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THE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE
– A CHANGE OF PARADIGM
OF GERMAN UNIVERSITY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

When in January, 2004, the Socialdemocrat/Green Federal Government under Gerhard Schröder for the first time spoke about a programme on creating elite universities, this triggered off an enormous reaction by the media. The fact that the Socialdemocrat Party, of all – in respect of the educational sector traditionally in charge of equality of opportunity – was freeing the elite concept from taboos created greatest astonishment. Reactions quickly resulted in officially renaming the intended initiative. From then on it was called “Excellence Initiative”. This way, one tried to give to understand that there was not at all talking about single universities to be privileged but about a general competition of performance. All universities were said to have basically the same chances; every university losing in the first round might as well count among the winners in the second one, as the public sta-

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tements by the supporters of this initiative from politics, business, and science were, which were to be heard again and again.

However, already a first closer look at the etymological origins of the word “excellency” makes us sceptical. “Excellentia”, the Latin origin of the word, means both outstanding performance or quality and an outstanding, superior position. This double meaning has been preserved over the centuries by French “excellence”. In France, still today the word “excellence” is used for excellent performance and for high dignitaries of diplomatic service and Church. Here, its closeness to the elite concept cannot be overlooked also at the linguistic level. Elite, however, does just not mean that everybody has equal opportunity; much more it means lasting isolation of a small group from the rest, from the masses, an isolation which is not exclusively, indeed not even overwhelmingly due to performance but to a high degree to origin and the inclusion into structures of power and domination coming along with this (Hartmann 2002, 2006).

Will the development in the field of universities in Germany also go towards this direction? Will a small number of universities be lastingly labeled “excellence” or “elite”, including the status connected with this, without the official criterion of performance being exclusively or at least predominantly decisive for this? What will this mean for the social accessibility and performance of the German university system? These questions shall be pursued in the following.

ELITE AND MASS UNIVERSITIES

If in the context of universities there is speaking about excellency, at first only one thing is clear. Conceptually, excellency means a good bye to the idea, which has traditionally been characteristic for the German university system, that basically all universities are equal. If some are made stand out, this will only be possible by disparaging the others. Some are excellent, the others are not. Now not high quality everywhere is the substantial goal of university policy but “world class” for single institutions, the so called “towers” of science. Even before the first results of the excellency competition were made known, the magazine ZEIT on November 17th, 2005, in an article described its main effect by the true sentence: “The competition will smash the university system for good, as far as it is based on equality.”

At this time, however, such statements were exceptions. Some months later things had indeed changed. After the the Excellence Initiative had been politically enforced and the results of the first round showed a massive concentration of successful application at relatively few universities, public statements became increasingly clearer. E. g. the former President of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft = German Research Association), Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, in his good bye address at the yearly DFG meeting on May 31st, 2006, clearly identified the effect which from his point of view is the decisive one, by saying that this initiative could not at all be compared to previous support programmes because it would “change” the entire German “landscape of universities and research in a way as yet unimagined”. The “push” for Germany the former Federal President, Herzog, had demanded in 1997 had “now happened as an earthquake” for universities and science. Those qualitative differences as already existing between universities would even grow due to the Excellence Initiative. Apart from “pure research universities being orientated at the demands of modern scientific research even for their teaching there will be those only basically trying this and for single subjects, those not at all striving for meeting this demand, and those looking for their strong point rather by orientating towards practical work”, as is Winnacker’s conclusion (Winnacker 2006: V, IXf).

In an interview with the Heidelberg students magazine “Ruprecht” in June, 2006, the former vice chancellor of the University of Heidelberg, Jochen Tröger, explained that same fact by way of an example: “A university such as Munich does top research, a university such as Oldenburg does subject-related university education for people who are also needed”, as is his short conclusion. His choice of words makes obvious what the expectations among the expected winners of this competition are like. There are excellent scientists and there are “people who are also needed”, in other words an elite and the rank and file. Two years ago, when giving reason to tough inner-university selection processes, his predecessor expressed this in the same way when saying that “elite” and “mass” did not fit together.

