2003), a critical stance can open up a possibility to build dialogue on alternatives (Gergen 2009) and help actors to become conscious of the causes and consequences of their own discourses (Fairclough 2001).

According to Burr (2003, 150), social constructionism is a “loose collection of theoretical perspectives”. In this thesis, a discourse analytical approach is used.

4.1 Discourse analytical approach

A discourse analytical approach in research positions language and text to the forefront. Discursive studies explore constructed worlds (Gergen 2009), focusing on how and why the social world comes to have the meaning(s) that it does (Phillips and Hardy 2002). Discourses can not be studied as such, however, but through the texts in which discourses emerge. The texts can be written, spoken or visual. Rather than relying on large samples, measurement, and statistics, discursive researchers draw from richly textured examples which always require interpretation – what the data mean (Gergen 2009). The goal of discursive studies is not to predict or control, but to show, for example, how one discourse is dominating our understanding of a social reality, and how it excludes other alternative understandings (Gergen 2009).

My approach to discourse analysis emphasizes the constructive power of language as a system of signs and symbols existing at the level of society and culture (Burr 2003). The term 'discourse' is understood as a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, names, and statements that in some way together produce a particular version of events (Burr 2003, 64). As alternative versions of events are possible, there may be a variety of different and competing discourses (Burr 2003). I share the view according to which discourses are one important form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). I do not assume that everything is reducible to discourse (Fairclough 2003) but acknowledge that discourses are associated with other social and material practices (Mantere and Vaara 2008).

Central to my approach is the view that discourses not only describe the world as it exists but also construct social reality. Discourses (re)produce knowledge, culture, and power relations (Vaara and Tienari 2004). They define what knowledge is relevant and what is marginalized, and assign value jugdments. Discourses also construct concepts, the means and the vocabulary through which people give the meaning to a specific phenomenon, and define and structure the social space within which social actors can act, what they are expected to do, and what they can and cannot do (Philips and Hardy 2002). These conditions for possible social action are often taken for granted. Although social actors can purposefully position themselves vis-á-vis specific discourses or mobilize particular discourses to their own purposes (Vaara and Tienari 2008), they tend to be "very much constrained and even disciplined by the available discursive resources and practices – of which they are often unaware" (Vaara and Tienari 2004, 343). The concrete effects of discourses are often subtle and thefore, they easily pass unnoticed in society (Mantere and Vaara 2008).

As specific ways of using language, discourses embody certain ideologies (van Dijk 1998), that is, implicit belief systems and values (Hackley 2003). Given that there is a multitude of discourses mobilized in and around an organization, there is a constant struggle between ideologically diverse discourses competing for existence and dominance (Fairclough 2001). Thus, discursive struggles are also ideological struggles (Vaara and Tienari 2008). The traces of differing discourses and ideologies can be found in different kinds of organizational texts within which discourse is manifested (Wodak 2004). A certain manifestation of an organization may become the dominant discourse at a given time, but the 'order' of discourses may change over time (Fairclough 2001).

Applying the discourse analytical approach to reputation research means that organizational reputations – like brands – are understood to be constructed in relation to specific discourses which provide the lenses through which people make sense of and give sense to particular issues (Fairclough 1992). Reputation construction is then considered as an ongoing discursive struggle between ideologically diverse discourses. What is at stake in these struggles, is the varying understanding of the organization. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) point out that the critical discursive approach is a flexible theoretical and methodological framework rather than a rigid set of tools. It is in this spirit of flexibility that the approach is being applied in this thesis.

4.2 Empirical materials and analysis

The empirical focus of this thesis is the merger of Aalto University in Finland. Aalto was created by merging three existing universities in the capital area: the Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology, and the University of Art and Design Helsinki. The idea of the merger was made public in 2005. The merger became effect on 1 January 2010. The merger process was discussed in Chapter 2 and is summarized in each research paper (Part II).

The empirical materials used in this thesis consist of a large amount of qualitative materials, produced during a 9-year time-span (2005 – 2014) before, during and after the merger in 2010. The materials are partly real time and partly retrospective, which is typical for this kind of longitudinal research aiming to understand how an organization evolves over time (Langley 1999). Some of the materials, namely the interviews with decision-makers (see below), have been produced by the scholars in a research project in which the merger of Aalto University was studied from different viewpoints (see e.g. Granqvist and Gustafsson, forthcoming, Teerikangas 2014, Lipponen and Hakonen 2012, Lipponen et al. 2011). The scholars participating in the project represented the three merging schools. The project was active in 2007–2010 and followed the unfolding of the merger in real time. I personally joined the project in February 2009.

To emphasize the social constructionist epistemology of my research, I prefer talking about data production, instead of data collection. Unlike treating data as objective information to be collected, I regard data as outcomes of the processes of social construction, produced in a certain context (Alvesson 2003). In the role of researchers, me, my co-authors and colleagues in the research project have been involved in data production by participating in the knowledge creation processes in the interviews and by making choices about what kind of materials to use, and whom and how to interview (Hämäläinen 2007). Instead of expecting data to reveal reality, I am interested in exploring the richness of the meanings in the empirical materials (Alvesson 2003), and to study what kind of social reality the texts as such construct.

Empirical materials are treated as spoken or written *texts* produced, distributed and consumed by actors both external and internal to Aalto University and its predecessors. Different materials are used in order to find the multivocality and polyphony needed in studying the complexity of reputation construction. All materials used in this thesis are presented in the tables below.

Table 4: Texts produced by actors external to Aalto and its predecessors

Type of Text	
Domestic and international governmental committee reports and releases	Hallituksen iltakoulu 21 November 2007: Yliopistojen taloudellisen ja hallinnollisen aseman uudistaminen ja innovaatioyliopiston perustaminen. Opetusministeriö 21.11.2007. [Reforming universities' governance and financial position, and establishing innovation university. The Finnish Government]
	Korkeakoulujen rakenteellisen kehittämisen periaatteet. Keskustelumuistio 8.3.2006. Opetusministeriön monisteita 2006:2. [The principles of the structural development of universities. Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture]
	Pääministeri Matti Vanhasen II hallituksen ohjelma. 19.4.2007. [Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's second Cabinet]
	Releases on http://www.minedu.fi.
	Teknillisen korkeakoulun, Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun ja taideteollisen korkeakoulun yhdistyminen uudeksi yliopistoksi. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:16. [Merging the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics and the University of Art and Design into a New University. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture]
Research and commentaries on the Aalto University and the reform of Finnish higher education sector	Aarrevaara, T., Dobson, I.R. and Elander, C. (2009). Brave new world: Higher education reform in Finland. *Higher Education Management and Policy, 21*(2), 1-18.
	Koschke, P., Arminen, I., Mälkiä, T. and Lumijärvi, I. (2011). *Kun tiede ja taide kohtasivat tekniikan ja talouden. Aalto-fuusiota selvittäneen tutkimushankkeen väliraportti. Helsingin yliopisto & Tampereen yliopisto*.
	Kunelius, R., Noppari, E. and Reunanen, E. (2009). *Media vallan verkoissa*. University of Tampere, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, publications, series A-112 / 2009. [Media in Nets of Power.]
	Ridell, S. (2008). Top University – downhill for humanities? Policing the future of higher education in the Finnish mainstream media. *European Educational Research Journal*, *7*(3), 289-307.
	Tomperi, T. (ed.) (2009). *Akateeminen kysymys? Yliopistolain kritiikki ja kiista uudesta yliopistosta*. Tampere, Finland: Vastapaino. [Academic Question? Criticism on the Universities Act and the Dispute Over the New University.]
	Välimaa, J. (2007). Tie huippuyliopistoksi – koulutuspoliittisen keskustelun analyysiä. *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 5/2007, 5-10. [The road to top university – analysis of educational policy discussion.]

Laws and statutes	Hallituksen esitys Eduskunnalle yliopistolaiksi ja siihen liittyviksi laeiksi [The bill of the government to the Parliament about changing the Act of Universities]. HE 7/2009 vp. Yliopistolaki [University Law] (558/2009). http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2009/20090558.
Media texts (national)	Helsingin Sanomat (HS), the major Finnish daily newspaper; texts published 6 September, 2005 – 30 May, 2014. Kauppalehti (KL), the business daily; texts published 6 September 2005 – 31 December 2010. HS and KL articles are collected from the Internet article retrieval archives of the respective papers. Searches are conducted with the different names used for Aalto University: *innovaatioyliopisto (Innovation University), huippuyliopisto (Top-University), Aalto-korkeakoulu, and Aalto-yliopisto (Aalto University*). App. 3 000 media texts in total. Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets (e.g. regional newspapers, periodical magazines such as Suomen Kuvalehti and Talouselämä, Acatiimi, Prima, Kanava)
Media texts (international)	Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets, e.g. The Financial Times, Harvard Business Review, Newsweek. An access to over 250 000 digital sources around the world provided by online media monitoring company Meltwater Group.
Reports, brochures, and presentations	*Kohti kansainvälistä huippututkimusta. EK:n tutkimuspoliittiset linjaukset*. The Confederation of Finnish Technology Industries (EK). 2006. [Towards international top research. EK's research policy guidelines] *Matkalla Innovaatioyliopistoon* – tieteidenvälisen yhteistyön mahdollisuuksia luotaamassa. Itkonen, Maija (ed.). The Helsinki University of Technology and The Federations of Finnish Technology Industries. 2009. [On our way to Innovation University] McKinsey & Co (2010). *Työtä, tekijöitä, tuottavuutta: Suomen prioriteetit seuraavalle vuosikymmenelle*. Report, McKinsey Helsinki. [Work, actors, productivity: Finland's Priorities for the next decade.] *Osaamisen uusi Aalto*. Fundraising material, the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK). 2008, 2009. [New wave of know-how] PowerPoint presentations. The Confederation of Finnish Industries. 2006–2008.

Table 5: Texts related to stakeholders internal to Aalto and its predecessors

Type of Text	
Organizational brochures and reports	Aalto University, Towards Creativity and Innovation 2010 Aalto University, Meillä tiede ja taide kohtaavat tekniikan ja talouden 2010 Aalto University, Where science and art meet technology and business 2012 Aalto University, Meillä tiede ja taide kohtaavat tekniikan ja talouden, 2012 Aalto University, Annual Report 2012 Aalto University, Annual Report 2013 Aalto University, Annual Report 2014

Other organizational materials and documents	Online and printed materials and document on the making of the new university: e.g. strategy, HR, marketing documents, and artefacts with visual imagery such as brochures and advertisements. 2007-2014.
Accounts of the President of Aalto University	PowerPoint and oral presentations, blog entries, newsletters. 2009–2014.
Letters to employees from the Chair of Aalto Board	29 October 2008, 8 December 2008, 12 January 2009, 13 March 2009, 4 September 2009.
Ceremonial session (the establishment of Aalto University foundation)	*Säädekirja*. [The Charter of Aalto University Foundation]. 2008. Speech by the Chair of the Board, the Confederation of Finnish Industries. 26 June 2008. Säätytalo, Helsinki.
Employer releases (intranet, email)	HSE Piazza 2009, Aalto Inside 2010-2014 (intranets). Aalto Newsletters and Infos 2008-2014, the Aalto School of Business Newsletters 2013-2014.
Student materials	KyWeb (online chatroom for HSE students) and Kylteri (HSE student magazine). Search 2005–2010, carried out in March 2012. Student marketing materials. Aalto University. 2009–2013.
Magazines	Aalto University Magazine. October 2011 – March 2014. Issues 1–10. Avista (HSE alumni magazine). 2009–2011. 5 issues.
E-mail conversations	E-mail conversations with HSE professors on the School's name and brand (in real time October 2009; retrospectively September 2012).
Surveys	Aalto image survey for internal and external stakeholders (conducted in February-March 2011) and employee survey (conducted in May 2011). Lipponen, J. and Hakonen, M. (2012). *Henkilöstön kokemuksia Aalto-yliopiston fuusioprosessissa 2009–2011*. [Employee Experiences of the Aalto University Merger Process 2009-2011.]
Research reports and retrospective accounts	Herbert, A., and Tienari, J. (2013). Transplanting tenure and the (re)construction of academic freedoms. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2), 157-173. Kasanen, E. and Sotamaa, Y. (2010). Epilogi – tie Aalto-yliopistoon. In *Tulkintoja, tosiasioita, tarinoita: Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun historiaa,* E. Pöykkö & V. Åberg (eds.). Porvoo: WS Bookwell. [Epilogue – The Road to Aalto University.] Lipponen, J., Lendasse, K. and Aula H-M. (2011). Aallon logon herättämät mielikuvat 2009 ja 2010 [Perceptions of the Aalto logo in 2009 and 2010]. Unpublished manuscript.

Interview materials include two different groups of people; decision makers and communication experts. Decision makers were interviewed by my colleagues in our research project, and communication experts by me. All interviews were recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The tables below present the interviews: background and number of interviewees, and the number and the year of the interviews.

Table 6: Interviews; decision-makers

Background of interviewees	N interview	N person	Year(s)
Rectorate (Aalto and its predecessors)	12	7	2008–2010
Aalto Board and top management	4	4	2009, 2010
Aalto's temporary change organization	5	4	2009, 2010
Faculty (Aalto University School of Business)	4	4	2009, 2010
Students (Aalto's predecessors)	2	2	2008
Ministries	7	9	2008, 2010
University staff associations and unions	2	2	2008
Finnish business and industry foundations, associations and confederations	5	6	2008–2010
Politician	1	1	2008
Sponsor organization	1	1	2008
Consulting organization	1	1	2008
Total	44	41	

These 44 interviews were conducted by my colleagues in a semi-structured manner during the years 2008–2010. Altogether 42 different persons were interviewed either once, twice or three times. The interviews lasted between 42 - 93 minutes (information on duration is missing from 7 interviews). The interviews focused on the merger negotiations and the process, its management and forums, the key actors involved in the process, and the aims of the merger.

Table 7: Interviews; communication experts

Background of interviewees	N interview	N person	Year(s)
Communication managers (Aalto and its predecessors)	5	5	2009–2010
Head of Communications (Aalto)	2	1	2010, 2011
Dean of Aalto University School of Business	1	1	2012
Branding expert consulting Aalto's communication	1	1	2010
Key stakeholders	2	3	2009
Total	11	11	

These 11 interviews were carried out by me in a semi-structured manner during the years 2009–2012. Altogether 11 different persons were interviewed once or twice. The interviews lasted between 41 – 126 minutes. These interviews focused on actors, forums, organization, policies, objectives, and responsibilities related to communication and branding in the various stages of the merger process.

The research process in this thesis followed 'abductive' logic (Dubois and Gadde 2002). This logic is based on *systematic combining*, which emphasizes theory development rather than theory generation. It refers to a research process where the theoretical framework, empirical fieldwork, and analysis evolve simultaneously. An abductive approach positions closer to an inductive than a deductive approach, but should not be seen as a mixture of them. Abductive logic emphasizes iteration and is more non-linear process than inductive and deductive approaches. A distinctive characteristic of an abductive approach is that it allows redirection of the research. This can be caused by the case that gradually evolves, the analytical framework, or the availability of theories, for example. (Dubois and Gadde 2002) Therefore, an abductive approach suits well this kind of qualitative research where the case is studied as it evolves and where the theories and frameworks cannot, thus, be determined beforehand.

The decision to address *branding*, in particular, in two studies included in this thesis, can be seen as one kind of adjustment in this research. Branding was taken as specific focus in studies 2 and 3 for three reasons. First, it was triggered by the empirical case itself. As the empirical purpose of this thesis is to study the Aalto merger as it unfolds, I wanted to be sensitive to the case and let it guide the direction of my research. At the time of preparing the second and the third studies, Aalto University was initiating significant rebranding activities (e.g. logo, visual identity, new school names, brand hierarchy). This was evident in the empirical materials and thus, in my opinion, it deserved closer examination in this thesis. Second, research on university branding was increasingly gathering momentum. As branding had become "a recent fashion for universities to position themselves in the field of higher education" (Drori et al. 2013, 143), researchers had increasingly begun to address that timely topic. And third, I had a great opportunity to collaborate with respected researchers from other disciplines, in Finland and abroad. Branding as a focal point in research was a natural way to join our research interests together, and to create an interesting and inspiring study around it.

The research process in each study included in this thesis has been a continuous interplay between theory, empirical materials, and analysis. A large amount of empirical materials has been used in each study, but their exact composition may differ. The materials and the research processes are described in more detail in each of the respective papers. We (me and my co-authors) have tried to make our research choices visible, so that the reader can assess the credibility of each study. As most of the empirical materials used in the studies are public, our interpretations and argumentations can be traced, and if necessary, challenged.

In general, each study began by reading materials indicated above. With an initial research idea or question(s) in mind, the materials relevant for further analysis were identified and separated from the totality of the materials. These identified texts were then read in more detail. As the research question started to get more specific, the amount of material was further cut down, if possible. At this stage, I (and my co-authors) kept going back and forth between empirical materials, theory, and analyses. The findings and interpretations were structured and categorized in a way that was appropriate for each particular study. The amount of materials was also increased at some points of the analyses in order to test and make sure that our interpretations and observations held for the rest of the materials. Personally, I experienced this part of the analysis particularly important. In some instances, this was the moment when the possible inconsistencies in the interpretations became visible. The analyses were elaborated and specified until a plausible understanding of the phenomenon at hand was reached. In the final stage, the materials were revised in order to look for typical examples illustrating the examined phenomenon.

The four studies have been presented in a chronological order in Part II. Thematically, however, they can be divided into two sets. Studies 1 (*Becoming "world-class"? Reputation-building in a university merger*) and 4 (*The meaning of the university – How reputation are constructed in higher education discourse and in market economy discourse*) offer a longitudinal critical discourse analysis of the Aalto merger in 2005-2009 and 2005-2014 respectively. Study 1 examines the dynamics of controversy and conformity in how Aalto University came into being. Focusing particularly on the notion of "world-class", the study examines how the key actors purposefully aimed to build Aalto's reputation, and how it became contested and (re)constructed in the Finnish public debate. Study 4, in turn, examines the discourses that social actors drew upon in a university merger, and the accounts of reputation that this mobilization produced. The study shows that the two dominant discourses produce different accounts of university reputation, suggesting competing, even contradictory meanings for the university.

Studies 2 (*Struggles in organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics: the case of a marketizing university*) and 3 (*The university branding game. Players, interests, politics*) specifically address university branding, which in this thesis is considered as a means to build reputation. Study 2 is an in-depth analysis of a university rebranding initiative which aligns with a contemporary market-oriented and service-dominant (SD) logic (cf. Vargo and Lusch 2004, Brodie et al. 2006, Merz et al. 2009). The study shows that adopting a new branding logic involves struggles and dynamics of power and resistance. It seems to trigger contradictory and adversarial interpretations among stakeholders about the role and identity of the focal actor vis-á-vis their own roles and identities. Study 3, in turn, develops the notion of university branding as a political game and illustrates this in the case of Aalto University. The study shows how conflicts and struggles in building and presenting a university brand characterize the process.

The four studies are summarized after Reflections (4.3) in Chapter 5. The original research papers, in turn, are presented in Part II.

4.3 Researcher reflections

As the constructionist view on knowledge production emphasizes the close relationship between the researcher and the researched phenomenon, *reflexivity* on the part of the researcher and her role is essential (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). In constructivist epistemology, the researcher(s)'s interpretation is a vital part of the analysis. Data production, case description, and fact construction are always results and constructions of a researcher's own *interpretation* (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000). As Fairclough (2001, 22) argues, “What one ‘sees’ in a text, what one regards as worth describing, and what one chooses to emphasize in a description, are all dependent on how one interprets a text”.

I acknowledge that my own research is also a social construction of the studied phenomenon. I do not claim it to be an objective description of reputation-building; neither do I claim that such a description could even be produced. I also acknowledge that the empirical materials are not generated in a vacuum, but are related to other texts and discourses. I have grounded this research in the context of changing higher education in order to understand how certain constructions of the merger of Aalto University have come to be the way they are, and how historical, institutional, and societal contexts both constrain and enable reputation construction.

Throughout this thesis, I have emphasized polyphony in the construction of organizational reputation. In the research papers, I (and my co-authors) have aimed to bring multiple voices and perspectives to the fora. Despite these efforts and intentions, not *all* possible voices have been able to be included, and those that are included may have been expressed in an unequal manner. I have privileged those, internal and external, that have been heard in public discussion on the Aalto merger, and in decision-making in building Aalto. The voice that is purposefully left more silent is that of the employees of Aalto and its predecessors. Although important in building organizational reputation, this decision was made in order to avoid studying my own department, people with whom I work with (see below), and my own voice. The employee perspective is, however, specifically brought up in chapter 6.3 where I discuss future research avenues. There, I argue that the impact of reputation-building and branding on the identification or dis-identification of employees with the new organizational entity needs to be studied further.

My own interest in reputation research dates back to the years I worked in a reputation and communication consultancy. Needless to say, perhaps, at that time my perspective to reputation was rather managerial. I saw reputation as a valuable asset for an organization, and therefore it needed to be carefully built and protected. I also considered that reputations are generated by culturally specific, predetermined attributes. As such, they were (easily) measured, affected, and built. However, as I became more familiar with the concept, I also became troubled by it – and particularly, by the way how reputations evolve and develop. I also became confused by the different conceptualizations that clearly stood in literature. Soon I realized how little we actually know about the socio-cognitive processes in which reputations are built and developed. Having always been interested in doing research, I decided to conduct research of my own and to examine this fascinating phenomenon myself. So, essentially, this thesis stems from my personal and practice-based interests and curiosity to better understand how organizational reputations emerge, evolve, and change, and from the need to make sense of the different conceptualizations of this complex concept.

To study the reputation of a *university* organization had never occurred to me, until I was offered a chance to join the research project called *Aalto University*

Merger: Sources, Forces, and Challenges of Integrating Three Universities. The project was a loose network of researchers from all the three merging universities (mainly from HSE and HUT, however) interested in studying the making of Aalto. To me, the project provided access not only to an inspiring research community but also to a very special empirical case. The research project was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and by Aalto University. It should be noted that neither the sponsors nor the research project set any criteria for, or demands on, this research. In that sense, this thesis is an independent work.

I have been writing this thesis in one of the merging schools – now known as Aalto University School of Business (earlier the Helsinki School of Economics). I have had an office in the Department of Management Studies during the time of my research (2009 – 2015), except in 2011 - 2012 when I was visiting Stanford University in the United States. This means that I have been studying my own university, to which I have had close ties during most of my research time. Neither the Department of Management Studies, nor the people with whom I have worked with, however, have been studied in this research.

In any case, I have not only been studying the merger of Aalto University, I have also been living it. In addition to being a researcher, I am an alumna (graduated from HSE), an employee, and a colleague. These roles are inherently intertwined and laden with different kinds of emotions concerning the empirical focus of this research – the merger of Aalto University. I have been aware of these roles and discussed them with some of my colleagues. At the same time, however, I have aspired to objectify Aalto University, and to make and keep it as a research object. In order to be able to do that, I have needed to externalize myself emotionally and physically from the work community from time to time. Studying my own organization in a situation that is known to be stressful for employees (e.g. Cartwright et al. 2007) has not always been an easy task for me. However, my position inside the studied organization has enabled me to make observations inside the organization and given access to internal empirical materials and unofficial discussions which I would not have had otherwise. It has also given me a possibility to participate in departmental work, giving me insight into an academic community, its practices and general sentiments.

Considering the reflexivity in this research, I have acknowledged the above-mentioned concerns during my research. Therefore, along the way, I reflect on my own interpretations and emotions concerning the Aalto merger, trying to be as honest and transparent as possible towards the voices in my materials, and towards the way how I interpret and report them in this thesis.

5. Four studies on constructing reputation

5.1 Becoming “world-class”? Reputation-building in a university merger

In this first paper, we examine conformity and controversy in organizational reputation-building. We analyze how key actors seek to build the reputation of the new merging university and how issues related to reputation become (re)constructed in different fora and vis-á-vis different stakeholders. The specific focus is on how notions of becoming ‘world-class’ are used to distinguish the new university from its domestic counterparts and predecessors, and to present it as an attractive and innovative global player.

This study offers a longitudinal critical discourse analysis of how Aalto University came into being in 2005-2009. Reputation is conceptualized as on-going evaluation process by relevant stakeholders (Rindova et al. 2005, Barnett et al. 2006), constituted in discursive practices (Coupland and Brown 2004, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010) of various stakeholders (Rao 1994, Rindova and Fombrun 1999). Reputation is thus seen as constant (re)construction (Aula and Mantere 2013), instead of as an outcome or as something achieved at a given moment. This qualitative study is based on publicly available on-line materials and media texts.

Our analysis of the textual material produced by the merger strategists and communication experts indicates that building the reputation of the new university was based on three main themes: (1) timeliness and societal significance, (2) interdisciplinarity and practical relevance, and (3) a symbolic break with the past, which was represented as inevitable. Vis-à-vis all the three themes, the making of the new Aalto University seemed to draw its legitimacy from success in the international arena and in relation to global players – not only Aalto among other universities, but also Finnish business organizations among international businesses.

As we analyzed media texts vis-á-vis the three indicated themes, we discovered compliance and resistance to reputation-building. First, discourse on Aalto’s societal significance became a contested space. Aalto as a flagship project in the Finnish university sector reform came to symbolize a dramatic transformation for better and for worse. The criticism of the sector was, however, often framed as direct criticism of Aalto. In addition, Aalto's 'world-class' reputation-building was often interpreted as 'American', which brought the incompatibility of the two university traditions (Finnish and American) to the fore. Aalto's societal significance and status as a "world-class" university was also contested when money was discussed. Second, Aalto's matter-of-fact claims to 'world-class' and uniqueness in its multidisciplinary approach became subjects of belittlement and sarcasm. The line of reasoning in such commentary was that a university does not become a 'world-class' university simply by calling itself one. Global university rankings were used selectively to make a point about the mediocre standing of the merging universities in international league tables. And third, while the symbolic break with the past was central in building the reputation of Aalto, the novelty of the concept was being refuted. It triggered judgments based on how well the symbolic choices correspond to the objectives and progress of the new university. Media published several articles that highlighted tensions inside Aalto.

This study illustrates the dynamics of reputation-building in a university merger. It shows how the notion of becoming an innovative 'world-class' university is used as imaginaries in the discursive constructions (Fairclough 2003); predictions of an inevitable future are used to legitimize radical and controversial actions in the present. The study also highlights the contradictions and controversies involved in making the new university and building its reputation. Nevertheless, the efforts to challenge the dominant discursive constellation of marketization, knowledge economy and entrepreneurialism seemed to remain relatively haphazard and elusive.

5.2 Struggles in organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics: the case of a marketizing university

This second study operates with the concept of branding, understood in this thesis as a means to build organizational reputation. This study is an in-depth analysis of a university rebranding initiative which aligns with a contemporary market-oriented and service-dominant (SD) logic (cf. Vargo and Lusch 2004, Brodie et al. 2006, Merz et al. 2009). Extant research has demonstrated the possibility of new types of logic for creating strong, stakeholder-valued brands, but has fallen short in looking at the processes through which organizations attempt to adopt such logics. The current developments in higher education (discussed in chapter 2) suggest that universities are adopting the generic principles of the SD logic, encouraging institutions to focus on the use-value they instrumentally provide to stakeholders, and thus replacing the idea that universities and their services/products have inherent value as such.

In this study, we consider Aalto's rebranding initiative (e.g. naming the new university Aalto) as an example of how a merging university attempts to adopt a new branding logic in which multiple stakeholders are invited to actively contribute to the focal brand and obtain value from it. This interpretative study takes a critical perspective and focuses on analyzing various stakeholder dynamics and resistances involved in this initiative. More specifically, we examine the emergence of the Aalto brand, in other words the attempts to define what Aalto University is in 2005–2010. The study draws on a wide range of empirical materials.

Our analysis is multiphase and iterative in its nature. First, we structure the events in the merger and branding process into three phases: (1) *opportunity identification* for the merger and for the new university brand to be created in 2005-2007; (2) *refinement* of the new brand to be created in 2007-2009, and (3) *launch* of the new brand in 2010. We then analyze in each phase (a) the service promises (value propositions) offered to stakeholders and (b) the stakeholder resources – the processes, people, and physical aspects (Ng and Forbes 2009) – through which the new service brand was supposed to be realized. We note that not only did various stakeholders become active in promoting or opposing the emerging brand at different phases but also in relation to different themes emerging from the materials, and the kind of brand images involved.

In further analysis, we identified instances of stakeholder dynamics where power and resistance implicate each other and where stakeholder struggles could be detected in relation to the branding of the new university. We examined the ways in which stakeholder identities, on the one hand, and the new university's brand identity, on the other, were enacted in the branding dynamics, by exploring how various stakeholders referred to 'us' and 'them' in relation to the new university brand. We also examined how various stakeholders perceived the university's new brand in relation to their identities, and analyzed the new roles and identities that would, by the newly conceptualized university brand, be imposed on the various stakeholders as well as on the new university itself.

Our study shows that adopting new branding logics involves struggles and dynamics of power and resistance. This seems to trigger contradictory and adversarial interpretations among stakeholders about the role and identity of the focal actor vis-á-vis their own roles and identities. The novelty of these findings is that they seem to be in sharp contrast with earlier literature, which emphasizes harmonic value co-creation between the brand and stakeholders. We conclude that resistance is not only targeted toward the brand's symbolic meanings, and conducted by marginal consumer groups to enhance their own identities. Rather, resistance can also be targeted toward the tangible resource roles that stakeholders are expected to assume vis-á-vis the brand, and conducted by various stakeholder resistors – with the outcome of undermining and shifting the essence of the brand itself.

This study contributes to reputation research by increasing our understanding on stakeholder complexity, polyphony, and controversy in university branding. Rather than focusing on the external brand image (reputation) of universities among one stakeholder group such as students (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, Yang et al. 2008), our analysis shows that the brand emerges and evolves – becomes (re)constructed and co-developed – through interaction among a variety of stakeholders. While much of the extant research on university branding has ignored universities' complexity as organizations (see, however, Chapleo 2010, Jevons 2006) by concentrating on one or few stakeholders and by assuming that a university is akin to a business firm (with a singular reputation in the customer group's mind), this study addresses universities as objects of contestation among a wide array of stakeholders.

5.3 The University Branding Game. Players, Interests, Politics

This third study continues to operate with the term branding. It addresses the issue that was particularly burning in creating Aalto University at the time of the study: an adoption of a one-brand strategy. The brand hierarchy was built, and the school brands were aligned with the university brand. While the three merging universities were all established organizational brands, the creation of the new Aalto parent brand and the dismantling of the old brands became the object of conflict and politics where multiple interests were at stake. Taking into specific focus the dismantling of the Helsinki School of Economic brand and its relationship with the new Aalto brand, this study focuses on tensions in creating the Aalto brand.

In this study, we show how conflicts and struggles in building and presenting a university brand characterize the process. The study joins the discussion of university branding, which can be understood as the process of identifying and making known the features of the organization's identity "in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition" (Balmer 2001, 281). In other words, university branding can be understood as the process of identifying those organizational elements on which the reputation of the university comes to rest. While the bulk of research on universities continues to treat branding as marketing and communications activities that are not only manageable but also a-political, this study argues that visible tangibles of branding intertwine with conflict-ridden processes involving multiple stakeholders – or players – in and around the university, who represent different ideas of what the university is, what is should be, and how it needs to be branded. A conflict about organizational branding is thus ultimately a conflict about the organization's reason for existing.

