

Broadening of Higher Education, lack of professionals - some trends in Austria

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Content of presentation

- introduction to the topic
- a remark - plus some data
- a few comments on the Austrian education system
- Higher Education in Austria
- ten years of the Universities Act 2002 - some facts and figures
- future perspective
- conclusion

Introduction to the topic .1

„Insbesondere an einer Universität wie der unsern in Wien mit ihren sechs- oder siebentausend Studenten, die durch Überfüllung den so fruchtbaren persönlichen Kontakt zwischen Lehrern und Schülern von vornherein hemmte und überdies durch allzu große Treue zu ihrer Tradition gegen die Zeit zurückgeblieben war, sah ich nicht einen einzigen Mann, der mich für seine Wissenschaft hätte faszinieren können.“ (Stefan Zweig 1942; Zweig 2010, p. 118)

“And in particular, in a university such as ours in Vienna, which was so overcrowded with its six or seven thousand students that fruitful personal contact between teacher and scholar was hindered from the very outset, and which had remained behind the times because of its all too great adherence to tradition, I did not see a single teacher who could make his branch of learning irresistible to me.” (Zweig 1964, p. 96)

Introduction to the topic .2

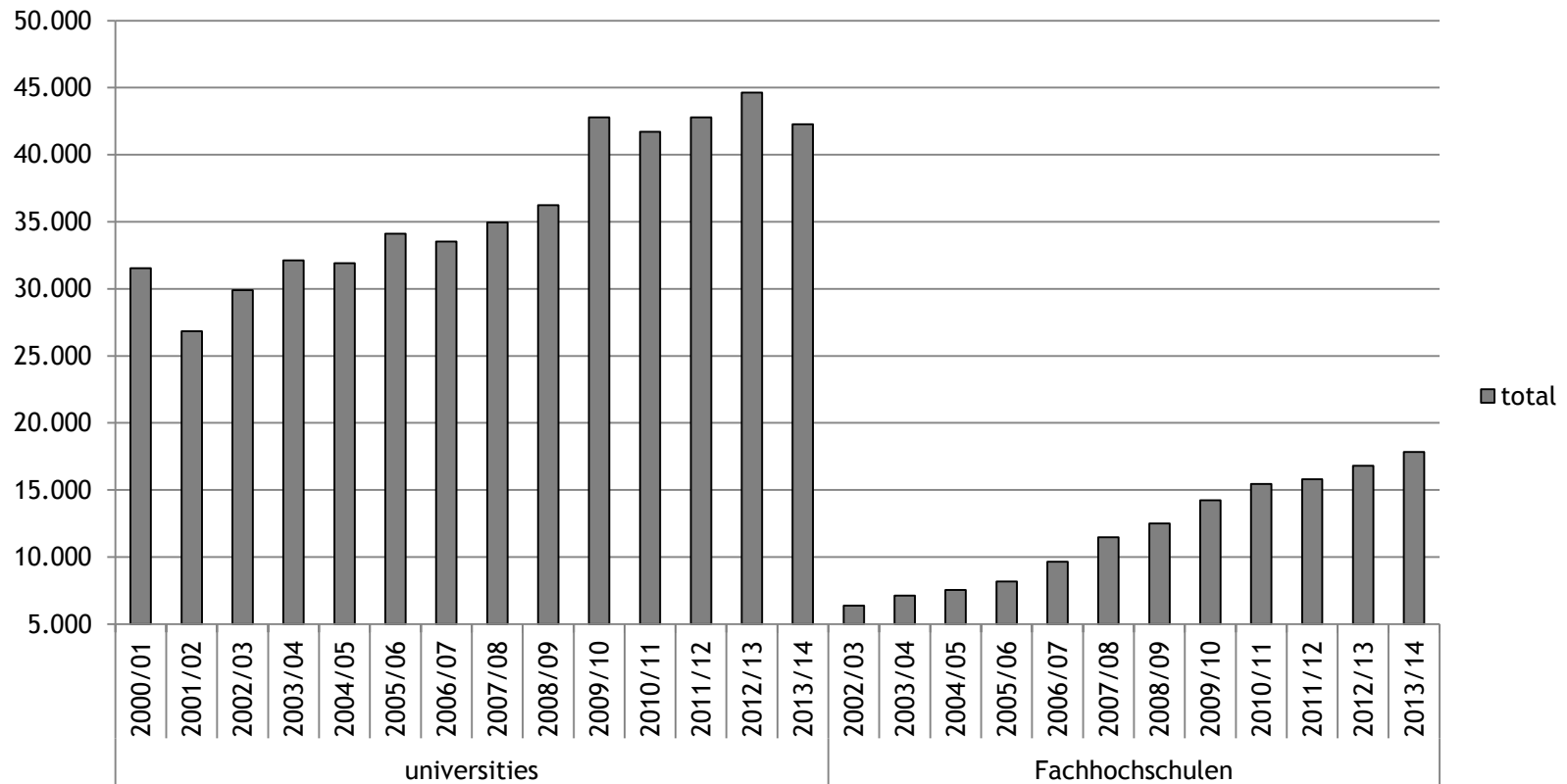
- “Increasingly precarious working conditions for academics” (APA/Austrian Press Agency 22.03.2010)
- “Rising unemployment among academics despite positive trend” (derstandard.at 27.07.2010)
- “Dark thoughts: why mental illness is on the rise in academia” (theguardian Higher Education Network, 6 February 2014)
- “At the heart of the Higher Education Debate: Academic assessment gone mad” (Times Higher Education, 6 March 2014)
- “Researchers criticise the Bachelor degree: Critical reasoning is neglected at universities” (Spiegel online, 11.03.2014)
- “Austria needs science and science needs funding” (FWF/Austrian Science Fund, 17.03.2014)
- “The highly qualified seek their fortunes abroad - demand for an ‘opportunity to return’” (ORF.at, 18.03.2014)

