

AG Hochschulforschung + FREREF Réseau Uni 21
Expectations and outcome of study
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The European University

Comparisons of Different Perspectives

A Report on a Conference, Klagenfurt 24.9.-26.9.2015

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Preface

The project is work in progress: planning, organizing, and performing the conference were the first steps. It is the intention to document the proceedings, first, in a video presentation, and finally as a regular book.

The title “The European University” should demonstrate the common characteristics and the historical background of the comprehensive universities in Europe. E.g. Talcott Parsons and George M. Platt called their book “The American University” (1973) in a similar understanding.

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Humboldt Universität, Berlin, founded 1810



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Main intentions of the Conference

- To recall and to demonstrate: there is an alternative to the present Bologna policy in Europe
- To incorporate students according to the name of the university as „*universitas magistrorum and scholarium*“
- To use comparisons as the best method of research in order to identify the characteristics of relations, processes, and structures

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Comparisons

- Views of persons who participated in a similar conference: “University and Higher Education Politics” 30 years ago
- The founding ideas of the universities of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford
- The implementation of the Bologna Declaration in different countries
- Principles of the Humboldt Conception versus those of the Bologna Process
- Similarities and differences of universities in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and the USA
- Personal ideal concepts of specific aspects versus the present situation within the world of the university

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1985: Conference “University and Higher Education Politics” at the University of Klagenfurt

Major innovations with regard to Higher Education after the conference:

- 1988: University of Bologna: 900-year anniversary of the university – celebration with 388 rectors and presidents of the universities of the world. “*Magna Charta Universitatum*”: General confirmation of the principles of the Humboldt-type university.

- 1998: Sorbonne Declaration “We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. To a large extent, these have been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development.”

- 1999: Bologna Declaration “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 [...]”

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Views of persons who participated in a similar conference: “University and Higher Education Politics” 30 years ago

- Hans-Joachim Bodenhöfer: Aims and Purposes of Higher Education
- Sigurd Höllinger: Politics of Higher Education in Austria
- Heinrich Neisser: Consensus and Dissensus with Regard to Politics of Higher Education
- Ulrich Teichler: Higher Education Policy – an International Comparison

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E.g. Ulrich Teichler: Higher Education Policy – an International Comparison

Although, specifically, the following Bologna Process dominated the change of the public view on the main function of the university – much more stress on teaching and education than on research and study, employability as the crucial purpose of Higher Education – U. Teichler claimed that the situations of European Higher Education 1985 and 2015 are similar: both were five to ten years after a broad political discussion and new specific laws. The very reasons for the restructuring of the Higher Education System were the “expansion of students” on the one hand, and to establish the connection to the BA/MA-system in order to attract more students from abroad and to enhance students’ mobility. He stressed his interpretation of the Declaration as a “soft law”, open for every policy. Only the different implementations of the Declaration caused the criticized consequences of more education for employment, restricted and overloaded curricula, and too little time for general education.

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The founding ideas of the universities of Bologna, Paris, and Oxford

Johannes Grabmayer: “*Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum* – Wisdom Constructed a Home for Itself. About the Beginnings of the Universities Bologna, Paris, and Oxford”

Johannes Grabmayer described very soundly the development of the European University, starting with early foundations of institutions of Higher Education in Arabia and Egypt as forerunners of the foundations of the universities in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford in the 11th and 12th centuries. He especially highlighted the role of the students and their corporations, building the *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* and its particular “Lebenswelt” as a community (joint world of living).

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The implementation of the Bologna Declaration in different countries

The message of similar statements of several participants: Although more or less all European countries and some further states outside of Europe have restructured their systems of Higher Education according to the model bachelor/master, respectively the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the concrete implementations of the Bologna Declaration inside the ongoing Bologna Process are remarkably different. In fact, the Declaration allows different interpretations, therefore one should be aware of the distinction between the Declaration and the following process.

