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TO BE A STUDENT WITHIN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

New insights in process and studies outcomes

Presses universitaires de Grenoble

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SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES – SOME RESULTS OF THE STUDENT SURVEY IN GERMANY

Tino Bargel

THE RAISE OF THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION AT UNIVERSITIES

The idealistic view of the scientific community at universities takes the internationality and equality of this institution for granted. In this concept the students are thought as international mobile in whole Europe and it is supposed that they are partners of equal status in the search of scientific truth. In reality the conditions and processes at our universities are often quite contrary. It is therefore an important task for the empirical social research about universities and students, to find answers to two basic questions: First: What do we know about the amount of social equality or inequality in access to universities as well as in the study situation and in study success? Second: How develops the international mobility of students, the strategic importance and the realization of studying abroad?

Combining both questions, we have to investigate: How is the international exchange between universities in different countries bound together with the social background of their students, which interdependencies does exist? The aim of this presentation is to communicate some findings about students in Germany, concerning the topic of social inequality and international mobility. It should contribute with some results and propositions to the 'social dimension' of the Bologna process, but additionally it should argue for establishing the 'cultural dimension' as well, which is becoming more urgent in the last years for constructing the European Higher Education Area (Ministerial Anniversary Conference 2010).

Questions of social inequality in access and in performance of studying did not find any interest at universities or in official politics for a long time. In Germany it was not before the late sixties of the last century that this topic found political and public interest (Dahrendorf 1967). In consequence in Germany started a phase of establishing new universities in new regions, to expand higher education and to realize more the civil right for education. And also the social grants for students (in Germany called *BAföG*) have been reformed and enlarged during the seventies. But this area of expanding higher education and of widening access to the universities for new social groups ended during the eighties. Problems of inequality at universities or propositions of new efforts for gaining young people of lower classes for studying at universities had nearly no public or political resonance.

It was not before the first years of the new century and the beginning of the Bologna process that questions of access to universities, of study habits, of teaching styles, of drop-outs and achievement, of quality management and of international mobility gained new attendance. Step by step different empirical studies showed that principles of social justice and equity are not realized at the universities, contrary to the criteria of achievement as the universal criteria for success. But very often success of the students at universities depends on social conditions as gender or social heritage (e.g. Georg 2004, Bargel 2007).

It is one result of the European development in higher education, that this topic of social inequality between students becomes more and more crucial, especially concerning the international exchange. During the Bologna process it can be observed, that one of its central aims, the enhancement of international exchange and student mobility depends in a crucial way on the social dimension: the economic and financial situation of students, their social contacts and their cultural habits and strategies.

Step by step the 'social dimension' has been established during the Bologna process. It has been talked about for the first time in the communiqué of Prague in 2001, strengthened by the communiqué of Berlin in 2003, confirmed officially as 'essential' in the communiqué of Bergen (2005), further explained, enlarged and described more concretely in the communiques of London (2007) and Leuven (2009). We can observe that the social origin and situation of students is more important now for the creation of the European Area of Higher Education than ever before. The importance of the 'social dimension', which is now the official term, has been shown, not least of all, through international mobility and studying abroad.

Important are the explanations in the Communiqué of the Conference of Leuven 2009, which is signed by now 47 nations participating in the Bologna-process. The point 9 of this declaration contributes expressively to the 'social dimension',

which is understood as 'equity in the access to higher education and by the successful studying'. Also the importance of 'data gathering' is mentioned by point 21 in this document, explicitly pointing to the social dimension: 'A better and more gathering of data will make it more easy to observe the progress in reaching the aims concerning the social dimension, the employability and the mobility...' (Ministerial Anniversary Bologna-Conference 2009).

Thus the engagement against social inequality in studies at a university, deriving from the social origin of students, is declared to be an important task when realizing the European Area of Higher Education. And it is acknowledged, that to support this process good empirical information are necessary to stir the further process.

