

# Branding in Higher Education

---

Jelle Mampaey

[Jelle.Mampaey@UGent.be](mailto:Jelle.Mampaey@UGent.be)

CHEGG – Centre for Higher Education Governance Ghent  
(Website: [www.chegg.ugent.be](http://www.chegg.ugent.be))

# Societal Context

---

- ❑ Global context → competition, marketization, privatization, ...
- ❑ This evolution is a global tendency, although it has also been criticized
- ❑ Competition in HE is increasing → HEIs are pressured to develop unique brands to reduce competition and to gain a competitive advantage in the market (see e.g. studies of C. Chapleo)
- ❑ Do HEIs succeed to develop unique brands?
  - ❑ How and why (not)?

# Dominant View in HE Literature

---

- ❑ Excerpt from Waeraas and Solbakk (2009: p. 453) in *Higher Education*:

*[B]randing is not a rational tool, but just a myth or a symbol that universities use to demonstrate conformity to their institutional environments (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977). From this viewpoint, it is more important to be similar to others than to differentiate, which may explain why branding may lead to rather bland and clichéd self-presentations. It is a paradox that branding, which is meant to lead to differentiation, may lead to a **conformity trap** that prevents organizations from expressing their unique features (Antorini and Schultz 2005). For example, there is a clear tendency for universities to present themselves as “the best”, “world-class”, “leading” etc. (Belanger et al. 2002).*

# Illustration of the Dominant View

---

## □ Mission statement of the University of Bath

*To deliver **world class** research and teaching, educating our graduates to become future **leaders** and innovators, and benefiting the wider population through our research, enterprise and influence.*

# Our Research Agenda

---

- Dominant view / methodology
  - Rather a-theoretical
  - Content analysis → identification of the dominant meaning communicated in e.g. mission statements (conclusion: quality / excellence)
  
- Our overarching aim: developing a more nuanced view on branding in HE by drawing on innovative theories and methodologies



# Innovative Theories?

---

- Under certain conditions ‘looking good’ is more important than ‘being good’
  - Intangible services
  - Distance between consumers and services
  
- Organizational image management (e.g. Alvesson, 1990 in *Organization Studies*)
  - = “a fabrication of public impression created to appeal to the audience rather than to reproduce reality” (Bernstein 1984: 13; in Alvesson 1990: 376)



# Innovative Theories?

---

- ❑ Strategic balance (Deephouse 1999 in *Strategic Management Journal*)
- ❑ HEIs are embedded in an environment with conflicting competitive and institutional pressures
- ❑ Implication: HEIs are pressured to be as different as legitimately possible → balancing between being different and being the same

# Innovative Methodologies?

---

- ❑ How to analyze similarities / differences in organizational image management in HE empirically?
  
- ❑ More sophisticated, theory-driven analysis is needed (e.g. cluster analysis, intertextual analysis, critical discourse analysis)!!
  - Content may be similar, but the emphasis on certain value clusters may be different
  - Content may be similar, but the meaning of certain value clusters may be different
  - Content may be similar, but the style of communication may be different





# Cluster Analysis?

| <b>Clusters</b>           | <b>Examples of word labels</b>                                    |
|---------------------------|---|
| Quality                   | Excellence, world class, leading, prestigious, effective          |
| Social justice            | Equal opportunities, respect, pluralism, widening access          |
| Third mission             | Applied, technology transfer, valorization, social responsibility |
| Academic orientation      | Research-based, fundamental, basic, academic freedom              |
| Collaboration             | Networking, partnership, cooperation, multi-disciplinary          |
| International orientation | International, global, mobility, world citizens                   |
| Evaluation                | Quality assurance, control, regulation, accountability            |



# EAIR Paper (2016)

| Total population                   | Most accessible cases              | Least accessible cases             |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Third mission (N = 96)             | Third mission (N = 48)             | Third mission (N = 48)             |
| Excellence (N = 32)                | Social justice (N = 22)            | Excellence (N = 32)                |
| Social justice (N = 27)            | International orientation (N = 12) | Meritocracy (N = 19)               |
| International orientation (N = 25) | Collaboration (N = 8)              | International orientation (N = 13) |
| Meritocracy (N = 19)               |                                    | Collaboration (N = 8)              |
| Collaboration (N = 16)             |                                    | Social justice (N = 5)             |