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Principles of the Humboldt Conception versus those of the Bologna Process

Humboldt's conception about 200 years ago stands for:

- Autonomy of the university
- A strong connection between research and teaching
- General education of the students in order to develop a comprehensive personality
- To gain best qualified civil servants.

The Bologna Process neglects all these aims in favor of "employability" and market competition, regarding education as a commodity.

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Similarities and differences of universities in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and the USA

- The universities in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands implemented the same formal structure "BA/MA", but in very different and very differentiated ways. E.g.: Where Austria knew only one general curriculum for the study of Business Administration in the past, there are now about 20. That had obviously negative effects on the mobility of students.
- The universities of Afghanistan prefer the installation of the Bologna philosophy instead of that of the USA. Amazing anecdote: Students in Kabul ask for the questions of final examinations with a pistol in their hands.
- The University of Pristina/Kosovo consists of 13 dependencies. Again an anecdote: The veterans of the Balkan War demanded academic titles without particular examinations.
- The most significant item between universities in the USA and in continental Europe are very high fees and tuition in the USA. The average debts of graduates are presently so high that the President had to launch a special law with limits for pay backs according to the income. Also important: BA more general education, MA more professional education; quite contrary to the implemented Bologna Process.

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Ideal concepts of specific aspects and the present situation within the world of the university – the topics of **professors**

- Roland Fischer: “Education” (BA general, MA professional education)
- Kurt Kotrschal: “‘Verwaltungsaufblähung’ (bureaucratization) and Schoolification”
- Michael Daxner: “University and Global Conflicts” (Afghanistan, Kosovo)
- Heinrich C. Mayr: “Aims and Organization of the Universities – Requirements and the Reality”

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E.g. Heinrich C. Mayr: Aims and Organization of the Universities – Requirements and the Reality

Every university

- has its particular tasks according to its location and time.
- should aim at its unique profile.
- has the general obligation to educate students with regard to their individual personality, to gain general as well as professional competences.
- has to teach on the basis of research.
- must ensure the community of teachers and learners.
- should act as an innovative corporation.

Unfortunately, the current political frame of references prevents the realization of these aims.

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Ideal concepts of specific aspects and the present situation within the world of the university – the topics of lecturers

- Helmut Guggenberger: “‘Economization’ of the University”
- Matthias Wieser: “Measuring of Science. Between a Legitimate Claim and Inadequate Governance”
- Egbert de Weert: “Structural Convergence as Panacea”
- Sigrid Maurer: “Freedom of Science, Liberal Arts, and Teaching”

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E. g. Sigrid Maurer: Freedom of Science, Liberal Arts, and Teaching

Sigrid Maurer, former president of the Students’ Association (“Österreichische Hochschüler/innen/schaft”), currently speaker of the Green Party in the parliament:

There is not much innovative content of the curricula, but a lot more pressure of different origin: legally, a significant shorter duration of the studies than in the past; a full load of examinations; the need for additional money through jobs in addition to studying; and the expectation to encounter many difficulties in getting an adequate job after graduation.

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Ideal concepts of specific aspects and the present situation within the world of the university – the topics of students

- Thomas Dannhäuser: “Schoolification of the Studies”
- Nele Klostermann: “Teaching by Students”
- Alexander Brenner: “The Participation of Students inside the University”

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E.g. Alexander Brenner: The Participation of Students in the University

Alexander Brenner is a student of Psychology and the speaker of the section “Societal Politics” inside the students’ government. First, he gave a differentiation of levels of participation: to be a regular student, a member of the students’ government or involved in the overall activities of the university. He demanded more participation on all levels of universitarian life: students organize their own lectures by the invitation of student and professional teachers; they created a platform for special and general discussions; and organized an open space for students’ activities. He criticized that students were seen as customers, that there is no full trust of the rectorate toward the student politicians, and that the relation between students with short time of presence at the university and the time of the regular administration of the university were inadequate. He proposed a recognition of students’ involvement in all political activities within the frame of the university by giving additional credits (ECTS).

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