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## HISTORY | CRITICAL ESSAY

# The public space and informal accountability: Verdandi's study manual, the press and Uppsala University

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**Abstract:** This article is concerned with the introduction of new forms of accountability. Instead of studying political reforms in the present, it explores a process in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden where the university became informally accountable to the public. It focuses not on large-scale government interventions but on seemingly mundane educational documentation: the study handbook published by Verdandi, a fraternity at Uppsala University, in 1887. The study is concerned with the impact of the handbook on the infrastructure of control, transparency and agency of the university. It shows how the handbook rearranged the academic structure of agency and provided new venues of assessment. The handbook was the first of its kind and it received nation-wide press coverage. It provided the press and the public with an official point of reference to informally and publicly assess, question and judge university education. At the same time, students were enabled to strengthen their influence within and without the university. The study illuminates a dual process of agency and accountability that was arguably an integral part to the 19<sup>th</sup> century “modern” university emerging in relation to the public space and contemporary political and social developments.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fredrik Bertilsson, Ph.D., defended his thesis “Policy Making in the Age of Liberty: The Educational Commission and the Academic Constitution, 1738–1766” at Södertörn University in 2017. He is now employed as a researcher at the Division of History of Technology, Science and Environment at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, Sweden. His research interests concern knowledge politics and research policy. This article on informal accountability is an expression of his efforts of researching the functions and effects of academic agency where one important aspect concerns the strategies enacted by academic actors in implementing new policy. He is currently working on a research project exploring the impact of the humanities on Swedish defence research during the 1970s through the early 1990s. This includes exploring the possibilities of engaging the humanities in contemporary crisis and risk management.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study aims to shed further light on the establishment of forms of assessing the university that we may now take for granted. It explores an instance when novel forms of making professors accountable for their actions emerged from within the university. It shows how students mobilised for increasing the control of the professors by focusing on the debate surrounding the study manual that was produced by a fraternity at Uppsala university, Verdandi, in 1887. Through the handbook, professors had to give an account of the content of the education in advance. The handbook would also alleviate what students saw as a major issue: the arbitrariness of the decision making and judgements of the professors. The handbook was the first of its kind. It sparked controversy and received nation-wide media coverage. It provided the press and the public with a point reference for assessing, questioning and judging university education. Simultaneously, it strengthened the position of the students.

**Subjects: Assessment; Higher Education Management; History of Education; Curriculum Studies; Assessment; Curriculum; Education Politics; History; Modern History**

**Keywords: accountability; public space; university; documentation; Verdandi; history**

**Geolocation: Uppsala; Stockholm; Sweden; Scandinavia; Europe**

## 1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, large-scale political reforms are being translated into new structures of university management, evaluation systems and accountability schemes profoundly affecting the academic production and provision of knowledge (Elzinga, 2010; Field, 2015; Hammarfelt & de Rijcke, 2015; Shaw, 2018; Shirin Ahlbäck et al., 2016; Wright, 2016). Instead of studying the present, this article investigates an historical process in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden where the university became informally accountable to the public. The study is not exclusively concerned with the specific content of certain control mechanisms but rather with how accountability schemes set in motion a wide range of actions making assessments possible (Ek, 2012, pp. 12, 15, 36, 102; Sahlin-Andersson, 2006, p. 37). The process of making the university visible is vital as it provides a public point of reference for valuation, verification and building public opinion (Lindquist, 2010, p. 225). This exploration does not commence with investigating the activities of “external” actors but rather an attempt from within the university to introduce a new form of accountability and its impact on the infrastructure of control, transparency and agency of the academic world.

Focus is on the study handbook that was published by Verdandi, a fraternity at Uppsala University, Sweden, in 1887. While study handbooks are today taken for granted as mundane pieces of administration or documentation that might seem uncontroversial or even unquestionable, Verdandi’s handbook was the first of its kind. It manifested significant change. It arguably rearranged the academic structure of agency and provided new venues of assessment. It received nation-wide media coverage, opening the door to a debate tying university education and knowledge to major contemporary social developments and political change. The handbook thus provides a window onto a process where the university became more integrated and arguably increasingly important as a provider of knowledge and competence in relation to the state, government and society at large. The aim of the article is to shed further light and provide additional perspectives on the entanglement between new forms of accountability, the public sphere and academic agency in relation to university matters as well as to the contemporary social development. Stressing such public relations, the article builds primarily on press material in addition to Verdandi publications and secondary sources.

The handbook contained information on the different degrees awarded at Uppsala university, the subjects included and course and examination requirements. Primarily, it did not focus on the actual examination procedures but rather demanded a clarification from the professors on course content and requirements for passing the examinations and obtaining a degree. It also provided advice on study methods. The price of the necessary literature was listed as well. Some information about the degrees at Stockholm University was provided along with information considered useful for planning the education leading up to the university. Thus, the handbook functioned as a road map not only for the university but for planning an entire educational career. Crucially, as the professors had to give an account of course and examination requirements in advance, they in effect produced publicised guidelines enabling assessments of the education.

