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What is the meaning of the “Expansion of Higher Education: More Students – More Problems?”

Contribution to the international workshop “Expansion of Higher Education: New Students – More Problems?” University of Konstanz, March, 27th-29th, 2014

Background story: When I received the invitation to this workshop, I concentrated my awareness on the expression “Expansion of Higher Education”. ‘Expansion’ addresses in my understanding categories of quantity. In the following days I took some notes as they came to my mind. Then I had to deal with quite different items like publications on the “Sociology of Money”. Four weeks prior to the conference, I started with the production of power point slides. I did not look at the complete title of the workshop again. Thus, I always thought of “more students, more problems”, not of “new” students. From this wrong understanding, I added some more notes to the former ones. The complete list is as follows:

First note: The title of our workshop contains two components, a statement and a question. The statement is: Expansion of Higher Education. The question is: more students, more problems?

At a first glance, this seems to be very easy to answer: Yes, there was and is an expansion of higher education, resulting in more students and more problems. But at a second and a third look, the situation is a bit more complicated.

Second note: Given the case, we accept at first the prevailing misleading usage of the words “expansion” and “education”, we have to agree: Yes, expansion of Higher Education results in more students. More students mean e.g. in Austria: The total number of students in all institutions of higher education (scientific universities, Art Academies, Universities of Applied Sciences) amounted to 49.063 in 1971. The last available number is that of 2012 with 344.462 students. The total “expansion of students” between the years 1971 and 2012 represents an increase of more than 600 per cent.

Third note: Yes, it also means more problems. That isn’t really surprising. More students simultaneously implies more problems. The reason is very simple: Changes with regard to quantities change the respective situations in general and everywhere. According to the old German philosopher, Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, quantity turns at a certain point into another quality – and vice versa: to a better or to a worse one. More students cause not only an increase in the number of students, but also of graduates, employed or unemployed and satisfied or disappointed young people, more institutions, their differentiation, their location, their staff etc. And all of this also affects financing questions. But the challenge of problems is their solution in order to enhance the conditions of life for all.

Fourth note: Perhaps, it is appropriate every time to state both – some aspects may be becoming better, while others worsen.

On the one hand, a huge enlargement of something is usually followed unavoidably by a significant change regarding contents and depth. On the other hand, the “expansion of higher education” required from all concerned persons and affected organizations a re-orientation of common views and traditional behavior. Let us try to analyze the three levels of the view and respective attitudes of students, institutions, and the society as a whole.

Fifth note from the viewpoint of the students: The “expansion of the students” means more precisely an enlargement of the number of freshmen, of students in general, and consequently of graduates with different academic certificates. Actually, it is impossible to expand a student, but it is possible to enlarge the number of students. More important is the change of the social origin of students. Whereas formerly most students had an academic family background, nowadays the proportion of students with no academic background has become higher. That has unavoidably affected the kind and mode of teaching and learning, but also of the methods of exams. E.g., instead of a limited number of oral discussions between the examiner and the candidate, currently mass examinations take place as multiple choice questionnaires with computer aided evaluation of the performance. Logically, as the number of graduates increases, the number of students with an academic background must also increase, but the methods of mass teaching and testing remain.

Sixth note from the viewpoint of institutions: Since it is impossible to expand the development of a personality, it is possible to expand the system of schools. We know that not only the number of scientific universities has increased but also that formerly “lower” educational institutions have seemingly been upgraded by being given the name “university”. Consequently, a segmentation of the “university” as community as well as unity of sciences into smaller and narrower institutions of higher education by usurpation of the term has taken place.

Seventh note: I now would like to draw your attention to quite a different aspect. I intend to question each of the words of our title except one: “more”. More is self-explaining. But what does expansion really mean? What higher? Education? Higher Education? Students? Problems? In general, I assert that each of these words is used today differently than in its original meaning, as an effect of the contemporary dominating superficial view. I am convinced that not merely a few problems of Higher Education have emerged because of inappropriate thinking. And thoughts are the basic orientation of our acting.

At this state of my work in progress, I stopped taking notes. Regarding the view of the society as a whole, I intended to explain and to discuss some of the following concepts later on:

Motivation and interests of the society (politically, economically, culturally, socially)

Push and pull

Ability and opportunity

Consequences and effects

Problems and difficulties.

I saw as main problems: Quantity dominates quality; exchange values vs. use values; public financing vs. financial support by private companies; subordination of Higher Education under business and money perspectives; individual assistance vs. mass education; heteronomous teaching instead of autonomous studying; students' interest in gaining status instead of knowledge; neglecting the structural principles of counterbalances of the classical European university on all levels of the contemporary university.

As time went by, I stopped making notes and started to produce the power point slides as follows.

Slide 1: Expansion of Higher Education: More Students – More Problems?
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“... causing our understanding of knowledge (seems) to be limited, compartmented, and lacking a multidimensional perspective.”
(Scope of the Series “Knowledge Studies in Higher Education”)

Paul Kellermann

What Does It Mean “Expansion of Higher Education: More Students – More Problems?”

Increases, Consequences, and Problems

Slide 2: **Increases**

General Overview: Austria

Students of all institutions of Higher Education

1971 – 2012 (Tab. 1.1, 1999/Tab. 2.1, 2013)

1971: 49.063;

1981: 112.930 (+ 113%);

1991: 181.416 (+ 61%);

2001: 197.143 (+ 8,7%);

2011: 331.588 (+68%);

2012: 344.462 (+ 4%).

Increase 1971 – 2012: 602%

Slide 3: **Increases**

Higher Education

2001- 2012 (Tab. 8.1, 2013)

New Entrants 2001: 31.547; 2012: 68.477.