Data: Student Survey in Germany

The following results derive mainly from the Student Survey in Germany. This inventory about the study situation and the orientations of the students started already thirty years ago. The development of the instrument aimed to gain information to six general problems: The efficiency of studying, the qualification of the students, the evaluation of teaching and courses, the socialization of values and concepts, the selection and social chances, and the future placement in the world of labour. In the meantime eleven surveys are available, a quite long time-series to observe developments and trends, starting in 1982/83 and the last one in 2009/10. This time series of eleven surveys existing up to now provides information not only about the actual situation at universities, but about developments and trends in higher education as well. At every inquiry about 9.000 students of universities in all the regions of Germany take part, they are chosen by chance and their answers are anonymous. The sample is representative for the German students, compared to important structural points as gender, field of studying, age and so on (more explanations in the article of W. Georg in this book, and in T. Bargel). The Research Group on Higher Education at the University of Konstanz (AG Hochschulforschung) is in charge for this 'Student Survey in Germany', supported financially by the German Ministry for Education and Research.

With the introduction of the new study structure (Bachelor and Master) this Student Survey in Germany offers an important source of data about the development and establishment of the 'Bachelor' at German universities. In spring 2010 a special monograph was published: 'Bachelor Students – Experiences in Study and Teaching'. This report and its findings have met with a lot of response by university rectors and students' associations, by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and the DSW (German National Association for Student Affairs), and also by political parties and the administrations in higher

education. Thus the survey with its systematic and differentiated information proved to be useful to find out the facts, and to be a basis for decisions in a crucial situation for higher education.

The survey is therefore an example of the necessity, to offer empirical evidence for practical and political discussions – in this case for the central topics of international exchange and of social inequality. We propose to establish the Diversity Management as part of the Quality Management at universities and to develop a general International Student Survey in Europe (ISSUE) at the European level, which has the sociocultural dimension of higher education as its topic.

DEFINITION OF THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS

This is not the place here to give a methodical lecture on how to define and measure the social background or origin of students. But it seems to be appropriate to shortly clarify the necessary terms and how they are constructed and used in the Student Survey in Germany.

The social background of students cannot be measured in a simple manner. Because it incorporates the mix of different living conditions, and therefore indicators of economic, social or cultural manner must be used. It means only an economic characterization if we speak of the 'population stratum of low income', or it has a broader cultural meaning as in the description of 'educational distant families or milieus'. The term 'social background' of the students, the social heritage, tells us something about the social status and the cultural environment of his or her parents and we suppose that it is of influence for the study process and the outcome of studying. When contrasting working-class children to children with an academic background, a frequent and popular comparison, two different criteria are being used, that of profession (worker) and that of qualification (graduate of higher education).

The professional position and the educational qualification are indeed two different important criteria. Both are used to classify people with regard to social standing, influence and gratifications. Between both, qualification and professional status we find a narrow connexion: 70% of those parents of German students, who themselves gained a certificate of university have also reached a high professional position. Looking to the social ranking of the students there are two extreme groups: at the bottom are those students who have parents with a low educational qualification and professional status (about 9 per cent), and at the highest level are students with parents who reached a grade at university and are in a leading or autonomous professional position (28 per cent).

Education, job position and financial income are closely connected; it is therefore obvious to define social classes using an index which integrates all these

factors of education, profession and income. This index uses points for each factor, and finally leads to the definition of social classes. Mostly three to six classes are built up: from the lower to the middle and upper or higher social classes (Hoffmann 2006). This construction of social classes is also used in the Euro-Student, the international survey about the social-economic situation of students as financing, dwelling and student services (Orr 2009).