In this study, we adopt a political perspective that recognizes conflicts of interests, diverging perspectives, the role of power, and different means of influencing branding in Aalto. Accordingly, this study develops the notion of university branding as a political game characterized by players with different interests, positions, and means of influence (Allison 1969), and illustrates this with the case of Aalto University. Drawing on a wide range of empirical materials, we focus on topics and processes related to the creation of the new Aalto brand and the dismantling of the old established HSE brand in 2005 – 2010. In the analysis, we identify the multiple players involved in the game, their different power base and conflicting interests as well as diverging interpretations of the university brand. We discuss the players' tactics, such as the use of power, coalition-building and open conflict, for influencing the branding outcome. We show how conflict intensity is affected by the relative strength of the opposing players and how much they believe is at stake.

Our findings indicate that parties with weaker formal authority seek to influence the process by teaming up with others in order to acquire a stronger power to influence the outcome, and that players who hold critical positions in the organization will seek support from other players in order to build powerful coalitions. As a result, whether a player can successfully determine the fate of the branding process depends on their level of agreement with other players as well as who is opposing them. This insight is particularly important for understanding the branding of university organizations that are characterized by a number of players who have a potential stake in a specific outcome of the process. In addition, our study shows that university branding is a political-strategic act that opens up fundamental questions of identity and reasons for existing. Choosing and defining an 'official' identity entails a reduction of variety and the downplaying of characteristics of brands that, in the past, have been meaningful to both internal and external stakeholders. As the Aalto case shows, such a top-down approach leads to political opposition. The downplaying or dismantling of (sub-) brands affects social identities and may lead to a loss of power and status.

5.4 The meaning of a university – How reputation is constructed in higher education and market economy discourses

This fourth, and the final piece in this dissertation, builds on the previous studies, most particularly on the first one. This fourth study examines university reputation construction in two discourses, the higher education and market economy discourse. The first study concluded that a counter-discourse to the dominant discursive constellation of marketization, knowledge economy and entrepreneurialism is expected to emerge when Aalto is under way and its consequences become more apparent. The higher education discourse identified in this fourth study can be seen as such counter-discourse.

While the three previous studies focused on the pre-merger stage (2005 – 2010), this last study extends the examined period. Offering a critical discourse analysis, the study examines the discourses that different social actors draw upon in a university merger in 2005 – 2014, and the kind of organizational reputations this mobilization produces. A wide variety of empirical materials was also used in this study.

In this paper, I identify two dominant discourses in which Aalto University was produced – the higher education discourse and the market economy discourse, and examine what kind of reputations their mobilization produces for Aalto University. Specifically, I analyze the meaning construction in the naming of the merged university. Before the official Aalto name, the university was called *Innovation University* and *Top University*. I show that both *Innovation University* and *Top University* came to have different meanings in the higher education discourse and the market economy discourse. Accordingly, the two discourses came to produce different accounts of reputation for Aalto University, suggesting competing, even contradictory meanings for the university.

In addition, the study shows that the two identified discourses developed and evolved in parallel, competing for existence and dominance to define the meaning of the university. The study indicates that the market economy discourse was hegemonic in the beginning of the examined period. The market economy discourse was particularly powerful at the time when the name *Innovation University* was used for the new university. The market economy discourse aimed to legitimate the merger of the specific parties (that of the Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology, and the School of Art and Design Helsinki) in the merger. Interestingly, the higher education discourse, in turn, aimed to legitimate the merger *as such* as a part of the higher education sector reform. This means that although the two discourses were competing with each other, they were interdependent. The adoption of the name *Top University* gave stronger ground for the higher education discourse in relation to the market economy discourse. The constructed meaning of *Top University* became widely-produced particularly within Aalto University itself, which enabled the development of competing accounts of reputation.

Interestingly, however, there seemed to evolve two competing accounts of reputation also within the higher education discourse. One account was built on inter- and multidisciplinary innovativeness that initially legitimated the merger. The other account of reputation seemed to rest on disciplinary excellence communicated through such measures as publication counts, impact factors, and ratios of foreign staff and students. The problematics of this is that these two accounts of reputation are considered to be in sharp contrast with each other (see Brint 2005). In the market economy discourse, in turn, the reputation of the new university rested on practice-relevance, meaning both the collaborative work of academia and practice, and the practical aims of conducted research and given education.

This study shows the existence of different and competing accounts of reputation for Aalto University. At the same time, it shows that there are different and competing understandings about the meaning of Aalto University. As reputations evolve around organization specific features, they come to suggest a meaning for the organization. Considering these findings in a wider context, this study joins the increasing discussion and debate about the meaning of the university institution (see e.g. Styhre and Lind 2010), and argues for the need to make sense of the contradictory understandings of universities.

6. Conclusions

In this final chapter I will present the key contributions of this thesis and discuss their practical relevance. I end by suggesting some research avenues that I consider worth exploring further.

6.1 Key Contributions

The overall aim of this thesis has been to enhance our understanding of organizational reputation in the context of a university merger. I join Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja (2010) and others (e.g. Middleton 2009, Coulpland and Brown 2004, Aula and Mantere 2013) in arguing for the need to understand reputation as a constant reconstruction. Specifically, I stress that reconstruction falls upon those organizational features that an organization and its stakeholders consider essential. The current study therefore contributes to the extant research that considers reputation as continuously (re)constructed in discursive practices. This discourse analytical approach has allowed me to examine how reputations develop and change in time. It has also enabled me to consider the multitude of different, even competing accounts of reputation that emerge and evolve across spatial and temporal contexts.

Contributing to the theoretical discussion of reputation construction, I have shed new light particularly on the complexity of the process of reputation construction. In this research I have shown that reputation is a dynamic process in which both internal and external stakeholders are involved. I have shown how the construction process is characterized by conflict, contestation, and power struggles, and how multiple stakeholder groups with varying ideas and varying interests in the organization take part in this process, attempting to define what the organization is and what it should be. I have illustrated how these varying understandings about the organization produce different accounts of reputation. This thesis thus argues that reputation construction in a university merger involves controversial organizational elements that create a contested space and provide the basis for a variety of interpretations among different stakeholders.

Reputation is an interdisciplinary concept that is operationalized in a variety of ways. In organizational research, reputation is typically considered to be an external perception of an organization (e.g. Brown et al. 2006, Gioia et al.

2000). The division between internal and external perceptions is the essential way to distinguishing reputation from similar concepts such as *identity* and *image*. As Kornberger (2010) points out, however, in a medialized global economy, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is internal to an organization and what is external in the traditional sense. A key contribution of this thesis is to challenge this dominant conceptual framework by showing that such a categorization may not hold in a university merger context. I show that reputation and a new brand for a merged university is built in interaction of all stakeholders, both internal and external, and that, eventually, it is not clear who is internal and who is external to a university. Emphasizing the role of different stakeholders, this thesis thus enhances our understanding of stakeholder dynamics in constructing reputation.

In addition, this thesis contributes to the literature of branding in higher education. The thesis joins the discussion on university branding, by complementing the research on building a university brand. In this thesis, branding is considered a means to build organizational reputation, characterized with attempts to develop and present the organization as one unified brand (Christensen et al. 2008). Although studies on university branding have become increasingly popular during the recent decade, they tend to be limited by simply acknowledging the complexity of both the university organization and the branding process, but not examining that complexity in any great detail. This thesis contributes to higher education branding studies by stressing the crucial role of the multitude of stakeholders who are involved and actively participate in defining and building the university brand. Rather than focusing on simply one stakeholder group such as students, this research shows that the brand emerges and evolves – becomes (re)constructed and co-developed – through interaction among a variety of stakeholders.

Moreover, while prior research has tended to view branding as a relatively harmonious and linear process, this thesis depicts the process as a struggle involving alternating resistance by one stakeholder group against another, even within a university. This research shows that the branding process is affected by different stakeholders, their varying interests, power positions, and means of influence (Allison 1969), and that the top-down approach in defining a university brand is likely to lead to opposition.

Finally, this thesis complements extant M&A literature by explicitly and uniquely focusing on reputation alone. In the M&A context, reputation has been mainly considered in association with other concepts such as trust (e.g. Stahl and Sitkin 2005). The few studies where reputation has been taken into focus (e.g. Luoma-aho and Mäkikangas 2014, Davies and Chun 2004, Saxton 2004) concentrate on examining what happens to organizational reputation after a merger, and comparing the reputations of the merging organizations before the actual merger with the reputation of the merged entity after the actual merger. Treating reputation as something that can possibly be transferred from one organization to another, existing studies fail to recognize and problematize the dynamics of reputation construction emphasized throughout this thesis.

6.2 Practical Implications

The practical relevance of this thesis stems from understanding the way how reputations develop and evolve. This research has shown that in the specific context of a university merger, reputation construction is a complex process which is characterized by tensions and contestations of the different understandings of the nature, role, and characteristics of the new institution. This thesis argues that reputation cannot be fully controlled by any individual stakeholder group, and that different understandings about the merged university are likely to emerge during merger process. These notions may be contrary to common existing premises, but are crucial to take into consideration in improving the reputation work involved in future mergers.

I want to emphasize that the same also applies to a university management who might be tempted to aspire for full control over the university's reputation or the university brand. Within the university, a top-down mentality in defining the brand and controlling the reputation often involves downplaying organizational characteristics that are important for people who are used to working in the merging institutions, and thus is likely to lead to resistance among the faculty and other employees. Therefore, university reputation (and brand) is best developed in dialogical interaction between the university and its stakeholders, where meanings are created and negotiated (Aula and Mantere 2013). It should be remembered, however, that the tensions and struggles that arise in building a reputation and a new brand are not exclusively counter-productive, but as Rouse (1994) notes, they may also offer potential for creativity.

Moreover, the university management needs to take on reputation-building as ongoing work that never comes to an end. No such a point can be achieved where a university would have a stable and clearly expressed and understood reputation of some kind. Instead, a university's reputation, its different and competing accounts, evolve and develop constantly. For the university management it is important – and maybe challenging – first, to recognize the different understandings about the organization, and then to accept their existence and the fact that none of them are 'wrong'. In building university reputation, rather than deny and overlook them, the different conflicting and competing understandings should be treated as resources that help to develop the university and to work towards its fundamental purpose.

There are also practical implications that stem from being an object whose reputation is being constructed by others, and then becoming an actor who can participate in the process of building its own reputation characteristic in a merger situation. For the new, merged, entity this means that its reputation may start developing even before the entity as such 'exists' yet. The reputation of Aalto University, for example, started to develop already in 2005 when the merger idea was first brought up in public. As shown in this research, the merged entity quickly became a contested object. It was owned by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, but its raison d'être was being debated by a number of different stakeholders. It was not until 2008 that the Aalto University Foundation was legally established and the new entity became an independent actor with its own voice. In the Aalto merger, like in any university merger, the moment when the new organization jumps into the process of building its own reputation is critical. It is important to consider, in what respect the organization-initiated reputation-building activities are aligned, and in what respect they are in contrast with, existing interpretations about the merged entity. Although different understandings are expected to remain also in the future, interpretations that are in sharp contrast with each other may seriously challenge the development of the new organization. It is also worth acknowledging that there is a difference between present and future organizational characteristics of the merged university, and that this should be taken into consideration in communication. If the future vision or the goals are presented in the present tense, they may seem totally surreal, and lead to denial and resistance among all stakeholders, most importantly among the employees.

Universities are special kinds of organizations in a sense that they tend to be wide open to power-play in reputation-building and branding. Considering the practical implications of this research, I thus want to emphasize the importance of knowing the nature and the character of the organization whose reputation is being built and developed. It seems to be a typical assumption among university management and its stakeholders that universities are akin to business organizations, and that the processes of reputation construction and branding would thus be similar. As this research is not a comparative study of a university and business organizations, my point here is not to make claims about the differences (or similarities) in constructing the reputations of these two types of organizations, but to highlight the importance of acknowledging the specificities of each organization.

Finally, this research has some political implications for the development of Finnish higher education. In many countries, Finland included, universities have a close relationship with the state. Although there has been an increase in universities' organizational and financial autonomy, the Finnish government still provides the basic funding for Finnish universities and decides on national educational policies (Pekkola 2009). The objectives of universities are thus mainly defined by the state, while universities themselves have more autonomy over how to pursue them in practice. The point is that, at the moment, Finnish universities seem to have been given divergent societal and economic responsibilities which may demand contradictory actions from individual institutions. Therefore, the role and the task of individual institutions – in respect to the Finnish higher education sector in its entirety – needs to be urgently clarified.

6.3 Avenues for Future Research

Finally, having looked at the theoretical contributions and practical implications of this research, I end this introductory essay by considering avenues for future research. The findings of this thesis have highlighted several aspects of the dynamics of reputation construction which have thus far not received much explicit research attention. As the question of power and resistance have largely been ignored in the extant reputation literature, the power-related issues would provide a fruitful basis for novel contributions in reputation as well as in branding research. What is needed is a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which power has been conceptualized in the extant reputation research. Also, empirical studies that increase our understanding of the myriad of ways how power and politics play out in constructing reputation warrants immediate research attention. The power structure in constructing university reputation needs to be made visible as it is by no means irrelevant who has the authority to decide what the university is and what it is not.

This present research has built on and further developed the notion of university branding as a political game characterized by players with different interests, positions, and means of influence (Allison 1969). This work paves the way for future research on the politics of university reputation construction. The analysis could be extended to players such as competing universities, media, business and industry partners, financiers, the State and other relevant stakeholders, and how they participate in the political game of reputation-building. Future research could pay closer attention to these different players and their tactics to influence and define universities' fundamental role(s) and reasons to exist.

Another relevant topic for future research is the relationship between reputation construction (and branding) and the identity work of employees. It would be important to study how reputation-building activities impact on faculty identification and dis-identification with the new organizational entity. Faculty members deploy their own readings of organizational reputation-building activities, whose implementations cannot result in a unified practice enacted by all organization members in a similar manner (Brannan et al. 2011). Processes of constructing reputation are always conditional, contingent and open to interpretation and negotiation (ibid.). This is also the case in the context of a higher education merger. The object of identification is not necessarily the new merged university, but rather the old merging school, the department, or – and most importantly – the discipline and the international community around it. Faculty interpretations of organizational reputation-building activities are thus likely to lead to ambiguity and resistance. My present research indicates that reputation-building and identity construction feed on each other, but the questions of how that happens, and how and why tensions and struggles arise over time, need to be further examined. It is clear that the process is not an uncomplicated one, and therefore it warrants critical examination. A possible backdrop for such work can be found in the literature on social identities of academics in different disciplines. The extant research has shown that academic disciplines have their distinctive cultural characteristics (e.g. Becher 1987, 1994), due to which they differ both on social behavior and their epistemological considerations (Price 1970).

Identity and (dis)identification issues, of course, do not concern only employees; other stakeholders are also affected. The findings of this research show that, while students - traditionally considered internal to a university - became externalized during the process of defining the new Aalto brand, the business community - traditionally considered external - became internalized. This finding gives reason to suggest that the interplay of internal and external forces would be worth further theorizing. As many stakeholders seem to experience ownership over a university organization and be participating in defining the merged university's raison d'être, a merger setting would be particularly promising for such work.

The merger is taken as a given setting in this thesis. The critical stance of this work is applied merely to the process of reputation construction and meaning creation, not to the merger as such. However, as the merger poses a special setting for reputation construction, it deserves to be critically examined in future reputation studies. Such research would offer deeper understanding of the significance of university mergers which are not only expensive but also problematic on many levels (individual, organizational and institutional). In the light of this research, most specifically of the fourth essay, the merger does not play a determining role in constructing reputation for the new university. Aalto's reputation seems not to rest on the merger, but mostly on characteristics independent of it.

To conclude, this particular study at hand is limited by its empirical focus on one single merger, that of Aalto University. More research is needed on emergent forms of conformity and controversy in constructing university reputation in changing higher education. One option would be to conduct comparative studies of universities in different societal environments facing similar global pressures for reform. Such work would have particular importance for Finland where universities are systematically compared to, and benchmarked with, universities in other countries. Thus, it could be explored how university reputations are constructed in different national cultures and in higher education sectors that have their distinctive histories, how power plays out in reputation building in these different cultural settings, and how culture-specific the forms of controversy and conformity are in university reputation construction. Every European country has its own unique higher education system which has evolved during a long period of time and which is considered an important aspect of the development of the nation and nation state (Aarrevaara 2007). This is also the case with Finland. The processes of constructing universities' reputations become understandable against the national traits of each higher education system. Applying a comparative method would help us to understand how the system specific – and hence also the country specific – characteristics affect and form the processes of reputation construction in universities. At the same time, however, the development of Aalto University's reputation would be worth studying further. The current research covers the period before and after the actual merger, that is, the years 2005–2014. The following years, as Aalto continues its transformation to world-class, is sure to provide an inspiring research topic and a basis for novel contributions for research on university reputation construction.

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Becoming "world-class"? Reputation-building in a university merger

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Abstract

Purpose – This study of a university merger seeks to shed new light on reputation-building, which has remained unexplored in the mergers and acquisitions (M&As) literature. It aims to study how key actors seek to build the reputation of the new university and how issues related to reputation become (re)constructed in different forums and *vis-à-vis* different stakeholders.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper offers a longitudinal critical discourse analysis of a merger of three universities in Finland. The qualitative empirical material comprises university communications materials and media texts.

Findings – The study illustrates dynamics of reputation-building in a university merger. It shows how the need to become an innovative "world-class" university acts as an imaginary incentive, and predictions of an inevitable future are used to legitimize radical actions. The study also highlights the contradictions and controversies involved.

Originality/value – The study complements extant M&As literature by offering a unique focus on reputation-building. More broadly, it offers an empirically-based critical analysis of university reform in the global economy. It suggests that the ways in which reputation-building activities impact on the (dis-)identification of academic staff in higher education reforms needs to be studied further.

Keywords Universities, Acquisitions and mergers, Finland

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

> Across the world, business people, creative types and technology geeks struggle to understand each other. Their education and training, even much of their work, is carried out in separate silos, with exciting collaborations the exception rather than the rule. Now Helsinki's business school, art college and technology school have come up with a radical plan: a three-way merger to create what they claim will be a unique, integrated seedbed for innovation. The new institution, Aalto University, will offer joint courses later this year and will be open fully at the beginning of 2010 as the flagship project in a national shake-up of higher education.

This is how the *Financial Times*, in an article titled "Merger with innovation at its heart"[1], commented on the merger between the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics and the University of Art and Design in Finland. First voiced in public in September 2005, the idea quickly caught on. The Finnish Government decided on the merger in April 2007 and the new Aalto University started to operate as a legal entity on January 1, 2010. The new name is a reference to the Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto (1898-1976). Aalto also has a metaphorical connotation as it means "wave" in Finnish, thus signifying movement and progress.

The FT article captures the official objective in the Aalto University merger. Creating an innovative "world-class" university was the explicit objective of the

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ministry officials and representatives of the business community who actively promoted the merger. This objective was to be reached by turning three state-owned universities into a single entity controlled by a private foundation. The Aalto merger became the single most important project in a radical reform of the Finnish university sector. The crucial question in the making of Aalto was to distinguish it from its domestic counterparts and to construct it as an attractive and innovative global player.

While extant research on mergers and acquisitions (M&As) has extensively discussed socio-cultural integration (Stahl and Sitkin, 2005; Fubini *et al.*, 2007) and identities (Van Dick *et al.*, 2006; Vaara *et al.*, 2007; Maguire and Phillips, 2008), we suggest that these contributions need to be complemented by an explicit focus on reputation-building. This is a timely challenge as it is clear that in the contemporary global economy issues related to form and appearance have become vital in organizational survival and success. Such pressures are evident in academia where global rankings and accreditations have acquired a prominent position and reputation has emerged as a key concern for decision-makers (Wedlin, 2006; Ressler and Abratt, 2009). Universities are forced to compete globally for the attention of financiers, academics, students, and employers.

In this paper, drawing from the work of Fairclough (2003) and Wodak (2001), we offer a critical discourse analysis of how Aalto University came into being in 2005-2009. We shed new light on reputation-building, which has remained unexplored in the M&As literature. Reputation is conceptualized as an on-going evaluation process by relevant stakeholders (Rindova *et al.*, 2005; Barnett *et al.*, 2006), constituted in discursive practices (Coupland and Brown, 2004; Middleton, 2009; Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja, 2010). Hence, it is not seen as an outcome or as something achieved at a given time, but as constant (re)construction. Reputation-building refers to Aalto top management and communications experts' attempts to influence this (re)construction. We focus especially on how notions of becoming "world-class" are used to build the reputation of a new university in a peripheral country, and we explore the ways in which it becomes (re)constructed in different fora and *vis-à-vis* different stakeholders. Our qualitative study is based on publicly available on-line materials and media texts. The study is exploratory, and it seeks to pave the way for increased understanding of reputation dynamics in a merger setting.

This paper is structured as follows. We first provide a brief outline of the changing academia; the broader context for the (re)construction of the reputation of Aalto. We then present our theoretical framework, which draws on literature on M&As, reputation and discourse. We go on to specify our empirical material and analysis, outline the Aalto merger, and illustrate key dynamics of reputation therein. Finally, we offer tentative conclusions based on our analysis, discuss the limitations of our study, and suggest ideas for further research.

Changing academia

Universities around the world have recently undergone dramatic change. In the UK, a radical reform of the higher education system was already under way in the early 1990s. Across Europe, changes in academia have been an integral part of wider public sector reforms promoted, for example, under the label of new public management (NPM). Within the European Union, university education has been harmonized through the Bologna process. In effect, universities are being subjected to processes of marketization (Wedlin, 2008). Their funding base is changing, with increasing reliance on external (often private) sources of finance. Some universities previously administered by the state have also been privatized. All this has led to new demands for external accountability of academic work.

Taking stock of extant research on these developments, Styhre and Lind (2010) outlined two intertwining perspectives. First, in the "knowledge economy" discourse, universities are presented as repositories of know-how that should be tapped into more effectively, bridging the gap between theoretical and practical interests (Barnett, 2000; O'Hara, 2007; see Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). Second, the "entrepreneurial university" is another popular label that has been used to denote recent changes in academia (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997; Clark, 1998; Rothaermel *et al.*, 2007). In this discourse, the university becomes conceptualized as an entrepreneurial hotbed where new productive cooperation between researchers and industry – public-private partnerships – is developed. The university is understood as a node in complex networks of relations across organizational and institutional boundaries, and the conventional bureaucratic university structure is forged into a flexible hybrid organism that is able to operate competitively under market conditions (Styhre and Lind, 2010).

Different views notwithstanding, it is evident that the role and character of the university as a competitive entity has changed (Wedlin, 2008). The demand for external accountability materializes in a number of ways. Ideas and practices of corporate management are adopted and adapted (Engwall, 2008). These include mergers between formerly separate entities in order to find synergies and secure efficient operations, on the one hand, and to provide opportunities to better meet the demands for innovativeness and academic entrepreneurialism, on the other. Reputation-building and branding, discussed in more detail below, have become central elements in the new practices of university management.

Various aspects of academia in the throes of change have also been subject to critical inquiry. It has been suggested that academic work has become commodified (Willmott, 1995). Hartley (1995) used Ritzer's (1993) concept of McDonaldization as a heuristic device to make sense of university reforms in the UK. He argued that McDonaldization in higher education denoted demands for efficiency, calculability, predictability and control, and pointed out that these goals were, paradoxically, couched in a language of choice and flexibility. Marginson (2008), in turn, argued that new public management (NPM) in academia is characterized by change that is imposed regardless of the consent of the managed subjects, and that its policies and practices are nested in larger systems of control designed to preserve social order without regard for intellectual freedom.

In this vein, current university reforms have been criticized for their managerialism; decision-making authority is being centralized to university top management and academic workers are losing their self-determination (Räsänen, 2008). Academic work is subjected to external assessments and audits; such social technologies individualize researchers (Krejsler, 2006). Importantly, it is argued that increasing top-down control and measurement runs against the very ethos of the innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit that is otherwise promoted in university reform discourse. In brief, there seems to be an in-built paradox in today's changing academia.

Contemporary Finland aptly exemplifies university sector reforms in peripheral countries, resembling developments in the UK in the early 1990s. Public discourse in

Finland has been colonized by market-oriented economic values (Ridell, 2008; Kunelius *et al.*, 2009; see Fairclough, 1993). A new Universities Act came into force in 2009, turning Finnish universities into independent legal entities with new governance arrangements. The Finnish reform remains, however, a contested space. It is characterized by a divide between reformist discourse emphasizing top-down change, on the one hand, and development discourse nurturing bottom-up initiatives for improving academic work, on the other. Reform discourse is evident in State policy documents and in official texts by university rectors (Kasanen and Sotamaa, 2010), while development discourse characterizes more critical takes on higher education and academic work (Räsänen, 2008; Tomperi, 2009). What is interesting in the Finnish case is the force and speed of the implementation of the reform. The Aalto University merger is emblematic of this.

Merging for reputation: a critical discursive approach

Merging universities

Higher education sector reforms around the world constitute an increasing number of university mergers. The nascent research literature on these manouvers has mainly been interested in socio-cultural integration within the merging organizations. Skodvin (1999) studied mergers around the world, noting that many of them were forced instead of voluntary. He maintained that if the merger process was led top-down, the probability of conflicts was high. Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006), in turn, argued that the success of a merger depends on how the employees perceive the way the process is handled and the direction in which its culture is proceeding (see also Goldman and Van Tonder, 2006). Communication and transparent change processes were pointed out as crucial for merger success. These findings found support in Cartwright *et al.*'s (2007) study, which suggested that the premerger period proved to be stressful for employees as they lacked accurate information about the future.

These findings echo the vast literature on corporate mergers and acquisitions. Management and organization research on M&As tells us that mergers frequently fail to meet the objectives of top decision-makers, and that challenges in integrating people in conditions of insecurity and uncertainty are the major cause for this (Fubini *et al.*, 2007). Specifically, researchers have explored the problematics of integration through themes such as culture (Buono *et al.*, 1985), stress (Cartwright and Cooper, 1990), ambiguity (Risberg, 1999), politicking (Vaara, 2001) and justice (Meyer, 2001), to name but a few examples. There is also interest in the persistence of identifying with the former organization and (dis-)identification with the new merged entity (Van Dick *et al.*, 2006; Maguire and Phillips, 2008) as well as in purposeful corporate efforts to build a new organizational identity (Vaara *et al.*, 2007). Reputation, however, has been mainly considered in association with other concepts such as trust: in the absence of a joint history of cooperation and mutual trust, merger partners are argued to make judgments on the basis of each other's reputation (Stahl and Sitkin, 2005).

In the literature on university mergers, issues related to social interaction and identity have received increasing attention. In their study of a South African university merger between a historically "white" and a "black" institution, Van Vuuren *et al.* (2010) were surprised to find that employees from both merging parties claimed to be the dominated group. In an interpretive narrative study of a merger of two UK-based colleges, Brown and Humphreys (2003) opened up possibilities for more critical inquiry sensitive to organizational power relations, politics and discourse. They found that while senior managers told a narrative of epic change, subordinate groups on both sides authored recognizably tragic narratives. This type of approach questions the univocality of notions such as "rationality" and presents the merger as a contested terrain.

Reputation

Increasing attention on the external accountability of universities has triggered research on their reputation-building. Such research has to a significant extent concentrated on business schools, often with the aim of understanding the effects of university ranking systems and accreditations on their management, operations and performance (Cornelissen and Thorpe, 2002). The importance of rankings has grown significantly as the demand for evaluation of academic institutions has increased and their modes of governance have become more market-based (Engwall, 2007). Universities around the world have come to constitute a market of their own (Wedlin, 2008). Alongside national evaluations, global ranking lists and "league tables" have become an important quality assessment of universities (Wedlin, 2006). Rankings have been criticized for using criteria that favor universities already on the lists at the expense of those that are not listed (Policano, 2007; Morgeson and Nahrgang, 2008). Nevertheless, an increasing number of business schools are attempting to master the rankings game (Corley and Gioia, 2000). Accreditations offer another vantage point for considering reputation-building in universities. Business schools in particular have become active in making themselves available for external audits by well-known international accreditation bodies, with the aim of acquiring and retaining the stamps of international excellence on offer.

Beyond rankings and accreditations, however, there is little research on reputation-building in universities (see, however, for example, Waeraas and Solbakk, 2009, on university marketing and branding). Ressler and Abratt (2009) noted the fragmented state of extant research, and sought to build a model to study how key stakeholders such as students, alumni and employers perceive the reputation of universities. Baden-Fuller and Ang (2001) suggested that European business schools comprise a reputation-driven industry. They pointed out that schools lacking in reputation, perhaps because they are new in the field without a track record, can generate reputation by association, and found that less well-known universities often try to build alliances with universities with a perceivedly "good" reputation.

While research on reputation-building *vis-à-vis* universities has been modest, interest in corporate reputation has grown steadily (Fombrun, 1996; Barnett *et al.*, 2006). Efforts have been made to distinguish reputation from related concepts such as identity and image (Barnett *et al.*, 2006), brand (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004), and legitimacy (Deephouse and Carter, 2005). It is clear, however, that different theoretical debates continue to conceptualize reputation differently. In the institutional perspective, for example, reputation is understood as the result of information exchanges and social influence among various stakeholders interacting in an organizational field (Rindova *et al.*, 2005). Reputation may vary across stakeholder groups according to the perception of each group regarding the degree to which the organization in question meets its unique expectations (Bromley, 2002). Deephouse (2000) argued that reputation construction occurs in the media when a corporation is praised for its actions or associated with positive actions, and reputation destruction occurs when the organization is criticized for its actions or associated with questionable actions. Rindova *et al.* (2007) moved beyond measuring reputation to study how the reputation of new firms in emerging businesses is (re)constructed in media texts.

A critical discursive approach

Reputation is an ambiguous theoretical concept. We understand the reputation of the merging organizational entity to comprise judgments by stakeholder groups (Rindova *et al.*, 2005). Judgments often occur as a consequence of triggering events arising, for example, from the visible actions associated with that entity (see Barnett *et al.*, 2006). Overall, reputation can be conceived of as an on-going evaluation process by relevant stakeholders (Rindova *et al.*, 2005; Barnett *et al.*, 2006). Reputation-building refers to actions – by discursive and semiotic means – that purposefully attempt to influence the (re)construction of the reputation of a particular entity, for example, a merging university.

Reputation can be understood to be constructed in and through language and semiosis. An emerging strand of literature has argued for viewing reputation as something that is constituted in discursive practices. Middleton (2009) studied reputation management from a narrative perspective, while Coupland and Brown (2004) viewed reputation as continuously (re)constituted through text and talk in dialogical processes. Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja (2010), in turn, explored the meanings constructed *vis-à-vis* reputation by focal actors in interactions with relevant stakeholders. These contributions coincide with discursive studies on M&As, which have become popular in recent years. It has been argued that mobilization of discursive resources play a crucial role in merger processes, which lend themselves to politicking (Vaara, 2001). Particular discursive resources are mobilized by actors to legitimize their viewpoints and decisions and to delegitimize those of others (Hardy *et al.*, 2000; Vaara *et al.*, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2007).

Reputation-building in the contemporary global academia is an ambiguous and contested space, and it warrants a critical constructive reading that seeks to make visible assumptions behind dominant views and to voice alternatives (Carr, 2006). We suggest that a critical discursive approach is well suited for studying reputation-building in university mergers as it enables us to explore how particular worldviews and actions are constructed as taken-for-granted. It enables us to analyze how, through language, powerful actors seek to render their viewpoints rational and self-evident, and how they marginalize and exclude other voices (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, 2001). Importantly, this approach enables us to focus on how other actors seek to challenge and resist the dominant views and (re)construct alternative understandings and meanings, and to consider how dominant views and their criticism feed on each other. This is what we set out to study in the Aalto University merger.