# EAIR Paper (2016)

| Total population                   | Most accessible cases              | Least accessible cases             |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Third mission (N = 96)             | Third mission (N = 48)             | Third mission (N = 48)             |
| Excellence (N = 32)                | Social justice (N = 22)            | Excellence (N = 32)                |
| Social justice (N = 27)            | International orientation (N = 12) | Meritocracy (N = 19)               |
| International orientation (N = 25) | Collaboration (N = 8)              | International orientation (N = 13) |
| Meritocracy (N = 19)               |                                    | Collaboration (N = 8)              |
| Collaboration (N = 16)             |                                    | Social justice (N = 5)             |



# EAIR Paper (2016)

| Total population                   | Most accessible cases              | Least accessible cases             |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Third mission (N = 96)             | Third mission (N = 48)             | Third mission (N = 48)             |
| Excellence (N = 32)                | Social justice (N = 22)            | Excellence (N = 32)                |
| Social justice (N = 27)            | International orientation (N = 12) | Meritocracy (N = 19)               |
| International orientation (N = 25) | Collaboration (N = 8)              | International orientation (N = 13) |
| Meritocracy (N = 19)               |                                    | Collaboration (N = 8)              |
| Collaboration (N = 16)             |                                    | Social justice (N = 5)             |

# EAIR Paper (2016)

| Total population                   | Most accessible cases              | Least accessible cases             |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Third mission (N = 96)             | Third mission (N = 48)             | Third mission (N = 48)             |
| Excellence (N = 32)                | Social justice (N = 22)            | Excellence (N = 32)                |
| Social justice (N = 27)            | International orientation (N = 12) | Meritocracy (N = 19)               |
| International orientation (N = 25) | Collaboration (N = 8)              | International orientation (N = 13) |
| Meritocracy (N = 19)               |                                    | Collaboration (N = 8)              |
| Collaboration (N = 16)             |                                    | Social justice (N = 5)             |

# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

---

- ❑ Branding content versus branding style

*We offer world class education and research (assertive)*

*We are committed to offering world class education and research (commissive)*

*Please visit our world class institution where we offer world class education (directive)*

*We truly believe that we offer world class education and research (expressive)*



# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

---

|                           | KU Leuven | UGent |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Quality                   | 6         | 3     |
| Social justice            | 3         | 3     |
| Third mission             | 9         | 4     |
| Academic orientation      | 5         | 3     |
| International orientation | 3         | 1     |
| Collaboration             | 4         | 3     |
| Evaluation                | 0         | 0     |
| Total                     | 30        | 17    |



# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

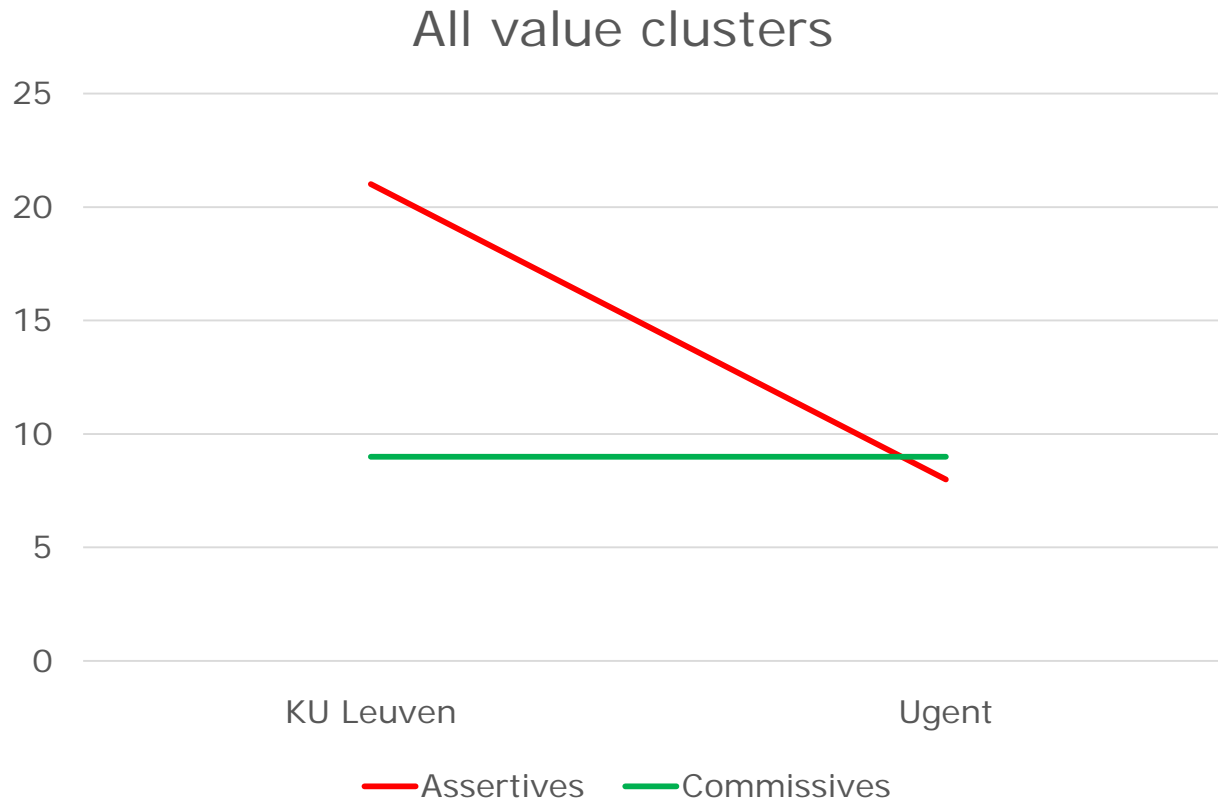
---

|                           | KU Leuven | UGent |
|---------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Quality                   | 6         | 3     |
| Social justice            | 3         | 3     |
| Third mission             | 9         | 4     |
| Academic orientation      | 5         | 3     |
| International orientation | 3         | 1     |
| Collaboration             | 4         | 3     |
| Evaluation                | 0         | 0     |
| Total                     | 30        | 17    |