Preliminary remark

- “expansion”: the broadening of accessibility of Higher Education for educationally disadvantaged groups within the population
- participation in education increases - respectively, educational attendance is extended
- “educational winners” and “educational losers” - with regard to the significance of the level of education gained (the “title”) for professional opportunities (i.e., the “position”; Pierre Bourdieu)
- Do the provision of resources, the budgeting and the governance of the Higher Education system correspond to this “natural expansion” - or produce an inhibitory or obstructive effect?

Development of public HE institutions in Austria .1

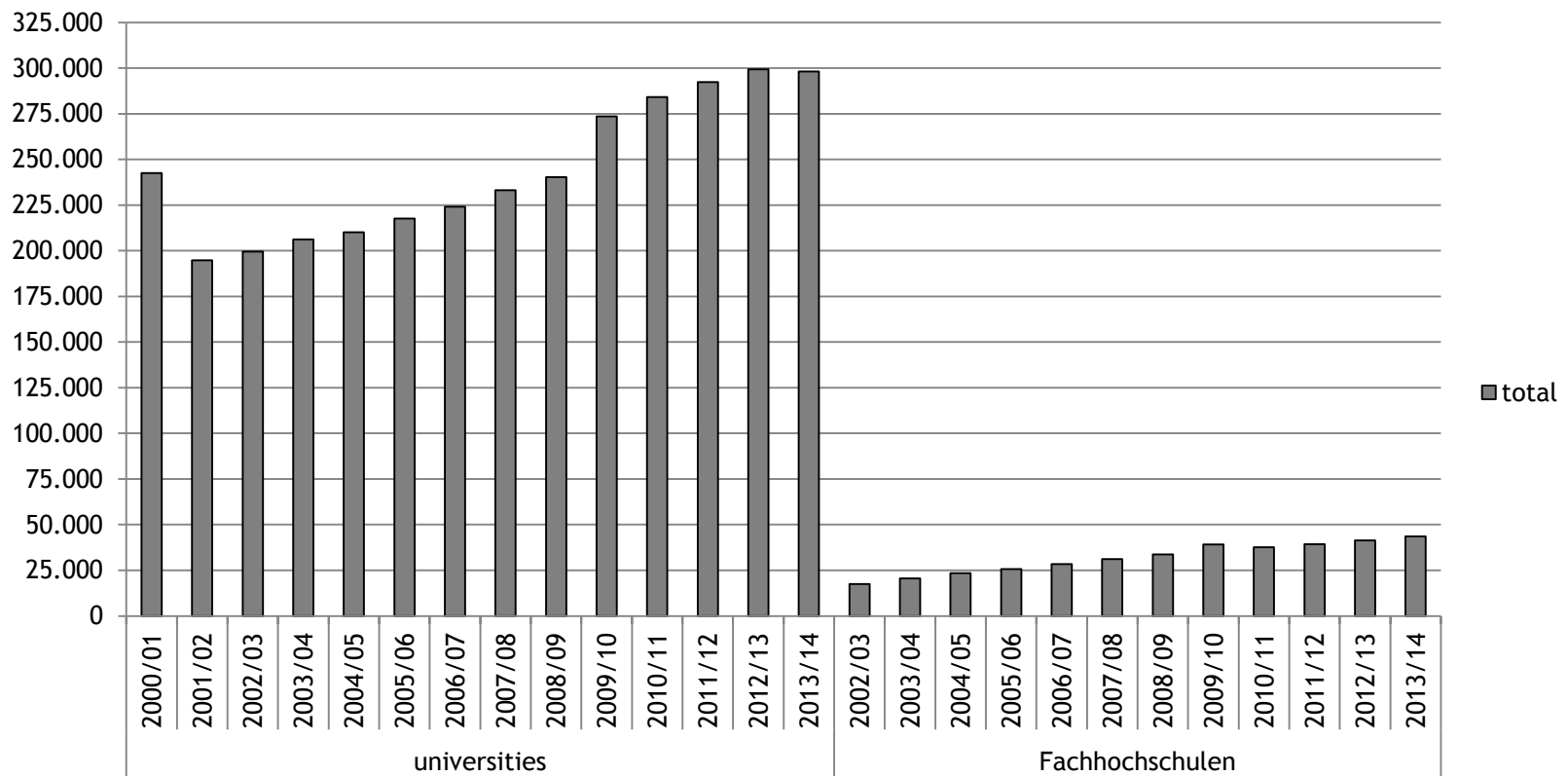
Dia. 1: Access to Higher Education



Source: bmwf, Abt. I/9; unidata (23.03.2014)