Empirical materials and analysis

For the study reported in this paper, we analyzed a wide range of texts. First, to understand the particular societal setting where Aalto University came into being, we studied governmental committee reports and earlier research on the changing Finnish university system. To make sense of the purposeful construction of Aalto's reputation, we analyzed documents and on-line materials produced by its communications experts, targeted at particular audiences such as employees, students, financiers and alumni. We also analyzed materials by actors such as the The Finnish Confederations of Industries (EK), which actively promoted the merger.

Second, to form an understanding of how the reputation of Aalto has become (re)constructed in key fora in the Finnish public debate, we analyzed media texts covering the period since the merger idea was first raised in public in September 2005 until January 15, 2010, a week after the opening ceremony of the new university. We analyzed the coverage of the major Finnish daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (*HS*) and the business daily *Kauppalehti* (*KL*), comprising a total of 644 media texts. We also gathered individual texts focusing on particular aspects of the Aalto merger in a wide range of other media outlets in Finland (e.g. regional newspapers and student magazines) and abroad (*Financial Times*, *Harvard Business Review*).

We suggest that it is particularly interesting to study the preparation period for the Aalto merger (2005-2009) as it exemplifies a dramatic break from the past, attracting a great deal of commentary by a range of actors. Key dynamics in reputation-building became visible as the merger strategists and communications experts needed to put effort in, first, legitimizing the merger and, second, starting to build a reputation for the new university. At the same time, the merger and the new Aalto University were challenged and criticized by other actors. To approach the two sides of reputation-building, we draw on Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analytical (CDA) approach, which focuses on three elements: analysis of texts (micro-level textual elements), discursive practice (the production and interpretation of texts) and social practice (the socio-cultural context).

To simplify, the point of departure in our analysis was to see what was being said, by whom and how, through what practices this was done, and in what changing broader setting it took place. We located key actors in the texts and followed their efforts to legitimize or delegitimize their viewpoints. We tracked the textual strategies through which actors did this, and considered their strategies and audiences in the light of the particular socio-cultural context, that is the changing Finnish academia. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010) point out that CDA is a flexible theoretical and methodological framework rather than a rigid set of tools. We have applied CDA in this spirit of flexibility, and adapted it to the study of reputation-building.

Our analysis has been an iterative process, which is typical for CDA (Wodak, 2001). The textual material produced by the merger strategists and communications experts was read and re-read, and organized according to recurrent key themes. Three main themes seemed to characterize the reputation-building efforts:

(1) societal significance;

(2) interdisciplinary innovativeness; and

(3) a symbolic break with the past.

Vis-à-vis all themes, the making of the new Aalto University seemed to draw its legitimacy from success in the international arena and *vis-à-vis* global players not only in academia, but also in private business. We selected a smaller set of texts (what we considered typical for the reputation-building) for closer textual analysis, searching for expressions and phrases in individual texts regarding how the themes were intertwined and the new university-in-the-making was represented. We sought to interpret the particular meanings these representations seemed to convey.

Next, media texts were similarly read and re-read. The material was organized according to particular recurrent topics. Our initial analysis brought to the fore eight recurring topics: merger rationale, legal form (private foundation), nature of merger process, financing, role of the University of Art and Design (TaiK), cooperation, names and symbols, and campus location. We revisited the material to see how texts focusing on particular topics corresponded to the three key themes in the reputation-building material. We then selected a smaller set of media texts (what we considered typical *vis-à-vis* each theme) for closer textual analysis, again searching for expressions and phrases illustrating how the themes intertwined and the new university-in-the-making was represented.

Finally, we revisited all empirical materials, focusing specifically on how notions of becoming a "world-class" innovation university permeated the reputation-building and media discussions. To put the "world-class" discourse in the Aalto merger into a broader perspective, we carried out a small-scale web site search of selected universities around the world. We considered how top decision-makers and communications experts in these universities had decided to forge their mission, vision and strategy. For this, we accessed the university home page and, if the home page did not carry the information, we checked the "about us" or equivalent pages (the web site materials referred to below were accessed on 6 September 2010).

As our study is based on an analysis of publicly available materials, it is replicable by other researchers who can trace our interpretations and argumentation and, if necessary, challenge them. At the time of writing this article, we were both employed by Aalto University School of Economics (ex-HSE). Our aim is not to criticize the actions of Aalto strategists, nor indeed the actions of those who have criticized the making of Aalto. To be critical in our study means to adopt a constructive stance where we aim to give voice to alternative understandings of the new university and its reputation-building. University mergers are complex social phenomena, and they need to be treated as such. Before presenting our findings on reputation-building, we provide a brief chronological description of how the Aalto University merger process unfolded.

The making of Aalto University

The making of Aalto University has been a short and intensive process. Professor Yrjö Sotamaa, Rector of the University of Art and Design Helsinki (TaiK), is generally credited for first publicly voicing the idea of merging the Helsinki University of Technology (TKK) and the Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) with his own university[2]. This took place in September 2005 in Sotamaa's opening speech for the new academic year. Representatives of the Finnish business community began to actively promote the merger idea.

An inquiry was commissioned by the Finnish Government in October 2006, looking into the possibilities for major structural changes in the Finnish university system. The message in the Inquiry Report, made public in February 2007, was that the system of higher education in Finland was in dire need of transformation. The report drew on earlier reports published by OECD, the European Union as well as business and industry associations and right-wing think tanks in Finland, all reiterating the need for restructuring, for more focus, and for increased innovativeness in Finnish universities (Aarrevaara *et al.*, 2009)[3]. The international standing of Finnish universities was deemed unsatisfactory. The inquiry report voiced concern and urgency. It was the culmination of the Finnish public debate (Ridell, 2008; Kunelius *et al.*, 2009). It laid out the rationale for merging TKK, HSE and TaiK, which operate in fields that were considered crucial for the Finnish economy and society, and gave instructions on how to do this in practice. Preparations for other university mergers and alliances also began in different parts of the country.

A new centre-right Finnish government took office in April 2007 and included the implementation of the merger of TKK, HSE and TaiK in its governmental program. The necessary political decisions were taken in 2007-2008, including the establishment of a foundation to govern the merged university, which was to be to a private instead of a public institution. In May 2008, the name Aalto University was introduced. In August 2008, the Board of the Aalto University Foundation was chosen, comprising corporate executives, academics and policy-makers. The Chairman of the Board, Mr Matti Alahuhta, is the CEO of Kone, a Finnish-based multinational corporation. In December 2008, the name of the new Rector (President) was made public. Professor Tuula Teeri came from outside the merging universities. Her background in Finland is in biotechnology and at the time of her appointment she was Vice Rector of the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden.

The crucial precondition for the general reform of the Finnish higher education sector was the passing of a new Universities Act in Parliament. Despite criticism from several directions (Tomperi, 2009), the Finnish Government and the Ministry of Education drafted the Universities Act proposal at a fast pace, and in February 2009 submitted it to the Parliament, which passed it in modified form in June 2009. In the autumn of 2009, the by-laws of Aalto University were introduced by the Foundation Board. On 1 January 2010, the authority and responsibilities of TKK, HSE and TaiK were transferred to the Aalto University Foundation, and the new university officially began its operations.

Next, we revisit the period 2005-2009. We specify and illustrate reputation-building by the Aalto University merger strategists and communications experts, and then proceed to the (re)construction of reputation in the media. Key issues are summarized in Table I.

Building an innovative world-class university

> *Aalto University – flagship project in higher education reform*
>
> The innovation university project, as the Aalto University project was known before, is one of the flagship projects in the extensive higher education reform currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education. [. . .]
>
> The increased importance that universities have as promoters of econimic growth and wellfare [sic] are behind the university reform. Universities are the most important public entities of the innovation system. At the same time, Finnish universities have to compete ever more for funding and talents internationally[4].

This extract is from the Aalto University web site, explaining the preparations for the merger. We find this text typical of Aalto's communications. It adopts a matter-of-fact tone, stating particular issues as facts. It emphasizes the broader significance of the

Table I. Dynamics of reputation-building in the making of Aalto University

	Constructing an innovative "world-class" university	Being (re)constructed
Societal significance	Rising to the inevitable challenges posed by the global economy on Finnish society and economy, and aspiring to become a top university on a global scale	Symbolizing the Finnish university sector reform, for better or for worse Enhancing domestic competition, and attracting a range of reactions based on different viewpoints
Interdisciplinarity	Building a unique interdisciplinary university that fosters innovations relevant for business practice through top research and teaching	Leaving room for sarcasm and belittlement in relation to the materialization of the espoused objectives in practice
Symbolic break with the past	Emphasizing novelty and a new beginning through symbols not directly linked with the merging universities	Triggering judgments based on how well symbolic choices correspond to the objectives and progress of the new university

new university in Finnish society, and establishes it as the single most important element – the "flagship project" – in this changing setting.

Our analysis indicates that building the reputation of the new university has been based on three main pillars. First, the benefits of the university merger for Finnish business and the society at large has been a significant feature in promoting Aalto. In Finland, it is inescapably framed by the fact that it has become the most radical and visible answer to the concerns voiced in the Government Inquiry Report of February 2007, which indicated that "the position of the Finnish academic institutions within the international field of universities is not adequate to meet the challenges of globalization."[5] The Finnish Confederations of Industries (EK) maintained that "The central objective of Aalto University is to secure the competence capital within fields central to the development and competitiveness of Finnish business community and society"[6]. The perceived national importance of the merger in the global economy was reflected in the reputation-building throughout 2005-2009.

Second, and relatedly, the interdisciplinary nature of Aalto University and its operations has been emphasized enthusiastically. Building the reputation of Aalto has focused on innovations driven by technology and laced with design, emphasizing the unique opportunities provided by the merger for combining competences. Newly established interdisciplinary units became the spearheads in building Aalto's reputation:

> *Design Factory, Media Factory* and *Service Factory* are the first joint projects of the Aalto University the, so called, New Expertise Workshops. The workshops are learning, teaching, research, and co-operation environments in which the academic teams and projects as well as companies or communities work together. The workshops support international principles, open innovation, and new ways of learning and teaching as well as an interdisciplinary attitude. The objective is that the research information will be seamlessly transferred into teaching[7].

This somewhat cryptic on-line text (for example, what does "support international principles" mean?) exemplifies the objective of interdisciplinarity, relevant for corporate practice, that has been constantly repeated in Aalto's communications. The three "factories" were chosen as the top new initiatives in Aalto, and they received generous extra funding to kick-off their operations. With the extra funds, the argument went, risk-taking in the creation of new ideas could be encouraged in an exciting physical and intellectual space.

Emphasis on interdisciplinarity has also been evident in the ways in which academic research and teaching have been represented in the Aalto merger. Ambitious academic research that aims at publications in "top-tier" international journals, on the one hand, and that fosters innovations with practical relevance, on the other, has been actively advocated. "Aalto University will focus on research on significant global questions," the Aalto web site stated[8]. World-class research, bringing together the best minds in different fields and disciplines, has been emphasized throughout the merger process. US universities such as Harvard and MIT have been used as benchmarks in Aalto's effort to achieve excellence. Accountability, measurability and competition based on criteria from global standards is the recurring message of Aalto's communication materials. At the level of the three merging universities (or "schools" as they are now called in the new structure), excellence is linked to internal research assessment exercises, the first of which was carried out in 2009.

Reputation-building on the basis of measurable performance is also linked to a new tenure track career system that has been prepared in Aalto and introduced in spring 2010. In contrast to the USA and UK, career systems in Finnish universities have hitherto not been based on tenure tracks. Top decision-makers sought to differentiate Aalto from its Finnish counterparts and introduced the first tenure track system in a Finnish university: "At Aalto University, the tenure track is the core academic career structure and cornerstone of aspirations to be a world-class university with a distinct profile, in which science and art meet business and technology.[9]"

Third, novelty and a symbolic break from the past has been central in the making of the new university. The name Aalto was chosen as "a tribute to one of the internationally best-known Finns – Alvar Aalto – and has been chosen to reflect the concept, spirit, values and goals of the new university.[10]" Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) was an architect and designer who gained legendary status in Finland. "This name symbolizes change and is a tribute to a courageous, overarching renaissance man, who distinguished himself in not only the fields of technology and economics, but also art."

Another fundamental break from the past is the fact that the new university is controlled by a private foundation. Aalto was the first Finnish university to appoint a board composed entirely of members from outside the university. "The members represent a wide spectrum of sciences and arts, as well as the best social and industrial expertise on both national and international levels."[11] After her appointment in December 2008, the new Rector (President), Professor Tuula Teeri laid out the foundations for her approach in an editorial titled "Added value to all parties", published in Aalto News (6/2009)[12]:

> The basic tasks of the university are high-quality research and teaching. Persistent and uncompromising basic research generates new scientific breakthroughs and inventions that provide the seed for innovations. Teaching based on pioneering research guarantees the best education that meets the needs of a constantly changing and renewing society. The university can foster an excellent partnership with companies and other organizations by observing a high standard of quality.

Teeri's own background in the natural sciences is clearly visible in the text, with references to "scientific breakthroughs and inventions". One could also characterize her talk as integrative: top research informs new innovations in teaching, and together they will meet the needs of businesses operating in the fast-moving global economy. The "world-class" discourse is once again in evidence as comparisons are made between Europe and the USA and the need for change is justified by claiming that the former lags behind: "Although European and especially Nordic research is of a high level, it has not traditionally succeeded in generating innovations quite as effectively as, for example, the American research community," Teeri stated in the editorial.

In the spring of 2009, the new visual identity of Aalto University was introduced. A design contest had been held, and the winning entry was called "Invitation". The repertoire of new visual imagery, signifying another radical break from the past, was revealed on 25 September 2009:

> The basic version of the Aalto University logo is "A?", a simple visual message that asks "What is Aalto University?" and invites participation: "What would you like Aalto University to be?" The aim was to create a sign containing as little identity-predefining symbolism as possible. The meaning and symbolism of the logo will be constructed hand in hand with the University. [. . .] The logo has no single static form; instead, it can adopt a number of

> variations by combining the letter A with diverse punctuation marks. In addition to the basic version, the University will use "A!" and "A""[13].

President Tuula Teeri maintained that "Our new visual identity expresses the ideas of Aalto University regarding creation of new connections, being multidisciplinary, and having a diversity of values. It also reflects our focus on the basics – i.e. in-depth research and first-rate teaching." At the same time[14], the new official names of the three schools in Aalto were announced. As of 1 January 2010, the Helsinki School of Economics, for example, was to become the Aalto University School of Economics.

How unique are the reputation-building efforts at Aalto? A search of home pages around the world suggests that a combination of honoring tradition and crafting a modern outlook is typical for universities. This is usually laced with references to international excellence (i.e. the university is "one of the leading…"). In Finnish universities, claims for international orientation are typically combined with explicit references to multidisciplinarity. For example, the University of Helsinki is "one of the best multidisciplinary research universities in the world", the University of Turku is "an internationally acknowledged, multidisciplinary scientific university", and the University of Lapland is "an international, multidisciplinary institution". The "activities" of the newly merged University of Eastern Finland "underscore multidisciplinarity" and "the university has extensive international networks". Whether all these explicit references to multidisciplinarity have been crafted in response to Aalto's matter-of-fact claims to uniqueness is beyond the scope of our study.

In comparison with other universities in Finland and elsewhere, a rhetoric of becoming (world-class) is characteristic of the new Aalto University. The reputation-building is explicitly future-oriented. In the web sites of other universities, the rhetoric seems to be more about the present (and the past): the university "is" something and "has" particular features that are developed, for example, to improve the university's ranking in the domestic or global league tables. "With centuries of experience"[15], Aalto looks forward boldly with the aim of creating something new, which is not merely the sum of its predecessors.

Being (re)constructed: controversy and conformity

> [TaiK rector] Sotamaa displays astonishing arrogance in relation to the film and casting experts in his own university. He gives out false information about the discussion on the so-called top university and about the views opposing it. […] Teachers responsible for film and casting arts, students and staff are forced to initiate discussion on the fate of the department in public because within TaiK this discussion has been systematically put down (*HS* April 18, 2007/letter to the editor by a group of TaiK professors).

The quote above exemplifies how controversies in the construction of Aalto's reputation came to the fore, in this case in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the major Finnish daily newspaper. TaiK has in many ways been a special case in the Aalto merger. It is the smallest of the merging universities, and it comprises a broad spectrum of different disciplines ranging from industrial design to art education. Staff and students at departments such as motion picture, television and production design actively opposed the merger already when the Government Inquiry Report was published in February 2007. Several protests were organized, and a Pro Arte-appeal to disentangle TaiK from the merger project was signed by over 5,000 people. The place of art in the new university became a recurring subject of controversy in the public debate.

Overall, in the Finnish media, the making of Aalto was discussed through a range of themes that shifted over time. First, Aalto University's status as the "flagship project" in the Finnish university sector reform meant that it came to symbolize a dramatic transformation, for better or for worse, depending on the view adopted. Supporters and critics of the university reform used Aalto in different ways to argue their case. For example, representatives of the business community assumed an active role in promoting the merger as a "must". In *Helsingin Sanomat*, the president of EK wrote a fiery letter to the editor:

> The [merger idea] is in accordance with the requirements of the modern world, and it must be implemented according to the original plan. A few Finnish universities must be provided with opportunities to compete successfully with such world-class top universities as the American Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Chinese Tsinghua University. This is far more important then providing equal resources for all Finnish universities so that they can compete amongst themselves. It is time for Finland to make an effort to leap to the top of the university world (*HS* 14 October 2006/letter to the editor by the president of EK, published in the editorial page).

The reference to "requirements of the modern world" is typical of reformist discourse, constructing change as self-evident. Comparisons to "world-class top universities" is, again, a major part of the argumentation. Top Finnish politicians also chipped in. "Universities are not capable of renewal without pressure from the State," the Minister of Education declared (*KL* September 7, 2006). Blaiming academics for their inability to change in the face of global challenges in the "real world" became a recurring feature in the pro-Aalto media coverage.

In turn, it is evident that criticism of the university sector reform was often framed as direct criticism of Aalto. In the three merging universities, only students and employees from TaiK actively voiced their criticism in public. Professor Yrjö Sotamaa, the Rector of TaiK who is generally credited for first voicing the merger idea, paid a price for his active support of the merger. In April 2008, he was voted out of his position (*HS* April 10, 2008). Sotamaa had repeatedly said in public that the merger was widely supported in TaiK. However, according to the head of the TaiK Student Union, voting Sotamaa out of office "shows that the views of TaiK students and employees have not been taken sufficiently into account in preparing for the innovative university."

An interesting take on Aalto's reputation was published in *Aino* (29 September 2009), the new gazette of the Aalto Student Union. In a text sarcastically titled "American, but not a dream," Finnish branding experts were quoted commenting on how Aalto's "public image" had developed so far. One of them had the following to say:

> ... the image of the new university represents the logic of world-class sports: you only support athletes who are already good, while others get nothing. The only objective is to succeed in international competition.

The apparent incompatibility of Aalto's 'world-class' (or "American") reputation-building efforts with Finnish traditions was brought to the fore. In general, the contrast between, on the one hand, the captains of Finnish industry who advocate "world-class excellence" and, on the other, those who ridicule it illustrates how different stakeholder groups have attached different meanings to the making of Aalto.

The public debate on Aalto generally took a more critical turn when money was discussed. Actors in other Finnish universities complained about favoritism. Key individuals affiliated with the University of Helsinki argued that Finland already has one “world-class” university – theirs, which is the oldest, largest and most established university in the country[16]. Interestingly, on its web site, the University of Helsinki boldly claims that it is “one of the best multidisciplinary research universities in the world”[17] and that it is the “most versatile institution for science, education, and intellectual renewal in Finland, a pioneering builder of the future”[18]. Regional Finnish universities, in turn, felt threatened as the reform rhetoric embraced the need to cut back on the geographically dispersed university system. Their representatives were active in the media, both questioning the rationale of the reform and of Aalto’s apparently strong financial position therein. Aalto became the “envied prodigal son,” as *Helsingin Sanomat* wrote on 13 August 2008. Discourse on Aalto’s societal significance became a contested space.

Second, in line with Aalto University’s communications, the principle of multi- and interdisciplinarity was celebrated by those supporting the merger. “Emphasizing interdisciplinarity is ‘in’ around the world. The most significant insights are produced in interfaces between different disciplines,” the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education recited the pro-Aalto view (*HS* 21 April 2008). Overcoming mediocrity and boosting energy into an apparently fossilized Finnish academia became a way to frame Aalto positively in media texts. “An inspiring and attractive environment needs to be created so that we get a bit of new energy into academia, too,” an influential industry lobbyist and Aalto Board member stated (*HS* 17 November 2008).

“Aalto is a step in the right direction: combining creativity, technical expertise and business enables, at least in theory, to get the best out of our education. We need a university that strives to be the best. The world is full of mediocrity,” a business manager wrote in *Kauppalehti* (23 November 2009). An “expert from the United States” was quoted as saying that “all of Europe should follow the Aalto model” in “taking the challenges of the global innovation economy seriously” (*KL* 16 July 2009). Texts sympathetic to interdisciplinary Aalto repeated the message. The Design Factory became a frequently used example of practical interdisciplinarity at Aalto, and it was used as a showcase in several articles in Finland (e.g. *Talouselämä*, 8 December 2009) and internationally (e.g. *FT*, 29 March 2009; Kao, 2009).

In marked contrast, the interdisciplinary Aalto was at times the subject of sarcasm and belittlement in the Finnish media. The line of reasoning in such commentary was that you do not become a “world-class” university simply by calling yourself one. A typical example is a column in *Helsingin Sanomat* (30 May 2008), titled “Innovation: more money for universities!”:

> In innovation speak, a mediocre institution becomes a great university, even a top university. [. . .] In practice, a totally different vocabulary describes everyday life in universities. The standard of teaching. Lousy salaries. Studies never completed. Endless hassle with assessments, results and efficiency. Continuous scramble for money to finance the next project.

Sarcasm was particularly evident in regional Finnish newspapers where Aalto became the target of ridicule. Global university rankings were used selectively to make a point of the mediocre standing of the merging universities in the international league tables. It was frequently pointed out that for decades several Finnish universities had already combined technical and business knowledge under the same roof, and that the Aalto concept was hardly unique or novel. Lappeenranta University of Technology, a regional university which boasts a relatively large business studies department, ran an advertisement in *Tekniikka & Talous* (15 January 2010), with the text: "Good luck to the new Aalto University. We have practiced combining technology and business since 1969. Should you have problems, give us a call." The message is reiterated on the university web site:

> For decades already, Lappeenranta University of Technology has been ahead of its time, combining two fields of science that complement each other – technology and business studies.

LUT's rhetorical countermove in the media and in its www-materials exemplifies sarcasm in the face of Aalto's matter-of-fact claims to uniqueness in its multidisciplinary approach.

Third, while a symbolic break from the past was central in building the reputation of Aalto, the novelty of the concept could be refuted, as pointed out above. When the composition of the Board of the Aalto University Foundation was announced in August 2008 and the name of the new President was made public, however, the media coverage was markedly positive. *Helsingin Sanomat* (20 December 2008) called Teeri a "surprise choice," but recited at length her international experience and change management skills. The title of the article was "The new rector of Aalto University: artists need not worry." This choice of emphasis illustrates how expectations of conflicts between "artists" and others in the new university continued to interest Finnish journalists. Aalto's new logo in its different versions – A?, A! and A" – was greeted with mixed feelings. "Aalto University could not decide," a columnist in *Helsingin Sanomat* commented on the question mark, openly baffled by the visual imagery (26 September 2009).

The other side of the coin is the ghost of past legacies. *Helsingin Sanomat*, among others, published several articles that highlighted tensions inside Aalto. Disputes between the Student Unions of the merging universities is a case in point. "An innovation is needed. Students of the forthcoming Aalto University should start playing in the same team when the handsome new university is opened in autumn next year. It doesn't look like it's going to happen," *Helsingin Sanomat* (19 October 2008) remarked sarcastically. "Aalto-students get their own customer magazine," *Helsingin Sanomat* (15 October 2009) mocked, commenting on the first issue of Aino, the new Student Union gazette. "The people responsible for the gazette have assumed the objectives and slogans of those backing Aalto University. The articles try hard to reassure us that the community spirit is great. Reading the gazette, you get a different impression. The joint spirit is missing."

Conclusions

In this paper, we have offered an exploratory study of a university merger, with the aim of shedding new light on reputation-building, which has remained unexplored in the mergers and acquisitions (M&As) literature. We have analyzed key actors' reputation-building, focusing especially on how notions of "world-class" are used to distinguish the new university from its domestic counterparts and to present it as an attractive and innovative global player. We have also explored the dynamics of controversy and conformity in how the reputation of the new university becomes (re)constructed in different fora and *vis-à-vis* different stakeholders.

Our empirical focus has been on a merger of three universities, which resulted in the making of the new Aalto University in Finland. We conducted a critical discourse analysis of how Aalto came into being in 2005-2009. The reputation of the new university, as constructed by merger strategists and communications experts, rested on its timeliness and societal significance, interdisciplinary and practical relevance, and on a break with the past, which was represented as inevitable. Viewing discourses as linguistically mediated representations wherein particular meanings are (re)constructed, our study illustrates the colonization of academia by neo-liberal market discourse celebrating marketization and competition (Krejsler, 2006; Wedlin, 2008; see Fairclough, 1993). At the same time, it brings to the fore the penetration of academia by knowledge economy discourse, where practically relevant and commerziable multidisciplinary innovations are presented as crucial (Barnett, 2000; O'Hara, 2007) and the entrepreneurial role of the university in society is emphasized (Clark, 1998).

We argue that notions of becoming an innovative "world-class" university have acted as imaginaries in the discursive constructions (Fairclough, 2003); predictions of an inevitable future are used to legitimize radical and controversial actions in the present. What is interesting in the Finnish case is the speed of the university reform and the dogmatism of the discourses that constitute it. While the dominant discursive constellation of marketization, knowledge economy and entrepreneurialism could be challenged by different stakeholders in fora such as the local media, these efforts have so far remained relatively haphazard and elusive. A strong counter-discourse to the making of the new university is yet to emerge. As Krejsler (2006) points out, in order for such discourses to gain ground, an in-depth understanding of the radical nature of the changes must be forged. This can only be done once the Aalto merger is under way and its consequences become apparent.

It is already evident that the current Finnish university reform and its dramatic manifestations sustain a number of contradictory elements that frame the reputation-building efforts of the new Aalto University. First, Aalto's close association with the contested reform can actuate a number of different (re)constructions of its reputation in the future. The "flagship" version may be overrun by the "envied prodigal son" version, to paraphrase labels used for Aalto in its communications materials and in the Finnish media, respectively. Second, the question of uniqueness, particularly in relation to multidisciplinarity, is crucial in Aalto's reputation-building, and how this plays out in different fora in relation to rhetorical countermoves by its domestic competitors (other Finnish universities) remains to be seen. Third, in its reputation-building, Aalto has communicated a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, fostering innovations with practical relevance is flagged up, while on the other, ambitious academic research aimed at publications in international "top-tier" journals is accentatuted. The two sides of Aalto's *raison d'être* do not necessarily work in tandem, however, as the first necessitates boundary-crossing and creative cross-disciplinarity, while the politics of academic publishing compel the latter to be strictly focused and discipline-based.

In all, viewing reputation as on-going evaluation constructed in and through discourse, our study has implications for extant research on identification and identity-building in the merger context (Van Dick *et al.*, 2006; Vaara *et al.*, 2007; Maguire and Phillips, 2008). In the medialized global economy, reputation-building and branding are paramount, and it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is "internal" to the merging organization and what is "external" in the traditional sense (Kornberger, 2010). Reputation-building in a merger involves controversial elements (Vaara *et al.*, 2007) that create a contested space and provide the basis for a variety of interpretations among different stakeholders (Brown and Humphreys, 2003). How reputation-building activities – constituting contradictions, as pointed out above – impact on the identification or dis-identification of employees with the new organizational entity needs to be studied further. The burgeoning literature on social identities of (communities of) academics in different disciplines provides a backdrop for such work. The dramatic change in how universities are perceived by the State apparatus and the business community, materializing in new demands for relevance and external accountability, makes university mergers particularly salient for theorizing further the interplay of "internal" and "external" forces in the merger setting.

Finally, while we have come some way in making sense of dynamics of reputation-building in a university merger, it is clear that the findings reported in this paper remain tentative. Our study is limited both by its focus on a single merger in a single country and by the relatively short period covered (2005-2009). More research is needed on emergent forms of controversy and conformity – or compliance and resistance – to reputation-building in the changing academia. Cross-cultural comparative studies of universities in different societal environments facing similar global pressures for reform are particularly called for. Although in recent years the marketization of universities has been studied extensively, a critical take on reputation-building and its connections to employees' social (dis-)identification may provide a fruitful basis for novel contributions.

Notes

1. Available at www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5399caa8-1aeb-11de-8aa3-0000779fd2ac,dwp_uuid = 02e16f4a-46f9-11da-b8e5-00000e2511c8.html (accessed 21 April 2009).
2. The Helsinki University of Technology (TKK), which received university status in 1908, was by far the largest of the three merging universities. Helsinki School of Economics (HSE), established in 1911, was the leading business school in Finland. The University of Art and Design Helsinki (TaiK), founded in 1871 as the School of Arts and Crafts, was the largest university of its kind in the Nordic countries.
3. Krejsler (2006) provides an excellent account of similar developments in Denmark. He traces the transition from a vanishing democratic and Humboldtian university discourse toward an emerging market and efficiency oriented university discourse.
4. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/the-innovation-university-as-part-of-university-reform (accessed 9 January 2009; misprints in the original).
5. Teknillisen korkeakoulun, Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun ja taideteollisen korkeakoulun yhdistyminen uudeksi yliopistoksi. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:16. [Merging the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics

and the University of Art and Design into a New University. Ministry of Education Reports 2007:16, p. 9.]

6. Osaamisen uusi Aalto. Aalto-korkeakoulun varainhankinta. Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto EK 2008. ["The New Wave of Competence. Fund-raising for Aalto University"; material available at www.ek.fi.]
7. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/factories (accessed 27 May 2009; misprints in the original).
8. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/call-for-ideas-in-research (accessed 27 May 2009).
9. Available at www.aalto.fi/en/about/careers/tenure_track/ (accessed 14 January 2010).
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11. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/foundation-board (accessed 20 November 2009).
12. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/tuula-teeri-added-value-to-all-parties (accessed 27 May 2009).
13. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/news/aalto-university-revealed-its-new-visual-identity (accessed 20 November 2009).
14. Available at www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/news/aalto-university-revealed-its-new-visual-identity (accessed 20 November 2009).
15. Available at www.aalto.fi/en/about/ (accessed 7 October 2010).
16. An example is available at http://blogs.helsinki.fi/t-retki/page/4/ (accessed 28 May 2009).
17. Available at www.helsinki.fi/inbrief (accessed 6 September 2010).
18. Available at www.helsinki.fi/strategy/ (accessed 6 September 2010).