Present as well as past administrative procedures and documentation should not be considered mere instruments of bureaucratic regulations but are rather “constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves” (Hull, 2012, p. 253). Documentation is fundamental in making accountability, control

and government possible (Riles, 2006, p. 290; Shore, 2008, p. 290). I view Verdandi's handbook as one part of such documentation. Furthermore, through the press coverage of the handbook, the university was scrutinised in a considerably broader sense. With an expression developed elsewhere, the academia was pushed to "perform in public" (Strathern, 2006, p. 190).<sup>1</sup> University education as well as the actions, or inactions, of the professors became a matter of public assessment. I argue that this type of "informal accountability" was part of a process where the university developed in relation to the public space and an increasing interest of the public in university matters. The university appeared as a public institution possible to assess, question, judge and ultimately change.

The article begins with a discussion about accountability as a factor for manufacturing social relationships. I explore the production of Verdandi's handbook and how objectives, arguments, and claims were formulated, developed and disseminated through the press. I then turn to the consequences of the handbook especially in terms of its impact on the social setting of the academia and even more specifically on the distribution of agency between students and professors. Throughout, the exploration is activating an historical context in relation to which interventions were deemed necessary and that made actions possible. I conclude by placing this new form of documentation in a historical conjunction pointing to how rendering the university visible and informally accountable in the public sphere was an integral part of integrating and strengthening the university in relation to contemporary society.

## 2. Accountability as an historical entry point

Scholarship on the introduction and impacts of audits, accountability and adjacent themes are mostly focusing on the present with historical outlooks on the developments since the 1980s or the 1990s (Elzinga, 2010; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; Shore & Wright, 2000; Wright, 2015). While avoiding "presentism", analytical instruments developed for studying university politics of today have also been productively used for bringing new light on the more distant past, even though explanations and interpretations of the present have little if any bearing on these specific historical circumstances. For instance, the concept of the audit society, developed by Michael Power, has been employed for categorising and exploring overarching forms of governance and control of the university from the early modern period until the present (Djelic, 2012; Power, 1997). An historical perspective has also been employed for clarifying characteristics and traits connected with the concept of accountability with particular focus on Denmark (Ydesen, 2013; Ydesen & Andreasen, 2014). This historical research, as well as scholarship focusing on the present, points out the disciplining effect of accountability, how it impacts on the behaviour of the actors involved as they align their actions to pass the controls they are subjected to.

Guided by this research and theoretical development, this article seeks to contribute to the efforts of reinvigorating the research field of university history (Östling, 2018, pp. 1–2). The exploration draws in particular on the concept of accountability, employed primarily for providing analytical viewpoints. This study explores one specific case rather than developing a general perspective on a longer historical transformation. It investigates the function of a specific form of documentation initiated by students rather than broad university reforms introduced by the government as part of major political programs.

Recent studies emphasise the fluid boundaries between the university and its environment, highlighting the inextricable influence of public connections.<sup>2</sup> Anders Ekström argues against the notion of the "public" university as determined primarily in relation to "funding streams and administrative arrangements" that undergirds what is commonly referred to as the accountability and management of the university. Instead, he argues that "universities only become distinctively public institutions through their way of shaping and fostering public values" (Ekström, manuscript).

This study broadens the definition of accountability. Accountability allegedly stems from "giving an account", which points out the connection between accountability and funding; whoever

“funds” the university is also entitled to an accounting (Marchand & Stoner, 2012). However, too narrow a focus on the demands of economic agents may render obscure claims that may not display the same obvious economic agenda. Providing a broader conceptual base, Mark Bovens defines accountability as “a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2006, p. 450). Bovens underscores the multitude of forms that an accountability forum may take. The analysis is not concerned with assessing the behaviour of public agents from a normative standpoint, but rather of analysing the institutional arrangements that accountability schemes bring about and how they operate (Bovens, 2010). Accordingly, this study is not exclusively concerned with the content of certain accountability schemes but also with accountability as an agent in manufacturing social relationships.

In addition, this study conceptualises the “publicness” of the university as a relationship or exchange between university actors, media and the public space. The public space as an “informal accountability forum” is at the heart of the exploration. Evidently, accountability commonly concerns agents acting on the university from “the outside”. This study concerns a case when university actors themselves were initiating a process that rendered the university visible for public scrutiny, but it was driven by students seeking insights into educational decision making. This inquiry will show how initial demands were advanced by the press and integrated with a broader political agenda.