Development of public HE institutions in Austria .2

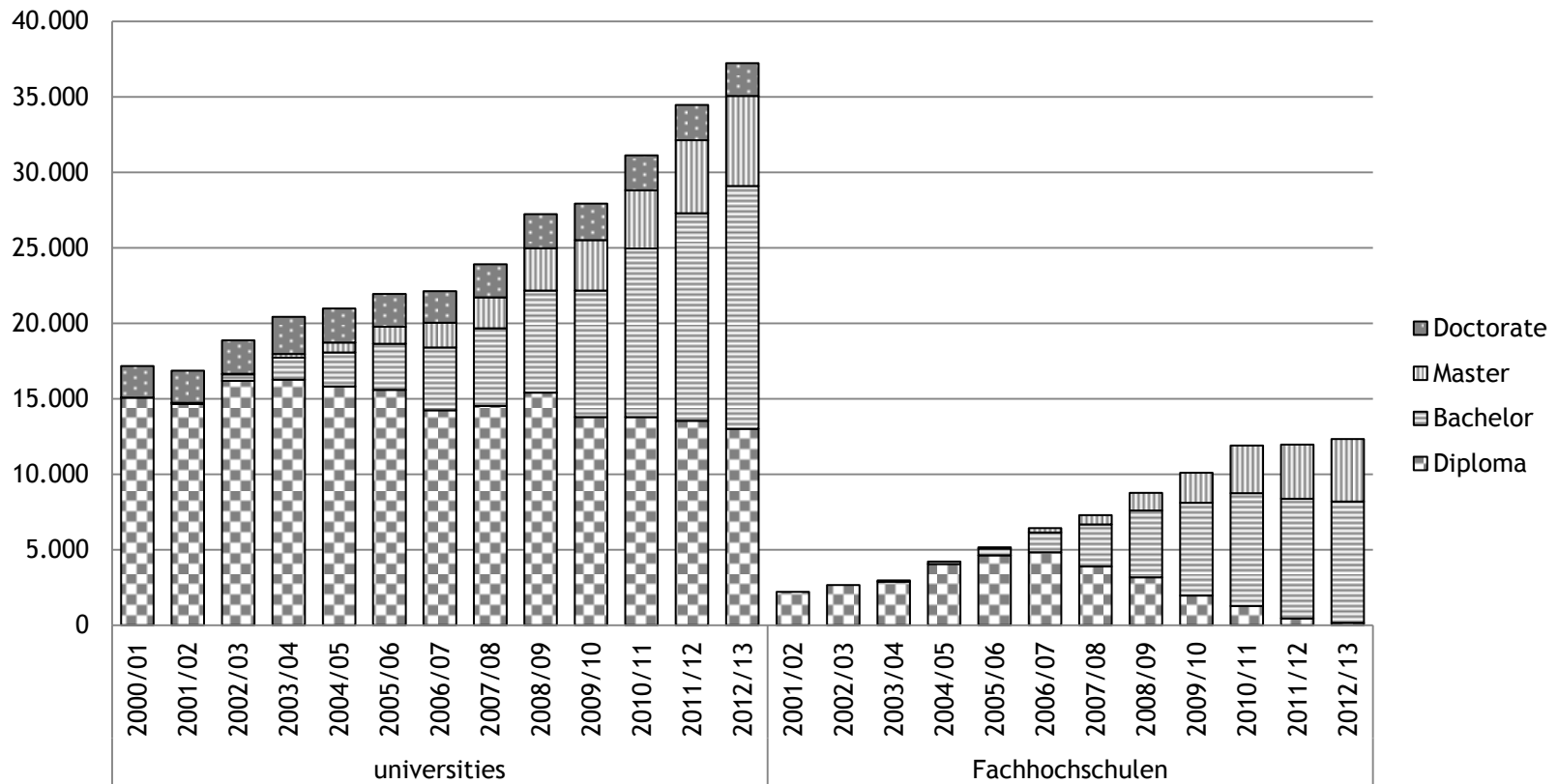
Dia. 2: Students enrolled



Source: bmwf, Abt. I/9; unidata (23.03.2014)