To define the social background of students for practical purposes, the general education as well as the professional qualification of the parents is preferable. The steps of educational achievement may follow the OECD-scheme, which is widely accepted as a measure of the social background, usable also for international comparisons (OECD 2008). To define the 'educational background' four different strata are used, following the proposals of the OECD: up to lower secondary (ISCED 0, 1, 2), upper secondary (ISCED 3), post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED 4), higher education/university (ISCED 5,6). To define the 'professional status' ISCO-88 might serve as an orientation; it proposes ten steps, and the steps 1 to 4 and 10 are 'white (not-blue) collar workers' and the steps 5 to 9 are 'blue collar workers' as a main differentiation. Nevertheless it is often not so easy to transform the national categories for the profession and their position in a schedule which is useful for international comparison.

The following distinction of the social background is mainly used in the Student Survey in Germany and therefore also in this contribution. Three groups of students are differentiated concerning the qualification of their parents: low status, if parents passed only basic general and professional education (in German: *Hauptschule und Lehre*); medium status, if parents have reached middle certificates and passed special professional schools (*Mittlere Reife und berufliche Fachschule*) and high status, if the parents gained the permission to higher education and passed institutions of higher education (*Abitur and Universität*). In the reports about the findings of the student survey often the term 'educational climbers' is used: that are students of a low or medium educational class who use the university study in order to rise to a higher social layer. These students have non-academic parents, a simple attribute but a social starting position with many consequences for decisions, strategies and habits.

CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY AND SUBJECT

Social origin in itself is already effective when choosing the kind of university – a traditional university or an university of applied sciences – as well as the field of study. Quite a lot of research exists, for example the time series of the social inquiries in Germany since 1951 (Isserstedt u.a. 2006) or international comparisons about the equality of access to universities in Europe (Koucky *et al.* 2008).

When looking at the kind of university the facts are clear: general universities stay to be a place where graduates tend to reproduce themselves that is their children very often will attend them as well. Universities of applied sciences, however, noticeably are institutions chosen by educational climbers and lateral entrants. The figures of the student survey in Germany show: At traditional universities there are 41 per cent educational climbers; among the universities of applied sciences things are different: here are 58 per cent of the students educational climbers (according to the definition above.)

With regard to the subjects taken by students we get the following differentiated picture: At universities the reproduction rate of university graduates are similar in all subjects mostly ranging from 54 per cent in social science and 58 per cent in law and economics. The quota is highest in medicine: 71 per cent have academic parents, rather high also for engineering at the university level with 64 per cent. The lowest quota exists in the field of social work at applied universities with only 36 per cent of students with high qualified parents (table 1).

Table 1. Social background of the students (qualification of parents) and choice of the university (traditional or applied) and of the field of subject (2009/10). Figures in %.

Institution and Field of Subject	Social Background Qualification			
	Low	Medium	High	All
Traditional University	19	22	59	100
Cultural sciences/languages	20	24	56	100
Social Sciences/psychology	23	23	54	100
Law	20	22	58	100
Economics	20	22	58	100
Medicine	12	17	71	100
Science	21	24	56	100
Engineering/technic	18	18	64	100
Applied University	28	30	42	100
Social work	34	30	36	100
Economics	29	25	46	100
Engineering/Technic	24	35	41	100

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

In former years the study of law had a reproduction rate above proportion, whereas educational climbers more often chose engineering even at universities. Nowadays the reproduction rate in engineering at universities is rather high, but in law it became normal as in most other field of study.

Among the prospective young engineers an interesting splitting has taken place in the last years: children of graduates now keep to themselves at universities more and more, and children of educational climbers are mainly to be found at universities of applied sciences. However we are going to interpret these differences, the fact remains that when choosing universities and subjects students show social differences which are noticeable and persistent with even new ones appearing as in engineering.

STUDY SUCCESS AND FEAR OF FAILURE

It is possible to go through every single condition for students with regard to subjects or to universities, and to find out about their relation to social background. However, though it is not possible to do so here in detail, we may concentrate to three examples in doing so: the assurance and self-reliance to study as a social aspect, the financing situation and the need to work beside studying as an economic aspect, and the coping with the academic world and scientific milieus at universities as the cultural aspect.