### **3. An actor of university operations: the formation of verdandi**

In the mid-1800s, Swedish universities were still organised on the humanistic foundation of previous centuries. Even though the systematic seeking of knowledge, or research, was formally recognized through the statutes of 1852, education was usually the primary focus (Nordin, 2008, p. 59). During the century, the usefulness of classical education was questioned for instance by those seeking to align university education with the needs of the state and industry. Commonly, Latin education was at the centre of critical attention (Lindberg, 1984). This development coincided with students becoming more influential not only at the universities but in the public debate at large in the latter half of the 19th century. The commitments of the students now concerned fundamental social issues in addition to university matters. The students also became more numerous. The quantity of students had been quite consistent since the mid-1600s but rose from 800 to 1800 in the quarter of a century between ca. 1850 and 1875. The number of students in Lund never passed 1,000 before the year 1909, however (Fehrman, 1984, p. 326). The university also opened for women in the early 1870s, but the proportion of female students was only a few percent (Geschwind & Terrell, 2011, p. 84).

Verdandi was formed in 1882, sparked by a discussion on religious freedom in the early 1880s taking place both in the parliament and at the university. Verdandi were to act as a link between Uppsala university and students who embraced the fundamental principles of freedom of thought and expression and who shared an interest in “general human and social issues”.<sup>3</sup> Several known figures were members. Karl Staff, who later became prime minister of Sweden, was the first president. Among other well-known co-founders were Knut Wicksell, Gustaf af Geijerstam and Tor Hedberg. Membership grew rapidly. Later, Hjalmar Öhrvall and Otto von Zweigbergk also joined. They would come to speak on behalf of the organisation in various public formats. Crucial to Verdandi was the ambition of advancing social change. Developing popular means of distributing knowledge and scholarly results to the public beyond the academic world was essential (Kärnfelt, 2000, p. 197).

Verdandi was part of the growing student movement and in the progressing radicalization of the students during the second half of the 19th century (Skoglund, 1991, pp. 71–80). Whereas previous generations of students to a larger degree had disguised their subversive activities (Sjöberg, 2002, p. 190), political actions targeting the hierarchy and patriarchy of the university were now carried

out in the open. At the time of Verdandi's inception, students had already begun claiming their rights against the university leadership.

Verdandi was not uncontroversial. The debate it organised on morality and "free love" received wide-spread attention both at the university and in the press. The moral judgements were often harsh and Verdandi leaders were later sanctioned by Uppsala University. Verdandi also supported Hjalmar Branting when he was convicted of blasphemy. Otto von Zweigbergk, Verdandi's "in-house historian", stressed that Verdandi was part of a critical development that clearly broke with tradition and that it was taking important steps in effecting change. The previous generation of students was characterised as "youth without ideals", clearheaded but lacking willpower (Zweigbergk, 1892, p. 4). Based on von Zweigbergk's narrative, the establishment of Verdandi is comparable to a general outline of how resistance to present political processes occurs. It commences as the intended subjects recognise they are part of a process of subjection, refuse to accept this subjugation, and, as they realise that their agenda is shared, they mobilise to advance their own aspirations (Shore & Wright, 2011, p. 18). Arguably, the study handbook was one concrete result of Verdandi's mobilisation.

University historian Carl Frängsmyr, in researching the history of Uppsala University between 1852 and 1916, notes the radicalisation of the students but maintains that Verdandi should not be viewed as a radical break with tradition. Frängsmyr is emphasising continuity, placing Verdandi on a continuum between the preceding decades and the cultural radicalism of the 1920s. There certainly is merit to this characterisation. Nevertheless, placing too much emphasis on the continuity of the broader historical narrative risks obscuring distinct disruptive actions. Frängsmyr devotes marginal attention to Verdandi's handbook but notes its impact not least in terms of influencing the faculties at Uppsala University to publish study guides in 1891 (Frängsmyr, 2010b, p. 513). Instead, I view the handbook as a significant initiative. Not only did it affect internal university matters. Against the backdrop of an emerging "modern" society, it was potentially quite effective in other ways as well.

The bureaucratisation of the state administration during the second half of 19th century meant among other things that formal merits, at least officially, trumped the traditional importance attributed to birth regarding the recruitment of public officials. The process accelerated during the latter half of the century as legislation was introduced circumscribing the precedence of the nobility to public offices. Instead, a recruitment procedure based on meritocratic principles was established. The development was roughly parallel in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, but lagging in relation to England, France and Germany (Granhölm, 2013, p. 30–31; Nilsson, 2013). The process arguably furthered the significance of the contemporary university and specifically a university degree. As Verdandi's handbook was a tool for helping students obtaining their degrees, it was also advancing their influence on their future professional lives. Given the prominence and tradition of the university of educating students for public offices and other influential positions, this would also affect the knowledge and competence of the state and society.