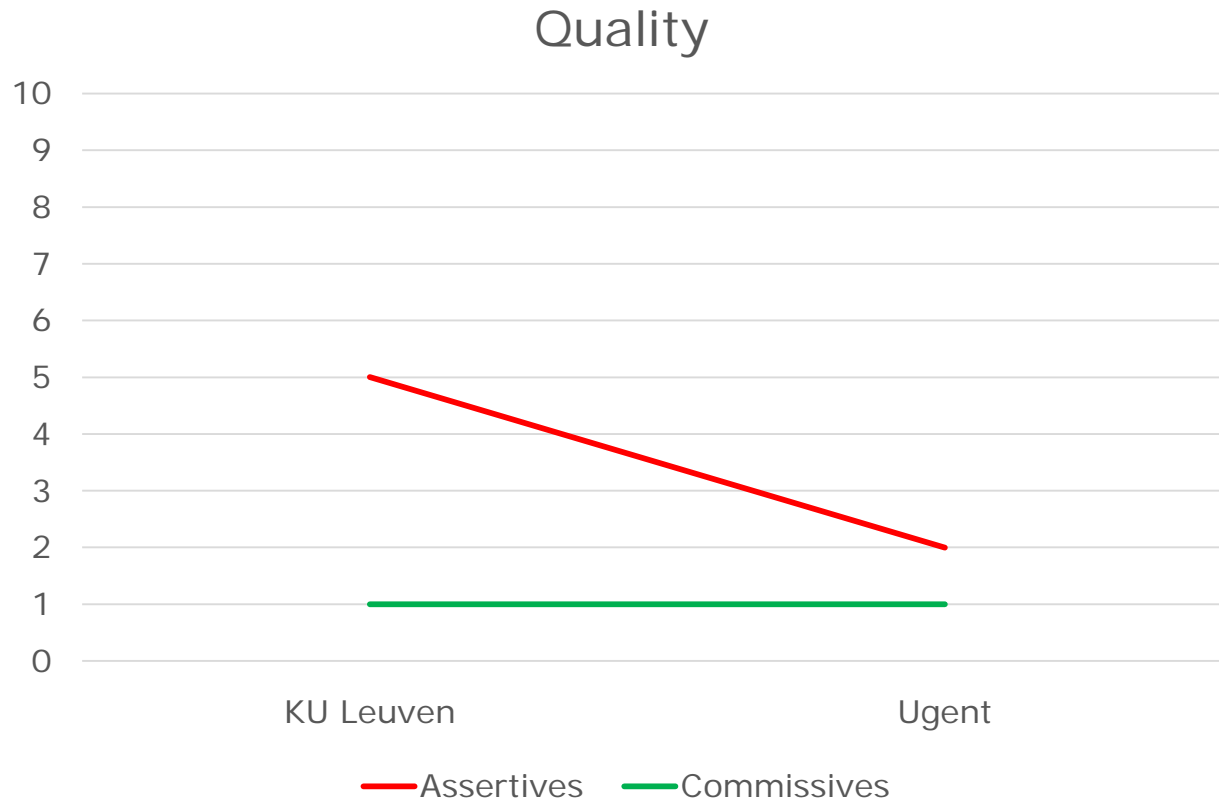




# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

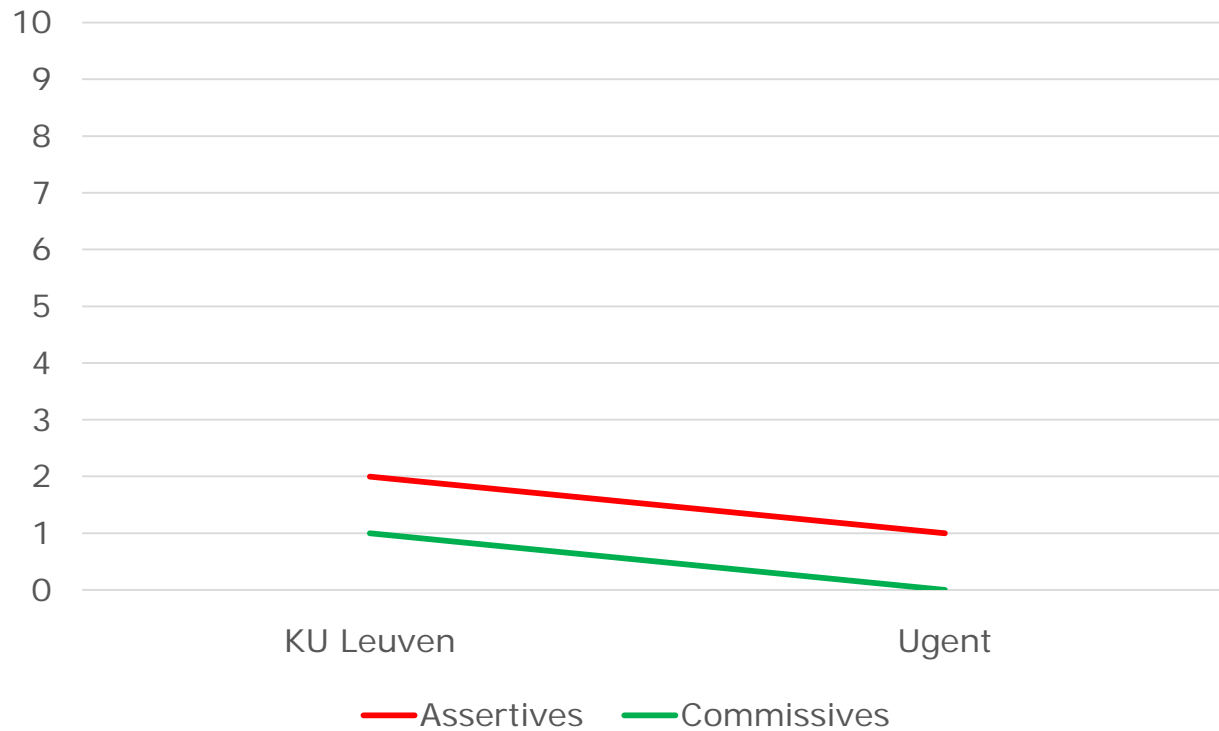


# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)



