

Konstanz, 16.11.2012
Workshop "Beyond Employability: Citizenship and
Responsibility in Higher Education".

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Employability and Higher Education in the Money Society

***"Those, whose thinking is flawed,
can act correctly only by chance."***

Preliminary Remark

Already “beyond” employability? Employability is one of very few central words of the “Bologna Declaration”. The subsequent Bologna Process replaced step by step the classical conception of the European University in order to make students “employable”. Shouldn’t we, first, try to clarify the connection of employability and the reconstruction of Higher Education? Isn’t it better to discuss the very meaningful concepts “Citizenship” and “Responsibility” after a deeper understanding of “Employability”?

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I Components of the central words

I.1 Employability

- To employ: "To use the services of (a person or group) to perform work in return for pay"
- Employer: "A person or group that employs others".
- Employee: "A person who is employed".
- Employment: "The state of being employed".
- Employable: "Suitable to be employed" (Longman 1987, 333).
- To be able: "Having the skill, power, knowledge ... or other qualities that are needed in order to do something."
- Ability: "The fact of having the skill, power, or other qualities that are needed in order to do something." (Longman 1987, 2)

I.2 Higher Education

Higher Education is the term for all kinds of organized education above secondary school, taking place at a college or university.

I.3 Money Society

A “Money Society” is a society in which all people need money because more or less every item and activity has a price. “Money thinking” dominates more and more all other orientations towards actions. E.g. if a case of emergency exists somewhere, everyone primarily asks for money, but not for direct non-financial support.

II Employability in the Declarations of Sorbonne and Bologna

Two significant documents with regard to students, graduates and Higher Education in general appeared at the end of the last century: The **Sorbonne Declaration** of European ministers in charge of research and science in 1998, and the **Bologna Declaration**, adopted by ministers of education of 29 European countries in 1999. Both documents contain the expression “**employability**”.

II.1 Employability and the Sorbonne Declaration (1998)

“We hereby commit ourselves to encouraging a common frame of reference, aimed at improving **external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability.**” (Sorbonne Declaration 1998: 1)

II.2 Employability and the Bologna Declaration (1999)

“We must in particular look at the objective of increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of Higher Education ... in order to promote European citizens’ **employability** and the **international competitiveness** of the European higher education system ...” (Bologna Declaration 1999: 1)

III European University, Spirit of the Age and Labor Market

The University is the core of the system of Higher Education in all countries. Usually we look at the University of Bologna as the first instance of the formal foundation of universities in Europe (1088). The foundation of the University of Berlin (1810), inspired by Wilhelm von Humboldt, brought together what had been developed during the centuries.

III.1 European University: Magna Charta Universitatum and Glion Declaration

The essential purposes of the University in the frame of the division of labor in society are described in many documents. Two of them should be quoted.

“Magna Charta Universitatum” (Magna Charta)

“1. The University is an autonomous institution ... it ... must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority ... and economic power.

2. Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable ...

3. Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life ... Rejecting intolerance and always open to dialogue, a university is an ideal meeting-ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation and students entitled, able and willing to enrich their mind with that knowledge.

4. A university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition; its constant care is to attain universal knowledge ... Each university must ... ensure that its students’ freedoms are safeguarded, and that they enjoy conditions in which they can acquire the culture and training which it is their purpose to possess.” (Magna Charta 1988: 1f.)

“The University at the turn of the Millennium” (Glion Declaration)

“In every aspect of its discovery, testing, dissemination and application, the universities of the world play a crucial role ... They are the chief agents of discovery, the major providers of basic research that underlies new technology and improved health care, they are the engines of economic growth, the custodians and transmitters of cultural heritage, the mentors of each new generation of entrants into every profession, the accreditors of competency (sic) and skills, the agents of personal understanding and societal transformation ...” (Glion Declaration 1999: 1)

III.2 Spirit of the Age and Higher Education

“Spirit of the Age” is more than what we like to call “public opinion”. The German expression is “Zeitgeist”. It is a kind of paradigm, a basic perspective without a special reconsideration.

The current not only European Spirit of the Age is focused on money and business, even with regard to Higher Education.

III.3 The Labor Market

“Labor Market” is not the appropriate relation if employability is in question: The crucial point is the state of the employment system. In case of high unemployment rates the labor market is a market of jobs, in case of low unemployment rates it is a market of work forces. Currently, the employment system does not offer sufficient jobs.

“The youth unemployment rate in the EU-27 was more than double the overall unemployment rate in 2011.”
(http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment_trends, Oct. 27, 2012).

But much more important than the employment system and employability are the development of the system of work and the acquired competences of graduates. The decisive point of academic work, be it dependent or independent, is the capability to meet the professional requirements.

IV Conclusions

IV.1 Dependencies

IV.2 Deficiencies

IV.3 Increasing „Un-employability“ of the employment system

IV.4 Final conclusion

IV.1 Dependencies

The employability of graduates does not depend simply on the Bologna designed courses of study (and most certainly not on the universities), but at least on the following conditions and developments:

- The social organization of work in general (independent, 'new' independent, dependent; paid, unpaid; innovative, reproductive, preventative employment etc., cf. Kellermann 1985: 280ff.).
- The ideology or value system applicable to the autonomy of citizens with respect to their freedom of choice of profession.
- The number of independent professions.
- The labor market for graduates.
- The interest of businesses and companies in innovation and higher academic education of their staff.

IV.2 Deficiencies

The focus of the Bologna Process is on teaching and instruction, neglecting, firstly, self-organized and self-responsible studying and professional working, and secondly, neglecting scientific research. Students are seen as potential human capital for business. Many studies were reorganized for restricted application instead of for open minded science.

IV.3 Increasing “Un-employability” of the employment system

Taking into account that in some European countries more than fifty percent of Europe’s youth, including Higher Education’s graduates, are jobless, the proclaimed word “employability” is gaining new contents:

It is the European employment system that is not “able” to “employ” the Bologna qualified people.

An explanation of this failure is that it is a basic mistake to see Higher Education only as a means to produce dependent labor forces for the employment markets as the Bologna Declaration and its implementation by the Bologna Process did and obviously still do.

IV.4 Final conclusion

We can conclude: The Bologna Process completely flopped with regard to its central purpose of making students of Higher Education fit for “employability”.