#### **4. Documentation, trust and transparency**

The production of the handbook involved a significant number of actors. It also drew on a rather ambitious collection of materials. Questionnaires were sent out to students who had just finished their degrees or were about to graduate as well as to professors and teachers who examined or taught in the relevant subjects. There had also been opportunities for the public to submit comments and suggestions through book services offered in Uppsala. Professors were also directly involved. The information in the study guide had in most cases been approved or even produced by the respective examiner at the university (Studentföreningen Verdandi, 1887, p. vi). This cooperation obviously displays the support of the handbook and stresses consensus rather than controversy.

The specific problems Verdandi wanted to redress concerned the lack of guidance especially for students just entering the university. Unlike previous schooling where there were clearly defined

tasks and plans as to what should be done, students at the university had to find this out for themselves. The information they would get would moreover often be incomplete or even unreliable which was obviously considered destructive and a common reason as to why students were neglecting their studies. It could also lead to students prematurely focusing on one or a few of their favourite subjects rather than studying for the exam in its entirety (Studentföreningen Verdandi, 1887, p. iv). Verdandi stressed that although this had been known for quite some time there had been no serious efforts on behalf of the university leadership to ameliorate the situation. It also underscored that the handbook was a means of reaching the end of studying according to “an ordered plan” (Studentföreningen Verdandi, 1887, p. iii). However, the handbook did more than merely guide the students at Uppsala university towards obtaining a degree. It implied a connection with contemporary social and political developments stressing how “the *issue of reforming university education* is on the agenda” (Studentföreningen Verdandi, 1887, p. vii).

Five years after its publication, von Zweigbergk was significantly more explicit concerning an additional issue that had motivated the handbook. He expressed an apparent distrust towards the professors, stressing a strikingly insufficient transparency. The procedures of deciding on course content and knowledge control were according to him wrapped in “secretive dusk” [*hemlighetsfulla dunke!*]:

The absolute and uncontrolled sovereign power, that distinguished the academic teachers’ arbitrarily and between four eyes determined decisions about what should be read for a certain degree, led to irregularities in the requirements of certain teachers, irregularities that would easily be evened out if the persons in question were charged with fixating their syllabuses on paper.<sup>4</sup>

Worth noting is that von Zweigbergk’s criticism did not explicitly target the examinations or the educational content per se but rather the relatively unrestricted capacity of the professors of deciding on course requirements without apparent consistency across the body of students. While the study manual sought to resolve these issues, it could only go so far. Some professors maintained the large amount of freedom in the organisation of the studies and advised the students to follow the individual guidance they would get from the examiners.<sup>5</sup>

The handbook provides a window onto a process of changing forms of establishing trust. Bjørn Stensaker och Lee Harvey, who are studying present university politics, points out how accountability schemes are introduced due to deteriorating levels of trust. In principle, formal assessments would not be activated if there was complete trust between the parties involved (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011, p. 11). Stensaker and Harvey uses an ideal-typical format for analysing changing forms of establishing trust. On the one hand, trust is based on reputation, norms and expectations that are shared among the actors. Trust is established over time as actors demonstrate their shared values. Another situation occurs when trust is instead primarily established through formal assessments of how actors abide by official standards, rules or regulations. The process of establishing trust through informal processes and shared values pertains, according to Stensaker and Harvey, to the traditional university. Concerning the contemporary university, trust is instead primarily established by formal control mechanisms (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011, pp. 11–12).

Stensaker and Harvey focus on trust between the university and its environment. This study instead expands on the notion of environment pointing out the deteriorating trust amongst actors within the university itself. Verdandi’s handbook was a means of building trust, but not between the university and the government, but rather from the viewpoint of the students. In effect, the handbook illustrates how trust was to be achieved by introducing documentation facilitating formal assessments of how professors met official standards rather than establishing trust through shared informal norms and values. This transformation indicates a change in line with general aspects of the emerging modern bureaucratic administration, stressing formality and documentation. This is not saying that the practice of producing trust through formal regulation

was new. It was made manifest long before, for instance through the examination regulations introduced across European universities in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Bertilsson, 2017, p. 187; Runeby, 1979, p. 301).

The handbook indicates a changing structure of agency as well. The students turned against the professorial authority of the traditional university and enforced new standards of procedure. However, this is complicated by the fact that professors also engaged in the production of the handbook. The handbook was initiated by students, but professors contributed, as it were, to making themselves visible and assessable. Instead of painting a picture of the university as a conservative bastion, the collaboration behind Verdandi's handbook shows how the professors were also embracing new procedures and how transformations were not exclusively driven by groups commonly identified as radical actors of cultural change.