When beginning their study students' assurance varies whether or not they will be able to cope with it. The self-confidence is much higher, when the students have parents of academic experience. This is an elementary element of social capital (first example). It differs very much with regard to their social background; its rate has been between 19 and 21 per cent during late years – a remarkable margin. At present students of low social background show only to 40 per cent a high self-confidence starting studying at university level, and the students of high social background confirm to 60 per cent such a high self-confidence (table 2).

Studying is for 'new' students without academic parents also more uncertain, they have more sorrows, if they will reach and pass the last exam. Only 45 per cent of them show no sorrows about study-success, students of higher social background show this optimism to 54 per cent. That is not only because of some intellectual deficits but they have more difficulties with their financial and social conditions, and these disadvantages make studying more difficult for them.

Table 2. Start and Success of Studying depending of social background of students (qualification of parents) in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

	Social Background (parental qualification)		
	Low	Medium	High
1. Social habitus: high self-confidence	40	45	60
2. Firmness: no sorrows about study-success	45	45	54
3. Potential drop-out: Thinking about giving up	23	20	17
4. Other choice: not studying again	12	9	8
5. Contentness: Like to be a student	64	68	72

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

The amount of social self-confidence as a part of the social habitués, regarding the entrance to university and the success of studying, by the way is very far fetching: it helps to cope with demands and difficulties of a study; it is a protection against external disturbances like fluctuation of the labor market. Consequently we find in the lower social group of students significant more potential drop-outs, who think more or less intense to give up studying and leave university. In this social low group it is nearly a quarter of the students who admit this inclination (23 per cent), in the social high group only 17 per cent are thinking to give up studying. Also more students with low qualified parents would not go to university again if they had a new choice (12 per cent).

This social distance to studying and university life is at last shown by the lower amount of contentment with the status and being a student. Normally the rate of contentment as a general indicator of well-being is rather high, but not so much for the students of the lower social group. Less than two third of them are very content to be a student (64 per cent), whereas in the higher social group are nearly three quarters (72 per cent). That means that the social and educational climbers feel not so often 'at home' at the university, that studying is for more of them a new pathway of many risks – and that they miss sufficient support to compensate the disadvantages and barriers.

FINANCING SITUATION AND REASONS OF WORKING

The economic situation covers an important area (the second example): the nucleus here is financing of study and receiving a social scholarship (*BAföG*).

The social background is very important when looking at the way students finance their study: only one out of five students coming from lower classes can fully count on their parents. Contrary to that two out of three students with parents having a university degree can be sure of being financed by them (table 3). This is a far better precondition in order to do a study consistently.

Working-class children receive *BAföG* as a social grant above proportion: about a quarter of them compared to 10 per cent of higher social classes. It is also to notice, that in 1998 much less students of lower class origin received a social grant, only 15 per cent of them. Step by step this proportion of grant receivers grew from 17 per cent (2001) about 23 per cent (2007) to the actual proportion of 27 per cent (2010). This is a positive development to support the educational climbers. Nevertheless this amount of social grants seems not sufficient regarding the necessity for lower class students to go to work in addition to studying.

Table 3. Sources of financing the study by students of different social background (parental qualification) in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

	Social Background (parental qualification)		
Sources of financing	Low	Medium	High
Parents	25	36	54
Social grant (*BAföG*)	27	19	10
Own work during semester	24	21	15
Own work during holidays	22	20	14

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

In fact, educational climbers of lower and medium social strata must finance their study more often by own work during semester (24 per cent) or during holidays (22 per cent) than students with academic parents (only 15 or 14 per cent). In this case the working students rather often have to go to work more than two days per week. Such a burden leads in many cases to longer studying, because it is not possible to finish it in the official prescribed and regular time.