Development of public HE institutions in Austria .3a

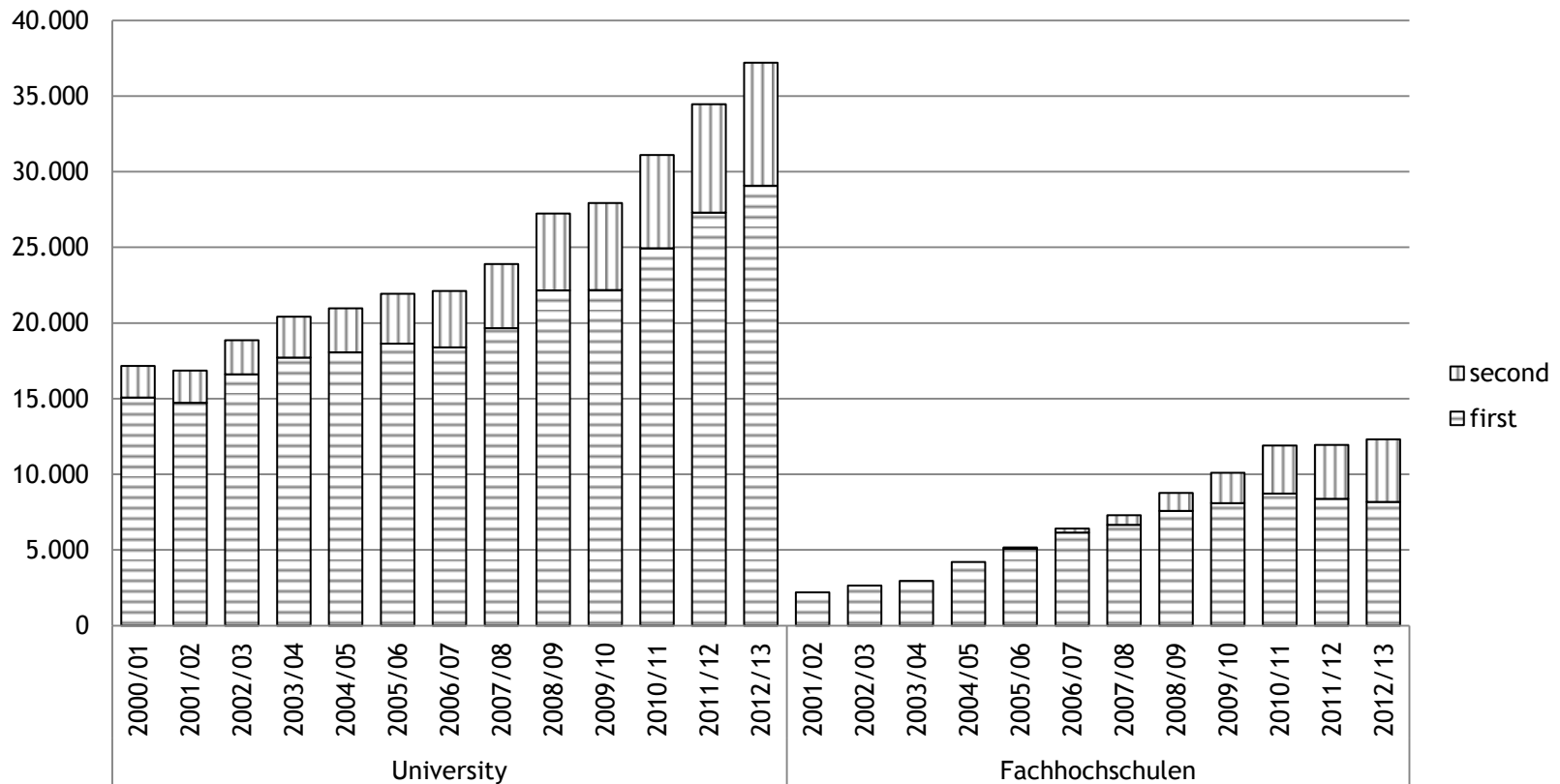
Dia. 3A: Types of degrees



Source: bmwf, Abt. I/9; unidata (23.03.2014)