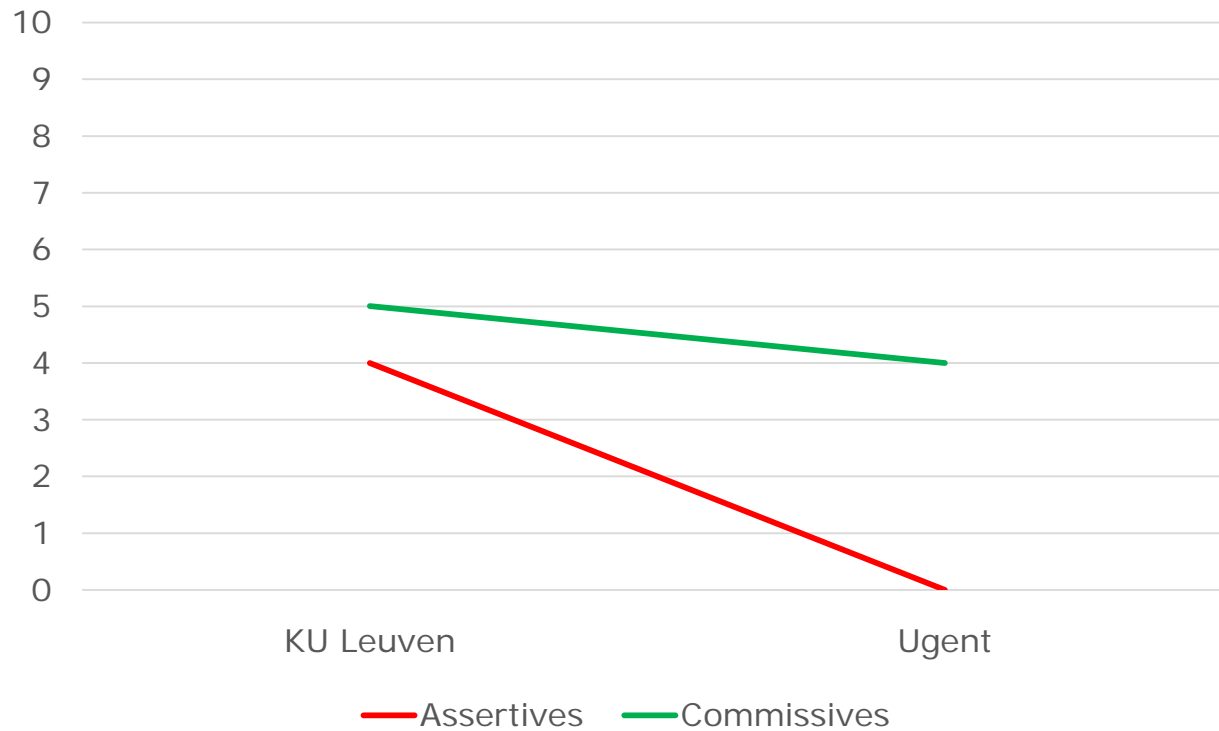
# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

## International orientation



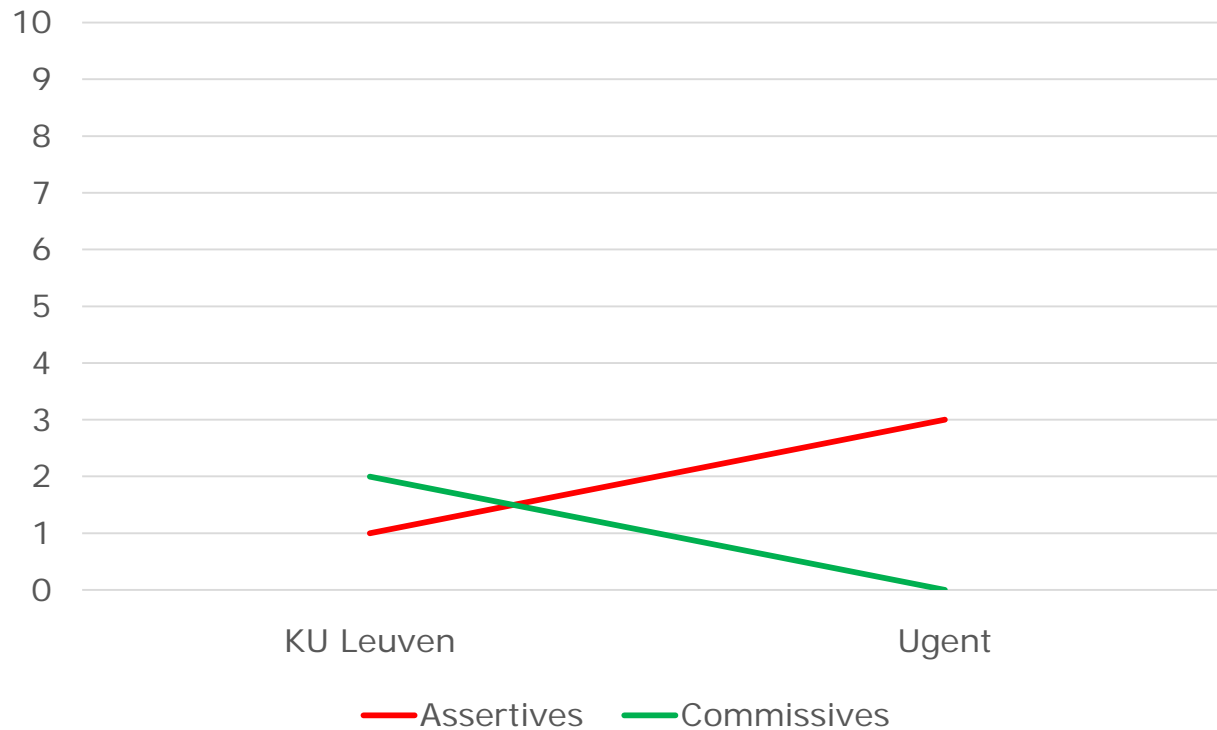
# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