If we look to reasons, why students are working beside studying, we get an impressive result: for more than the half of students from lower origin it is a bare necessity to earn for their living (54 per cent), whereas this reason is only for a third of higher class students very important (34 per cent). That means that students of lower origin have also more difficulties to combine the necessity

of work with the demands of studying. It is not only the missing of time but also deficits in recreation and concentration.

Far too many educational climbers have to cope with a large amount of uncertainty and financial straits during their study, just for securing their bare living. Furthermore they more often have the burden, for example, to do a job outside university for their living, parallel to their study and during term. The payment by *BAföG* partly compensates disadvantages of the lower social classes, but it is not enough by far and does not compensate the disadvantages of the students from lower social class (Hoffmann 2002).

COPING: DIFFICULTIES AND STRESS

With regard to coping with study conditions the educational climbers more often have problems in connection to cultural, academic styles at universities (third example). Life and dealings with each other are more often strange and unusual to them. Subsequently orientation in study and planning of study is more troublesome for them. The unfavorable social climate – for instance the prevailing anonymity – poses more difficulties, especially at universities with the high number of students and a bad students-professor ratio.

Especially students of lower social background with less educated parents show some more difficulties to take part in discussions at courses (39 per cent of them with many or some difficulties), and to show an adequate behavior face to face to lecturers (29 per cent). Both handicaps of cultural reliance are causes that they cannot demonstrate their talent and knowledge as well as students from higher social strata.

In the case of planning the future steps of study the students of lower social background have much more difficulties (59 per cent), perhaps because they cannot get help or support by their parents. An effective disadvantage is for them, that they in addition have more difficulties to prepare exams and tests, what may also be caused by the missing advices of family members how to behave in such a new and important situation (table 4).

It is to understand that therefore students with less educated parents, which have no experience themselves with the university, feel more stress because of the level of demands of their studying. Even more stress they feel in front of the upcoming exams. Students of lower social background concede to nearly the half (45 per cent) much stress with the exams, those of higher social background only to a third (34 per cent).

Table 4. Difficulties and stress during studying at university for students with different social background (parental qualification) in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

Difficulties	Social background (Parental Qualification)		
	Low	Medium	High
Take part in discussions at courses	39	37	30
Behavior face to face to lecturers	29	22	22
Orientation in the field of study	44	42	41
Planning the future steps of study	59	53	46
Preparing exams and tests	64	60	52
Stress			
High Level of demands	39	33	33
Upcoming exams	45	40	34
Actual financial situation	39	26	15
Job perspectives in the future	21	17	15

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

Bigger problems for students of lower class brings the actual financial situation. Rather many of them (39 per cent) have much stress with their financial situation, but of higher level students it is only a small proportion (15 per cent). This reason is that they get not much money from their parents, the social grant by *BAföG* is not enough at all and they are forced to have a job outside the university. The social differences between the students have even consequences for their expectations concerning their future life. The stress because of problematic job perspectives is more often the case for students of lower class then of higher class (table 4).

To summarize, the students of lower social origin more frequently are troubled whether they will be able to do the study successfully, and in the allotted time. This pressure has augmented since the introduction of the Bachelor study. The greater stress for students of lower classes is also due to the fact, that they do not have the same chance to concentrate for studying, what is even more necessary in the Bachelor study with its 'modules' and a lot of more exams during the semester. Furthermore educational climbers, especially students of working-class origin, have some more difficulties in communicating with teachers, and in participating in discussions during class. Thus they are less

able to show their capacities, and are more reserved to present themselves. This could be a reason why they get less frequently a job as a tutor or as a student assistant at universities.

STUDY ABROAD AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

It is an urgent question how to promote and multiply a study abroad, since this seems to be an important precondition for the qualification of university absolvent's. This accounts for the fact that the social dimension in building the European Area of Higher Education has lately got more into focus for the political administration and a lot of researchers (DAAD 2009). Only when it is possible to convince students of the lower strata also to study abroad the intended quota of about 25 per cent of all students might be reached, at the moment it is in Germany about 16 per cent).