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Struggles in organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics: the case of a marketizing university

Recent research underlines that strong branded identities are created through co-creational processes in which multiple stakeholders are actively involved and brand identities are matched with cultural, political, and economic forces in society. However, there is a lack of in-depth research into how organizations attempt to adopt new branding logics. To address this research gap, we conduct a study of a university that is rebranding itself in accordance with a new marketoriented, service-dominant logic. While harmonic value co-creation between the brand and stakeholders is emphasized in an earlier literature, our study shows that attempts to adopt these logics trigger contradictory and adversarial interpretations among stakeholders about the role and identity of the focal actor vis-à-vis their own. We conclude that adopting new branding logics involves struggles and dynamics of power and resistance, which have passed unnoticed in earlier research. Resistance is not only targeted toward the brand's symbolic meanings and conducted by marginal consumer groups to enhance their own identities. Rather, it can also be targeted toward the tangible resource roles that stakeholders are expected to assume vis-à-vis the brand, and conducted by various stakeholder resistors – with the outcome of undermining and shifting the essence of the brand itself.

Keywords: branding logics; consumer resistance; organizations; stakeholders; service-dominant logic; marketization; university; merger

The identities and self-images adopted by consumers are not a straightforward marketing issue (Berthon et al. 2007), as branding has become a core activity of contemporary consumerist culture (Schroeder 2009) and capitalist society (Holt 2006) as well as a meaning-making device in organizations (Kärreman and Rylander 2009). The logics by which effective branded identities are created are in flux. Most notably, extant research underlines that in today's marketplace, strong "iconic" or "gestalt" branded identities are created through interactional processes in which multiple stakeholders are actively involved and brand identities are aligned with cultural, political, and economic forces in society (Diamond et al. 2009; Holt 2006). This contrasts with the traditional understanding of branding, which was based on one-way supply of brand images from marketers to consumers, who were rather passive recipients of brand images and who did not actively ponder the motivations of marketers or the value that each party stood to gain from the focal brand.

Despite the fact that recent research has demonstrated the possibility of new logics for creating strong, stakeholder-valued brands in the marketplace, there is a lack of research into the *processes through which organizations attempt to adopt* such logics amidst wider cultural, political, and economic forces. To partly fill this research gap, we conduct an in-depth case study of a rather extreme example of a university rebranding initiative, which aligns with a contemporary market-oriented and "service-dominant" (SD) logic (cf. Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Merz, He, and Vargo 2009; Vargo and Lusch 2004). We consider this initiative as a revealing example of how a traditional, passively branded organization shifts to a new logic in which multiple stakeholders are invited to actively contribute to the focal brand and obtain value from it. Indeed, as an instance of a new branding logic, SD-aligned branding shares much common ground with the aforementioned notions of contemporary cultural and gestalt branding (Diamond et al. 2009; Holt 2006), such as the emphasis on the active contribution of multiple stakeholders to the brand, as well as on the notion of co-creation of use-value to all parties (Campbell, O'Driscoll, and Saren, 2013).

Some strong university brands such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Harvard have of course existed for centuries, and universities have always "branded" themselves with heraldic crests, seals, and mottos. This reminds us that university branding is not an entirely new phenomenon. But as universities have become further marketized in recent years not only in the Anglo-American scene but also in the state-controlled systems of higher education in Europe (Wedlin 2008), they have engaged in more holistic strategic rebranding initiatives, which go beyond the design of seals, slogans, and marketing communications to span university restructuring processes in their entirety (Hearn 2010). Such a move toward new branding logics constitutes a radical disruption for the university organization. Ours is a study of an organizational attempt to adopt a new branding logic from a critical perspective, with a focus on analyzing various stakeholder dynamics and resistances involved in this initiative.

We argue that adopting new branding logics involves struggles and dynamics of power and resistance, and invite researchers in the field of consumption culture, in general, to address these dynamics in the organizations and branding processes that they study. We further contribute to research on consumer resistance, in particular, by addressing the following less-studied phenomena identified by Izberk-Bilgin (2010): (a) the resistances and power play involved, when global branding phenomena take over traditionally non-market scenes, (b) the resistances of multiple, sometimes vague stakeholders groups, instead of merely those of various consumer groups, and (c) the shifting roles and identities of the variety of stakeholders involved in contemporary branding processes.

The present article is structured as follows. First, to set the stage for the changing cultural, political, and economic context, we describe how marketizing universities are adopting a brand logic that is de facto aligned with the SD logic advocated by some marketing scholars (Merz, He, and Vargo 2009; Vargo and

Lusch 2004). Second, we provide a brief review of the literature on university branding as well on SD-related branding. Third, we describe our in-depth case study methodology and, fourth, offer our findings. Finally, we critically discuss the adoption of new brand logics by contemporary organizations and reflect our findings vis-à-vis earlier research on consumption cultures.

Universities between autonomy and instrumentalism

> *During more than eight centuries, 'university' has been the name given by a society to a sort of supplementary body that at the one and the same time it wanted to project outside itself and to keep jealously to itself, to emancipate and control (Derrida 1983, 19).*

Over time, universities have been subject to alternating religious, cultural, political, and economic forces. Since its inception, the concept of university has drawn meanings from surrounding society, and its position and autonomy have been legitimized in different ways in different locations at different times. At the same time, the structure and content of higher education have converged across boundaries of nation-states at several historical junctions (Rüegg 2004).

One key dimension along which universities have alternated over centuries is their focus on the terminal values of knowledge and truth defined by the academic community itself vs. an alternative focus on instrumental information and value created for external parties (Rüegg 2004). Some of the latter instrumental focus was observed in the West in the era of imperialism and the World Wars, when universities were subject to pressures to serve the political and military purposes of nation-states. In recent years, a different form of instrumentalism has emerged. This is the expectation that universities must provide marketable knowledge and value to industries, companies, employers, and the civil society. Indeed, a general "marketization" trend can be observed where private businesses and markets are increasingly taken as benchmarks for transforming universities and where applicability of knowledge as well as competition, efficiency, and external accountability are embraced and exercised through various techniques of measurement and control (Marginson 2008). Although such marketization has proceeded at a different pace in different countries (Krejsler 2006), the transformation of universities has accelerated across the West and beyond (Wedlin 2008). Thus, as a contemporary form of instrumentalism, universities are increasingly defined by policy-makers as producers of information and resources that should be useful and valuable to external stakeholders such as companies and industries – and less representative of the virtues defined by the academic community itself (Marginson 2008).

With their marketized focus on the delivery of instrumental use-value to external stakeholders, universities compete against each other in attracting the "best" students and scholars as well as funding from the market (Engwall 2007; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007). Such use-value has also been argued to call for interdisciplinarity, thus challenging disciplinary boundaries and traditions within academia (Gibbons et al. 1994). Yet another aspect of marketization is the consolidation of universities through mergers and other restructuring initiatives familiar from the corporate world. These endeavors, too, have typically been initiated from outside the academic community and orchestrated by management and administrators. Viewed from within universities, they have often been forced rather than voluntary (Skodvin 1999), causing uncertainty and stress among academics (Cartwright, Tytherleigh, and Robertson 2007).

Taken together, one can observe that the aforementioned developments can be viewed as signs of contemporary universities adopting the generic principles of the SD logic, as advocated by contemporary marketing thought (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Managerial SD logic expressly encourages organizations to focus on the use-value they provide, instrumentally, to stakeholders – replacing the idea that organizations and their products have inherent value as such. Service in this perspective is synonymous with the benefits provided by an actor to other actors (Vargo and Lusch 2004). The aforementioned university marketization and the related notion of "higher education as a service" (Ng and Forbes 2009) testify to attempts by universities to align with SD logic. Moreover, the contemporary notion that the services of universities should benefit multiple stakeholders is also well-aligned with managerial SD logic, which emphasizes that service value is always co-created with multiple customers and stakeholders rather than being incorporated, per se, in goods or services (Vargo and Lusch 2004). In a similar vein, university stakeholders are seen to include not only faculty and students but also alumni, private donors and employers, the state, and accreditors (Ng and Forbes 2009).

Thus, setting the stage for our study, we have one logic and modus operandi (i.e. autonomous universities where knowledge and truth are pursued by scholars), which is disrupted by broader cultural, political, and economic forces (i.e. university marketization). This puts pressure on universities to align themselves with a new modus operandi. This shift, in turn, pressures them to adopt new identity and brand logics, evoking dynamics of power and resistance. In our empirical study, we focus especially on the latter part of this broader process (i.e. the adoption of new identity and brand logics, and the struggles involved).

Next, we provide a brief review of a prior literature on university branding and on a branding-related SD literature, and define research questions for our empirical study. However, it is important to note that even if the marketization of universities can be viewed as the alignment of emergent SD actors with the logic of instrumental use-value–creation for a variety of stakeholders, we describe the struggles in an organization's *attempts* to adopt the SD identity and brand. We do not argue whether or how the organization *should* go about this endeavor, which is the focus of most of the prior, normatively and managerially oriented SD literature. The SD literature (Ballantyne and Aitken 2007; Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Fyrberg and Jüriado 2009; Merz, He, and Vargo 2009; Vargo and Lusch 2004) as such offers, indeed, a rather unproblematic picture of the value–creation philosophy and initiatives behind branding – as if value co-creation between stakeholders was essentially harmonic cooperation.

Instead, we focus on the identities, interests, and struggles involved in the process, and highlight how it gives rise to dynamics of power and resistance.

Adopting a service-dominant logic in university branding?

Universities increasingly invest in branding. They appoint professional brand managers, define brand identities, integrate branding concerns into their strategies, and introduce branding initiatives. This signals how universities are under pressure to change from a "Republic of Scholars" into an organization like any other (Krücken and Meier 2006). However, the extant literature on university branding has taken a relatively traditional perspective, most often focusing on the external brand image of universities within a single stakeholder or "customer" group such as students (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007; Yang, Alessandri, and Kinsey 2008). By concentrating on one or few stakeholders and by assuming that a university is akin to a business firm (with a singular brand image in the customer group's mind), much of the extant research has all but ignored their complexity as organizations (Chapleo 2010; Jevons 2006), failing to address them as objects of contestation among a wide array of stakeholders (Lowrie 2007; Lowrie and Hemsley-Brown 2011; Stevens Armstrong, and Arum 2008). Indeed, it has been argued that some branding perspectives try to abstract the heterogeneous and complex institution into a pithy image (Hearn 2010). Universities are likely to be "too complex to be encapsulated by one brand or identity definition" as they do not "speak with a single voice" (Waeraas and Solbakk 2009, 449), and branding of universities is likely to involve an ongoing negotiation of representations where both "what" and "who" are being branded is constantly under scrutiny (Vásquez, Sergi, and Cordelier 2013).

Making sense of the stakeholder complexity, polyphony, and controversy is where our focus on a university's attempt to adopt a new logic of branding can inform the study of university branding – and where the literatures of new branding logics can learn from the study of a university. We specify our first research question as follows: *What kind of diverse stakeholder actions and struggles characterize the branding dynamics of an emergent SD actor such as a university, and how are they linked to broader cultural, political, and economic forces?* In focusing on this question, our study comes close to Vásquez, Sergi, and Cordelier's (2013) research on the communication practices of university faculty in "being branded and doing branding," meaning that we do not focus on explicit, conscious branding efforts such as logo changes and promotion campaigns alone but zoom into daily practices of a variety of stakeholders in (not) aligning themselves with a putative new brand.

At the same time, branding is not only about tangible actions but also about the perceived identities or images held by stakeholders of both themselves and other stakeholders. Prior SD literature, as well as the literature on contemporary branding logics (Diamond et al. 2009; Holt 2006), recognizes that the contemporary (SD) brand is not a singular product or corporate brand image that can be simply added by the organization on top of its service output (through, e.g. marketing communications), but rather a complex sign system that symbolizes the entire, proposed value-creation processes (Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006). However, while the term "sign system" apparently refers to a complex variety of brand images in stakeholders' minds, how exactly they operate in the context of SD branding and what perceptual processes take place in SD-aligned branding remain to be studied. Thus, we specify our second research question as follows: *How do stakeholders perceive the identity of an organization attempting to align with a contemporary (SD) branding logic?* The extant SD-related branding research does not ask or answer this question directly, other than by pointing out broadly that a brand of SD logic is about value propositions or promises made and delivered to stakeholders (Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Brodie, Whittome, and Brush 2009; Fyrberg and Jüriado 2009), as also emphasized for some time in the Nordic school of service marketing (Grönroos 2009).

Our two research questions reflect the nature of a brand both as an entity (reflector of brand identity and stakeholder identities) and as a process (of stakeholder actions and reactions) (Stern 2006). In addressing our research questions, we pay specific attention not only to the intentional efforts by university management to create a new identity and brand through holistic restructuring of the university, but also to reactions such as com pliance and resistance that it generates across a variety of stakeholder groups. We discuss the meanings that the brand and its representations obtain among both the brand's advocates and its opponents (Kärreman and Rylander 2009). Our premise is that the two positions feed on each other (Parker 2006) and that they affect the co-production of the new brand (Lowrie and Hemsley-Brown 2011) – not as harmonic value co-creation but as a contested process. In this process, power and resistance are closely knit together in an interconnected dynamic as modes of resistance "flow from communicative networks that include dominant groups" (Fleming and Spicer 2007, 305; Scott 1985). We adopt the concept of "struggle" to denote this dynamic (Clegg 1989; Fleming and Spicer 2007; Thomas and Hardy 2011) in a university's attempts to adopt a new branding logic. Finally, we take seriously the fact that all this takes place in a particular context that influences the ways in which the branding of the SD logic-oriented actor plays out. On the one hand, cultural conventions affect identities and branding, and cultural codes both enable and constrain organizations in using brands to create value for stakeholders (Schroeder 2009; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006). On the other hand, the political and economic environment has a bearing on branding, by shaping, enabling, and intervening in branding processes and the dynamics of power and resistance involved. With this theoretical framework we now turn to our empirical case.

Research site, empirical materials, and analyses

Our empirical focus is on Aalto University, which was formed through a merger of *the Helsinki University of Technology (HUT), the Helsinki School of Economics (HSE)*, and *the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH)* in Finland. HUT, which obtained university status in 1908, was by far the largest of the three merging universities, and the leading technological university in Finland. HSE, established in 1911, was the leading business school in Finland. UIAH, originally founded in 1871, was the largest university of its kind in the Nordic countries, although the smallest of the merging institutions. All three universities were the top institutions in their respective fields in Finland. The merger idea was first proposed in September 2005, the new name was introduced in May 2008, and the merger took effect on 1 January 2010, when Aalto University became a legal entity. While the merging universities had all been public and state-owned, the new university was placed under the control of a private foundation.

In order to study the dynamic processes related to the attempt to create a new Aalto University brand with an SD logic orientation, we adopted an interpretive case study design (Stake 1995). Our longitudinal study of the making of Aalto in 2005 – 2010 draws from a wide range of empirical materials. Since November 2007, when the official merger decision was made by the Ministry of Education, our study proceeded in real time. This has offered us an opportunity to study the emerging Aalto brand "in its totality" (Diamond et al. 2009).

We collected a comprehensive set of empirical materials, ranging from public documents and earlier research reports dealing with the university merger through documents and communication produced by the universities and their management to reports focusing on the faculty, students, and other stakeholders. We also conducted interviews with key individuals involved in the merger and branding project as well as key stakeholders. All our empirical materials are summarized in Table 1 below.

A preliminary analysis of our empiral materials indicated that a pragmatic way to make sense of the events in the merger and branding process was to structure them along the following phases: (1) *opportunity identification* for the merger and for the new university brand to be created in the merger, (2) *refinement* of the new brand to be created in the merger, and (3) *launch*. In further analyses, we located a number of themes that emerged from our empirical materials in each phase and noted how various stakeholders became active in promoting or opposing the emerging brand at different phases and in relation to different themes (research question 1) and to the kind of brand images involved (research question 2). To provide a supportive framework for an analysis of the case in terms of its alignment with SD logic, we analyzed (a) the service promises (value propositions) offered to stakeholders (Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006) and (b) the stakeholder resources (Vargo and Lusch 2004) through which the new service brand was supposed to be realized. In analyzing the resources, we relied on an established categorization of key resources of service delivery systems previously applied in conceptualizing higher education as service: the processes, people, and physical aspects through which service (promises) is offered (Ng and Forbes 2009). Within this framework, the case accounts in the following section present a description of the case for our initial analysis (as attached in Appendix 1).

Table 1: Empirical materials

Texts produced by stakeholders external to Aalto and its predecessors

- Domestic and international governmental committee reports (OPM 2007)
- Research and commentaries on the reform of the Finnish university system (Lipponen, and Hakonen 2012; Lipponen, Lendasse, and Aula 2011)
- Memos and brochures by The Finnish Confederation of Industries (EK)
- Media texts in the major Finnish daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* and the business daily *Kauppalehti*, covering the period 6 September 2005, until 31 December 2010 (1203 media texts in total)
- Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets in Finland (e.g. regional newspapers and student magazines) and abroad (T*he Financial Times, Harvard Business Review, Newsweek*) (FT 2009; Kao 2009)

Texts related to stakeholders internal to Aalto and its predecessors

- Online materials and documents on the making of new university, e.g. strategy, HumanResources (HR), and marketing (2007–2010); artifacts with visual imagery such as brochures an advertisements
- Powerpoint presentations, blog entries, and newsletters by the new university president(rector) (2009–2010)
- Aalto image survey for internal and external stakeholders (conducted in February-March 2011) and employee survey (conducted in May 2011) (Lipponen and Hakonen 2012)
- Retrospective account by the rectors of HSE and UIAH (Kasanen and Sotamaa 2010)
- KyWeb (online chatroom for HSE students) and *Kylteri* (HSE student magazine), search 2005–2010 carried out in March 2012
- Email conversations with HSE professors on the school's name and brand (in real time October 2009; retrospectively September 2012)
- Research report by a group of scholars who interviewed top management and employees at Aalto (Koschke et al. 2011), research report on the new career system (Kunelius, Noppari, and Reunanen 2009), research report on the new university's reputation (Aula and Tienari 2011)

Interviews

- Key decision-makers such as rectors and vice rectors of the merging universities, state officials at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, representatives of the Finnish business community and industry, the new president (rector) and her new top managers (interviewed in 2008–2010); 45 in total
- Communications managers of the merging universities (interviewed twice: March 2009 and March 2010)
- Communications experts the Ministry of Education and EK (interviewed in March-April 2009)
- Senior branding consultant (interviewed in February 2010)
- New head of communications (interviewed in September 2010 and May 2011)

To extract findings and interpretations from the case description in terms of research question 1 *(What kind of diverse stakeholder actions and struggles characterize the branding dynamics of an emergent SD actor such as a university, and how are they linked to broader cultural, political, and economic forces?),* we revisited the empirical materials and analyses to identify instances of stakeholder dynamics where power and resistance implicate each other and where stakeholder struggles could be detected in relation to branding of the new university. In so doing, we also examined the ways in which the stakeholder identities, on the one hand, and the new university's brand identity, on the other, were enacted in the branding dynamics by exploring how various stakeholders referred to "us" (and "them") in relation to the new university brand. In turn, this analysis fed in interpretations of our second research question *(How do stakeholders perceive the identity of an organization attempting to align with a contemporary (SD) branding logic?)* by indicating how various stakeholders perceived the university's new brand in relation to their identities. In practice, this meant analyzing the new roles and identities that would be imposed by the newly conceptualized university brand on the various stakeholders (in terms of promises given and resources expected in exchange) as well as on the new university itself. Overall, with these questions in the focus of our analysis, our research has been characterized by a process of iteration and a continuous interplay between theory, data collection, and analyses.

The case study

In the following, we present our findings on the branding of Aalto University in three phases: *opportunity identification* in 2005 – 2007 (with a focus on how various stakeholders identified opportunities that could be seized with a new university), *refinement* in 2007 – 2009 (with a focus on the development and negotiation of the new university concept and brand among stakeholders), and *launch* in 2010 (with a focus on the realization of the merger and further negotiation of the Aalto brand). Appendix 1 provides a summary of the case account in terms of the framework described above (value propositions and stakeholder promises).

Opportunity identification

Case account

Professor Yrjö Sotamaa, rector of the UIAH, is generally credited with first voicing the idea of merging the UIAH, the HUT, and the HSE. This took place in September 2005 in Sotamaa's opening speech for the new academic year. He linked the initiative to "the well-being and future of the nation." *Helsingin Sanomat*, the foremost daily newspaper in Finland, picked up the story and framed it as an initiative to create a Finnish "innovation university." Through its lobbying organizations, the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) and the Federation of Finnish Technology Industries, the business community supported the initiative and made its interests clear on its website: "the central objective of [the merger] is to secure the competence capital within fields central to the development and competitiveness of the Finnish business community and society."

The university merger was promoted as a major national initiative in the midst of the economic boom of 2005 – 2007. The interests of Finnish business and industry, the minister for higher education, and the rectors of the three universities gradually converged with a joint vision. The label "innovation university" stuck, and it became the main template for branding the new university. Rectors Eero Kasanen (HSE) and Sotamaa (UIAH) later concluded that this brand template "provided something for everyone. State officials could enhance innovation policy, the business community could promote [national] competitiveness, the Ministry of Education could advance structural reform, and university people could enhance their operations" (Kasanen and Sotamaa 2010, 260).

An inquiry was commissioned by the Finnish Government in October 2006 to outline the possibilities for major structural change in the Finnish system of higher education. The message of the inquiry report (OPM 2007) was that the system was in dire need of transformation: "the areas to be developed include the accomplishment of top research and teaching in nationally significant (chosen) core areas, increasing internationalization, and the strengthening of the economic and operational autonomy of universities."It was also pointed out that there was a need for "interdisciplinarity and cooperation across disciplinary boundaries, as companies are forced at an accelerating pace to respond to the challenges of the globalized economy through developing new business competences, service business, and new models of innovation." The report laid out a rationale for merging HUT, HSE, and UIAH. It suggested that the merged university would be granted extra resources to ensure its development into a "world- class institution." The inquiry report used the label "top university" to describe the new entity.

Explicit critics were still few at this stage. They included students and faculty from UIAH who resisted the idea of the new university and its pro-business agenda, treating the very notion of a new "Top University" with sarcasm. They organized public demonstrations, which were covered by the media: *Helsingin Sanomat*, for instance, reported (March 7, 2007) on the demonstrations with the title "Swindle University," which involved a sarcastic play of words, as the word "Swindle" ("huiputus") was substituted for the close word "Top" ("huippu"). A related letter to the editor of *Helsingin Sanomat* (October 17, 2007) summarized the critique: "you can't just say that you establish a top university. Putting together three internationally mediocre institutions doesn't make a great one." Following such reactions, the advocates of the merger soon reverted to talking about an "innovation university."

In spring 2007, the merger became the "flagship project" in reforming the Finnish system of higher education. Political decision-makers in the center-right, market-friendly national government elected in April 2007 were pivotal in this new initiative that shook up the established order in the Finnish academic system. The business community promised to contribute 200 million euros to the initial capital of a private foundation (altogether 700 million euros with 500 million from the state) to govern the new university. "Finnish universities are crap and something needs to be done about it," one of our interviewees in the business community put it bluntly.

The top panel of the table in Appendix 1 provides a summary of the opportunity identification stage where key stakeholders (the Finnish business community, politicians, the Ministry of Education, the governmental inquiry committee, and the rectors of the three universities) began to actively speak for the "innovation university." This marked the beginning of the initiative to create a new university brand, which would symbolize a number of novel opportunities deemed necessary in the global marketplace for higher education. The core service promises of the new university were markedly future oriented and pro-business.

Analysis

Stakeholder reactions and identity struggles (research question 1). Aligned with SD logic (Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006), the instrumental value promises of the new university brand proposed by the initial advocates (e.g. industry representatives and the rectors of the constituent universities) were clearly discernible during the opportunity identification stage – and they involved specific promises to various stakeholders (instead of any single customer group; see Appendix 1), in exchange for their presumed involvement and resources in creating the new university. However, the initial value promises themselves also began to implicate shifts in the stakeholders' identities vis-à-vis the renewed brand and its identity.

Most notably, certain stakeholders who had traditionally been *internal* to the university became *externalized*; and certain traditionally *external* stakeholders were *internalized*. For instance, students – traditionally viewed as key internal stakeholders in the university community – became partly externalized with respect to the new university brand; they were assigned the role of external customers entitled to higher quality education. In turn, the faculty found themselves in an ambiguous position. As they were not involved in the initial identification of the merger and rebranding opportunity, they, too, became somewhat externalized in, and yet subdued by, this "national innovation project."

Correspondingly, some traditionally external stakeholders became partly internalized. Especially, some captains of industry (and industry interest groups) became akin to corporate insiders of the new university. They became the new university's central resource-providers and assumed increasing decision-making authority concerning the university's research and teaching (e.g. advocating particular focus areas for research). While endowments and active involvement of the business community in universities are not unusual for US universities (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008), in Finland they marked a dramatic transition to a new form of university funding and governance. In contrast, the role of students and faculty in the university's internal decision-making diminished. Especially at UIAH, some students and faculty reacted concretely to the identity shifts implicated by the value promises of the new brand by filing complaints about the new university and its pro-business stance. These stakeholder dynamics and identity shifts also had obvious links to broader economic and market(ization) forces. The upturn in the Finnish economy, combined with the market-friendly ideology of the national government, contributed to the pro-business and market stance of the initial brand promises.

Thus, the first moments of implicit resistance in our case pertained to the simple fact that for a university it is not self-evident who the “suppliers” and “customers” are (Naude and Ivy 1999; Waeraas and Solbakk 2009). In other words, the redrawing of the external – internal contours of the organization as such as well as the roles of suppliers and customers, started to invite resistance from stakeholders vis-à-vis their traditional roles and identities. This observation extends the prior literature’s notion of consumer resistance (Izberk-Bilgin 2010), wherein resistance has been depicted to occur mostly in the form of resistance by consumers or customers toward supplier brands and toward the meanings associated with such brands. In the present case, in contrast, the emergent resistance was more targeted toward the shifting supplier-customer roles and relationships themselves.

Perceived brand identities (research question 2). Interpreting the dynamics in terms of brand images reveals that at this early stage, the new university’s brand image consisted of future opportunities to be seized by countering certain perceived weaknesses of the “old” universities. In other words, the “innovation university” brand image was explicitly conceptualized and framed as a promise to eliminate such weaknesses, and to seize opportunities in the future (e.g. industry involvement and interdisciplinary research to counter the current lack of innovations; Appendix 1). This conceptualization stands in contrast to traditional corporate and product branding, wherein brand images are conceptualized on the basis of the *current or present* (instead of future) strengths and values of the product or corporation; wherein current weaknesses and threats are mostly concealed (instead of serving as central reference points); and wherein competitors are usually the reference group (instead of the current, dire status of the focal organization). Furthermore, the involvement of some stakeholders per se – for example, captains of industry and international top scholars – began to appear as an important and integral part of the brand image of the newly branded university. This demonstrates the networked nature of the focal actor’s brand image, a substantial part of which consists of perceived links to (or secondary associations with) *other* actors. At the same time, reflecting the stakeholder struggles, the perceived links to these actors were regarded as attractive by some stakeholders (e.g. business community and politicians) and unattractive or threatening by others (e.g. some students and faculty).

Refinement

Case account

In November 2007, the Ministry of Education made the official go-ahead decision for the merger, provided that the Finnish Parliament would reach a consensus on reform of the Finnish university law, which was needed to make the privatization possible. The “innovation university” would be a crucial element in promoting a novel university model in Finland; it would be governed by a private foundation, monitored professionally by a board including representatives from the business community, and managed by a president who was to be unhindered by traditionally collegial academic decision-making.

Symbolic measures emphasizing a fresh start and a break from the past began to characterize the merger process. In May 2008, the name Aalto University was introduced. It referred to Alvar Aalto (1898 – 1976), the internationally renowned Finnish architect whose interdisciplinary reputation as an advocate of functionalism was used as a platform to brand the new university: "Aalto University aims to break down walls between scientific and artistic disciplines." Thanks to a relatively favorable reception by both the media (Aula and Tienari 2011) and the faculty of HUT, HSE, and UIAH (Koschke et al. 2011), the selection of Mr Aalto's name for the university appeared to create an aura of smooth transition from the past to the future for the university's brand image, and delicately highlighted some of its putative new values related to practical innovations and interdisciplinarity.

In August 2008, soon after the founding of the private foundation to govern it, Aalto University became the first Finnish university to have a board composed entirely of outsiders. Matti Alahuhta, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Kone, a Finland-based multinational industrial company, became chairman. In December 2008, the board chose Professor Tuula Teeri of the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden, herself an outsider, as president of the university.

The first manifestations of the new university's innovative, interdisciplinary brand were three new units created in 2008: the Design Factory, the Media Factory, and the Service Factory. The HSE alumni newsletter (Avista 1/2008) stated that "The point of departure in the factories is to bring students, teachers, researchers, and companies together to meet and resolve the challenges of everyday life." The Design Factory in particular became the showcase for practically relevant interdisciplinary education and a new student-centered, company-cooperative culture at Aalto. It attracted attention in Finland and abroad (FT 2009; Kao 2009). However, among Aalto faculty, feelings about the factories were mixed, as the "innovation university hype was beginning to be a source of irritation" (Koschke et al. 2011, 18). Some of the irritation was also targeted toward the new logo and visual imagery of Aalto University (Figure 1(a)). While Aalto's board and president argued that this unconventional visual imagery signaled innovativeness and open-mindedness on the part of the new university, many stakeholders greeted it with indifference or disdain. Some students, for example, dismissed the visual imagery as "kindergarten stuff" (Lipponen and Hakonen 2012; Lipponen, Lendasse, and Aula 2011), and parodies of the new visual imagery were circulated by actors critical of the university reform (Figure 1(b)). Sarcasm and parody about the visual imagery also reflected a broader concern that the traditional internal stakeholders – students and faculty – increasingly had about the heavy push to create an "American-style," pro-business university in a Nordic welfare society such as Finland. The title of a feature article in the Aalto Student Union magazine (*Aino*, September 29, 2009) put this concern succintly: "American, but not a dream."

Indeed, increasing dissent was now voiced by many stakeholders. For instance, representatives of other Finnish universities questioned the rationale for the strong financial support of Aalto, which they regarded as unfair and detrimental to other universities (Kunelius, Noppari, and Reunanen 2009). Concerned about a new tenure track career system, some Aalto faculty, in turn, feared a division between a small elite in the new system (which they feared would consist of new "top" recruits from abroad) and a Finnish majority condemned to a marginal role (Herbert and Tienari 2013). The arts faculty and students of UIAH also continued to actively resist Aalto's pro-business agenda. In addition, the student unions of the two other constituent universities, HSE and HUT, began quarreling with each other over how their assets would be rearranged in the merger.

Figure 1. (a) Official version of Aalto University's logotypes. (b) Satirical versions distributed of the official logotypes (Tomperi, 2009; fifi.voima.fi).

Furthermore, while the fund-raising for the new university had began in an optimistic spirit in 2007, the global financial crisis hit Finland hard in fall 2008. The Finnish business community found it increasingly difficult to raise funds for the university. At Aalto, talk about extra resources changed toward focus, cost-cutting, and streamlining operations.

For the faculty and students of HSE, the campus in downtown Helsinki and especially its historic main building became a symbol of past glory that had to be retained. In contrast, the university board and president advocated a one-campus model, to create a "unified culture" with a "common purpose" for achieving "world-class" status. HUT's campus outside Helsinki, in Otaniemi, was chosen as the site for the new university; it offered room for expansion. HSE faculty and students continued to resist both the move to the suburbs and the university administration extended in Otaniemi. Faculty sensed that a "new layer of bureaucracy had been set up at the headquarters," as one professor expressed his frustration. The middle panel of the Table in Appendix 1 provides a summary of the key developments at the refinement stage.