### 5. Activating the forum: relationships with the press

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Swedish universities were becoming an integral part of a society that in the earlier parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be faced with the breakthrough of modern parliamentarism and democracy. The integration of the university and the surrounding community was also furthered as the corporation system was revoked during the 19<sup>th</sup> century after having been one of the conceptual backbones of the early modern society of estates. Academics established, maintained or possibly even strengthened their influence in this new social landscape. They prioritised a more heterogeneous set of ends rather than exclusively adhering to an academic or scientific standard (Blomqvist, 1992, pp. 408, 416).

Newspapers and other media outlets contributed to increasing the proximity between the university and the public as well. Universities on the European continent had been cultivating active media relationships at least since the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when an ideal of a new kind of professor took form in connection with new media relations (Clark, 2006, p. 247). Publicized scholarly results became an academic merit. Academic writings circulated through the emerging book market not least based on the idea that reaching a broader audience would yield a greater social impact and increased economic revenue (Josephson, 2014). Thus, the scientific developments during the 19<sup>th</sup> century should be viewed in relation to a new and broader audience and to an expanding cultural marketplace where science was consumed in shows, exhibitions, popular lectures and city museums as well as other venues (Fyfe & Lightman, 2007). Similar trends were evident in England, Germany and Great Britain. When the modern Swedish university developed during the century it arguably did so in tandem with an expanding public sphere (Svensson, 2015, p. 161; Lindström & Wickberg Månsson, 2015, p. 10). Although sharing certain similar traits, the public sphere then was obviously quite different from what it is now.<sup>6</sup>

For a long time, the university had been accountable to the Church and the state rather than to any putative public (Marchand & Stoner, 2012, p. 17). However, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, both in Sweden and Prussia, student examinations were made public which at least in theory rendered a crucial aspect of professorial authority open to public scrutiny (Clark, 2006, p. 122; Runeby, 1979, p. 301). Swedish professors complained that this new form of transparency was a sign of governmental distrust and even found it abusive that students would now be able to attend and informally assess the actions of the professors (Fakulteternas betänkande om kanslerernas examensförslag, 1912, p. 307). This transparency was relatively limited to the academia, as it concerned primarily the relationship between professors and students. The situation at the time of Verdandi's handbook, more than a century later, was quite different. The press was commonly used for building public opinion and for furthering political causes or other initiatives (Lundell, 2010, p. 86). In the university city of Uppsala, local newspapers devoted considerable space to academic matters and events such as public discussions and promotions (Frängsmyr, 2010a, p. 42). The press coverage was not exclusively initiated by writers, journalists or others outside of the university. Academics were actively seeking to further or even create their scientific and social influence by utilising the press or other media outlets (Svensson, 2015, p. 161; Lindström &

Wickberg Månsson, 2015, p. 10). It was not a kind of “linear dissemination model” with clear-cut boundaries between the production and the consumption of science. It was rather a mutual exchange between scholars, media and the public (Ekström, 2004, p. 15).

Already a year prior to publishing the handbook, Verdandi circulated a statement urging the responsible minister to commence what was referred to as a most necessary task of providing adequate guidance to university students. Since this effort proved ineffective, Verdandi decided to produce a study guide of its own (Studentföreningen Verdandi, 1887, p. v), a decision that was also made public.<sup>7</sup> The subsequent news of Verdandi having published the handbook later spread throughout the country.<sup>8</sup> The interest of the press regarding Verdandi’s study handbook should be seen in the light of the controversy that the fraternity previously had given rise to through its public debates. Several of the country’s major newspapers had already published and spread news of its previous actions.

Verdandi’s arguments and problem descriptions underpinning the alleged need of the handbook also became a public matter. *Aftonbladet* furthered many of Verdandi’s standpoints stressing the lack of supervision that university students were likely to expect as well as the urgency of the situation. Freedom *in* studies could, *Aftonbladet* noted, rather lead to freedom *from* studies, or to a broad and unstructured education that did not lead the students any closer to graduating.<sup>9</sup> Instead, a relatively instrumental image of university education was formed and distributed. *Svenska Dagbladet* pointed out that the advice given in the handbook were “eminently practical” showing “the most straightforward and yet safest way to pursue a degree”. University education was even described in the same terms as more elementary schooling:

The bachelor’s degree, which plays the main role [in the study handbook], is considered in general life as a form of proof of scientific education, but it appears from this book that even such a [bachelor’s] degree can in most cases be the fruit of homework, [and] not to a significant level of scientific studies.<sup>10</sup>

The article did not elaborate on what scientific education referred to. It is somewhat symptomatic that Verdandi’s handbook never explicitly assessed the actual content of the university education. The press inferred or developed educational ideals from the handbook and used them to criticize major parts of the university as a social institution. Those adopting a more positive view could also point to how Verdandi’s study manual streamlined education which would allow students more time to engage in general political issues during their time at the university. Making university education more effective would also mean that the country’s youth would spend less time studying and more of their productive years benefiting the country and society in their capacity as professionals.<sup>11</sup>