Strategic value of a study abroad

More and more, experiences abroad are being valued by students; they no longer hesitate to take this adventure. A study phase abroad is not only deemed important for the personal development but for employability as well. This positive view of a study abroad has increased of late years. It has been supported by economy and guidelines of politics, who advices the students to start this possibility.

But we have to acknowledge to differences concerning the development of this judgment: the usefulness of studying abroad for the personal development as well as for better employability shows a remarkable growing from 1993 to 2001: from 54 per cent to 62 per cent concerning the personal development, and from 51 per cent to even 64 per cent very useful for better employability. But then it slows down in the new century, and 2010 studying abroad seems for 59 per cent of the students to be very useful for both aspects.

Behind this general development we have quite impressive discrepancies between students of different social origin. The usefulness of studying abroad for a better employability, the social aspect, is the same for all students of low, medium or high social background: a little less than 60 per cent of the students in all three groups.

But the usefulness for the personal development, the cultural aspect, is quite different: more often it seems useful for students of high social background (63 per cent very useful) than of low social background (only 51 per cent very useful). We have a quite different evaluation about the cultural advantage of studying abroad by students of low and high social background (table 5).

Table 5. Strategic value of studying abroad for personal development and for employment (chances) for students of different social background in Germany (1993-2010). Figures in %.

| Year of survey | Studying abroad is very useful for... | | | | | |
| | Personal development | | | Better employability | | |
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1993	50	49	60	49	51	51
1995	51	54	60	50	50	51
1998	56	61	67	59	63	64
2001	55	62	65	59	65	65
2004	52	56	64	60	60	63
2007	50	58	63	58	60	62
2010	51	54	63	58	58	59

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

If this different estimation of studying abroad leads to different planning and realization, then this activity to gain international experience will be a special example for a lasting social inequality. Because then the planning and the carrying out of a time abroad, be it as a study phase, an internship or a language course, depends much on the social background of the students. As great parts of the economic world and of the industries announce the importance of experiences abroad to get a job and make a career, this will have consequences in the professional future of the students. Then it might be more difficult for students from lower strata to get into a higher position than for their fellow students from higher strata, who will be later a rival for the job.

Information on possibility to study abroad

The amount of information for students about possibilities to do a study abroad has considerably and continuously increased since the eighties. Until the beginning of the nineties less than one out of four (22 to 24 per cent) students felt to be sufficiently or well informed. In the meantime this number has more than doubled: nearly half of them (46 per cent) ascribe this factor to themselves now (2009/10). This big increase of well informed students is due to the augmenting interest of students at the one side and of the more intensive work of the international offices at the other side.

Students coming from parents of 'low social class' describe themselves to be less well informed about the possibilities to go abroad. But the gap between the students of different social classes has lessened since the nineties and can be regarded as to be small now, nevertheless it continues to exist: If the parents have a high qualification 23 per cent of these students are good or even very good informed, but for students with low qualified parents this amount is only 18 per cent (table 6).

The number of student disinterested in information about studying abroad is a little larger among students coming from a lower social class. In former times, especially in the eighties of the last century, the gap between the students of the different classes concerning their interest about those information was rather great (22 per cent of low, 14 per cent of high social background in 1985). But the difference diminished persistently over the years, and nowadays (2010) the level is only 14 per cent of no interest for students of low and 10 per cent of no interest for students with high social background.

Table 6. Amount of information for studying abroad of students of different social background (parental qualification) in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

Amount of Information	Low	Medium	High
Low, few	43	44	42
Sufficient	25	22	25
Good/very good	18	20	23
No interest	14	14	10
Total	100	100	100

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

Over the years more and more students become interested in going abroad and to gather information about the possibilities, but disproportionally more students from the lower classes. This is an important precondition to support these students to study abroad as well as other students of higher social heritage.