Analysis

Stakeholder actions and identity struggles (research question 1). The refinement stage elicited important stakeholder dynamics in terms of actions and struggles. Reflecting the SD logic, the new university's branding came to activate negotiations between stakeholders about the value propositions and resources of the new brand (cf. Merz, He, and Vargo 2009). However, while the SD logic literature typically implies that these negotiations constitute a process of harmonic co-creation where stakeholders jointly work to align their interests and resources and make their preferences and needs "match" in the pursuit of common opportunities (Lusch and Webster 2011), our case highlights the efforts of certain stakeholders to question the new brand promises in their entirety as well as to resist or refuse to play along. In effect, a number of stakeholders began to regard the initial opportunities promised in the brand as actual *threats*. This concerned both the core service propositions (e.g. the opportunity for practice-oriented, interdisciplinary innovations, which turned into a threat from the perspective of basic research in the disciplines) and the prospective utilization of stakeholder resources (e.g. the objective of attracting more internationally acknowledged scholars from abroad, which turned into a threat of excessive elitism as perceived by the present faculty). Thus, the Aalto brand offered a mirror against which the faculty, for example, became acutely concerned about their professional and school (HSE, UIAH, and HUT) identities, and a medium through which to share their frustration in the face of a threat that was perceived to be external to the university.

Thus, in this phase, extending the resistance toward the shifting customer–supplier roles (see phase 1), the instrumental brand values and benefits that had been envisioned, or promised, to various stakeholders became a further subject of struggle. Notably, the fact that the brand value(s) envisioned for some stakeholders may, paradoxically enough, become an actual threat to be resisted for others has not been explicitly recognized in the earlier literature, although brand identities have been noted to often involve paradoxes (Izberk-Bilgin 2010; Thompson and Arsel 2004). Extending observations in earlier studies, the value–threat paradox also involved resistance in the form of culturally elaborate sarcasm and parody (Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2014; Mikkonen and Bajde 2013; Mikkonen, Moisander, and Firat 2011) – for example, around the Aalto logo and visual imagery – that served to ridicule and undermine the essence of the new brand. Another manifestation of stakeholder dynamics could be observed in the manner in which some actors suddenly turned from cooperators into competitors of the new university. This was the case with other Finnish universities, which had traditionally had relatively friendly relations with Aalto's constituent universities. They now became openly envious of Aalto's resources and extra funding. Also, while the student unions had a long tradition of friendly co-existence, they now became adversaries when their funds were to be merged and redistributed.

Regarding the broader cultural, political, and economic forces, this second phase showed that the much-promising brand envisioned by the merger advocates in the previous stage – framed as a silver bullet to counter all the alleged weaknesses of the old universities – was too radical for the focal sociocultural context. At least, the initial promises failed to take the prevailing cultural codes into account and underestimated the extent to which the putative brand opportunities would represent threats to different stakeholders.

University management did make symbolic efforts to provide smoother links from the past to the future (e.g. by choosing the neutral Aalto brand name), but even so, many of the planned changes (e.g. an "American-style" pro-business and innovation stance and a tenure track system; the radically new visual imagery) evidently remained at odds with traditional cultural codes in Finland. In addition, unexpected turmoil in the economic environment due to the financial crisis in fall 2008 called into question the initial resourcing model, given the economic realities of the main funders (government and business community). Eventually, these controversies pushed the management to tone down or reframe many of the initial brand promises (e.g. the cross-disciplinary innovation orientation; see Launch phase below).

Perceived brand identities (research question 2). Our findings point out that in the concept refinement phase, many of the opportunities initially associated with the university's new brand image became perceived threats for some of the stakeholders. To various stakeholders, the university brand essentially symbolized not only the value and resources offered by the focal actor to them, but also the value and resources expected or required of them in return. In effect, for stakeholders unwilling or unable to offer those resources in exchange, the opportunities afforded by the brand image became threats (e.g. for art students who did not wish to engage in pro-business "innovations;" professors who opposed cross-disciplinary "hype" and loss of their own identity; industry representatives who had diminishing financial resources; and HSE faculty and students who were reluctant to move to a common campus). The fact that the contribution and resources expected *in return* from the stakeholders would constitute an integral part of the brand image of a new SD logic-aligned actor (and the resistance this engenders) is in contrast to traditional understandings of corporate and product brand images, which mostly focus on impressions of the value and benefits which the focal product or corporation is expected to offer to customers and other stakeholders.

Launch

Case account

On 1 January 2010, the authority and responsibilities of HUT, HSE, and UIAH were legally transferred to the Aalto University Foundation and the new university officially started operations. At the time, opinion regarding the new university was sharply divided. On the one hand, the cross-disciplinary Design, Service, and Media Factories continued to receive positive attention from the media and from universities abroad. The Aalto Entrepreneurship Society (AaltoES), a student-led community and hub for developing and testing ideas for start-up business, became another favorite of the Finnish media. On the other hand, much of the faculty and media had become critical or cautious about the new university. The dispute over establishment of the new Aalto student union, for example, was keenly followed by the media. "The students' quarrel over money has poisoned the beginning of Aalto University," the leading daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (June 6, 2010) concluded.

Importantly for the faculty, "academic excellence" became an increasingly essential part of Aalto's brand promise as a "world-class university." This catchword received the suffix "by 2020" when Aalto's mission statement, vision, and strategic goals were drawn up. In spring 2009, internal research assessment exercises (RAEs) had been initiated with a specific focus on publications in top-tier international journals, in effect favoring research in disciplines over more boundary-crossing work. In 2010, the results of the RAE exercise were used in allocating financial resources across the university's departments and research units, and to frame some of them as particularly important for the "world-class by 2020" goal. At the same time, a singular emphasis on top-tier journal publications as a measure of quality and success scared some faculty, who were concerned that they would be unable to live up to the new "world-class" Aalto brand (Herbert and Tienari 2013; Koschke et al. 2011) and would become redundant to it (Lund 2012).

With regard to the core service promises, the original idea of interdisciplinarity was further de-emphasized as the president stressed excellence in "basic research" in her speeches, newsletters, and blogs, especially in the natural and technical sciences. The president and her top management team assumed an increasingly prominent role in decision-making, further decreasing the authority of the schools. All decisions on the allocation of resources such as "slots" (positions) in the newly established tenure track system were ultimately made by the president herself. At the same time, three original key figures in the creation of Aalto – the rectors of the constituent universities – were sidelined into retirement or sabbatical leaves. The promise of the Aalto brand was now spearheaded by a board, president, and a team of top managers who had all joined the organization after the opportunity identification stage.

Finally, the campus question had now become one of the most critical internal disputes in developing Aalto and its brand. President Teeri and the board continued to advocate concentration at the ex-HUT campus outside Helsinki. The Finnish media reported that the students of the former HSE were strongly opposed to moving away from their downtown campus (*Helsingin Sanomat*, April 24, 2010). The dean and faculty of HSE also made their opposition to the one-campus model clear: "Aalto University needs a strong presence in the Helsinki city center." The campus decision became not only a question of physical location (downtown Helsinki vs. suburban Otaniemi), but also a symbolic, identity-laden issue. The downtown campus symbolized the school's heritage for the ex-HSE faculty, while concentrating operations in Espoo would signify HUT's dominance in the merger.

The bottom panel of the table in Appendix 1 provides a summary of key developments at the launch stage.

Analysis

Stakeholder actions and identity struggles (research question 1). Some of the opportunities initially identified in 2005 – 2007 with the Aalto University brand were being pursued in 2010. However, significant modifications and adjustments resulting from struggles across various stakeholders had been made. These struggles continued in the launch phase, which demonstrated overall that the management responsibility or locus of the new university brand – who or which stakeholders were in the driver's seat – alternated over time and was dispersed in the network in and around the focal organization, rather than residing in the original advocates (many of whom had been sidelined) or even entirely within the present top management. Thus, while the earlier SD logic literature tends to see one actor in control of the brand (as "brand governor" in Fyrberg and Jüriado 2009) and consumer resistance research has tended to assume pre-defined roles for consumers who resist firms, products, and services that are branded (Izberk-Bilgin 2010), our case clearly shows that the control as well as resistance may shift over time and does not reside in any one stakeholder group.

Overall, a sense of ambiguity remained in the Aalto branding process. Uncertainty and insecurity mounted among the faculty, who felt unable or were simply unwilling to live up to the new "world-class" university brand, as decision-making authority was simultaneously centralized at the headquarters in Otaniemi. The university brand was progressively delivered and communicated in mutual exchanges among various stakeholders. Accordingly, the targets and subjects of branding efforts – reciprocally conducted by and toward various stakeholders – were also dispersed, and involved multi-way communications from the focal actor to stakeholders, from the stakeholder to the focal actor, and from stakeholders to other stakeholders. As examples of the latter, the brand was increasingly affected in the launch stage by negative and adversarial communications between two student unions and by disputes between faculty and top management over the campus location. At the same time, however, the media's infatuation with initiatives such as the Design Factory and Aalto Entrepreneurship Society bolstered Aalto's brand as an innovative, exciting new university.

Furthermore, the launch phase culminated in a broader societal and cultural struggle between traditional (discipline-based) and new (interdisciplinary) university models (cf. Brint 2005; Gibbons et al. 1994). The Aalto brand continued to be a manifestation of the new marketized interdisciplinary university model, while internally it was now geared toward discipline-based research (e.g. with the emphasis on top-tier publications and a high-performance tenure track). Strong traditional cultural codes prevented implementation of the most radical innovation-oriented and cross-disciplinary brand promises. Because of this controversy, a substantial sense of ambiguity remained characteristic of the Aalto branding process: some stakeholders (e.g. industries, some of the newer faculty, the students' Entrepreneurial Society) accepted the new order and started living according to the roles and identities assigned to them in this hybrid of innovation and discipline-oriented basic research, while others (some of the traditional faculty; some students) continued active resistance to those roles and identities or, most often, remained passive about them.

Perceived brand identities (research question 2). The launch phase notably underlined that an essential component of an SD logic-aligned actor's brand image comprises the stakeholders' perceptions of the *direction* in which the branded actor is moving. This includes the potential benefits of the brand that are provided in exchange for certain resources in the future. This was manifested expressly in how the meanings and activities around the new Aalto University influenced – and were influenced by – the perceived stance of the university toward *future* (opportunities as well as threats) – instead of by static impressions of the organization's *current* stature, benefits, or values. This contrasts with the traditional product and corporate branding notions, wherein the influential time perspective of the brand image is typically a snapshot, as customers (and other stakeholders) are mostly seen to be affected by the brand's current image and identity at a certain point of time (e.g. a product purchase, stock investment, or job application).

Discussion

Table 2 provides a summary of our key findings, on the basis of which we outline below the contributions of our study – to the consumer culture theory (CCT) literature on contemporary branding logics and consumer resistance, as well as to the literatures on SD branding and university branding. In Table 3, we provide an additional summary of findings related to the perceived SD brand identity or image, contrasting it with traditional concepts such as corporate and product brand identities (cf. Balmer and Gray 2003; Hatch and Schultz 2003).

To start with, an earlier literature on contemporary branding logics has emphasized that effective brands are created in interactional processes that actively involve multiple stakeholders, and that brand identities are affected by cultural, political, and economic forces in society (Diamond et al. 2009; Holt 2006). However, the bulk of this literature has focused on brands which have been effective in creating an "iconic" or cult status and/or operate in exciting consumption spheres, brandscapes, or subcultures (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Diamond et al. 2009; Holt 2006). Our study extends this literature by focusing on the attempt of a traditional non-market organization to adopt a new branding logic. Our analysis highlights several aspects of the processes involved, which have thus far not received explicit research attention: dynamics of power and resistance and the brand identity perceptions in the struggles involved.

First, prior literature in CCT emphasizes that a key component underlying effective contemporary brands is the brand's ability to facilitate multi-way interactions *among* the brand's multiple consumers (i.e. consumer–consumer–brand relationships) – instead of simple interactions from the brand to consumers (i.e. brand– consumer relationships) (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). Our study highlights that attempts to facilitate mutual value–creation and interaction among the brand's stakeholders are constrained by at least the following aspects: (a) it may not be clear who the new brand's suppliers and customers are, and what their value–

Table 2: Summary of key findings

	Stakeholder dynamics (research question 1)		*Perceived brand identity (research question 2)*
	Stakeholder and identity struggles	*Underlying socio-cultural and market forces*	
Opportunity identification phase	The marketizing SDL actor's brand involves various promises to a multitude of stakeholders, framed as opportunities to eliminate weaknesses of the old organizations. Certain internal stakeholders (students) are externalized and certain external stakeholders (industry captains) are internalized in terms of decision-making. Previously internal stakeholders (e.g., students) or distant stakeholders (e.g., companies) become customers ("customerized") for the brand.	An economic upturn, combined with the market-friendly ideology of the new center-right government contribute to the pro-business and market stance in the initial brand promises, as well as to optimism about its financial resources. Contemporary innovation hype serves to back up the rhetoric justifying the renewal as well as many specific brand promises.	The SDL actor's brand image is explicitly conceptualized in terms of (and thus contains) pairs of 'future opportunities-present weaknesses' (i.e., impressions/ promises by the new actor [university] to eliminatea set of present weaknesses in future). The SDL actor's brand image is networked so that it centrally includes perceived links to certain stakeholders.
Refinement phase	The putative opportunities involved in brand promises turn into perceived threats for certain stakeholders. Stakeholders debate and struggle over the brand's promises and resources regarding the future. Struggles include resistance in culturally elaborate ways through sarcasm, irony, and satire. Some previous cooperative stakeholders suddenly turn into competitors or	The framing of the new brand promises as eliminating (all) alleged weaknesses of the old organizations is too radical for the prevailing cultural context and codes. The management makes symbolic efforts to provide smoother links from the past to the future (e.g., name choice), but even so, many of the planned renewals (e.g., American-style pro-business/innovation stance and tenure track system; the radically new visual imagery) remain at odds with the traditional cultural codes.	The SDL actor's brand image becomes heterogeneous and conflict-laden, so that the opportunities contained in it turn into threats for certain stakeholders. The SDL actor's brand image symbolizes to various stakeholders not only the (i) value and resources the focal actor has to offer to the stakeholder but also (ii) what value and resources the stakeholders

	adversaries (e.g. student unions).	Also, unexpected turmoil in the economic environment puts the planned resourcing model at odds with the economic realities of the main funders (government and industries).	themselves are required to offer in exchange (thus engendering resistance).
Launch phase	The management and communication locus of the brand alternates over time and is dispersed in the network around the focal organization. Especially, non-conventional communications and exchanges to, from, and between stakeholders gained ground (taking over coordinated communications from the focal actor and its management to the stakeholders).	Eventually, the cultural controversies push the management to take back or reframe many of the brand's initial promises. The broader struggle between traditional (discipline-based) and new (interdisciplinary) university models come to a head. A substantial sense of ambiguity remains in the branding.	The SDL actor's brand image contains the stakeholders' perceptions of the *direction* of the change towards which the branded actor is moving.

Table 3. Comparison of SD branding with product and corporate branding (based on Balmer and Gray 2003 and Hatch and Schultz 2003).

	Product (or service) brand	*Corporate brand*	*Service-dominant logic aligned brand*
Definition	A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (AMA).	A company name that identifies one company as distinct from other companies to multiple stakeholders (both internal and external). "A visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organization's unique business model" (Knox and Bickerton 2003).	The name of an actor that symbolizes to various stakeholders (1) what value and resources the focal actor has to offer to the stakeholder and (2) what value and resources the stakeholder is required to offer in exchange.
Focus attention on	Individual product(s) or service(s) sold under the brand (name).	The company behind the company name—and its corporate identity.	The exchanges occurring in a network of stakeholders around the focal actor.
Brand image/value perception (of stakeholders)	Unidirectional from the branded product to customer/user: *What are the products (sold under the brand name) typically like? What value and benefits do the products offer me (as a customer)?*	Unidirectional from the company/organization to stakeholder: *What is the organization like (corporate associations)? What value and benefits does the company/organization offer to me (as a stakeholder)?*	Bidirectional, reciprocally among actors and stakeholders: *What value/resources (1) does the actor promise to me (as a stakeholder) and (2) what value/resources am I expected to provide to the actor and its other stakeholders?*
Brand image influencing/ attracting stakeholders	Only present or contemporaneous brand image associations attract customers (if perceived unique and valuable).	Only present or contemporaneous corporate image associations (or reputation, or actual/conceived	Present and prospective future associations together (i.e., current brand associations as well as opportune and threatening future

		identity) attract stakeholders (if aligned with their own values).	brand associations) attract as well as threaten stakeholders.
Present image vs. future vision	Distinguished (present brand image *VS*. desired/aspired brand image/identity).	Distinguished (present corporate image, reputation or actual/conceived identity *VS*. intended corporate image or ideal/desired identity).	Non-distinguished, integral (the perspective extending from the present to the future is intrinsically involved in the brand associations).
Time horizon	Short (life of product)	Long (life of company)	Fluctuating (between current and future development prospects and realizations)
Management responsibility	Brand manager	Chief executive	Alternating (driver's seat occupied by various protagonists at various times)
Delivered by	Marketing	Entire company	The focal actor, in mutual exchange and narratives with other actors in the network.
Attract attention and gain support of	Customers (for the product)	Multiple stakeholders (for the company)	Multiple actors, reciprocally (by and for)
Communications mix	Marketing communications	Corporate communication	Communications (1) from the focal actor to stakeholders, (2) from the stakeholder to the focal actor, and (3) from stakeholders to other stakeholders about the focal actor.

Importance to company	Functional	Strategic	Integral and implicit
Key actors and points of resistance	Consumers'/buyers' resistance or denial of the meanings associated with the product brand (e.g., not trusting the premium quality of a brand).	Stakeholders' resistance of the values associated with the corporate mode of operating (e.g., not accepting the mass-produced/marketed nature of the corporation's supply chain).	(1) Stakeholders' resistance of their own roles as well as those of others; (2) Stakeholders' resistance of brand's actual values as threats; (3) Shifting resistors of the brand.

creation relationships to each other are (or are supposed to be), and (b) customers and other stakeholders may have a natural tendency to create such interactions with each other that undermines rather than strengthens the mediating role of the emerging brand. In our study the former (a) was evident in the fact that much of the branding process at the university revolved around the question of which stakeholder is supposed to provide what resources to whom (i.e. who is whose supplier and customer) and the fact that the new branding logic implied significant role and identity changes for many stakeholders (e.g. internal stakeholders became "customerized" and external stakeholders became insiders). The latter (b) was seen especially in the later stages of the process, where some of the customers and other stakeholders of the new brand began to contradict each other (e.g. controversies related to the new tenure track system; quarrel between the student unions; dispute over the campus) and thereby undermined and diverged on the branding initiative, rather than facilitated and converged on it.

These considerations also provide contributions to the SD literature and university branding literature. Rather than focusing on the external brand image of universities among one stakeholder group such as students (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007; Yang, Alessandri, and Kinsey 2008), our analysis shows that the brand emerges and evolves – becomes (re)constructed and co-developed – through interaction among a variety of stakeholders. This multiple stakeholder focus is consistent with earlier conceptual explorations of SD branding (Fyrberg and Jüriado 2009; Merz, He, and Vargo 2009). However, while prior research has tended to view this multiple stakeholder process as relatively harmonious co-creation, with the brand "facilitating" relationships between the actors (Fyrberg and Jüriado 2009), our study depicts the process as a struggle involving alternating resistance by one stakeholder group against another. In other words, while Fyrberg and Jüriado (2009) briefly refer to issues of power and trust in the stakeholder network, they view the brand itself as a rather unproblematic concept – a "facilitator" of the network. In contrast, our study demonstrates how the brand actually comes to symbolize the very struggles in the process occurring in a network of stakeholders where no actor is unilaterally a customer or a supplier of value and resources, but *both* (akin to both operands and operants; cf. Campbell, O'Driscoll, and Saren, 2013).

Second, our study highlights that despite the attempts by university management – or any other individual stakeholder – to take control, the control of the brand inevitably becomes diffused and heterarchical. In other words, producers and consumers of the brand mix and to some extent coalesce into "prosumers" as the branding becomes "co-authored" in a somewhat open-source way (Pitt et al. 2006, 118). However, our case gives a more controversial view to this process than the term "open-source" would as such imply. In our case, "proresistors" could more accurately describe the role of many of the stakeholders rather than "prosumers." In this sense, our findings also somewhat contrast with those of Diamond et al. (2009, 132) who note that "marketers can [still] retain a significant degree of control while choreographing co-authorship opportunities … ,while primary brand ownership remains with the corporation and value to the corporate owner is undiminished." In the light of our study, it is also questionable whether the adaptation of the focal brand identity over time in response to stakeholder reactions and inputs will make the new brand more valuable to consumers or "choreographable" to senior managers. Rokka, Karlsson, and Tienari (forthcoming) capture these kinds of challenges in managing branding with the notion of "balancing acts." In the Aalto case, this is evident in, for example, balancing over time between a unified representation of the new university and a more fragmented image reflecting differences between its constituent parts (see also Vásquez, Sergi, and Cordelier 2013).

Third, our study offers opportunities to forge links between research on contemporary logics of branding in CCT, and critical perspectives on identity, power, and resistance in CCT as well as in organization studies. Our study shows that a new brand proposed by some is likely to disrupt the identities of others in and around the organization (Land and Taylor 2011). Acts of power – such as attempting to adopt a new branding logic – invite resistance. Power and resistance operate together in webs of relations, in which "power is never complete and possibilities for resistance always exist" (Thomas and Hardy 2011, 326). Fleming and Spicer (2007) capture this dynamic with the notion of struggle – referred to above – which offers a fruitful way to make sense of identities in organizational branding initiatives. In such struggles, dominant narratives of organizational reality offer identities to stakeholders, which are contested and resisted in alternative narratives (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Brown and Humphreys 2003).

In this sense, our study also extends prior CCT literature's notion of consumer resistance, wherein resistance occurs mostly in the form of people with a (self-evident) consumer role resisting against supplier brands and the meanings associated with them. In contrast, in our case the main resistance came (a) in the form of stakeholders' resistance against their newly defined or shifting supplier vs. customer roles *per se* (e.g. external vs. insider identities). This further implied that the resistors (as well as advocates) of the new brand shifted over time. Also, resistance emerged (b) in the form of questioning the very value(s) and benefits envisioned for the stakeholders, as certain actors framed the values and benefits as threats instead. This value–threat paradox adds to earlierconsumer resistance literature's observations about paradoxes involved in resistance. Earlier examples include consumer resistance of Starbucks due to its suppression of local coffee shop culture despite it being framed as the local American option (Thompson and Arsel 2004), and hipsters' resistance of mass-produced products that are explicitly marketed as "hip," yet sometimes replacing them with mass-produced private label products (Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2014).

In line with the recent consumer resistance literature (Izberk-Bilgin 2010; Mikkonen and Bajde 2013; Mikkonen, Moisander, and Firat 2011), our study further points out how initial brand promises may encounter criticism in culturally elaborate ways through sarcasm and parody that may undermine or at least generate shifts in the essence of the brand. Yet, in contrast to many of the previous studies concentrating on sarcasm, parody, and other forms of consumer resistance, our analysis underlines that it may not only be marginal outsiders who engage in such resistance vis-à-vis the focal brand in order to enhance their own in-group sense of belonging (cf. Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2014). Instead, sarcasm and parody can offer a way for stakeholders to raise other stakeholders' awareness of problems of the new branding logic; a form of broader resistance and, perhaps, a way to find allies in the struggle over the modus operandi of the branded entity. Crucially, as a form of resistance, sarcasm and parody in any case draw meanings from the cultural codes available in the particular context, and only become understandable when viewed in this context (Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006).

Fourth, the Aalto University case shows that the power relations and struggles in branding are not exclusively repressive or counter-productive, but also offer potential for creativity (Rouse 1994), as apparent in the many advances that Aalto and its brand made among stakeholders nationally and internationally in a relatively short time. In this sense, our findings suggest that the marketization of universities – or that of traditional non-market *fora* in general (Fonseca 2005) – is a more complex phenomenon than either its advocates or critics may lead us to believe. In the USA, the forerunner in marketized academia, critical scholars have argued that universities have been hijacked by administrators and career managers whose sovereignty has been placed above the purposes of faculty and students (Aronowitz 2000; Ginsberg 2011). In Nordic countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway the marketization trend is more recent. It has thus far been welcomed as a positive development by policy-makers, while reactions within universities remain mixed (Aarrevaara, Dobson, and Elander 2009; Czarniawska and Genell 2002; Krejsler 2006; Wæraas and Solbakk 2009). The Aalto University case is intriguing because it represents a dramatic and rapid attempt to break with the conventions and traditions in its context, bringing to light both the struggles and more positive aspects associated with adopting a new branding logic.

Finally, when it comes to brand (identity) perceptions (Table 3), our study highlights the essence of the brand as a symbol that signifies to various stakeholders *both* what value and resources the actor has to offer to the stakeholder *and* what value and resources the stakeholders themselves are expected to offer in exchange. Notably, both the CCT literature on contemporary branding logics (Diamond et al. 2009) and the SD literature have emphasized reciprocal, two-way creation of value and exchange of tangible and intangible resources (Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Campbell, O'Driscoll, and Saren, 2013; Merz, He, and Vargo 2009). However, the notion that the SD brand image of an actor would explicitly come to involve impressions of not only the value/resources to be obtained from the actor but also the contribution/resources required from it has to our knowledge not been proposed before. Another key distinction of the present brand image perspective, not explicit in previous research, pertains to the future-oriented time perspective. Here, our study extends Berthon et al.'s (2007) notion that brand managers must be able to leverage a "symphony" of old and new brand meanings as the essence of the new brand's perceived identity/image lies in the future roles and identities it promises to various stakeholders. Yet, we add (see bottom role of Table 3) that these future promises associated with the brand are also likely to invite stakeholder resistance of their own new roles and identities as well as those of others; resistance in the form of framing the brand's values as threats; and shifting resistors (as well as advocates) for the brand in general.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored a university organization's attempts to adopt a new branding logic amidst wider cultural, political, and economic forces. The study elucidates how sociocultural and market context influences the dynamics of branding (Schroeder 2009; Schroeder and Salzer-Möling 2006) as the brand becomes lodged in new networks and cultural discourses (Holt 2006). The marketizing organization's attempt to adopt the new branding logic could be seen to reflect Arvidsson's (2005, 244, 248) holistic view of brand as a "platform of action" that tries to anticipate "certain activities and certain modalities of relating to those activities," enabling the "production of particular immaterial use-values" and functioning as a "programing device" for the undertakings of various stakeholders. At the same time, the role of the brand as a programing device for use-value–creation to stakeholders is not unproblematic and uncontested. In particular, our study extends the extant literature on contemporary branding logics by highlighting how mutual value–creation and interaction between the brand's stakeholders do not necessarily facilitate the creation of a strong brand and how resistance and struggles among stakeholders and stakeholder identities may retard the branding process and change the trajectory of the brand identity – albeit also providing room for some new ideas and creativity.

Despite the rhetoric of contemporary branding frameworks emphasizing harmonic value co-creation between the brand and stakeholders as well as among stakeholders themselves (Diamond et al. 2009; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001), our study shows that organizational attempts to adopt new branding logics will trigger contradictory and adversarial interpretations among a variety of stakeholders about the role and identity of the focal actor vis-à-vis their own roles and identities. These heterogeneous interpretations, and the struggles and resistance they elicit, lead to shifts in the essence and control of the brand itself. In line with some earlier CCT perspectives, our study shows that while brands become more valuable to the extent that they penetrate the public's consciousness, they also tend to break loose from the control of their original advocates (Holt 2006; see also Pitt et al. 2006). We add that the brand becomes subject to future-oriented struggle over the identity of the brand itself and those of its stakeholders, which invites heterogeneous forms of resistance. This resistance is not only targeted toward the brand's symbolic meanings and it is not only conducted by marginal groups to enhance their own identities (cf. Cronin, McCarthy, and Collins 2014; Izberk-Bilgin 2010). Rather, it is also focused on the tangible resource roles the stakeholders are expected to assume vis-à-vis the brand in exchange of promises of use-value. The outcome is an undermined, or at least shifted and struggle-laden, essence for the brand itself. This is in somewhat stark contrast with the optimistic, new service-oriented logic that the marketizing organization attempts to pursue.

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Appendix A**.** Analysis of the brand promises and stakeholder resources involved in the Aalto University case

	Service brand promises	Stakeholder resources		
	Value propositions	*Processes and structures*	*People*	*Physical environment*
Phase 1–Opportunity identification (2005-2007)				
Perceived opportunities of the new university to counter perceived present weaknesses.	More interdisciplinary innovations with practical relevance (to the business community) Better, world-class research (to the scientific community) Higher-quality teaching and education (to students and the business community) 'Top' university capitalizing on the latest technology (to all key stakeholders).	More autonomy (expected from the government) More resources (expected from the government and the business community) Interdisciplinary research in focus areas (expected from the schools and faculty) A student-centered culture (expected from the schools and faculty) Business venturing (expected from the schools, faculty, and students).	More internationally-acknowledged top scholars (expected from the merging universities) Visible support from captains of industry (expected from the business community).	One, common campus model (expected from the local government, schools, faculty, and students).
Phase 2–Refinement (2007-2009)				
Perceived opportunities turning into threats	Interdisciplinary innovation approach becomes viewed as antithetical to top disciplinary research (by the new president and some professors)	Restructuring results in new layers of bureaucracy (as perceived by the schools and faculty)	Focus on supporting 'top' scholars runs the risk of elitism (as perceived by some faculty) Centralization of decision-making authority is	Common campus model and elimination of existing campuses become an identity threat (as perceived by some schools, faculty, and students)

	The "world-class", "top" ideology and rhetoric is contested (by other universities and some internal stakeholders).	Additional funding is problematized (as perceived by other regional universities) Funding from business community runs into problems (as perceived by some firms and industry organizations).	problematized (as perceived by some faculty) New brand name hierarchy becomes an identity threat (as perceived by some employees and faculty).	People become reluctant to move (as perceived by HSE students and faculty).
Phase 3–Launch (2010-)				
Outcomes of negotiations and refinements	Design Factory and some other innovative units continue to flourish, but enthusiasm around inter-disciplinarity is diminishing (vis-à-vis industry and academic community) Discipline-based 'basic research' emphasized in internal RAE leading to the identification of key focus areas (vis-à-vis faculty) Development of teaching still receives scant attention (vis-à-vis students and society).	Fund-raising by business community is adequate (by firms and industry organizations) University-level headquarters developed further; decision-making is further centralized (by schools and departments) Resources allocated to 'top' research units (by headquarters, schools, and faculty) Service administration is reorganized (by headquarters).	New president (rector) assumes central role in decision-making (by the board and top management) Brand communication work faces some discontinuities (by the headquarters and the schools, and communication directors) Original promoters of the merger step down (by the board and new top management).	Campus question heating up; decisions to be expected only later (by the schools and the cities of Espoo and Helsinki).

Publication 3

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The University Branding Game. Players, Interests, Politics

Abstract: In this article, we argue that university branding can be understood as a political game. Analyzing a new university created in a merger, we demonstrate how branding is characterized by different interests among players with different means to influence brand development. We suggest that university branding is a fundamental question of organizational purpose, connected to identities and (dis-)identification of internal and external players in a particular socio-cultural and societal context, not a mere marketing and communications exercise.