Verdandi stressed the utility of university education but also brought to the fore that while there were many prominent scientists at Uppsala University, there was a significant lack of teachers properly contributing to the broader task of guiding students in the process of “being and becoming oneself”. *Dagens Nyheter* agreed that university education should certainly entail more than doing homework and receiving a diploma, but also stressed that Verdandi had in fact overlooked that there were professors who provided students with precisely the kind of guidance that Verdandi had been asking for.<sup>12</sup>

The press reporting shows similarities to what today is referred to as a kind of disenchantment of higher education (Barnett, 1992, p. 16), which refers to how the university becomes obliged to give account of its operations as great expectations are being placed on it, implying how stakeholders are no longer prepared to accept a lack of insight into an opaque but highly influential social institution. New forms of accountability are accordingly understood as a reflection of how the university must become more responsive to economic needs and governmental demands (Alexander, 2000). It is, however, also worth stressing how accountability claims might also have

a broader educational base and be formulated both from within and without the university by actors not exclusively or directly seeking economic benefit.

In the reporting following Verdandi's handbook, the press posed questions and passed judgement, even though it lacked formal authority in university politics. In other words, the press became a kind of forum in relation to which the university became accountable. Evidently, then, the press was not simply a passive channel for circulating news about the university, but rather active in distributing agency across a broader spectrum of actors. The university became informally accountable to the public, but the process was not exclusively driven by either of the parties involved but through a mutual exchange between actors of the university and the press. A space was created that has similarities to that which is created regarding present-day university reforms (Rabo & Wright, 2010, p. 11). Different actors converged with sometimes separate ways of conceiving the present as well as the future. They struggled to realise their own visions, albeit with sometimes markedly different resources and mandate to effectively impose reform.

## 6. Reconfiguring the structure of agency

The press played a part not only in how students at this time increased their influence in the public debate, but also concerning their influence on university politics. The press reporting stressed how students had taken on an effort that was really the responsibility of the professors who instead had neglected their duties despite being aware of the problem as well as its consequences.<sup>13</sup> Professors had allegedly showed little if any interest in producing a study guide until the need was already met.<sup>14</sup> Verdandi's handbook was instead even seen as "a true accomplishment".<sup>15</sup> The handbook was also seen as redress for the disciplinary actions that were taken against Verdandi and the persecution it had been subjected to by some of the professors.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Verdandi was applauded for achieving what the professors had failed to do, as well as recognized as a legitimate partner in academic cooperation.

Emphasis was not exclusively placed on how traditional areas of responsibility had been subverted. The press reporting also indicated new ways of distributing duties and emerging forms of cooperation. *Aftonbladet*, among others, noted that the study handbook had in fact been produced through a broad collaboration between students and professors.<sup>17</sup> This ties in with research showing how academic transformations have been produced by cooperation or through networks populated by actors from different sectors, within as well as without the university (Beckman et al., 2008, pp. 15–21; Fors, 2003, p. 199). This case illustrates how these networks were populated not only by political and scientific agents but by students as well.

Verdandi's handbook was, however, also questioned. *Stockholms Dagblad* picked up a notice from the paper *Uppsala* stating that the Faculty of philosophy at Uppsala University believed that Verdandi's handbook was "partially unreliable and misleading" and that the faculty would therefore produce an "official instruction".<sup>18</sup> This notice was also picked up by the newspapers in the cities of Kalmar and Norrköping.<sup>19</sup> It was primarily the professor of history at Uppsala University, Harald Hjärne, who criticized the handbook. Hjärne might not have been impressed by its factual content but more to the point here is that his criticism reveals how the handbook touched upon more fundamental aspects than merely clarifying course contents and requirements.

Hjärne presented his position at a faculty meeting at the university that was later distributed by the press. He pointed out that, according to the university statutes, each faculty was responsible for informing their students on current demands and requirements for each degree. Hjärne acknowledged that there was in fact a need for a study manual and that this had also been recognized among the professors. However, he considered it "less appropriate that a single fraternity is authorized to act publicly as an intermediary body between the examiners and the academic youth". Even worse, Verdandi had been sentenced to disciplinary actions by the university board. Authorising such a student organisation in this matter would, according to Hjärne, damage the reputation of the academic disciplinary authority. Professors should therefore

“reaffirm their position as the authority which order and publicly announce the actions that are necessary for the proper maintenance of academic education”. He accordingly proposed that the faculty should produce its own study plans for each degree.<sup>20</sup>

A few days later, *Dagens Nyheter* reported that Hjärne’s proposal had been voted down, at least in part because many of the professors had already contributed to the study handbook.<sup>21</sup> Hjärne garnered the support of only two other professors. Through the daily press, then, Verdandi achieved a kind of public recognition. Verdandi had been authorised by a clear majority of the professors who had also agreed or even contributed to making their own work more transparent.