Activities and study phase abroad

Regarding a study phase abroad already accomplished, the student survey offers three quota with reference to social classes: 9 per cent of students coming from the near-illiterate social class, 11 per cent of middle class students, but 18 per cent of students with a parental social background of higher civil servants and freelancers have already been abroad for study. This difference must be evaluated as a great gap, because the students of higher social background have been nearly twice more often at a university in another country than their fellow students from lower strata – and this is a huge advantage for the personal development and for professional chances.

These differences continue to be quantitative impressive even in the planning of a study phase abroad: 16 per cent of students from low social class, but 18 per cent of students coming from the middle group of educational climbers, and even 30 per cent of students with an academic parental background are planning such a study phase in earnest: they are very sure or rather sure, to realize it (table 7).

If we add both percentages, that for already done and for planning a study abroad rather earnest we get for the lower class students only a quarter of them (25 per cent), but for the higher class nearly a third of them (48 per cent), who will at the end of their time at university have the experience of studying in another country.

Looking at other activities abroad, for example internships/work placements or language courses, similar differences with regard to the social background of students occur. They are noticeable throughout, and the according figures have been stable in the last years. In social classes having a higher education activities abroad, including a study phase, are tripled in relation to those of the near-illiterate social class.

Table 7. Studying abroad: already done and planned by students of different social background in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

Social background	Low	Medium	High
Already done	9	11	18
Planned, to study abroad			
Very sure	6	7	15
Rather sure	10	11	15
Together	16	18	30

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.
Note: 'having been abroad': only students from 7. – 12. Semester; 'planning to study abroad': students from 1. – 4. Semester.

Reasons against a study phase abroad

When examining questions regarding international mobility, it is useful to get to know students' reasons against a study phase abroad. Are these reasons weighted differently and in accordance with the social background, as it is the case concerning the reasons to go to work in addition to studying?

The biggest difference, to be expected in relation to social background, exists on account of financing the time abroad. It is a noticeable one indeed: 45 per cent of students with parents of lower qualification in contrast to 27 per of students with parents coming from an academic world state that the problem of financing weight heavily with them (table 8). The parental purse is of great importance for the decision to do a study phase abroad.

Table 8. Reasons against going abroad by students of different social background in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %

Reasons against studying abroad	Low	Medium	High
Financing problems			
some impact	32	30	27
much impact	45	38	26
together	77	68	53
Not good enough in foreign language			
some impact	13	10	10
much impact	8	6	5
together	21	16	15
Difficulties to get information			
some impact	14	13	13
much impact	4	3	3
together	18	16	16

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

Some kind of social difference exists with reference to the knowledge of a foreign language (as a cultural factor) as well: 21 per cent of students coming from a class with a low educational level, in relation to 15 per cent with parents of a high educational level, state that insufficient knowledge of a foreign language is an important reason for them not to go abroad for study.

That estimation of the students about their knowledge of foreign languages is basically true. That becomes clear, if we look for example at the knowledge of the English language: 34 per cent of German students whose parents have an academic profession think their English is very good, but only 21 per cent of educational risers think so; at universities of applied sciences this figure is even less.

All other criteria amount to the same or to a similar level. The difference regarding the fear to lose time when studying abroad remains rather small between students of different social backgrounds (plus 2 to 4 per cent). Similarly the factors getting credit points accepted at home and receiving information are not more important to students with a lower educational background than to others – these factors are even rarely mentioned.

'INTERNATIONAL OFFICES' AS STUDENT'S SERVICE

It is possible to add a positive result here immediately about the International Offices. They are a part of the different fields of student services as study counseling, career planning, or social support, which are more and more established at the universities.

First of all it is noticeable that the rush of students calling at the office keeps within clear bounds. Though the frequent feeling at the office itself of having too much work is justified, only one out of ten students calls at the office in order to get information or council. This is not a high rate; it has been even a bit higher in the late nineties.