Brands and branding pervade the global economy (Kornberger 2010), and branding of universities has received its share of increasing research attention. This attention reflects changes in the operational environment of higher education institutions, which are subject to marketization and new demands for external accountability (Krejsler 2006; Marginson 2008; Wedlin 2008; Lowrie and Hemsley-Brown 2011). In order to attract students and faculty and to appeal to corporate partners and governmental regulators, universities engage in identity-, image-, and brand-building activities (Chapleo 2011; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007; Lowrie 2007; Melewar and Akel 2005; Wæraas and Solbakk 2009; Whelan and Wohlfeil 2006). They seek to become more visible and better positioned vis-à-vis other universities that are considered as their competitors.

Research on university branding is gathering momentum, but it is mainly concerned with branding activities and their effects. While critical scholars look at branding as an identity regulation that gives rise to struggles and tensions (Kärreman and Rylander 2008; Land and Taylor 2011), the bulk of research on universities continues to treat branding as marketing and communication activities that are not only manageable but also apolitical. We argue, in contrast, that the visible tangibles of branding intertwine with conflict-ridden processes involving multiple stakeholders—or players—in and around the university, who represent different ideas of what the university is, what it should be, and how it needs to be branded.

Our empirical focus is on Aalto University, which was formed by merging the Helsinki University of Technology (HUT), the Helsinki School of Economics

(HSE), and the University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH) in Finland. While the merging universities were all established organizational brands, the creation of the new Aalto brand and the dismantling of the old brands became the object of conflicts and politics where multiple interests were at stake. In this article, we pay particular attention to the dismantling of the HSE brand and its relationship with the new Aalto parent brand.

Our research question is as follows: *To what extent does university branding involve organizational politics and how do politics play out*? Against this backdrop, the aim of the article is, first, to develop the notion of university branding as a political game characterized by players with different interests, positions, and means of influence (Allison 1969); and, second, to illustrate this phenomenon in the case of Aalto University. In the following, we present our study in four parts, each digging deeper into the empirical subject of inquiry: outlining a political perspective on branding, describing the merger process, identifying key players and interests, and discerning politics in dismantling the HSE brand.

University branding: A political perspective

Corporate branding can be defined as the process of identifying and making known "the attributes of the organization's identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition" (Balmer 2001, 281). Although recent developments in branding theory and research highlight the importance of including lower level employees and external stakeholders into branding efforts (Antorini and Schultz 2005; Ind 2001), the literature is dominated by normative models and frameworks for corporate branding execution. The prevailing view is that all products, services, cultures, and identities should be integrated under one umbrella and into one single expression, as one coherent organizational "body" (Christensen, Morsing, and Cheney 2008). To achieve such integration, the "corporate brand proposition requires *total corporate commitment*" (Balmer 2001, 281, emphasis added). A corporate brand "influences organizational activities from top to bottom, and it infuses everything the company is, says, and does, now and forever" (Hatch and Schultz 2008, 10). The challenges of achieving such integration are not unknown. For example, Schultz (2005a, 183–184) noted that "the cross-disciplinary and cross-functional nature of corporate branding makes the implementation process vulnerable to turf-issues, corporate power struggles and status conflicts." However, these dimensions of corporate branding are largely ignored in theory and research. Relatively little is known about challenges for branding activities that arise from conflicts, power struggles, and bargaining. As a result, "this normative literature provides less knowledge on how [corporate branding] actually unfolds" (Schultz 2005b, 41).

In order to better understand branding processes that occur in higher education institutions, a perspective on corporate branding that recognizes universities as "organized anarchies" (cf. March and Olsen 1979) riddled with "academic tribes" (Becher 1989) is necessary. While extant studies of university branding have tended to concentrate on branding strategies and perceptions of brands (e.g., Curtis, Abratt, and Minor 2009; Gray, Fam, and Llanes 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007; Kosmützky 2012; Melewar and Akel 2005; Whelan and Wohlfeil 2006), echoing developments in the corporate branding literature, we propose to extend the research on higher education branding by adopting a political perspective that recognizes conflicts of interests, diverging perspectives, the role of power, and different means of influencing branding in the university. Pfeffer (1981, 7) describes such situations as characterized by organizational politics, i.e., "those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcome."

A political perspective on branding should recognize the following elements. First, following Allison (1969), organizational politics is characterized by a set of *actors* ("players") who occupy *critical positions*, have different *interests* and uneven *power bases*, and are involved in *bargaining games* to further their interests. The positions of the actors define what they can and must do in the brand-building decision-making process, as well as which questions are considered in the game (Allison 1969). Second, turning an organization into a brand is a *political-strategic act* (cf., Rodrigues and Child 2008). Much is at stake because the fundamental definition of the organization is involved. Deciding upon one particular direction for the organization's future may exclude other, alternative courses. Disagreement is likely because different internal and external actors may hold different opinions about the nature of an organization. For some, a suggested brand definition may represent an identity threat; for others, it is an opportunity to exercise power, achieve objectives, and acquire an even stronger power base (Land and Taylor 2011). Third, conflict intensity is generally affected by two factors: how much is *at stake* and the *relative strength* of the parties involved. How much is at stake is often a question of scarce resources or how much interest or prestige is associated with the conflict by the parties. In branding processes, how much one actor (or coalition) has to lose from the prospective of a particular branding outcome determines its resistance and involvement. Conversely, how much one party gains from the same process is likely to determine the intensity of its involvement and its coalition-building efforts. The relative strength of the parties can be significant for the outcome if one coalition is stronger than the others (Allison 1969; Cyert and March 1963). All parties can be expected to seek support from both internal and external stakeholders, eventually pursuing powerful coalitions that allow them to further their interests.

Methods

We have studied the Aalto University merger since November 2007 and generated various qualitative empirical materials in order to understand its unfolding (see Table 1). Following the definition proposed by Van Maanen (1979, 520) of the purpose of qualitative research, we have attempted to "describe, decode, translate or otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world." We have applied a single case study design as it allows us to explore in-depth relations between interdependent elements and to gain rich contextualized insights into the studied phenomenon that is the politics of branding (Stake, 1995; Welch et al. 2011). For the purposes of the present article, we have focused on analyzing topics and processes related to the creation

Table 1: Empirical materials

Texts produced by stakeholders external to Aalto and its predecessors

- International and domestic governmental committee reports
- Research and commentaries on the reform of the Finnish university system
- Memos and brochures by The Finnish Confederation of Industries (EK) (2007–2010)
- Media texts in the major Finnish daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) and the business daily *Kauppalehti* (KL), covering the period from September 6, 2005, to December 31, 2010 (1,203 media texts in total)
- Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets in Finland (e.g., regional newspapers and student magazines) and abroad (*The Financial Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Newsweek*)

Texts related to stakeholders internal to Aalto and its predecessors

- Online materials and documents on the making of new university, e.g., strategy, HR, marketing (2007–2010); artefacts with visual imagery such as brochures and advertisements
- Powerpoint presentations, blog entries, and newsletters by the new university president (rector) (2009–2010)
- Aalto image survey for internal and external stakeholders (conducted February–March 2011) and employee survey (conducted May 2011)
- Retrospective account by the rectors of HSE and UIAH (Kasanen and Sotamaa 2010)
- KyWeb (online chatroom for HSE students) and Kylteri (HSE student magazine), searched 2005–2010, carried out in March 2012
- E-mail conversations with HSE professors on the school name and brand (in real time October 2009; retrospectively September 2012)
- Research reports on specific topics

Interviews

- Key decision makers such as rectors and vice rectors of the merging universities, state officials at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance, representatives of the Finnish business community and industry, the new president (rector) and her new top managers (interviewed in 2008–2010); 40 in total
- Communications managers of the merging universities (interviewed twice: March 2009 and March 2010)
- Communications experts the Ministry of Education and EK (interviewed March–April 2009)
- Senior branding consultant (interviewed February 2010)
- New Head of Communications (interviewed September 2010 and May 2011)

of the new Aalto brand and the dismantling of the old HSE brand. Instead of relying on a predefined coding scheme, consistent with our constructionist epistemology, our analysis has been an iterative process of shifting back and forth between data, patterns emerging from the data, and theory, until we have reached a plausible understanding of the meanings conveyed by our empirical materials. Patterns emerging from the data have encouraged us to focus on themes such as conflict, coalitions, interests, and power, ultimately aggregated into a perspective on higher education branding that we refer to as *political*.

Results

Chronology of events

The merger took effect on January 1, 2010, when Aalto University became a legal entity. HUT, which received university status in 1908, was, by far, the largest of the merging universities and a renowned institution in the fields of engineering and technology. HSE, established in 1911, was the leading business school in Finland, with Triple Crown accreditation and a solid international reputation. Although the smallest of the merger partners, UIAH, founded in 1871, was the largest university of its kind in the Nordic countries and known for its expertise in industrial design.

The merger planning process proceeded rapidly. In September 2005, the Rector of UIAH first publicly voiced the merger idea. Subsequently, the Finnish business community began to actively promote it. In October 2006, the Finnish government commissioned an inquiry on the issue. The message in the Inquiry Report, made public in February 2007, was that the system of higher education in Finland was in dire need of transformation to become more efficient (OPM 2007). The report laid out the rationale for merging the three universities and provided instructions on how to accomplish it in practice. In April 2007, a new government took office and included the merger in its governmental program. In November 2007, the Ministry of Education gave an official "go" decision for the merger. To signal that its objective was to create something new and exciting, a totally new university name became imminent.

In May 2008, the name Aalto University was introduced, referring to Alvar Aalto (1898–1976), Finnish architect and designer with a reputation for crossing disciplinary boundaries. In September 2009, the new Aalto logo and other visual imagery were presented. Designers had been invited to send in their ideas, which a panel of experts assessed. The panel was eventually split between two entries, and the president of Aalto University made the final decision. To signify the forward-looking nature of the new university, radical imagery was chosen over a more traditional one (see Figure 1). It was also announced that Aalto would consist of three schools, each corresponding to a merging university, and that the old university names and logos were to be abandoned at the end of 2009. For example, HSE became Aalto University School of Economics, with the acronym Aalto ECON.

Meanwhile, a comprehensive reform of the Finnish higher education sector was taking place, and the creation of Aalto became its focal point. A new Universities Act came into force in 2009, turning Finnish universities into independent legal entities with new governance arrangements. The Universities Act extended the autonomy of universities by giving them more freedom to seek funding from the private sector and to appoint external members to their boards. While HSE, HUT, and UIAH were public universities, Aalto became a foundation under private law and the second largest university in Finland with some 20,000 students and 5,000 employees.

Figure 1: Aalto logo (Aalto University 2009)

*The basic version of the Aalto University logo is **A?**, a simple visual message that asks 'What is Aalto University?' and invites participation: 'What would you like Aalto University to be?' The aim was to create a sign containing as little identity-predefining symbolism as possible. The meaning and symbolism of the logo will be constructed hand in hand with the University. This is also transmitted by the universal visual building blocks of the main colours and the basic font.*

*The logo has no single static form; instead, it can adopt number of variations by combining the letter **A** with diverse punctuation marks. In addition to the basic version, the University will use **A!** and **A"**. The varying symbols modify the significance of the **'A'**, indicating that Aalto University is not completely predefined and is open to discussion, questioning, and different perspectives.*[1]

Players and Interests

Merging HUT, HSE, and UIAH and branding Aalto involved a number of players with different interests (see Tables 2 and 3 below). The early days of the merger, in 2005–2008, were marked by the active involvement of the Finnish Ministry of Education, for whom the issue was of political-strategic importance. The new university was to be a solution to a political problem of not only having an inefficient higher education sector, but also of lacking a well-reputed, innovative university that was able to compete successfully in the global market.

Collaboration formed between the Ministry and representatives of the Finnish business community, who pushed aggressively for the merger. "Finnish universities are crap and something needs to be done about it," one of our interviewees said bluntly. Through its lobbying organizations—the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) and The Federation of Finnish Technology Industries—the business community put pressure on political decision makers and universities to provide better opportunities for developing applicable knowledge and educating students to meet the demands of global business: "[T]he central objective [of the merger] is to secure the competence capital within fields central to the development and competitiveness of the

1 Available at http://www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/news/aalto-university-revealed-its-new-visual-identity; accessed 20 November 2009.

Table 2: Players and interests

Players	Principal Interests	Examples	Means of Influencing
The Ministry of Education	To advance reform of Finnish higher education To enhance Finland's competitiveness in the global economy To create an internationally competitive university	"According to the Minister of Education, no radical changes are possible in universities without strong initiative from the state" (Helsingin Sanomat, Sep 7, 2006). "The position of Finnish universities does not match the requirements of globalization. … Finland's competitiveness entails … universities where research and education in selected key areas are world-class" (OPM 2007: 9). "A crucial element of the new [university] should be the significant autonomy of the Schools and a management system that supports this autonomy" (OPM 2007: 16, 45–46).	Exercising owner's authority Preparing the merger in a small circle
HUT, HSE and UIAH rectors	To increase university autonomy vis-à-vis the state To attract more resources	"We propose a full merger and substantial structural changes" (The three rectors, letter to the editor of HS, March 5, 2007).	Collaboration with other players
Business Community	To create a technology (innovation) university To increase practical relevance of education To promote industry competitiveness	"The new university must mean significant improvements in all operations … collaboration with companies and the best universities … new operational culture and management … There is no way that the transformation will remain an administrative merger. Renewal is a must. The new university must be able to focus and give up [some operations]." (Speech by EK chairman, June 26, 2008)	Putting pressure on universities (and the Ministry) Collaboration with other players Active input of captains of industry Offering funding

Table 3: Players and interests, part two

Players	Principal Interests	Examples	Means of Influencing
Aalto University			
Aalto board	To build a world-class university To create a unified Aalto culture	"It is important at this moment to make Aalto known, and you can do it better with one name than with three separate names" (Interview with a board member).	Decision-making authority as owners' representative
Aalto president	To build a new coherent university brand	"Our goal is to be in world class in 2020. In my view, we need to … develop a common culture to achieve that" (comment in a workshop, February 21, 2011).	Decision-making authority ensured by centralized structure
Aalto communications		"Visual Identity guidelines" for faculty (2010).	Decision-making authority ensured by mandate from board and president
School of Economics			
Rectorate (management)	To develop distinct school brands To preserve the HSE brand	"I do fear that … if this [merger] is carried out too much like […] a monolithic university model, creativity will suffer and … the operational conditions of the School of Economics … will suffer" (interview with member of rectorate).	Negotiations with the board and president
Students	To maintain existing brand recognition To preserve HSE brand	"Aalto University becomes the 'mother brand' of the three universities… According to the Rector [of HSE] the schools will continue with their own brands" (online student comment, KYweb, June 1, 2008).	Appealing to the president Relying on the traditional tripartite decision-making model of the school (professors, other staff, students)
Faculty	To maintain existing brand recognition To maintain HSE identity and to preserve its brand	"Some 'marketing guru' has probably sold the Aalto top management a false one-brand ideology" (professor in an email discussion in October 2009).	Relying on the traditional tripartite decision-making model of the school (professors, other staff, students)

Finnish business community and society." Innovation — technological innovation in particular — became the buzzword of the new university.

In 2006–2007, the rectors of the three universities formed a coalition whose viewpoints eventually converged. While the rector of UIAH[2] was viewed as the father of the merger idea, the rector of HUT initially raised his doubts while the rector of HSE was ambiguous in his statements. In August 2006, the three rectors suggested that a joint research institute, instead of a full merger, be established, bringing together talent from the three universities to carry out well-resourced, innovative, interdisciplinary research. However, following lobbying from the business community, the responsible cabinet minister dismissed the institute idea. The Inquiry Report of February 2007 outlined alternative solutions, but suggested a full merger as the most viable solution. There was no time for general discussion about alternatives, as the new Finnish government accepted the full merger plan only two months later. Furthermore, the three rectors now complied with the merger idea. At this stage, the blueprint for the new university reflected their aspiration of independent schools within a merged university.

In August 2008, power relations vis-à-vis the new university changed and the Board of the Aalto University Foundation became a focal player. The Board comprised corporate executives, policymakers, and academics, none of whom directly represented any one of the merging universities. The Board's first main task was to recruit a new president (rector) for Aalto. The new president was recruited from a Swedish university. In 2008–2009, new governance arrangements charged the centralization of decision-making authority to the board and president, who were able to trump resistance and settle for a one-brand strategy. A centralized structure with a strong Aalto brand prevailed over an alternative, decentralized one with autonomous schools and strong school brands. Many questions of socio-cultural integration between the merging universities were addressed, for example, in getting people from the three merging universities together to discuss the mission, vision, and values of Aalto. In contrast, no clear branding strategy was established until 2010.

Aalto became a legal entity on January 1, 2010. High ambitions were set, and Aalto's goal was communicated by its president as "to achieve world- class status by 2020" (Aalto strategy 2010). In April 2010, following the appointment of a new head of communications at the Aalto level, there was a marked shift from uncoordinated communications efforts to the systematic strategic branding of Aalto. The centralized communications unit became well resourced. "The gun was loaded," an interviewee remarked.

In 2011, the School of Science and Technology was divided into four schools, and in 2012 the Department of Architecture in the School of Engineering was combined with the former UIAH. Today, Aalto operates with six schools. Overall, the creation of Aalto is emblematic of the small Finnish society characterized by tightly knit elite networks. A small group of key individuals,

2 UIAH exemplifies the fact that the merging universities were not uniform entities in their interests vis-à-vis the merger. While its rector was one of the most visible proponents of the merger, the most explicit resistance could be seen among the faculty and students of some UIAH departments who organized public demonstrations to oppose the merger. In the spring of 2008, they voted the rector out of office.

representing various players, was able to make the university merger a reality in a relatively short time.

Politics

The dismantling of the HSE brand was decided by the Aalto Board and president in 2009. This passed unnoticed in the Finnish media but not among HSE students, faculty, and alumni. The head of the HSE Student Union wrote an open letter of complaint to the president, demanding thatHSE "is maintained as a sub-brand of Aalto University." Alumni and clients of HSE Executive Education, in turn, were worried about the recognition of their degrees "if the brand is taken away," as one of our interviewees put it. The rectorate of HSE had sought to preserve the HSE brand after the merger. Up until 2009, they believed that this preservation was possible (Kasanen and Sotamaa 2010). HSE was internationally well known, and it was relatively well positioned in global business school rankings. In Finland, it was considered as the number one business school. Since the late 1990 s, the HSE brand had been meticulously developed in relation to international quality audits and accreditations. In 2007, HSE achieved Triple Crown status with three international business school accreditations (AMBA, EQUIS, and AACSB). The dismantling of the HSE brand came as a surprise even to the HSE rectorate.

More was at stake than the Aalto board and president had anticipated. When the students' letter to the president was brought to their attention, several HSE professors engaged in an e-mail discussion where they shared their frustration about dismantling the newly crystallized HSE brand. This expanded into complaints about the highly centralized decision-making system in Aalto. The timing was unfortunate as HSE faculty had just engaged in various branding initiatives, which were targeted at positioning the school vis-à-vis other top business schools across the world. Now the reference point became muddled as HSE, under a new name and logo, was being branded as part of a larger university. There was no longer an obvious yardstick on a global scale, and the business school identity became unclear.

In January 2010, the rector of HSE became the first dean of Aalto ECON, but soon decided to leave for a sabbatical. Also, the previous HSE vice rectors stepped down. Among the faculty, the new Aalto ECON brand was expressed through negation: the focus was on losing one's unique business school identity, rather than embracing the Aalto brand and positioning oneself within it. Questions of losing prestige also prevailed. Apart from losing a reference point internationally, this apprehension was related to the perceived weakened bargaining position of the School of Economics vis-à-vis the technology-intensive schools when resources were allocated. All key resource allocation decisions were now made at the Aalto level.

The powerful position of the president enabled her to pursue the ideal of a *top university* with a coherent and uniform brand. In her newsletters, presentations, and blogs, she constantly emphasized the need to create a "unified culture" with a "common purpose" for the university to become "world-class." The rector was backed by the board, but also by the Aalto communications unit. The title of a presentation given by the new head of communications in a conference in the United States (May 2011) exemplified his approach: “Building a Brand for a Newcomer: *From Nowhere* to World-Class Stature” (our italics). After his initial show of strength, however, the head of communications came to advocate a more decentralized approach. He sought to work with the various schools on their distinct profiles and identities “within the Aalto totality” (interview 2011). Nevertheless, the reference points for the School of Economics were still to be found within Aalto, not in other business schools across the world. In August 2012, as recommended by an international advisory body and advocated by the new dean, the board changed the name of Aalto ECON to Aalto University School of Business, or Aalto BIZ for short.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study contributes to theory and research on higher education branding by exemplifying that building and presenting a university brand involve organizational politics. While the bulk of extant research tends to overlook this issue, our findings extend the research in three ways. First, viewing university branding through the lens of politics allows us to discover a multitude of players with different power and conflicting goals as well as diverging interpretations of the university brand. Consistent with Allison’s (1969, 711) notion of “where you stand depends on where you sit,” the findings highlight how the viewpoints of some players conflict with those of others. Players who occupy critical positions have the authority to make decisions, but any player’s position defines “what they can and must do” (Allison 1969) in the political game of branding. Our study, thus, highlights the importance of identifying not only these critical players but any player who is likely to engage politically in the branding process. The findings call for closer scrutiny of these players and their tactics for influencing the branding outcome, including the use of power, coalition-building, and open conflict.

Second, the findings add to our understanding of corporate branding at the university level by demonstrating how branding is a political-strategic act, opening up fundamental questions of identity and reason for existing. Corporate branding involves not only logos, names, or value statements, but also prioritizing different strategic concerns and ultimately choosing a specific brand identity on which the entire brand buildin process builds at the expense of other, alternative identities. Choosing an *official* identity entails a reduction of variety and the downplaying of characteristics that by some players are held in high esteem, and possibly even the dismantling of gbrands that in the past have been meaningful to both internal and external stakeholders. Although a one-brand strategy is not necessarily prescribed in standard corporate branding theory, the idea of coherence is central and, in our case, clearly reflected in the strategy chosen by the president and the board. These findings represent an important contribution to corporate branding theory and higher education branding research because they reveal how such a top-down approach leads to political opposition. The downplaying or dismantling of (sub-) brands affects social identities and leads to a potential loss of power and status.

Finally, the political perspective improves our understanding of higher education branding by highlighting how conflict intensity is affected by the relative strength of the opposing parties and how much they believe is at stake. Certain parties and coalitions have the power to influence the outcome more than others, although all are affected by the branding outcome. Consistent with the notion proposed by Rokkan (1966) that "votes count, resources decide," parties with weaker formal authority seek to influence the process by teaming up with others in order to acquire a stronger power base. However, our findings also suggest that players who hold critical positions in the organization will seek support from both internal and external stakeholders in order to build powerful coalitions. As a result, whether players can successfully determine the fate of the branding process depends on their level of agreement with, as well as opposition from, other players. This insight is crucial for our understanding of any corporate branding process, but particularly the branding of higher education institutions. These organizations are characterized by a number of players who have a potential stake in a particular outcome of the process. In the case of Aalto University, the HSE rector and vice rectors had different goals and interests in the branding compared to the Aalto University top management, but they lacked powerful coalition partners at crucial moments.

Today, universities operate in a competitive global market (Wedlin 2008). Many of the tensions related to this new order are crystallized in the politics of branding where questions of purpose are brought to the fore. In this spirit, we have conceptualized university branding as a political game and illustrated this concept empirically. Our study is exploratory, and it paves the way for future research on the politics of university branding. Given the limited space, we have not extended our analysis to players such as *competing* universities and the media. Nor have we theorized on how branding becomes lodged in social networks and broader socio-cultural discourses (Holt 2006; Schroeder 2009). To move the discussion forward, it would be important to conceptualize university branding as a fundamental question of purpose, and thus connected to identities and (dis-)identification of various internal and external players in a particular socio-cultural and societal context, not as a mere management challenge and marketing and communications exercise. Research on the relationships between branding and the identity work of faculty would be especially welcome. How branding and identity feed on each other and how and why tensions and struggles arise over time warrant immediate research attention.

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Publication 4

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The meaning of a university – How reputation is constructed in higher education and market economy discourses

Abstract

In the contemporary changing higher education, the purpose and task of universities is being debated. There are different, even contradictory understandings about the meaning of a university that compete for existence and power base. In this paper, I explore these different understandings with specific focus on how they are present in building a new university through a merger. Specifically, I examine the distinct understandings by studying a university's reputation and the way it is constructed. Reputations evolve around organization specific characteristics, thus suggesting a fundamental meaning for the organization. This paper emphasizes the idea that there is no one essential reputation, but rather many accounts of a reputation (Coupland and Brown 2004), constructed in relation to specific discourses that provide lenses through which people make sense of, and give sense to, a university. In this paper I identify two current dominant discourses: higher education and market economy discourse. These discourses produce different accounts of university reputations, and show how the struggle to give a meaning to the university institution characterizes the studied university.

Introduction

The meaning of universities has increasingly become a subject of debate (Styhre and Lind 2010) as the discussion on the global knowledge economy has escalated (Krejsler 2006). Governments feel pressure to increase national competitiveness in the increasingly important field of knowledge production, and want universities – the knowledge producing institutions par excellence (ibid.) – to better contribute to the national economies and well-being (Deem et al. 2008). The overarching question is what this means in practice; how universities can more effectively and widely be integrated with society. As Styhre and Lind (2010) suggest, some consider that the answer lies in integrating economic development into universities as an academic function along with teaching and research (Etzkowitz 1998), while others expect universities to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical research interest by transforming knowledge creation systems in universities to what Gibbons et al. (1994) refer as 'Mode 2 research'. Either way, a new conceptualization of universities would take place. The university would no longer be understood merely as a site dedicated to basic and formal research activities, but considered as a node in a complex network of relations across organizational and institutional boundaries (Styhre and Lind 2010, Stevens et al. 2008).

At the same time, however, universities are turned into more autonomous and independent organizations (Krejsler 2006). They are thought of as competitive actors with a need to position themselves strategically in a competitive academic field (Wedlin 2008). Universities are not only acting on, but also constituting a global market of their own, where students are considered as customers, and education as a 'service' that can be promoted world-wide (Melewar and Akel 2005, Ng and Forbes 2009). In effect, universities are increasingly competing with each other, not only for students, faculty, funding, and other resources, but also for status and reputation (Wedlin 2008, Harman and Harman 2008). Global standing and international recognition has become a key concern for many universities around the world (Williams and Van Dyke 2007, Salmi 2009). In aspiring and showing their excellence, universities apply different, even contradictory strategies. Some universities, for example, aim to build their strength on existing academic disciplines, while others aim to innovate and create new openings in the intersection of the established disciplines (Brint 2005). The former route supports a monodisciplinary research culture, while the latter emphasizes interdisciplinarity. The chosen strategy has a significant impact on the fundamental nature of the university, conceptualizing it differently.

It is thus clear that there are different and competing understandings of the meaning of a university. The differences concern universities' boundaries and their role in society, on the one hand, and university specific strategies in competing in the market of higher education, on the other. In this paper, I examine the dynamics of different understandings about universities, and how these different understandings are present in building a new university through a merger. In order to grasp this dynamic, I study reputation that evolves around key characteristics of an organization, expressing the essence of the university. As Coupland and Brown (2004) note, there is no one essential reputation, but many accounts of them. Reputations can thus be considered as discursively negotiable entities that are constructed in relation to a variety of different and competing discourses. Therefore, a discursive study of reputation can enable us to get at the tensions in the many meanings given to universities, and to help us to understand how these tensions play out. In this paper, I offer a critical discourse analysis of how the reputations of a new Finnish university became constructed in 2009 – 2014. For that purpose reputation is conceptualized as an ongoing evaluative process (Rindova et al. 2005, Barnett et al. 2006), in which the organizational characteristics are constantly (re)constructed (Coupland and Brown 2004, Aula and Mantere 2013) in the discursive practices (Coupland and Brown 2004, Middleton 2009, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010) of various stakeholders (Rao 1994, Rindova and Fombrun 1999).

The paper is structed as follows. I begin by discussing the profound changes in contemporary higher education, and the importance of reputation in this setting. Then, I present my theoretical framework, which draws on extant university reputation research, and discourse. I go on to outline my empirical case, and specify my empirical materials and analysis. After this, I illustrate my findings with examples. In my conclusions section I summarize my study and discuss my main findings – the two types of discourse that I have identified, through which reputation and the meaning of the studied university is constructed.

Changing higher education: becoming a reputation-driven industry

Contemporary higher education is under gradual, albeit, radical transformation across the Western world (Krejsler 2006). This transformation is driven by two major changes that are related to each other (cf. Wedlin 2008) and that make universities' reputation-building increasingly important.

The first major change concerns the growing pressure to better integrate universities with wider society. This pressure stems from a certain vision of globalization and the emergence of knowledge economy (Clark 2001). As nations' economic growth and global competitiveness are increasingly driven by knowledge (Salmi 2009), universities are expected to become more closely engaged with business and industry sectors, and thus, to better contribute to the national economies (Deem et al. 2008). Government policies aim to modernise and render a more efficient higher education system. Concequently, higher education sectors have been reformed across the Western world (Krejsler 2006). In Finland, the national government initiated a structural reorganization of the higher education sector in the 2000s, aiming to enhance competitiveness and internationalization of the universities (Tirronen and Nokkala 2009). A crucial precondition for the reform was the passing of a new Universities Act in the Finnish Parliament in 2009. Coming into force in 2010, the new law turned the universities into independent legal entities, and increased their financial and organizational autonomy from state control.

These developments have brought a question of the fundamental meaning of a university to the forefront, indicating changes in purpose and tasks of universities (Etzkowitz et al. 2000). Styhre and Lind (2010) have outlined two intertwining perspectives through which the new idea of a university is currently being examined. In one of the perspectives, the new idea of a university is discussed under the concept of 'entrepreneurial university' (Clark 1998, Rothaermel et al. 2007). In this discussion, the entire university institution becomes reconceptualized as an "entrepreneurial hotbed" where productive and mutually rewarding partnerships between academia and industry are developed (Styhre and Lind 2010, 107). In an entrepreneurial university, economic development is considered as a new and essential academic function along with teaching and research (Etzkowitz 1998). Examples of entrepreneurial activities are patenting and licensing, creating incubators, science parks, and university spin-offs, and investing equity in start-ups (Rothaermel et al. 2007).

A related perspective is embedded in the discussion on the role and nature of knowledge (creation) in society. Specifically, the debate concerns the content of research, the nature of research processes, and the way how knowledge is disseminated in society. From this perspective, universities are expected to bridge the gap between theoretical and practical interests (Starkey and Madan 2011, see Styhre and Lind 2010). This is typically discussed under what Gibbons et al. (1994) refer to as mode 2 knowledge (M2K), as opposed to Mode 1 knowledge (M1K) which we have traditionally understood to be a scientific approach to knowledge creation. In their seminal work *the New Production of Knowledge,* Gibbons et al. predicted a fundamental shift in knowledge creation. While the traditional M1K is characterized as disciplinary-based, primarily cognitive, focusing on theory rather than practice, M2K emphasizes the interdisciplinary and problem-solving nature of research as well as production of knowledge in the context of application and collaboration. The shift per se remains contested (see e.g. Bresnen and Burrell 2012), but the questions of *what* knowledge is produced and *how* it is produced has become a subject of increasing discussion.

Nevertheless, in either perspective – the entrepreneurial and the knowledge perspective – a new conceptualization of a university would take place: Rather than considering a university merely as a provider of teaching and research in the theoretical domains of interest, universities are increasingly seen as entities operating in the intersection of multiple institutional domains (Stevens et al. 2008, Wedlin 2008, Styhre and Lind 2010). The reputation of universities would then rest on characteristics that emphasize entrepreneurial or M2K type of knowledge creation activities.