When later editions of the handbook were published, nothing was said of the initial controversy.<sup>22</sup> Instead, unanimity and the cooperation between students and professors were emphasised along with the increasing level of trust. Verdandi seemed to have overcome the “distrust it had met from certain academic quarters”.<sup>23</sup> Since it had achieved its goals of formalising and making course requirements public, one could speculate that at least some of Verdandi’s doubts vis-a-vis the professors were likely dispelled as well.

Today, new external controls impose new conditions impacting on the relationships between universities and external stakeholders as well as on the relations amongst academics themselves. Academics now “cope” with external demands and quality controls (Newton, 2002). Verdandi’s handbook also had the potential to, or did in fact, affect the relationships between professors and students. While some of the professors mobilised for upholding a traditional order or hierarchy, they reinforced their positions not in relation to an external controlling government authority, but rather to an agent acting from within the university and, as it were, from below. However, as most of the professors recognized and even contributed to the handbook, they instead engaged with the students, thus contributing to a new structure of academic agency.

### 7. The university and beyond

The views differed as to the significance or impact of the handbook. *Stockholms-Tidningen* noted that the interest for Verdandi in the Swedish capitol was likely limited, while *Dagens Nyheter*, also based in Stockholm, noted that the study guide would probably be met with satisfaction by both students and those in government who had been arguing for a more convincing political take on Swedish university education.<sup>24</sup> At Uppsala University the handbook was supported by the Student Union that continued to put pressure on the university leadership to publish an annual specification of the requirements of the degrees issued by the university.<sup>25</sup> *Aftonbladet* noted that Verdandi’s handbook had received attention abroad without specifying how. International links were also highlighted through the alleged influence of initiatives of Danish student on the efforts of Verdandi of publicizing shorter scientific essays.<sup>26</sup>

Lund University followed Verdandi’s lead and published a handbook in 1888, the year after Verdandi’s was issued. Lund’s handbook would not only benefit the students, it was also regarded as an additional sign of redress and recognition of Verdandi.<sup>27</sup> The two handbooks combined, however, had another and arguably more significant impact by rendering visible certain discrepancies between the two Swedish universities.

Minor variations were noted regarding the content of the education, but larger differences were allegedly also brought to the fore concerning the organisation of the studies and the subject matter, especially regarding political science. *Svenska Dagbladet* noted how remarkable this was given how Swedish universities had a joint governmental leadership and answered to the same public office.<sup>28</sup> This arguably implies a notion of insufficient centralisation of the governance of Swedish university education which by extension would entail variations as to the knowledge of the students. In the long run, it would potentially affect the competence of state and society. In addition, the handbooks revealed different degrees of conflict or unity. The relationships between

professors and students at Lund's university seemed to be based more on consensus than they were in Uppsala where controversy or opposition allegedly was wide-spread.<sup>29</sup>

The press coverage connected Verdandi's handbook to a general debate on university education. It also activated a broader discussion on the benefits of education and the propagation of scholarship in relation to social change and the popular movements taking shape at the time. Deeper political interests echoed not least through press supporting general social reforms, liberal politics or the labour movement, painting the university as a backwards institution primarily preserving an equally backwards social order. Occasionally, professors were lamented for their "learned pedantry",<sup>30</sup> while Verdandi was instead praised for acknowledging the responsibility of scientific practitioners of making scientific knowledge accessible to "the broad layers of the population",<sup>31</sup> likely referring to workers or others who were unlikely to be found at the university at this time. Evidently, then, the handbook opened the door to major social developments and political change at the time that seem far beyond the question of how to obtain a university degree.

## 8. Discussion

Rather than exploring the question of how large-scale political reform introduces new control functions and accountability schemes, this article is concerned with the introduction of seemingly mundane documentation. The study handbook that was published by Verdandi, a fraternity at Uppsala University, in 1887 provides a prism for studying the historical processes of making the university publicly and informally accountable. Investigating processes of making university affairs visible and assessable in the public sphere is essential to the inquiry.

Primarily, the handbook sought clarification on course content and examination requirements, furthering the students' abilities of passing their exams, obtaining their degrees and in turn improving their professional prospects. The legitimacy of the handbook was enhanced by the fact that most of its content had been verified if not produced by the professors themselves. Through the broad acknowledgement of its efforts, Verdandi was publicly recognised as an actor in university operations.