Increase: 117 %

Students 2001: 197.143; 2012: 338.584.

Increase: 72 %

Graduates 2001: 17.051; 2012: 39.094.

Increase: 129 %

Percentage of occupational population 2001:
9,0; 2012: 17,4.

Increase: 93 %

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Slide 4: **Increases**

Students at institutions of Higher Education (Tab. 2.1, 2013)

	2007/08	2012/13	increase
Universities	217.587	275.523	27 %
Private universities	3.886	6.778	74 %
Fachhochschulen	31.064	41.366	33 %
U.C. Teacher education	6.779	14.917	120 %

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More women

1971 (Tab. 1.1, 1999)

2012/13 (Tab. 1.1/2.1/4.1a, 2013)

New entrants 8.998; **women 34,8%** New entrants 70.676; **women 56,1%**

Students 49.063; **women 27,7%** Students 344.462; **women 54,0%**

Graduates 4.483; **women 26,1%** Graduates 50.351; **women 56,1%**

More graduates

Public universities and Fachhochschulen

(Schools for professional Education/"Universities of Applied Sciences") (Tab. 4.1b, 2013)

Study year **2005/06**: 27.095

Study year **2011/12**: 46.415

An increase of 71% in six years.

Slide 7: Consequences

Higher Proportions (Tab. 1.1, 1999; Tab.8.1, 2013)

New entrants as a proportion of **age cohort**

1971: 9,0%; 2012: 51,4%

Students as a proportion of **age cohort**

1971: 6,1%; 2012: 40,4%

Labor force with university degree as a proportion of total labor force

1971: 3.1%; 2012: 17,4%

Slide 8: Consequences

More unemployed

Recorded unemployed persons – highest completed Institution (AMS 2014)

	2007	2013	increase
Elementary School	104.228	132.920	28%
Academic Education	8.952	15.210	63%
University	7.151	11.536	61%
Fachhochschule	6.97	1.722	147%

Slide 9: Consequences

Unemployed graduates

Recorded unemployed graduates – study fields

	2007	2013	Increase
Ethnology	48	98	96%
Communication, Media	242	436	80%
Psychology	313	418	80%
Biology	246	327	33%
Sociology	103	171	66%
Law	721	919	27%
Economics	94	236	151%
Mechanical Engineering	91	156	71%
Architecture	190	336	77%
Informatics	82	139	70%
Medical Sciences	419	389	-(1) 7%

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Slide 10: Consequences

Differentiation of Institutions

Public universities

Fachhochschulen (Schools for professional Education/"Universities of Applied Sciences")

University colleges of teacher education

Universities of Arts

Private universities

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Slide 11: **Problems**

The **structure of counterbalances** of the classical idea of the European University as Universitas magistrorum et scholarium (Community of professors and students) changed:

Imbalances and divisions

Professors and students
Research and teaching
Rector and chancellor
Lecture and seminar
General and professional education
Teaching and learning
Rigorous examinations and wild celebration
Twice four month of study work and long holidays in between

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Slide 12: **Problems**

Some questions

What does it actually mean „**Expansion of Higher Education – more students, more problems?**“

„Expansion of Higher Education“ – Can the **education** of a person contrarily to a system **be expanded**?

What is „**higher**“ or „**lower**“ education? a longer resp. a shorter one?

Education as development of a personality? as a system of schooling?

What does „**student**“ really mean today? A person that tries autonomously to **gain knowledge** by asking question? a **living storage** learning foreign information by heart? only an **object** of educational activities of others?

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Slide 13: **Problems**

Some more questions

Is „Expansion of Higher Education“ in fact nothing else than an **inflation** of the number of students? „Inflation“ in the general understanding of a decreasing value?

Was the past „Expansion“ of Higher Education not more than a **standardization** of education on a specific level as a regular pattern according to the shifts from the Agrarian over the Industrial to the Service and finally to the Money Society?

Is it not a **misunderstanding** to talk about a „democratization“ when nontraditional new students „expand“ the Higher Education system? Is it actually an adaptation to the changes of the social division of labor in general?

Is it not a **societal pressure on women** to involve themselves in the systems of higher qualification and paid work in order to enlarge the workforce in the interests of the companies?

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Slide 14: **Problems**

Results: serious problems

General problem: Any increase or decrease in numbers changes the quality of the respective item.

We are using words without a precise meaning. We have **indifferent contents** in mind. In our talking we are looking alike a **blind person** who needs a stick in order to find his way in his darkness.

“If you think wrong, you can act right only accidentally.”

There is no surprise that we have **serious problems** with the “Expansion of Higher Education” – as individuals as well as society.

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“Modern universities have been experiencing remarkable growth in terms of access. Some countries are approaching the point of almost 100 % tertiary enrollment. In addition, academic research has grown exponentially in the knowledge society. However, notwithstanding these growths, contemporary universities are confronted with critical challenges. The major challenges are how to harmonize different missions, e.g. teaching, research, and service. These missions seem well coordinated in their nature; however, many empirical studies found that these missions conflict each other. Universities have begun to apply the division of labor between teaching-efficient and research-efficient professors, and some universities even hire professors for community service. The decoupling between teaching, research, and service has become wider recently. The modern university started as an innovative model – research-driven teaching and service model in the nineteenth century – but the contemporary university is having an identity crisis.” (Jung Cheol Shin, Ulrich Teichler: Preface; in: The same, ed., *The Future of the Post-Massified University at the Crossroads – Restructuring Systems and Functions*. Springer Switzerland 2014, p.V)

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