Development of public HE institutions in Austria .3b

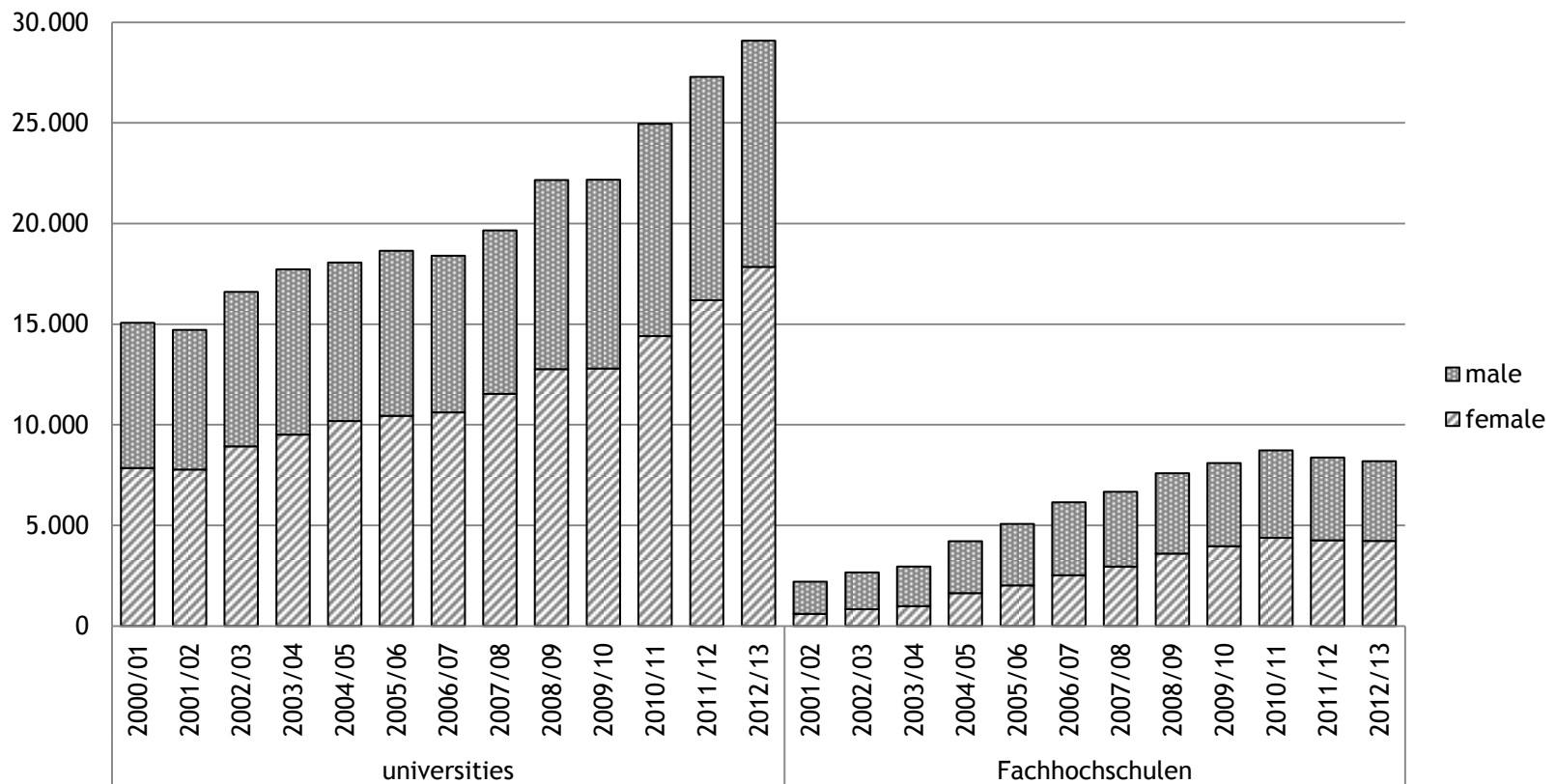
Dia. 3b: First and second degree



Source: bmwf, Abt. I/9; unidata (23.03.2014)

Development of public HE institutions in Austria .3c

Dia. 3c: First degree / gender



Source: bmwf, Abt. I/9; unidata (23.03.2014)

The Austrian education system .1

- ... features a number of special characteristics
 - relatively early differentiation of pupils along two separate educational paths: *Hauptschule / Gymnasium* // „*Neue Mittelschule*“
 - specific training within the framework of “dual vocational education”
 - relatively heavy weight of the so-called middle vocational training paths („*Höhere Technische Lehranstalt/HTL*“)
 - “open access to Higher Education” only requiring the *Matura* (or alternative, “non-traditional” routes)
 - high level of political centralisation, bureaucratisation and regulation of the education system
 - relatively high level of expenditure for the education system, due especially to high personnel costs

The Austrian education system .2

- principal policy discussions and reforms in the sphere of education and Higher Education
 - during the 1950s / from 1990 onwards
 - The reformation of the education system represented an ongoing issue for all governments and state administrations after 1945.
- What is the result of the education and Higher Education policy efforts? Have they resulted in an equalisation of opportunities, or rather in a reproduction of the status quo?
 - development of the number of secondary school graduates
 - development of Higher Education quite spectacular

The Austrian education system .3

- one third of an age cohort will attend university
- the quota of university-educated persons among the employed in Austria would align with the significantly higher level of other western countries (8 % in Austria during the Nineties; 20-25 % in DE, FR, GB)
- “At the centre of Europe 2020 - the EU’s main strategy for growth in the current decade - lie two European targets for education: The EU aims to increase tertiary education rates to at least 40 % and reduce early school leaving (ESL) rates below 10 % - despite the fact that education remains a national, rather than a European, competence.”
(Eurydice, 28/02/2014; http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/focus-on/Europe_2020.php [24.04.2014])

The Austrian education system .4

- Educational research results reveal that the second half of the 20th century introduced a “massive expansion of education” in Austria; a “genuine ‘educational revolution’” (Haller 2008, p. 207).
- The “educational expansion” was the result of educational policy decisions, which resulted, specifically, in a far-reaching development of the secondary school system.
 - Those to benefit especially were children from rural regions, girls/women, as well as children from the middle and upper social strata.
 - While the inequality of regional educational opportunities has diminished, the inequality related to the specific social stratum provenance remains the most powerful determinant of educational opportunities; followed by citizenship.