## Third mission



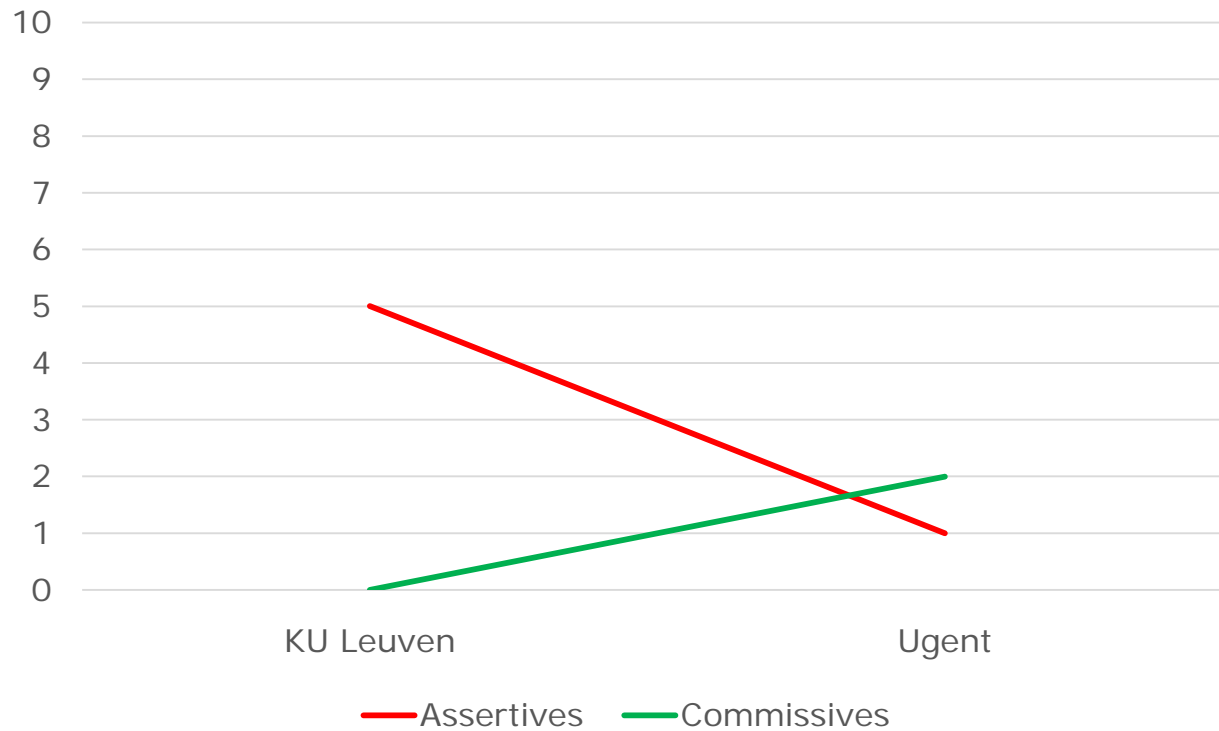
# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