At the same time, however, another major change – partly related to and partly driven by the first change presented above – is taking place in higher education, namely the development of universities as organizational actors, and creation of a higher education market (Wedlin 2008). Universities are increasingly thought of as competitive actors with a need to position themselves strategically in a competitive academic field (ibid.). Universities have started to gradually adopt and adapt corporate management ideas and practices (Engwall 2008). Benchmarking private business and markets, they are increasingly embracing competition and economic efficiency, and operating through specific control techniques (Amaral et al 2003). Universities have also taken on more formal organizational structures and, for example, established business-like communications departments, mission-statement production and implementing marketing and branding activities (Wedlin 2008). They have started to develop distinct images in order to gain competitive advantage (Louro and Cunha 2001, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007).The universities' funding base is also in change: as public governmental spending in most countries is decreasing (Weber and Duderstadt 2004), universities are increasingly relying on external, often private, sources of finance (Wedlin 2008).

As Wedlin (2008) points out, universities are not only acting on, but also constituting a global market of their own. Students are increasingly considered as customers, and education as a 'service' that can be promoted world-wide (Melewar and Akel 2005, Ng and Forbes 2009). Many public higher education systems that have earlier been closed have become open, allowing and encouraging competition, which is not only for students, faculty, funding and other resources, but also for status and reputation (Wedlin 2008, Harman and Harman 2008). Global standing and international recognition has become a key concern for many universities around the world (Williams and Van Dyke 2007, Salmi 2009). Accordingly, universities are engaging in strategic planning and establishing strategies. In his study of American research universities, Brint (2005) found that the race for becoming 'leading' and 'world-class' has led universities to develop strategies that might be in sharp contrast with each other. He found that while some universities aim to build strength in the traditional existing disciplines, others aim to 'follow new directions', being "less attuned to disciplinary rankings than to making 'cutting edge' contributions to new technologies, forms of expression and social relations" (p. 25). Brint says that those universities that aim to improve their standing within disciplines show their excellence by measuring themselves against each other, using such indicators as student test scores, graduate/undergraduate ratios, rankings, publication counts, and impact factors. These measures support monodisciplinary research culture in the similar way as the traditional academic assessments and reward system (Lam 2007), existing work norms, and disciplinary-based organizational structures in universities (Starkey and Madan 2001). In turn, those universities that emphasize interdisciplinary research culture question the disciplinary-based organizational and faculty structures and aims of the university, and attempt to build teams to work on problems at the intersection of established disciplines (Brint 2005). Such universities may not have, for example, any academic departments, nor would they have tenure tracks (Salmi 2009).

These two parallel major changes in higher education – the relationship with universities and wider society, and the nature of university organization and the market of higher education – create a contested space for universities. While the changes in economic and societal level put pressure for universities to be better integrated with wider society, and to develop their knowledge creation accordingly, the changes in the sector and the organizational level encourage developing strategies that enhance universities' competitive position in the global higher education sector, but that might be in contrast with demands from the level of society. As many characteristics of universities are hidden or otherwise difficult to be observed (Engwall 2007), an understanding of universities, their purpose and task, is formed substantially according to their reputation. Higher education is a reputation-driven industry (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001), and therefore, research on reputation and its construction is highly important in the field.

Privious studies on constructing university reputation

In the extant studies of higher education institutions such as universities and business schools, three research streams can be identified that inform us about reputation construction. The streams differ in their conceptualization of reputation, and emphasis in empirical research.

First, one focal research stream focus on organizational attributes generating reputation (Fischer and Reuber 2007). It is considered in this stream that university reputation is formed on the basis of a set of predetermined and universal organizational attributes, and that stakeholders' assessments of these attributes crystallize into a generalized favorability, that is, the reputation of an organization. Reputation is then understood as 'generalized favorability', consisting of an overall, generalized assessment of the organization's favorability, attractiveness or esteem (Lange et al. 2001). Empirical studies attempting to clarify the attributes of university reputation have generated a number of different frameworks and models to define what university reputation is (e.g. Arpan et al. 2003, Ressler and Abratt 2009, Rindova et al. 2005, Vidaver-Cohen 2007). For example, Vidaver-Cohen (2007) suggests that the variables generating business school reputation are organizational performance, product, service, leadership, governance, workplace, citizenship, and innovation. Arpan et al. (2003), in turn, identify three variables that affect university reputation, each consisting of different number of sub-features: academic (nine sub-features), athletic/social life (six sub-features) and news media coverage (two sub-features). These models and their different variations are used in university league tables. The rankings can be seen both as measures of reputation and means to build reputation.

Second, another central research tradition in studying the university reputation considers that there is one specific organizational attribute or characteristic around which reputation evolves (Weigelt and Camerer 1988, Milgrom and Roberts 1986). A particularly important attribute is the quality of the university offering such as research and education (Milgrom and Roberts 1986, Shapiro 1983). Hence, reputation becomes understood as "observers' expectations or estimations of a particular attribute of an organization" (Rindova et al 2005, 1033). As Fischer and Reuber (2007, 57) note, "an organization's reputation constitutes an assessment of a particular attribute or characteristic": A university has a reputation *for* something (Lange et al. 2011, Barnett et al. 2006). In this view, reputations can be built by signaling a certain message about this attribute to the field, attempting to affect the perceptions held about a university. This signaling function is considered particularly relevant in the field of higher education where the actual quality of an institution is difficult to assess. The quality and value of educational program, for example, can be known only after several years of professional life (Engwall 2007). The extant research has shown that organizations with intangible offerings aim to build their reputations by investigating a variety of relevant signals such as collaboration with reputable universities (Baden-Fuller and Ang 2001), and success in ranking lists (Corley and Gioia 2000). In collaboration, the question is about belonging to high-status groups of networks. Global rankings, in turn, are seen as important quality assessments of institutions (Wedlin 2006), and a hegemonic measure of competitiveness within the education and research industry (Corley and Gioia 2000). The importance of these rankings has grown significantly (Cornelissen and Thorpe 2002, Wedlin 2006, Policano 2007), as the demand for evaluation of academic institutions has increased and their modes of governance have become more market-based (Engwall 2007).

Finally, during the recent years, a third reputation research stream in higher education has strengthened. This research operates through the concepts of brand and branding, and joins to the discussion of branding in higher education. Branding can be seen as a means to build reputation, characterized with an effort "to develop and present the organization as one unified brand" (Christensen et al. 2008, 64). As branding is typically considered as a linear and a-problematic process, existing literature tends to be dominated by models and frameworks for effective branding also for universities (cf. Schultz 2005). In marketing and branding literature, the label of *external brand image* is often used in the meaning of reputation, referring to the perceptions that consumers (students) have about organization's products or services (education) (Fombrun and van Riel 1997). While the empirical research on higher education branding is gradually increasing (e.g. Drori et al. 2013, Chapleo 2010, Waeraas and Solbakk 2009, Yang et al. 2008, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007, Lowrie 2007, Melewar and Akel 2005, Chapleo 2005, Gray et al. 2003, Belanger et al. 2002), branding as a phenomenon in universities has become increasingly common over the last decades. As competition in the academic field has increased, universities have started to develop distinct images in order to gain competitive advantage in the 'market' (Louro and Cunha 2001, Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana 2007). According to Ivy (2001), these images are particularly important because they are likely to impact on students' willingness to apply for entry to a specific institution.

These three streams have contributed to research on reputation in higher education by providing greater conceptual clarity about what reputation is and how it is built. They tend to be limited, however, by simply acknowledging the complexity of both the university organization and its network of stakeholders, and the process of constructing university reputation, but not examining that complexity in any great detail. Viewing reputation as a single feature, or an outcome or something that is achieved at a given time, the existing research fails to address the dynamic nature of reputation construction. Stability and order are considered as a 'natural' state of organizations, and thus reputation is considered as a relatively stable social fact. Correspondingly, the majority of extant empirical research on higher education branding treats the reputation-building processes as linear, and reduces the multitude of stakeholders down to one group, namely students. Despite of few exceptions (e.g. Vasquez et al. 2013, Lowrie and Hemsley-Brown 2011, Waeraas and Solbakk 2009, Lowrie 2007, Jevons 2006), extant research thus largely fails to acknowledge ambiguity and polyphony in constructing university reputation – or a brand.

Therefore, in this study I take a (critical) discourse analytical approach to reputation (e.g. Vendelø 1998, Coupland and Brown 2004, Middleton 2009, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010) which recognizes the dynamic nature of reputation. Such an approach takes the changing setting of higher education seriously and considers that reputations are constantly (re)constructed in a continuous interaction of different stakeholders (Aula and Mantere 2013). The critical discourse analytical approach to reputation emphasizes the possibility of having multiple accounts of reputation that may compete with each other (Coupland and Brown 2004), and that evolve, develop and change across spatial and temporal contexts (Burr 2003). As Coupland and Brown (2004, 1341) note, reputations are "not singular or unitary 'things' that can be simply observed and easily measured. Rather, they are emergent aspect of an organization-centered discourse". Such an approach allows us to build on the idea that reputation is based on those characteristics that the organization and its relevant stakeholders deem important. Most importantly, however, critical discursive perspective enables us to study the tensions and contradictions that are likely to arise when the organizational characteristics are contested. Considering reputation as a "continuously developing set of evaluative narratives, beliefs, and expectations", Aula and Mantere (2013, 341) have outlined the nature of the contestation occurring in the interaction between the organization and its stakeholders. They point out that what this contestation is like depends on which party – the organization or its stakeholders – challenges the existing meanings attached to the organization, and how the other party reacts to this challenge.

Critical discourse analytical approach to reputation

My approach to discourse analysis emphasizes the constructive power of language as a system of signs and symbols existing at the level of society and culture (Burr 2003). The term 'discourse' is understood as a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, names, and statements that in some way together produce a particular version of events (Burr 2003, 64). Reputations are constructed in relation to specific discourses which provide the lenses through which people make sense of and give sense to particular issues. As alternative versions of events are possible, there may be a variety of different and competing discourses (Burr 2003) as well as accouts of reputation (Coupland and Brown 2004).

As specific ways of using language, discourses embody certain ideologies (van Dijk 1998), that is, implicit belief systems and values (Hackley 2003). Given that there is a multitude of discourses mobilized in and around an organization, there is a constant struggle between ideologically diverse discourses competing for existence and dominance (Fairclough 2001). Thus, discursive struggles are also ideological struggles (Vaara and Tienari 2008). The traces of differing discourses and ideologies can be found in different kinds of organizational texts within which discourse is manifested (Wodak 2004). A certain manifestation of an organization may become the dominant discourse at a given time, but the 'order' of discourses may change over time (Fairclough 2001). Accordingly, reputation construction is an ongoing discursive struggle between ideologically diverse discourses. What is at stake in these struggles, is the varying understanding of the university.

Central to the approach adopted in this paper is the view that discourses not only describe the world as it exists but also construct social reality as it is experienced. In the present study, discourses are considered as the very means of constructing and reproducing university reputations in a wider societal and institutional context, that is, the context of changing higher education. Context is a key element in discourse studies, defining the specific nature of the discursive struggle (Vaara and Tienari 2008). Chouliaraki and Fairclough (2010, 1215) define context as “an analytical construct that emerges within a specific research question and seeks to define the specific articulation of moments that is relevant to the constitution of specific bodies of organizational texts”. As such, they argue, context is “best conceptualized as itself an epistemic object, dialectically arising out of the multiple ways by which CDA problematizes language as an instrument of power”. In the current study this means the way how the changing higher education is being constructed and thus, how the new university is being contextualized.

I share the view according to which discourses are one important form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). I do not assume that everything is reducible to discourse, but acknowledge that discourses are associated with other social and material practices and that the concrete effects of discourses are often subtle and difficult to detect (Mantere and Vaara 2008). Discourses (re)produce knowledge, culture, and power relations (Vaara and Tienari 2004). They define what knowledge is relevant and what is marginalized, and assign value jugdments. Discourses also construct concepts, the means and the vocabulary through which people give the meaning to a specific phenomenon, and define and structure the social space within which social actors can act, what they are expected to do, and what they can and can’t do (Philips and Hardy 2002). These conditions for possible social action are often taken for granted. Although social actors can purposefully position themselves vis-á-vis specific discourses or mobilize particular discourses to their own purposes (Vaara and Tienari 2008), they tend to be “very much constrained and even disciplined by the available discursive resources and practices – of which they are often unaware” (Vaara and Tienari 2004, 343).

The critical tradition that is followed in this study not only include a concern for the processes of social construction of my phenomenon of interest, but also focuses more explicitly on the dynamics of power, knowledge, and ideology that surround discursive processes (Philips and Hardy 2002). I want to emphasize that the critical stance does not mean condemning, for example, the decisions taken by actors involved with creating the new university discussed in this paper. Instead, the critical approach implies a special emphasis on alternative discourses that provide very different means for making sense of, and giving sense to, the new university. As Mantere and Vaara (2008, 344) note, “these discourses can coexist in a dialectical relation where more dominant discourses are challenged by alternative ones”.

Consequently, an essential part of understanding how different meanings of the university appear and how they are present in making the new university is to examine the discourses through which specific actors make sense of, and give sense to, the new university. For my purposes, it is important to concentrate on those discursive practices that seem to construct (different) reputations for a studied universtiy. This leads me to formulate the following research question for my empirical analysis: *What discourses do social actors draw upon in a university merger, and what kind of organizational reputations does this mobilization produce*?

The case: the making of a new university

The empirical focus of this study is the merger of Helsinki University of Technology (HUT), the Helsinki School of Economics (HSE) and the University of Art and Design Helsinki (TaiK) into a new university, now known as *Aalto University*. At the time of making the merger idea public in 2005, universities were a subject of discussion and strong opinion in Finland. There seemed to be growing dissatisfaction with universities and their operational preconditions. University Rectors demanded that their institutions should be released from government control which would increase universities' financial and operational autonomy and better enable developmental activities. The representatives of the Finnish business elite demanded better universities, claiming that "Finnish universities are crap and something needs to be done about it", as one of the interviewees expressed. The Ministry of Education[1] wanted to advance the structural development of the higher education sector, which was part of the government's productivity programme. All parties called for operational focus for universities and clearer academic profiles.

In October 2006, the Finnish Ministry of Education commissioned an inquiry looking into the possibilities to deepen the collaboration between the above three universities. An inquiry is a typical procedure in the Ministry, but the proposal of the Report stood many by surprise. The Inquiry Report (MinEdu 2007), made public in February 2007, voiced concern and urgency to reform Finnish higher education, and gave instructions how to establish the new university through a merger in practice. The Report exploded public debate about the rationales of the merger (Ridell 2008, Kunelius et al. 2009). Two months later the establishment of the new university was written into the new Government Programme (2007). The Government of Finland promised the new university extra funding of 500 million euros, provided that the private sector would finance the endeavour with another 200 million euros. The new university also received larger relative annual funding from the State compared to other Finnish universities. While the three merging universities were public and state-owned, the new university was to be governed by a private foundation.

1 The name of the Ministry changed during the studied period. The Ministry of Education became the Ministry of Education and Culture in May 2010. See more http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Tiedotteet/2010/04/nimenmuutos.html?lang=fi.

For clarity, I use the name 'the Ministry of Education' throughout this paper.

Aalto University foundation was established in June 2008. The first Board of Aalto and the President were nominated later the same year.

The new university was referred to as *Innovation University* and *Top University* until it received its official name, Aalto University, in 2008. The Aalto name was chosen as a tribute to one of the internationally best-known Finns, the architect and designer *Alvar Aalto* (1898-1976). *Aalto* also has a metaphorical connotation: it means “wave” in the Finnish language, thus signifying movement and progress. Aalto’s new visual image and one-brand strategy was introduced a year later. A new Head of Communications, appointed in 2010, set up the university-level communications unit to establish joint functional processes. The outcome of the new order was a marked shift from uncoordinated communications efforts to systematic and centralized reputation-building of the new university. Officially, the merger came into effect in January 2010. The first years of operation are characterized by changes in organization, department and campus structures, study programmes, career system, and personnel. In addition, university’s entrepreneurial activities have been developed, while department-based research centers have been downsized. The way how these changes and developments in different phases of the merger process are put into words and communicated construct the purpose and the task of the new university.

Empirical materials and analysis

This study builds on my and my co-authors previous studies on Aalto University (Aula and Tienari 2011, Aspara et al. 2014, Aula et al. 2015). For the purposes of these studies, I have analyzed a large amount of qualitative materials, presented in the respected papers. They include written and spoken texts as well as visual images produced, distributed and consumed by both external and internal to Aalto University and its predecessors. Through these previous studies I have acquired not only overall but also partly specified understanding about the studied case and the phenomenon at hand.

In the study presented in this paper, the studied period is longer than in the abovementioned studies. The empirical materials of this study is produced during a 9-year time-span (2005-2014) before, during and after the actual merger in 2010. The materials are partly real time and partly retrospective. Compared to earlier studies, I specifically updated national and international media texts, employer releases, and Aalto’s stakeholder magazines, on-line materials, organizational reports and brochures, as well as Aalto’s student marketing materials to cover a longer time period. The main empirical materials of this study are summarized in the tables below.

Table 1: Texts produced by stakeholders external to Aalto and its predecessors

Type of text	
Governmental committee reports and releases	MINEDU (2007). *Teknillisen korkeakoulun, Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulun ja taideteollisen korkeakoulun yhdistyminen uudeksi yliopistoksi*. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2007:16. Helsinki: Ministry of Education. [Merging the Helsinki University of Technology, the Helsinki School of Economics and the University of Art and Design into a New University.] MINEDU (2006). Korkeakoulujen rakenteellisen kehittämisen periaatteet. Keskustelumuistio 8.3.2006. Opetusministeriön monisteita 2006:2.[The principles of the structural development of universities] Releases on http://www.minedu.fi
Other reports and brochures	*Matkalla Innovaatioyliopistoon* – tieteidenvälisen yhteistyön mahdollisuuksia luotaamassa. Itkonen, Maija (ed.). The Helsinki University of Technology and The Federations of Finnish Technology Industries. 2009. [On our way to Innovation University] *Osaamisen uusi Aalto*. Fundraising material, the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK). 2008, 2009. [New wave of know-how]
Media texts (national)	Helsingin Sanomat (HS), the major Finnish daily newspaper; texts published 6 September, 2005 – 30 May, 2014. Kauppalehti (KL), the business daily; texts published 6 September 2005 – 31 December 2010. HS and KL articles are collected from the Internet article retrieval archives of the respective papers. Searches are conducted with the different names used for Aalto University: *innovaatioyliopisto (Innovation University), huippuyliopisto (Top University), Aalto-korkeakoulu, and Aalto-yliopisto (Aalto University*). App. 3 000 media texts in total. Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets (e.g. regional newspapers, periodical magazines such as Suomen Kuvalehti and Talouselämä, Acatiimi, Prima, Kanava)
Media texts (international)	Miscellaneous media texts in a range of outlets, e.g. The Financial Times, Harvard Business Review, Newsweek. An access to over 250 000 digital sources around the world provided by online media monitoring company Meltwater Group.

Table 2: Texts related to stakeholders internal to Aalto and its predecessors

Type of text	
Organizational Reports and Brochures	Aalto University, Towards Creativity and Innovation 2010 Aalto University, Meillä tiede ja taide kohtaavat tekniikan ja talouden 2010

	Aalto University, Where science and art meet technology and business 2012 Aalto University, Meillä tiede ja taide kohtaavat tekniikan ja talouden, 2012 Aalto University, Annual Report 2012 Aalto University, Annual Report 2013 Aalto University, Annual Report 2014
Other materials and documents	On-line and printed materials and documents on the making of a new university: e.g. strategy, HR, marketing documents. 2007-2014.
Accounts of the President of Aalto University	Oral presentations and blog entries. 2009–2014.
Letters to employees from the Chair of Aalto board	5 employer letters (29 October 2008, 8 December 2008, 12 January 2009, 13 March 2009, 4 September 2009)
Employer releases (intranets, email)	HSE Piazza 2009, Aalto Inside 2010-2014 (intranets). Aalto Newsletters and Infos 2008-2014, the Aalto School of Business Newsletters 2013-2014.
Magazines	Aalto University Magazine, October 2011–March 2014, issues 1-10 Avista, HSE alumni magazine, 2009–2011, 5 issues.
Student materials	Aalto University student marketing materials 2009–2013.
Research report	Herbert, A., and Tienari, J. (2013). Transplanting tenure and the (re)construction of academic freedoms. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(2), 157-173.

Table 3: Interviews; decision-makers

Background of interviewees	N interview	N person	Year(s)
Rectorate (Aalto and its predecessors)	12	7	2008–2010
Aalto Board and top management	4	4	2009, 2010
Aalto's temporary change organization	5	4	2009, 2010
Faculty (Aalto University School of Business)	4	4	2009, 2010
Students (Aalto's predecessors)	2	2	2008
Ministries	7	9	2008, 2010
University staff associations and unions	2	2	2008
Finnish business and industry foundations, associations and confederations	5	6	2008–2010
Politician	1	1	2008
Sponsor organization	1	1	2008
Consulting organization	1	1	2008
Total	44	41	

Table 4: Interviews; communication experts

Background of interviewees	N interview	N person	Year(s)
Communication managers (Aalto and its predecessors	5	5	2009 – 2010
Head of Communications (Aalto)	2	1	2010, 2011
Dean of Aalto University School of Business	1	1	2012
Branding expert consulting Aalto's communication	1	1	2010
Key stakeholders	2	3	2009
Total	11	11	

My analysis follows 'abductive' logic (Dubois and Gadde 2002), as the research process has been in a continuous interplay between theory, empirical materials, and analysis. Abductive logic is based on systematic combining, which emphasizes theory development rather than theory generation. Abductive logic emphasizes iteration and is non-linear process in its nature. Therefore, it suits well to this kind of research where the studied phenomenon evolves and where the theories and frameworks cannot, thus, be defined beforehand. (ibid.)

In practice, my analysis proceeded through four stages. In the first stage, I went through my materials and sorted them out roughly. As I was already familiar with most of the material and had an initial idea about the research design, I was able to start reading the materials with a certain question in mind: Searching for expressions of the meaning, purpose and tasks, of the new university, I therefore read and reread the materials. I paid special attention to the arguments that aimed to justify the establishment of the new university and that pointed to specific tasks of the new university. When reading the materials, I identified texts that in some way touched these issues. Doing that, I was also able to reduce the massive number of individual texts.

In the second stage, I worked more closely on the selected materials and identified the discourses. The process at this stage was iterative in its nature, as I went back and forth between the texts and literature. I identified a number of different meanings, roles, characteristics, and tasks for the new university, which emerged from the materials. I structured and categorized my findings. As the initial meaning categories began to emerge, I noticed that they were constructed and framed differently. This notion let me analyze the reoccurring categories more rigorously, and to examine the ways in which the new university was being contextualized. From the selected materials, I picked the ones in which the themes and different meanings came out clearly. I then analyzed these texts as a whole (e.g. the whole single media article) and paid special attention to the line of argumentation and the meaning construction in each specific text. I analyzed wordings and expressions, and how relationships between different actors were depicted, and examined questions regarding *where*, *when* and *by whom* the text was produced and *to whom* it was targeted. At some point, I started to increase the number of closely studied texts and to test if my observations held for the rest of the materials. I kept increasing and decreasing the number of closely studied texts, elaborating and specifying my analysis until

I reached a plausible understanding of the phenomenon and was able to identify two different discourses in which the meaning of the new university became different. I have labelled these discourses as 'higher education discourse' and 'market economy discourse'.

In the third stage, I focused more closely on the two identified discourses. Again, I selected the key materials for more detailed analysis. In order to understand reputation construction for the new university, I needed to examine how particular conceptions of the new university and its meaning were discursively constructed and legitimated. I noticed that the different constructions of the new university became specifically salient in the way how the new university was called before it received its official name. This observation allowed me to examine *what kind of meanings the naming of the new university, "Innovation University" and "Top University", give to the new university in the two discourses*. In practice this meant analyzing the references of the words 'innovation' and 'top' in both higher education discourse and in market economy discourse. I found that the references differed significantly in the two discourses, as will be shown in the analysis below, constructing competing accounts of the new university's reputation. In the final stage, I revisited my empirical materials and identified the typical examples from the materials to illustrate the meanings of 'innovation' and 'top' in each discourse. I also extracted instances where the differing constructions of the new university became contested.

Contextualizing the new university

In analyzing the way how the new university was being contextualized, I was able to identify two discourses that produced a specific and different version of the new university. In one of the discourses, the new university was being contextualized within the (Finnish) higher education. Expressions such as "higher education reform" and "implemented by the Ministry of Education" connected the new university to the structural development of Finnish universities led by the Ministry of Education in Finland. In this discourse that I label as *higher education discourse*, the new university started to be considered a 'flagship' project in the sector reform. This is illustrated in the quote below.

> *The innovation university project, as the Aalto University project was known before, is one of the flagship projects in the extensive higher education reform currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education.*[2]

In another discourse, the new university was contextualized within the Finnish economy. References to "competence capital" and "competitiveness of Finnish business community" relate the social practices of the market economy to the new university, constructing the new university a purpose of securing the well-

2 www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/the-innovation-university-as-part-of-university-reform; accessed 9 January 2009)

being of Finnish society and business life (illustrated below). I label this discourse as *market economy discourse*.

> *The central objective of Aalto University is to secure the competence capital within fields central to the development and competitiveness of Finnish business community and society.*[3]

As the two discourses contextualized the new university differently, the two types – higher education discourse and market economy discourse – came to construct a university whose meaning – purpose, nature, and academic function – differed from each other. The key findings are summarized in the table 5 below after which the two discourses are elaborated in more detail.

Table 5: The two discourses constructing the meaning for the new university

	Higher education discourse	Market economy discourse
Purpose of the new university	To advance the Finnish higher education sector reform	To secure the wellbeing of Finnish business life and society
	To advance international standing of the Finnish higher education	To advance the national innovation policy
The nature of the new university	University-centric	Business-university partnership
	Focus on the areas in which Aalto is already strong and as close to "world-class" as possible	Focus on areas that are important to Finland and Finnish economy
Academic functions of the new university	Research and teaching	Research, teaching and economic development

Higher education discourse

In the higher education discourse, identified in the data, the reputation of the new university developed in relation to the discussion about the structural developments of the Finnish higher education sector. It was argued that Finnish higher education was lagging behind in global competition, and that the reasons lay behind the operational preconditions such as insufficient funding and tight government control that restricted organizational autonomy in financial, management and personnel issues. Also, low internationalization, a disadvantageous student-professor-rate, and long studentships were often brought up as drawbacks of the Finnish universities in my materials. It is typical that these problems and challenges were discussed in a general sense and in a way that they concerned all Finnish universities equally. References were made to other countries and to the conducted university mergers to show how universities were developed and invested elsewhere.[4]

3 Osaamisen uusi Aalto. Confederation of Finnish Industries.2008. [New wave of knowhow]

4 Helsingin Sanomat 5 March 2007, MINEDU 2007

Increasingly, Finnish universities are competing on the international market for finance and talent. The fact is that Finnish universities lag behind European and American universities in their facilities. … The current reform process must not forget its basic aim, which is to create an up-to-date operating environment for Finnish universities, to enable them to better fulfil traditional academic responsibilities – research and teaching – the very heart and soul of academia.[5]

The new university was legitimated by presenting it as the spearhead project in Finnish university reform. It was presented as a university that makes a quality jump in research and teaching by developing its operational environment. It was argued that the new university was an experiment whose results could possibly be used in other Finnish universities later on[6]. It was implied that it would take too much time to rebuild the whole sector. As the Inquiry Report (MINEDU 2007, 37) pointed out, "*quick and extensive reform is more likely to be achieved when reform focuses on a limited number of universities*". This can be seen as an attempt to legitimate the new university's position as the most important individual project in the reform.

The legitimacy of the new university was, however, contested in the discourse. The new university's focal role in advancing the Finnish higher education sector reform was challenged. The Rector of the University of Helsinki wrote a letter to the editor of Helsingin Sanomat (7 February 2008), the biggest daily newspaper in Finland, and argued that it was not the new university that would solve the sector's problems, but the New Universities Act (which was eventually passed in the Finnish parliament in 2009): "*Obviously, major stumbling blocks for the global success of Finnish universities are, on the one hand, their official status as public sector institutions, with public sector financial accountability, and on the other hand, their dated management and decision making styles. Luckily, the current reform process, to which the government is committed, will change this situation for all Finnish universities.*"

The existing operational preconditions, presented as inadequate and restrictive, defined the reputation-building efforts for the university, aiming to legitimate the way how the new university was to be built and developed. While the current challenges in the sector were presented as common to all universities, the developments were, in turn, presented to be university specific. At the same time, the new university became positioned into the same social group with the "modern European and American universities" (HS 22.12.2007). This kind of positioning aimed to make the new university different from other Finnish universities, claimed to be lagging behind the international development, and to be similar to modern contemporary international universities.

The explicit goal of the new university was to become a world-class university in specific areas that were later defined in the research assessment exercise

5 Helsingin Sanomat 22 December 2007

6 MINEDU 2007

(RAE). RAE was one of the first projects the newly nominated Board initiated in 2009. In his letter to the employees (29 October 2008), the Chair of the Aalto Board argued that RAE is "crucial for our efforts to create a world class Aalto University". According to the Vice Rector who was responsible for RAE, "the aim of RAE is to identify the potential for us to create world class research programs"[7]. RAE identified the four key areas that were considered Aalto's current strong points: Computation and modeling, Materials research, Design, and ICT and media[8]. These focus areas were later granted additional funding.

Market economy discourse

In the market economy discourse, the reputation of the new university was constructed in relation to the competitiveness of the Finnish economy and business sector. The inadequate quality of Finnish universities was framed in a way that connected this drawback to the challenges of the Finnish economy, in general, and of the technology sector, specifically. Although different economic indicators suggested that the sector was doing well[9], industry representatives insisted that Finnish technological know-how is lagging behind international development[10] and Finland is losing its attractiveness for international investments[11]. These claims were backed by references to the EU commission[12] and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD[13], to name a few. In addition, the quality of teaching in universities was questioned, as insufficient know-how of Finnish university graduates was presented as a cause for the negative prospects of the Finnish technology sector.

> *The Managing Director of Finnish Technology Industries, Mr [name] is worried that Finnish technological knowhow is coming to a standstill. [name] argues that the level of higher education teaching and research in technology is now unforgivably low, and already reducing the attractiveness of investments to Finland.*[14]

Interest in the technology sector for the new university was evident. The innovative aspect of the Aalto trio of technology, business and design was seen to be particularly interesting in the technology sector, as one of the interviewees explained. After the Inquiry Report, and just before the new university was included in the Governmental Programme, the Federation of Finnish Technology Industries promised to fund the new university with 80 million euros[15], which was 40 per cent of the required private funding.