The Austrian education system .5

- The educational expansion was unable to significantly reduce the inequality of educational opportunities related to social provenance.
- Three key aspects of social inequality should be recorded:
 - social provenance,
 - regional context,
 - citizenship (see Haller 2008, pp. 207-221).

Higher Education in Austria .1

- public and private universities, *Fachhochschulen*, University Colleges of Teacher Education (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*) providing ISCED 5A education as well as other institutions offering ISCED 5B tertiary education programmes
 - The objectives of the universities are scientific or artistic education in preparation for a profession (*Berufsvorbildung*).
 - Universities of Applied Sciences, in contrast, provide a vocationally oriented education on a tertiary level.

Higher Education in Austria .2

- Access to university studies is generally open. Only in some fields of study the number of study places is limited and admission tests are required.
- Until 2000 the Austrian Higher Education system was characterized by a two-tier structure. In 1999 the first bachelor and master programmes were introduced at public universities and at Universities of Applied Sciences; in 2002 through the University Act 2002 this structure became obligatory.

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .1

- The past decade can be characterised by the following headline: “Ten years of the Universities Act: more graduates, stronger dependency on third-party funding” (APA, 10.02.2014).
- The *Universitätsgesetz/UG 2002* was implemented in 2004. In the ten years that have since passed, much has changed at the Austrian universities. The changes include
 - a significant rise in the number of academic degrees,
 - an increase in the significance of non-public funding for research conducted at universities

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .2

- Both the number of students and the number of graduates have risen rapidly.
- The importance of the new degree programmes has grown rapidly over a short period of time.
- The transition to the new degree programme architecture was a gradual one, the “old” (Diploma) degree programmes were not transferred to the new (bachelor or master) degrees simultaneously, and thus they enter the data at different points in time.

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .3a

- 52 per cent of school leavers commence a degree programme at a university within three semesters of gaining the university entrance qualification.
- As from the start of the academic year 2011/12, the universities introduced a newly structured “introductory study and orientation phase”. The idea behind this is that it should serve not primarily the purpose of selection, but should ensure a conscious degree choice.
- University entries have increased significantly in recent years: In 2010/11 57,143 first-time students were admitted to Austrian universities.
- For a large proportion of students, gainful employment during the semester or during the holidays is a fixed part of their day-to-day experience of studying.

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .3b

- University Forecast 2011: In the long term, the number of first-time students each year in the entire Higher Education sphere is expected to stabilise at a high level, with around 64,000 to 66,000 persons.
- For the purpose of international comparisons, the “adjusted share of university graduates” is commonly used - i.e., the rate of completed degrees in the tertiary sector, which includes degrees at educational establishments closely related to universities:
 - a rate of 19 per cent for completed tertiary education among the 25- to 64-year old population;
 - Austria’s “adjusted share of university graduates” ranks it 17th among the (28) EU countries and 28th among the (34) OECD countries.

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .4a

- winter semester of 2010/11 315,000 domestic and foreign students at Austrian HE institutions
- 84 per cent of all students accounted for by universities, 12 per cent by Universities of Applied Sciences, and 4 per cent by university colleges of teacher education
- 53 per cent of domestic students at scientific universities were women, at university colleges of teacher education the share was 77 per cent, while at the Universities of Applied Sciences it had already reached 46 per cent (2010/11).
- 79 per cent of students Austrian citizenship; 11 per cent German national
- first-time students (first admittance) 22 years old on average
- average age (2010/11) of domestic students 26.7 (scientific universities), 26.4 (UCTE) or 25.4 years old (UAS)

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .4b

- Among the students who commenced their studies at universities (Diploma degrees) in the winter semester of 2003/04 44 per cent had completed a degree eight years after starting.
- Motives for studying:
 - primary motive “interest in the subject”
 - further relevant motives: “improving labour market opportunities”, “better income opportunities”
 - 30 per cent of new students seek a “new direction for their professional career” or want to engage in “further development”.
 - A further third regard the degree as a “step up”; around 10 per cent mainly hopes to “maintain the status quo”.
- 88 per cent of graduates from bachelor’s degrees at universities commence a master’s degree; 29 per cent of the Diploma, 38 per cent of the master’s degree graduates pursues a doctoral degree (averages from the graduate cohorts from 2002/03 to 2004/05).

