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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