The reputation of the new university rested on its new academic function: Instead of providing just research and teaching, it was now expected to

7 Aalto News 12/2008

8 Available at http://www.aalto.fi/en/research/strengths/; accessed 21 April 2010.

9 Kauppalehti 28 July 2006

10 Helsingin Sanomat 14 October 2006

11 Helsingin Sanomat 5 May 2006

12 Helsingin Sanomat 14 October 2006

13 Kauppalehti 28 July 2006

14 Kauppalehti 28 July 2006

15 Helsingin Sanomat 30 March 2007

contribute to national economic development. The new university was presented as an answer not only to the challenges of the technology sector but of the whole Finnish economy. "Technology industries are vital for Finnish welfare, and their future depends on the competitiveness of Finnish universities"[16], was the argument. As such, it became an important part of the Finnish government's innovation policy. The Rector of TaiK, who first suggested the establishment of the new university, came to explain later that his suggestion was aligned with the idea of developing the Finnish innovation system: "... how to create multidisciplinary environments that would fuel innovation, improve the commercial exploitation of research results, and, overall, make our innovation processes more efficient..."[17]. The Minister of Education and Culture was quoted as using exactly the same wording in an article published in a Finnish business daily[18] half a year later. The Harvard Business Review (March 2009) pucliched an article by the US-based strategy and innovation consultant John Kao, titled "Tapping the World's Innovation Hot Spots." In addition to China, India, Singapore and the US, Finland was among those listed. Kao presented several nation-specific variants of innovation strategy. Aalto University, he claimed, is "one of the best examples of Finland's large-scale, holistic approach to innovation".

In the market economy discourse, the new university came to (re)brand Finland as a leading technology and an entrepreneurial friendly country, aiming to attract new investments to Finland. The recent financial crises, and particularly the downfall of Nokia Corporation, can be seen behind the views that "Finland's future lay with new companies, not old giants"[19]. This national importance legitimated the new university and its flagship position in Finnish higher education.

The new university was expected to focus on the specific areas that were considered important to Finland and the Finnish economy. A few concrete suggestions included top class technological knowhow, business knowhow, innovations in, and enhancement of, the service sector, more innovative operational models, strategic management and continuing strategic reform in companies, together with industrial design[20]. While in the higher education discourse the focus areas were defined according to the existing strengths, the market economy discourse emphasized change and focus in the specific areas that were considered important to Finnish society and business life.

Above, I have illustrated the two discourses –higher education discourse and market economy discourse. Next, I will show how the new university and its reputation became constructed in these two discourses. I focus on naming of the new university, as the different constructions become salient particularly well in the way in which the new university was named.

16 Helsingin Sanomat 14 October 2006

17 Helsingin Sanomat 15 February 2006

18 Kauppalehti, 5 September 2006

19 If in Doubt, innovate. The economist. 2 February 2013.

20 MINEDU 2007

Meaning in a name?

Naming can be seen as an attempt to describe what the new university is about, and to define the key organizational characteristics around which the reputation of the new university begins to be developed. The new university was referred to *Innovation University* (Innovaatioyliopisto) and *Top University* (Huippuyliopisto) before it received its official name, *Aalto University,* in 2008. My following analysis focuses on the meanings that were given to names used in the making of the new university.

> *Greater collaboration within an Art and Design university is, of course, a very good thing, but surely – from the perspective of national welfare and the nation's future – a greater benefit would be obtained from the creation of a completely new university formed from the University of Art and Design, the University of Technology, and Helsinki School of Economics. From an international perspective, the profile of this kind of an "innovaatio" [innovation, innovative] University would be unique; from the Finnish perspective, it would be the country's second biggest university as far as student numbers are concerned. If the creation of this university were not to start from an administrative point of view but from a genuine effort to create a new university that would stress new kinds of innovation; if this new university was to have considerable autonomy, innovate new types of collaboration with business and industry – and receive substantially bigger funding – we would be able to create an environment with potential to develop world class knowledge and knowhow. We should promote the development of such a high profile project.*

The above quote shows how the idea of the Aalto merger was made public in 2005. In his opening speech for the new academic year, the Rector of the University of Art and Design Helsinki envisioned a new university calling it *Innovaatioyliopisto (Eng. Innovative University, or Innovation University*[21]*).* The next morning, the Rector was quoted in the biggest Finnish daily paper (HS, 5 Sept. 2006) for saying that "We need a creative union of design, technology, and marketing – a true innovation university". As representatives of the business community and other actors also took the term into use, it became the name generally used to refer to the new university.

In 2007, the Inquiry Report dismissed the name *Innovation University,* and instead used the name *Top University,* which became a popular name to be used, too. Both names were used alongside until the official name *Aalto University* was introduced in the middle of 2008. Interestingly however, as the

21 The Finnish word 'innovaatioyliopisto' has been translated into English in two ways; Innovative University (e.g.Virtanen 2008) and Innovation University, the latter being the literal translation according to the Finnish-English dictionary (MOT). It is worth noting, that the two translations may reserve a divergent meaning for the university. In Finnish, only the word 'Innovaatioyliopisto' was used to refer to the new university.

analysis of the naming of the new university reveals, *Innovation University* and *Top University* carried different meanings in two discourses – the higher education and the market economy discourse. These different meanings became manifested with a variety of initiatives in *Aalto University*. The different meanings of the new university and their manifestations came to construct various accounts of reputation that competed, resisted and borrowed from each other in the making of the new university. In the following, I aim to show and illustrate with examples the dynamic processes of meaning construction in both discourses.

Constructing reputation for the new university in higher education discourse

The quote above (how the idea of the Aalto merger was made public) illustrates how the new university was presented in higher education discourse. 'Innovaatioyliopisto' is used in the meaning of *Innovative University*, suggesting that the new university *itself* is an innovation – a novel kind of an organization in Finnish higher education; a university that has increased autonomy and financial resources, and most importantly, that is able to create new innovative working practices. In the quote, new forms of collaboration with businesses is brought up, but as it turns out later, creativity and innovativity came to refer to new kinds of work practices particularly within the university.

The reputation of the new university started to evolve around novelty and originality, through which the new university became to be described. Arguments about the uniqueness of the new university referred to the combination of the three fields of the merging schools – technology, business, and art and design. "This combination has attracted global interest, as there do not seem to be many like it", argued the representative of the Ministry of Education[22]. This interdisciplinarity was characterized in a variety of ways: a marriage of science and art[23], a combination of technology, design and art[24], and of technology, design and marketing[25]. The slogan of the new university presents us a university where science and art meet technology and business.[26]

Aalto's innovative interdisciplinary nature was, however, widely contested, in particular by other Finnish universities. It was frequently pointed out that Aalto's concept was hardly novel, because several universities in Finland had already combined technical and business knowledge. It was also noted that many universities abroad had combined not only technical and business studies, but also art. Lappeenranta University of Technology (LUT), a regional university in Finland which has a relatively large business studies department, ran an advertisement containing the text: "Good luck to the new Aalto

22 Helsingin Sanomat 14 May 2008

23 Available at http://www.aaltoyliopisto.info/en/view/innovaatioyliopisto-info/the-name; accessed 20 November 2009.

24 President of Aalto's speech at Aalto University's opening ceremony in 2010.

25 Helsingin Sanomat, Koulutusliite, 2009

26 In Finnish this is *tiede [science] ja taide [art] kohtaa [meet] teknologian [technology] ja talouden [business],* all key words beginning playfully with the letter T.

University. We have practiced combining technology and business since 1969. Should you have problems, give us a call"[27]. The same message was reiterated on LUT's internet pages.

The name *Top University*, in turn, referred to the ambitious aim of the new university. In the higher education discourse, 'top' came to refer to academic research excellence and to global university rankings. 'Top' implied that Aalto belonged to the small elite of research universities in the world. This elite reference group was discursively constructed as the new university was systematically benchmarked with world-famous academic institutions such as MIT and Stanford. Also, the importance of international collaboration with the best universities in the world was continuously emphasized. Rankings were brought to the fore as an example of how academic excellence is shown and measured. Later, other measures such as publication counts, impact factors, and number of degrees were also introduced.

> *Perhaps the most concrete way to identify top universities is to create rankings of universities, the best known of which are the 'Shanghai list' and 'The Times Higher Education Supplement University Rankings.*[28]

Suddenly, the three merging universities were being presented in a very positive light, which was in sharp contrast to earlier public discussion and mud-slinging against Finnish universities. The three merging schools were praised as "nationally appreciated and high-quality universities which have also reached an international top-level in certain specific areas"[29]. Aalto itself reproduced this world-class rhetoric in its own materials in 2009 and onwards. "An internationally recognized multidisciplinary research university" was a description on Aalto's new internet pages in 2010[30]. "The three universities that make up Aalto University are well respected and recognized" was, in turn, stated in Aalto's student materials in 2011.

However, such 'world-class' rhetoric also became subject to belittlement and ridicule. While the benchmarked (mainly) US universities were ranked high in different lists, the mediocrity of the three merging universities was brought up in public discussion. A variety of input-out calculations were also produced[31]. These were used to show that Aalto does not rank high even among Finnish universities. The line of reasoning in this kind of argumentation was that you do not become a 'world-class' or a member of this exclusive group of world-class universities simply by self-declaration. Moreover, naming one university as 'top' made other universities seem 'not top'. Representatives of other universities came to note publicly that their universities are also international[32], and that

27 Tekniikka & Talous, 15 January 2010

28 MINEDU 2007, p. 32.

29 MINEDU 2007, p. 38.

30 www.aalto.fi/fi/about, accessed 8.September 2010

31 Helsingin Sanomat 3 May 2007

32 Helsingin Sanomat 27 March 2007

world-class research is conducted in their universities, too[33]. Professors of the University of Helsinki, the highest ranked university in Finland (e.g. in Academic Ranking of World Universities), kept pointing out that “there already is an international university in Finland, it is called the University of Helsinki”[34], and “a top-university has existed in Finland for 367 years!”[35]

Interestingly, interdisciplinarity, presented as the novel and unique characteristic of Aalto University, and the status of ‘world-class’, became manifested in a way that created contradictory construction of Aalto’s reputation. Interdisciplinarity was manifested in Aalto’s new interdisciplinary study curricula and multidisciplinary research programs. Aalto’s (student) materials underlined interdisciplinary study programmes such as IDBM and Creative Sustainability as well as some individual courses. “Interdisciplinarity update of teaching” was a headline in the Business School stakeholder magazine Avista (1/2010). The article in Avista informed us that ”these examples of Aalto’s latest course offereing are characterized by extensive interdisciplinarity combined with a bold learning-by-doing-policy”. As interdisciplinarity stood for ‘doing things differently’, Aalto’s materials presented us a variety of student projects where creative and innovative working practices had been applied. “Aalto on waves is just one great exaple of all the innovative projects the university has to offer”, was stated in Aalto’s student materials in 2012.[36]

In research, interdisciplinarity was typically referred to with the term *multidisciplinarity*, and manifested in research projects that “*brings together researchers from all three of Aalto University’s main schools*”[37]. World-class multidisciplinary research became a key organizational characteristic in building Aalto’s reputation. This is illustrated in the following extract.

Research at Aalto

The strength of Aalto University research is based on the collaboration and individual areas of expertise of the three leading universities in their respective fields, the School of Economics, the School of Art and Design and School of Science and Technology. A solid expertise in economics, arts and design and technology allows the University to carry out world-class multidisciplinary research in active cooperation with the surrounding society.

The University activities are based on long-term basic research and artistic activities as well as on high-quality teaching. Aalto University wants to enhance its expertise in all its areas of specialization and eventually rank among the top universities in the world.

33 Helsingin Sanomat 10 April 2007

34 Helsingin Sanomat 27 March, 2007

35 Helsingin Sanomat 9 September 2007

36 Freedom to succeed. Welcome to Aalto University. 2012.

37 Aalto promotional materials: towards creativity and innovativeness. 2010.

In both research and artistic activities, Aalto University invests in its current strong points as well as in new combinations of the different areas of expertise of its schools. The University wants to realize the full potential of its multidisciplinary profile and to tackle pressing global issues through fresh ways of cooperation.[38]

At the same time, however, it was argued that such multidisciplinary research, aiming to "bring scientific breakthroughs"[39], is only possible if the different disciplines have reached the top of their own fields. World-class academic research came to mean research published in international 'top-tier' journals. The ways in which such research was presented in Aalto's on-line materials and promotional brochures reflect a distinct bias for natural science-based, positivistic ontology and epistemology, emphasizing scientific progress and creation of new knowledge. Witness the following extract from Aalto's promotional materials.

Aalto University's solid expertise in the fields of economics, art and design and technology create a foundation for the most diverse scientific breakthroughs.

Scientific special know-how of the highest quality is a prerequisite for excellent multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. Only thus can a multidisciplinary approach bring clear added value to the university. This means that the various departments are at par with the corresponding departments at other international top universities. This can be achieved when Aalto University builds on its own strengths and develops profound competence in carefully selected areas. [40]

What is significant here is that, within higher education discourse, another account of Aalto's reputation was clearly evolving. While the first account of Aalto's reputation in higher education discourse developed around interdisciplinarity, the other account of reputation was evolving around world-class disciplinary specialization. The linguistic representation was supported by other social practices, such as the conducted Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the establishment of a Tenure Track that was claimed to be a "cornerstone of aspirations to be a world-class university"[41]. Thus, excellence of Aalto was evaluated and shown by indicators that essentially support monodisciplinary (research) culture. An example of this monodisciplinarity occurred on April 10, 2014, when the employees of Aalto University School of Business received an internal newsletter. The cover letter informed them that "Aalto University School of Business on its way to world-class. Number of

38 Available at http://www.aalto.fi/en/research/; accessed 21 April 2010.

39 Aalto promotional materials: Where science and art meet technology and business. 2012.

40 Aalto promotional materials: Where science and art meet technology and business. 2012.

41 Available at www.aalto.fi/en/about/tenure_track/: accessed 14 January 2010

publications and degrees increased in 2013. Read more.*"*[42] Behind the link was a piece of news giving the employees more detailed information on how much the number of peer-reviewed publications, Bachelor and Master's degrees, student credits, and non-Finnish faculty members had increased in 2013 compared to 2012. Such indicators are typically used to present the vision of a university that is based upon disciplinary specialization (see e.g. Brint 2005).

Above, I have presented the main ways in which the reputation of the new university was constructed in higher education discourse. Next, I will elaborate on the corresponding process in market economy discourse.

Constructing reputation for the new university in market economy discourse

In market economy discourse, the name *Innovation University* referred to the task of the new university to create something new – innovations – that would have commercial value. Described through such characteristics as "integrated seedbed for innovation"[43] and "exploring novel, commercially significant ideas"[44], the task of the new university was seen to be to "spur innovation"[45], and to "encourage new types of knowledge creation and innovation"[46]. The Financial Times (March 2009)[47] published an article on Aalto, titled "Merger with innovation at its heart". The article explained that "the project's working title was "Innovation University" – an indication of its central role in formalising the links and working practices that allow new ideas to flourish and be marketed affectively".

The reputation of the new university evolved around this task as well as the new university's ability to contribute to technological, product and service development, to support startups, and to advance the creation of a new kind of 'ecosystem' to Finland. In practice, this meant close collaboration with business organizations, and emphasis on research on applications, commercialization of research results, acquiring international patents, and education for entrepreneurship. A key idea was that the research and teaching in the new university was to be relevant to practice. The main Finnish business daily paper, Kauppalehti (29 Sept. 2006) published an article in which the Vice CEO of Nokia was interviewed. The text says:

> *According [to the Vice CEO], art and design create precisely the sort of products that people will want to buy in the future. People want goods to be replaced by entertainment, formats, images and*

42 https://inside.aalto.fi/display/enbiz/Number+of+publications+and+degrees+increased+at +School+of+Business+in+2013 accessed 11 April, 2014

43 Financial Times, March 2009. Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5399caa8-1aeb-11de-8aa3-0000779fd2ac,dwp_uuid=02e 16f4a-46f9-11da-b8e5-00000e2511c8.html; accessed 21 April 2009.

44 Harvard Business review, March 2009

45 The Globe and Mail. Game Theory: Go global or go home. 8 September 2011

46 AFR. Innovative courses to attract the entrepreneurial. 23 April 2012. http://www.afr.com/p/national/education/

47 Available at http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/5399caa8-1aeb-11de-8aa3-0000779fd2ac,dwp_uuid=02e 16f4a-46f9-11da-b8e5-00000e2511c8.html; accessed 21 April 2009.

sound. ”There is not enough education in art and design, and what there is is incorrectly focused. The emphasis must be on the production of digital experiences”, says [the Vice CEO]. He [the Vice CEO] then takes up the innovation university that Finland is planning, which unfortunately threatens to fail due to petty internal squabbling. ”Completely inconceivable”, he says. ”The project is an example of visionary new thinking, which is now needed.

Not surprisingly, this practice and business oriented task given to the new university became subject of negotiation and contestation. Helsingin Sanomat published an editorial (15 March 2008) in which the tasks of Finnish universities were divided into four categories. One of the tasks – supporting innovations – was indicated to belong to the new university while the other three tasks –international top level research, education, and advancement of stable regional development – were alloted to other Finnish universities. Two weeks later the Rector of one of the merging universities replied to the editorial in his own letter to the editor (HS 29 March 2008), arguing that ”the main tasks of the Innovation University are the same as in other universities: scientific research and higher education. We are therefore not speaking of the new university concentrating solely on innovative processes, as implied in the article” [HS 15 March 2008].

Even art education, traditionally known for its humanistic and non-commercial values, was expected to be developed in a way that would serve business purposes. This raised strong resistance in one of the merging schools, namely the School of Art and Design Helsinki. The personnel and the students of the School organized demonstrations against the new university, and together with representatives of the culture sector in Finland published a plea that was signed by over 5000 persons, demanding that the School of Arts and Design Helsinki should not be part of the new university because ”top-quality art education can be guaranteed only by securing an independent position for art”[48]. The line of argument was that not everything can be measured and evaluated by the criteria of economic development.

The name *Top University,* also in the market economy discourse examined, referred to the ambitious aim of the new university. Here, however, ‘top’ came to refer to (graduate) students’ skills and knowhow, on the one hand, and to the quality of the university–business research collaboration, on the other. The former meant that the new university should educate skillful employees for the needs of global businesses, and to train start-up entrepreneurs[49].

If successful, the Innovation University is a joint project between academia and business, benefiting everyone… The Innovation University will produce top experts in a wide range of fields, for

48 Helsingin Sanomat 13 April 2007

49 http://publicservice.co.uk/ Economic growth- an opportunity for improvement. 16 January 2012. Accessed 23 January 2012.

Finnish companies, while business and industry will offer students traineeships and membership in research projects.[50]

The latter meant that the new university is good enough to be able to compete for research collaboration with world-famous universities such as MIT and Standford.

Technological companies must look to top universities for partners and experts to work in their research projects – whether started up in Shanghai and Stanford, or Otaniemi and Oulu.[51]

Such research collaboration seemed to provide a way to (re)brand Finland as a leading high-technology country, as a short article published in Finland top business paper, Kauppalehti, illustrates. Titled "EU top IT research coming to Finland", the text says. It continues: "Finland can once again raise its head as a top country for IT knowhow"[52]. An essential part of research collaboration is its financial aspect. Collaboration was argued to generate investments necessary for Finland and the Finnish economy. The investment issue also brought up the question of how to allocate governmental budget funding between all universities in Finland. Thus, in market economy discourse, the new university became highly privileged vis-á-vis other Finnish universities.

The idea of merging TKK, HSE and Taik into a technology university is in accordance with the requirements of the modern world, and it must be implemented according to the original plan. A few Finnish universities must be provided with opportunities to compete successfully with such world-class top universities as the American Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Chinese Tsinghua University. This is far more important than providing equal resources for all Finnish universities so that they can compete amongst themselves. It is time for Finland to make an effort to leap to the top of the university world.[53]

Such privilege was, however, considered incompatible with Finnish traditions that emphasized equality and result-based rewarding. The issue was brought up in the public discussion. "American – but not a dream" was a sarcastic heading in Aino, the magazine of Aalto's Student Union (29 Sept. 2009). A reputation and communication researcher was also quoted as commenting "the image of the new university represents the logic of world-class sports: you only support athletes who are already good, while others get nothing. The only objective is to succeed in international competition". Moreover, the legal status of the new university as a foundation was considered to be difficult to consolidate with the traditions of Finnish universities and their collegial decision making. Aalto's

50 Prima 8/2007

51 Helsingin Sanomat, 14 October 2006 / letter to the editor by the president of the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), published in the editorial page

52 http://www.eitictlabs.eu. Accessed 8.10.2014

53 Helsingin Sanomat, 14 October 2006 / letter to the editor by the president of the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), published in the editorial page

governance was being built on the idea how governing of this type of university was typically interpreted in Finland; the ones who bring in capital also participate in organizational governance, as one of the interviewees from the Ministry of Education explained[54]. Critical voices raised concern for the autonomy of the university, arguing that the decision making authority is transforming from the university itself to the hands of business representatives. American competitiveness and Nordic egalitarianism were expected to clash in the new university.

In the market economy discourse examined, the reputation of the new university became manifested in a variety of innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives such as the Factories, the Center for Entrepreneurship, the Aalto Ventures Program, Start-up Sauna, and AppCampus. Design, Service and Media Factories were the early initiatives. They were presented as interdisciplinary environments known to be important in generating innovations and new ideas. The university actively partners with private firms, providing three multidisciplinary "factories" – physical spaces for collaboration between companies, researchers and students working on product development and solutions, was what the international media, the Globe and Mail stated (8 Sept. 2011). The Factories were chosen as the 'top' initiatives in the new university receiving extra funding to kick-off their operations. The Design factory became the most frequently used example of practically relevant interdisciplinary work in Aalto. In 2010, a Design Factory was established in Tongji University, China, in collaboration with Aalto University. A fourth interdisciplinary unit, a Health Factory, was established at Aalto in 2013. Factories were argued to be a place where "academia meets the 'real' world"[55], specifically industry, thus forging a link between abstract theory (Aalto) and practice (industry).

Factories underline the idea of collaborative work between academia and practice, and also the practical relevance of the aim of that work. This practice-orientation did not concern only research, but also teaching. For example: Service Camp is a course in Aalto's growth entrepreneurship Ventures Program, organized in the facilities of the Service Factory. A Finnish business magazine published an article about Aalto, building its story around the Service Camp. The text explains that "the Service camp course is based on Aalto University's key idea: to mix the pack in a way that creates something completely new"[56]. In a similar vein, a student project was presented in the HSE alumni magazine Avista (1/2011). Under the title "The new service concept of [a traditional Finnish company] is created together with students", the article tells us about a successful student project organized in collaboration with the new university and a business organization. The company representative is quoted as saying that "it has been great to be in a cooperative Aalto-project; it has shown me what the underlying Aalto idea really is". Both stories emphasize the'doing together' with businesses, with the aim of producing something new – whether it is a new

54 Interview, 30 November 2010

55 Aalto promotional materials: towards creativity and innovation. 2010. p.61

56 Business magazine, Talouselämä, 23/2010.

business idea or a service concept. Both articles also make a connection, quite explicitly indeed, from such practices to the key idea of the new university.

Another example of the innovative initiatives building Aalto's reputation in market economy discourse, is the Aalto Center for Entrepreneurship (ACE) that is focused on advancing Aalto's commercialization efforts, providing help to researchers, students, and staff of Aalto University to develop their inventions and business ideas further. "Its objective is to turn science and art at Aalto University into success stories in business operations and to act as a catalyst for ambitious entrepreneurship", Aalto's promotional materials[57] state. Aalto's annual report 2013 presents a successful center, and talks about the increase in numbers of innovation proposals and patent applications the Center has handled, and startups it has managed.

Apart from these Aalto-centered initiatives, Aalto's reputation is also manifested in the initiatives based on institutional collaboration. AppCampus is a mobile applications development program managed by Aalto University, but funded by Nokia and Microsoft corporations. Anyone can apply to the program that aims to "foster the creation of innovative mobile applications for the Windows Phone and Windows ecosystem to create a new generation of self-sustaining mobile startups"[58]. AppCampus has generated quite extensive media publicity. In one of the articles, Finland's prime minister is quoted as saying that "The ICT industry and knowledge base in Finland is one of the most competitive in the world, particularly in the mobile technology field. Finland is an early-adopter market, and the significance of national education and technology innovation is deeply rooted in our culture. As a result, there is a growing appetite for entrepreneurship among the younger generation at Aalto University and beyond. The partnership between Microsoft and Nokia is a critical investment in this growing ecosystem and represents an exciting opportunity and access to global markets for our local startup community".[59] The quote reflects the expected role of the new university in supporting Finland's innovation strategy, and branding Finland as a leading technology country.

Start-Up Sauna, founded in 2012, is a business accelerator, aiming "to create a more longer-term entity to support its 20-year mission of building a functioning startup ecosystem in the region"[60]. Located in the facilities of Aalto University, Start-Up Sauna provides a business accelerator program that aims to help early-stage startups to take next steps; a yearly-based Slush conference; and an internship program that enables students and graduates to visit startup hubs around the world. Anyone can apply to the programs and the conference. In 2013, Start-Up Sauna was ranked the top young university business incubator globally by UBI Index: "Aalto University's Startup Sauna supports startups and aspiring entrepreneurs in Northern and Eastern Europe and Russia", was proclaimed in internet[61].

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57 Where Science and Art meet Techology and Business, 2012

58 https://www.appcampus.fi/about/appcampus (accessed 11 November 2014)

59 http://thefonecast.com/news/. 26 March 2012 (accessed 23 April 2012)

60 http://startupsauna.com/about/#foundation (accessed 8.10.2014)

61 http://www.investinfinland.fi/articles/news/rd-and-innovation/finnish-startup-sauna-is-top-young-university-business-incubator/50-964

What is characteristic to all these initiatives is that they are presented with the focus on the activity, while the organization behind the activity remains in the background. The institutional engagement of, or distance to, Aalto University may thus remain unclear. Only some of these initiatives, most clearly the Factories, are branded according to Aalto's visual imaginary and presented as part of the official organization. Nevertheless, they all construct Aalto's reputation and support the entrepreneurial meaning of the university. The table below summarizes my findings in the process of the new university's reputation construction. It also illustrates what kind of meanings the naming of the new university carried in higher education and market economy discourses.

Table 6: Naming and the attached meanings of the new university in higher education and market economy discourses.

	Higher education discourse		*Market economy discourse*	
Name used to refer to the new university	Innovation University	Top University	Innovation University	Top University
The reference of the name	The innovative nature of the new university	Ambitious level in academic credits/ excellence	The task of the new university to create something new	Ambitious level in business-university research collaboration and student education
Meanings	New creative working practices inside the university and with actors outside the university Increased organizational autonomy and finance	Research excellence International recognition Belonging to a small "world-class" university elite	Product and service development New businesses (startups) Practical relevance in research and education Commercial-ization of research (results)	A Finnish alternative to MIT and other world-class technology universities Investments to Finland Graduate students' skills and knowhow
Manifestations	Inter-disciplinary study programs Multi-disciplinary research programs and centers	Indicators of excellence such as university rankings, number of scholarly publications, number of degrees awarded	Innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives such as Service, Product and Media Factories, The Aalto Center for Entrepreneurship; AppCampus; Start-Up Sauna Practice-oriented courses and entrepreneurial study programs	

Conclusions

In this paper, I have studied the discourses that social actors draw upon in a university merger, and the accounts of organizational reputation that this mobilization produces. I have aimed to illustrate how a certain account of reputation is produced in relation to a certain discourse, constructing a specific meaning, purpose and task, for the merged university. I have shown how these different understandings of the new university are present at the same time, and how they evolve in parallel, competing for existence and dominance to define what the new university is and what it should be.

I have conducted a critical discourse analysis of how the various accounts of reputation for the new university became constructed in 2005 – 2014. Conceptualizing reputation an ongoing evaluative process (Rindova et al. 2005, Barnett et al. 2006) in which the organizational characteristics are constituted in the discursive practices (Middleton 2009, Lähdesmäki and Siltaoja 2010) of various stakeholders (Rao 1994, Rindova and Fombrun 1999), reputation is seen as a constant (re)construction (Coupland and Brown 2004, Aula and Mantere 2013) instead of as an outcome or as something achieved at the given moment. The empirical focus is on the merger of three existing universities into what is now known as Aalto University. The empirical materials consist of a comprehensive set of spoken and written texts produced both by Aalto University and its predecessors, and Aalto's stakeholders.

In the analysis, I identified two discourses that I have labelled *higher education discourse* and *market economy discourse*. In higher education discourse, the new university is positioned in the Finnish higher education sector, on the one hand, and the global higher education market, on the other. The reputation of the new university is constructed in relation to the developments within the sector in Finland and abroad. In the market economy discourse, in turn, the reputational judgments about the new university are made vis-á-vis the Finnish national economy and the success of the business sector. The two discourses evolved at the same time, contesting and borrowing from each other. It seems that the market economy discourse was hegemonic in the beginning of the examined period. The market economy discourse was particularly powerful at the time when the name *Innovation University* was used for the new university. The market economy discourse aimed to legitimate the specific parties – the Helsinki School of Economics, the Helsinki University of Technology, and the School of Art and Design Helsinki – involved in the merger. This legitimation was borrowed in higher education discourse that, in turn, aimed to legitimate the merger as such (but not the merging parties). The name *Top University* gave stronger ground for the higher education discourse in relation to the market economy discourse. As a consequence, the rise of higher education discourse enabled the development of competing accounts of reputation, suggesting a different meaning for the new university.

Interestingly, not only were the two discourses competing for existence and power-base, but there were also competing accounts within one of them, namely the higher education discourse. In that discourse, the reputation of the new university rested initially on inter- and multi-disciplinary innovativeness. The combination of the fields of technology, business, and art and design was considered novel and unique. Presented as a key idea for the new university, this inter- and multi-disciplinary was used to legitimate the merger in the changing Finnish higher education. As such, it became a value in itself. Yet, the excellence of the new university was communicated through such measures as publication counts, impact factors, ratios of foreign staff and students, and number of graduates. It was also systematically benchmarked with world-famous academic institutions, suggesting its belonging to this discursively constructed elite reference group. Thus, another account of reputation in the higher education discourse began to develop around the concept of academic excellence, supporting on understanding of the university based on disciplinary specialization instead of interdisciplinary innovativeness.

In the market economy discourse, in turn, the reputation of the new university rested on practice-relevance, meaning both the collaborative work of academia and practice, and the practical aims of conducted research and given education. With the aim of contributing to technological and business development, startup support, and the creation of an 'entrepreneur ecosystem' in Finland, the new university came to support an entrepreneurial understanding of the university.

In all, what seems to be significant in making sense of the meaning of a university is the wider societal and institutional environment to which universities are positioned. It is clear that in the current developments in higher education, universities are considered as actors both in the national economy and in the global higher education market. What is at issue may not only be the boundaries of the university and its relationship with actors outside academia; rather, as the various constructions of a new university within higher education discourse show, the issue is the strategic position in the (global) higher education market. If, however, we reflect on the findings of this study from the perspective of institutional logics (see e.g. Delmestri et al. 2015), we can also point out the issue of equilibrium in institutional logics governing Finnish higher education. From the institutional logics perspective, the two identified discourses, and the two accounts within higher education discourse, can be considered as three competing logics: the capitalist market logic, the higher education sector logic, and the emerging global logic that can be described as the model of the "super research university" (Baker 2007, 9). While this present study has focused on examining how university reputation is constructed in language and discourse, future research, contributing to institutional theory, could zoom in on the institutional logics in university reputation construction.

It can be concluded that in the changing higher education sector where the different understandings of the purpose of a university are competing and can even be present in one and the same institution, reputation can help us to see the many meanings of universities and to make sense to the fundamental idea of a university. As this study is limited by its focus on a single merger in a single country, more studies on university reputation in different societal, institutional and economic environments facing similar pressures to change are needed. Although the period covered in this study (2005 – 2014) is relatively long, the making of Aalto University should also be followed in future studies. However, I hope that this paper will provide an inspiring basis for new contributions in the study of universities' reputation construction in the changing higher education sector.

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