Ten years of the *UG 2002*

- some facts and figures .5

- number of first and second degrees completed rose to 37,215 in 2012/13 (2011/12: 34,460; 2002/03 18,865)
- number of “new” graduates with completed university degrees passed the 60 per cent mark for the first time in 2012/13.
 - Number of completed degrees overall has increased by 8 per cent.
 - 17,853 women completed their first degree (61 %), 11,233 men;
 - completed Master’s degrees: 3,039 women (51 %), 2,925 men.
- Men predominated for the highest level degrees completed: 1,219 graduated from a doctoral degree programme, 946 women (44 %).
- Since 2011/12 there have been more graduates from Bachelor degrees than from Diploma degrees; in 2012/13 the relation was 16,074 to 13,012.

Future perspective .1

„Bislang wurde die Institution ,Universität‘ als ein Ort zur wissenschaftlichen ,Berufsvorbildung‘ verstanden. Inzwischen wurde daraus allerdings ein reine ,Berufsausbildungsstätte‘ gemacht.

[...]

Man kann in diesem Zusammenhang durchaus von einer ,Ökonomisierung des Bildungswesens‘ sprechen, welche zu Recht kritisiert wird!“ (Konrad Paul Liessmann; Kolosz (ed.) 2011, pp. 8/9)

“The institution of ‘the university’ has hitherto been regarded as a site of scientific ‘pre-professional education’. Now, however, it has been turned into purely a ‘vocational training centre’.
[...]

In this context, it is indeed permissible to speak of an ‘economisation of the education system’, which fully deserves the criticism it attracts!” (Konrad Paul Liessmann 2011; thanks for translation to Karen Meehan)

Future perspective .2

- Ranking ahead of the Universities of Applied Sciences, the universities largely remain the most important institutions of Higher Education. The economisation of the education system overall did not spare the Higher Education institutions in general, or the universities in particular.
- In the years since 1999 and 2002, the expansion of Higher Education has barely been an issue in Austria, either for the public or for science.
 - The talk has settled much more around the previously mentioned “economisation of knowledge” in recent years, than around the expansion of education.
 - “Knowledge is power” - there is probably a grain of truth here, as in every ideological construct: in a potential link between knowledge and power. Meanwhile, *ability* alone does not make actors powerful; it is with *opportunity* that action becomes possible.

Future perspective .3

- It is possible to speak of a “paradigm shift”, when issues of knowledge are primarily negotiated from the perspective of location or competitive advantage (i.e., “economically”).
 - But the suspicion may be justified that this is not actually completely new (cf. “promotion of human capital”, “exploitation of talent reserves” ...). Universities, at least this is how they were mostly seen in the 1980s and 1990s, should be central places for scientific work, places for the creation, preservation and transmission of knowledge. As a vehicle of cognitive progress, criticism, is a constituent component.
 - But what if a “cultural change” occurs, as was claimed within the context of the 2002 Universities Act, which causes the foundations of the entire system to be questioned?

Conclusion

- The contribution attempted to comprehend, to a certain extent, the current conditions for the production and proliferation of knowledge through the means of the “expansion of Higher Education” in Austria.
 - What - we have to ask - can “economisation” mean in this context; would it not be more appropriate to speak of “*Verbetriebswirtschaftlichung*” (see Kellermann et al. 2009)?
 - How do such trends appear in view of the much lamented dismantling of the democracy of university structures as well as the financial draining of the research landscape; are they not to be found amongst the reasons, or even the actual cause?
 - Which possible futures (consequences, risks and opportunities ...) can be glimpsed in the university context? Is all this an expression of the functional transformation of universities (see Kehm et al. 2012)?
- More questions than answers!

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