The handbook was one result of students taking on a more active role in university operations, in manufacturing the relationship between the university and the press, as well as in the provision of knowledge and competence. Verdandi took control over aspects of the knowledge assessment procedures, implying a redistribution of agency between professors and students. Certainly, the handbook implied a subjection under a university regimentation but was nevertheless an emancipation from what was considered an arbitrary exercise of power of the professors, reminiscent of the privileges of the society of the estates.

The handbook received nation-wide press coverage. It provided the press with an entry point for publicly scrutinising university affairs. It became an official point of reference for assessing university education. The press had no formal mandate in university politics, but its actions were nonetheless effective. The university was produced as a public matter and became enrolled in a public agenda. It was not a unidirectional process, but rather a kind of mutually reinforcing exchange. At the same time as the press took on a role as an accountability forum of sorts, it enabled university actors to enhance their influence both within and without the university. This was arguably an integral aspect of the "modern" university that emerged in relation to an increased interest of the public in university matters and science. Furthermore, this development was accompanied by an increasing ability of publicly assessing and evaluating the state of university affairs. Obviously, only a very limited number of actors were mandated to carry out official evaluations. The public space became an informal accountability forum that would influence the academic production of knowledge and competence.

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### Notes

1. On making public, see McLagan (2005, p. 224).
2. This line of inquiry is pursued by several contributions to the forthcoming anthology, Josephson and Karlsohn, 2019.
3. This is stressed in the first paragraph of Verdandi's organisation chart, reprinted in Zweigbergk (1892).
4. The original quote in Swedish reads: "Den absolut okontrollerade enväldsmakt, som utmärkte de akademiska lärarnes mellan fyra ögon meddelade ukaser angående hvad som skulle läsas för ett visst betyg, medförde oregelbundenheter och oformligheter i vissa lärares fordringar, oformligheter som lätt nog skulle afjämnas, om vederbörande blefve ålagda att fixera sina pensa på papperet". Zweigbergk (1892, p. 107).
5. See Harald Hjärne's advice on history studies.
6. For an in-depth argument, see Lundell (2002).
7. *Aftonbladet*, 24 February 1887.
8. *Aftonbladet*, August 2, 12 September 1887; *Göteborgsposten*, 29 August 1887; *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, May 2, 29 August 1887; *Jämtlandsposten*, August 5, 28 September 1887; *Jämtlandsposten*, 5 August 1887; *Lund Weckoblad*, 25 October 1887; *Nerikes Allehanda*, 31 August 1887; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 26 August 1887; *Tidning för Wenersborgs Stad Och Län*, 29 August 1887; *Upsala*, July 30, 25 August 1887; *Westmanlands Län Tidning*, August 27, 27 September 1887;.
9. *Aftonbladet*, 6 September 1887.
10. The original quote reads: "Filosofie kandidatexamen, hvilken här spelar hufvudrollen, anses i allmänna lifvet såsom ett slags bevis på vunnen vetenskaplig bildning, men af denna bok tyckes framgå, att äfven en sådan examen i de flesta fall kan vara frukten af lexläsning, ej i nämnvärd mån af vetenskapliga studier". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 September 1887.
11. See *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 May 1892.
12. *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 April 1889.
13. *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 August 1887; see *Sundsvalls Tidning*, 30 August 1887; *Kalmar*, 2 March 1887.
14. *Nya Wexjöbladet*, 18 October 1887.
15. *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 9 June 1888; *Nerikes Allehanda*, 11 June 1888.
16. *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 August 1887; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 22 September 1887.
17. *Aftonbladet*, 6 September 1887.
18. *Stockholms Dagblad*, 17 September 1887.
19. *Kalmar*, 19 September 1887; *Norrköping Tidningar*, 17 September 1887.
20. *Dagens Nyheter*, 15 October 1887.
21. *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 October 1887; see *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, 20 October 1887; *Nya Wexjöbladet*, October 21 1887; *Nerikes Allehanda*, 3 October 1887.
22. *Aftonbladet*, 20 January 1891; *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 21 January 1891; *Stockholms Dagblad*, 21 February 1891; *Jämtlandsposten*, 5 April 1891; *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 20 February 1891; *Lund Weckoblad*, 24 February 1891; *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, January 23, April 4, 23 February 1891; *Svenska Dagbladet*, 20 February 1891; *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 7 June 1895.
23. *Aftonbladet*, 2 February 1891.
24. *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 28 May 1892; *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 August 1887.
25. *Aftonbladet* 6/5 1888.
26. *Aftonbladet*, 13 June 1888.
27. *Aftonbladet*, 13 February 1888; see *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 January 1888.
28. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 February 1888.
29. *Svenska Dagbladet*, 24 February 1888.
30. *Eskilstuna-Kuriren*, 25 May 1891.
31. *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfarts-tidning*, 9 June 1888.

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