There is a greater social difference: a higher social background leads to nearly twice as many calls at that office; lately 9 per cent coming from a low to 17 per cent coming from a high social layer (table 9). Before, that is in 1998, there were clearly more calls, but the difference was the same according to the social background: 14 per cent of lower class students to 23 per cent of higher class students visited the international office to get information about studying abroad.

Table 9. Visit and evaluation of international offices by students of different social background in Germany (2009/10). Figures in %.

Visit international office	Low	Medium	High
one time	7	9	14
two and more	2	2	3
Together	9	11	17
Evaluation of counselling			
Positive evaluation: 'content'	71	70	69

Source: Student Survey in Germany, Research Group on Higher Education, University of Konstanz.

Students, regardless of their social background, give a feedback about the work of the International Office which is far more positive than negative: 70 per cent of them are satisfied after the visit. It is highly possible that as a result of this good counseling the students are far better informed about a study abroad of late years than before.

The social background has no influence on how students judge the quality of the counsel at the International Office of their university. The students of low, middle and high social classes, with regard to the educational level of their parents, they all give positive feedbacks with above 70 per cent, saying that they are content with the information, advice and support. So, the positive vote is equally high regardless to the social class, an important result as it is a welcome one. One should recommend to students, and especially to those with a lower educational background, to use the offer of the International Office.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A lot has happened in the past years with regard to the question of students' social background together with a fair and equal treatment at universities. It will be important to pursue such new attention and targets seriously, if the European Area of Higher Education is to fulfill the social and democratic concept of higher education.

The cultural and the social dimension of studying

Especially the European Students Union (ESU) pointed very early and with energy to the social problems in studying, made demands from the universities and effectively influenced the Bologna-process (European Students' Union 2008a). The Student Union edited not only reports about the Bologna-process with student eyes, but also generated an 'Equality Handbook' (European Students' Union 2008b). This handbook is a remarkable document. It contains chapters about 'Gender discrimination' or 'Discrimination on the basis of Religion', and also a chapter about 'Discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic background'. They are short and in a manageable form, additionally we find a helpful 'Equality Glossary' (S. 71 ff.). Important is the question 'What can we do?', in doing so the connection to 'Equity and Quality Assurance' is also raised (European Students' Union – ESU 2008 b).

An essential fundament for this task is empirical inventories and the development of a social and cultural monitoring. That means a diversity-monitoring as a basic for a Diversity Management (DiM), which is established at more and more universities. Therefore we need further research about social inequalities during the study process. The aim is the identification of indicators and the development of the Diversity Monitoring. It means the continuous inspection of the statistics in higher education and the evaluation under the focus of social equality. In addition special investigations about the study progress, the use of student services or the drop-outs would be useful.

A special part could fulfill a general student survey about the 'cultural dimension' of studying and of the students' orientation. The cultural dimension incorporates the following domains: qualification (employability) and education (citizenship); integration (contacts) and participation (responsibility); study habits (research orientation) and teaching styles (sense of science); support (counseling) and services (going abroad); cultural impact as motives, social values and political beliefs, aims and affiliations. Study quality and evaluation of lessons and teachers are central parts, but also the cognitive and cultural development of students, the processes of social selection, the difficulties and stress, furthermore wishes and demands for further development of study situation and higher education are of interest as well.

The Student Survey in Germany is an example for measuring the cultural dimension of universities and of studying. This article about the social background of students and their international activities may contribute to the insight that it is not enough to observe the 'social dimension', but that the 'cultural dimension' is equally important. It is time to start an international initiative on the European level for an International Student Survey in Europe: this might be the ISSUE.

Finally this should be the basis for a 'social main-streaming and monitoring' on the condition that a reduction of social inequality is an important part for the quality of study. In accreditation as well as in evaluation far more weight should be put on this fact. Faculties and universities should have a transparency policy here, giving information about development and success in this field of equity and fairness. We all should really understand that equity and fairness are important factors for the quality of study.

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