## Social justice



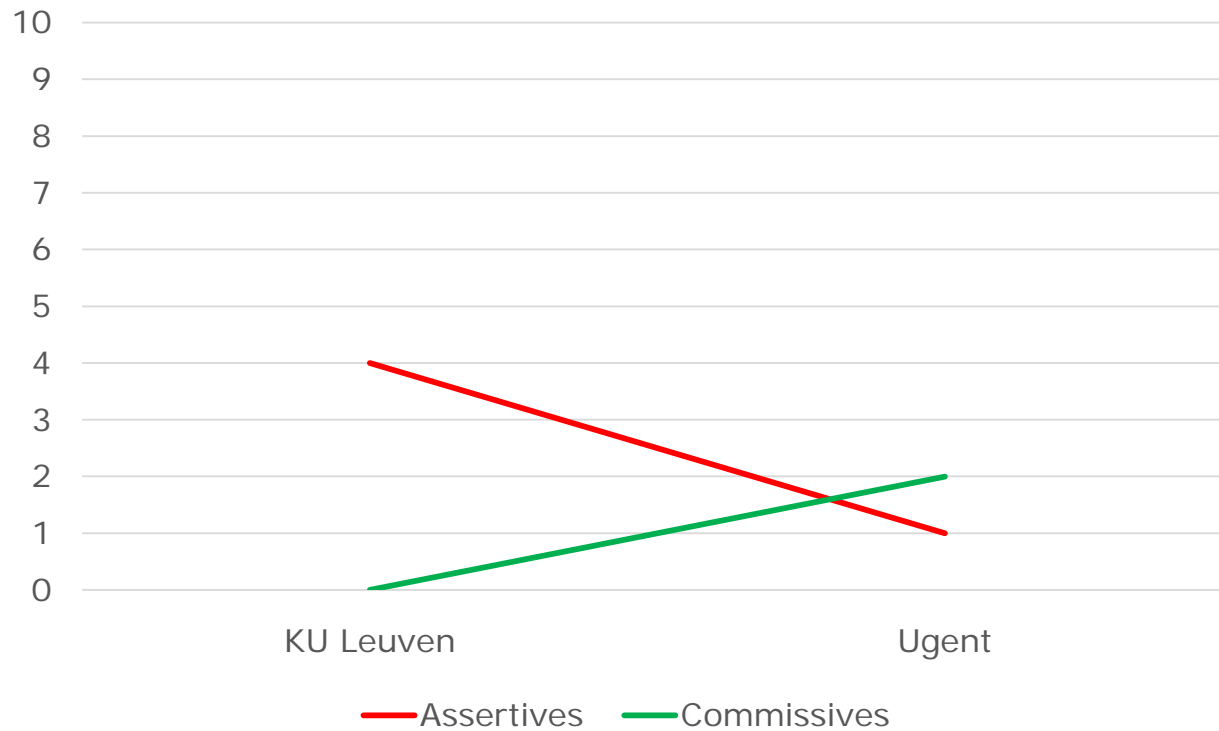
# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

## Academic orientation



# Book Chapter (Forthcoming)

## Collaboration



# Conclusion

---

- ❑ Higher education institutions cannot be portrayed as a homogeneous group of “excellent” organizations
  
- ❑ Similarities can be identified but these are counterbalanced with subtle differences in organizational image management
  - Differences in the emphasis on certain value clusters
  - Differences in the meanings of certain value clusters
  - Differences in the style of communication
  
- ❑ However, we would expect that these subtle differences exert strong, not necessarily desirable effects (Critical Discourse Analysis)



# Practical Implications

---

- ❑ Policy makers and practitioners should be aware of (the potential impact of) subtle differences in organizational image management of higher education institutions
- ❑ Policy makers and practitioners who aim to understand similarities and differences in the branding activities of higher education institutions need to deploy advanced techniques that can identify subtle differences
- ❑ If institutional differentiation is the goal, advanced techniques of organizational image management may be important tools



# Thank You!

---

- Questions, reflections, ...?