Before the results of the competition were announced, in the already mentioned ZEIT article one could unmistakably read about the basic principle dominating the Excellence Initiative. There it said: “In future, in the course of the Excellence Initiative the principle of who has will be given will have more effect than ever before”. He who has will be given. These are the logics of the entire competition. Accordingly, the successful applications concentrated on a comparably small number of the total of about 100 German

universities. This is true for the third funding line, for which right from the beginning only 27 universities had applied, 9 of which won the status of an ‘elite university’ (RWTH Aachen, FU Berlin, Freiburg, Göttingen, Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, Konstanz, LMU Munich, TU Munich); and it is also true for selecting graduate schools and clusters of excellence, in which much more universities participated (about 150 applications). Of the 37 clusters of excellence, three universities (RWTH Aachen, LMU Munich and TU Munich) share even eight among each other. Another eight clusters come from another four universities. Of the 39 graduate schools which won, 13 are located at only five universities.

This concentration shows clearly where the funds which are to be distributed in the course of the excellency competition will go to. A top group of 10 to 20 universities has developed which exhausted nearly the complete funds. If we do not count the graduate schools among them (which, with a total of 1 mio. Euros the year, are far behind the two other types of funding)¹, only 29 universities were successful. The mass of German universities will not only be excluded by the excellency competition, even now they must accept that their research capabilities are labeled as being very restricted at the most.

The German university system is facing a lasting split into two types of universities, research and training universities. Research will be concentrated at the former, the latter will hardly do any research at all but (like the technical colleges of higher education already today) will rapidly train for jobs. What such a system will look like is shown by an unusually clear statement by the former Senator of Science from Berlin, George Turner, in the *Tagesspiegel* from March 5th, 2006: “Officially this is fixed: the technical colleges of higher education are to be extended. But secretly there has been saying good bye to this objective by particularly funding ‘a maximum of ten’ top universities. In plain English this means: the rest of universities will not be formally degraded but will actually be included into the lower division. ... Those universities not succeeding with reaching the ‘1st Division’ – and this will be the overwhelming majority – and the colleges of higher education will be moved up closer. Even if it is hardly imagineable that so called elite universities are supposed to exist only in five federal states, and if thus it may be that the guideline of ‘ten at the most’ might begin to sway – of the

¹ The winner gets 21 Mio. Euro for the elite status and 6.5 Mio. for an cluster of excellence.

almost onehundred state universities the vast majority will belong to the 'rest', together with the colleges of higher education"².

Extensively replacing the old university grades of Diploma and "Magister" by Bachelor and Master is an important precondition for this split. The mass universities, being first of all in charge of training students, are supposed to quickly hurry the mass of Bachelor graduates through their studies, in order of being able to cope with the expected flood of students without additional staff. As, according to the intentions of most of the Ministers of Science, less than one half, usually only about 30% of all students is supposed to stay at university after having achieved their B. A., for a (more or less) great majority of students any insight into scientific research is not intended at all. Only some small, selected groups will be granted a look at research before their first qualifying graduation. The others will have to wait for their Master studies. But even there the split will go on. As already decided by the classical technical universities (the so called T9), they will accept the B. A. as a qualification for Master studies only if it was achieved at one of their member universities. This means that those universities counting themselves among the elite are already beginning to close off from others.

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AS OVERALL LOSERS

The split of the landscape of universities does not only concern the universities as a whole but it also comes along with a shift of relations between the five great fields of science (humanities, social sciences, technical sciences, natural sciences, as well as medicine). Since the results of the first round of the excellency competition were announced there has been disappointment or even dismay among humanities and social sciences scholars. The account is sobering. Of the clusters of excellence, six out of a total of 37 chosen clusters count among the field of humanities and social sciences. Thus, almost one third of those clusters as having been positively judged comes from the field of medicine, and another third from the natural sciences. The dis-

² A joint declaration by the Presidents of Humboldt University, Berlin, the University of Vienna, and the University of Zurich from July, 2006, goes towards that same direction if saying that throughout Europe of the currently existing ca. 1,000 full scale universities only about 300 will survive the coming years, and in this context explicitly mentioning the Excellence Initiative.

tribution of funds is thus clearly even more imbalanced than the university budgets, where even now humanities and social sciences are massively put at a disadvantage. Although for them about double the number of students has matriculated than for natural and technical sciences, they get only half the money. In the context of the excellency competition it is not even one sixth.

In retrospect, statements by the “Wissenschaftsrat” (Science Council) and the DFG, which were meant for calming down sceptical humanities and social sciences scholars, prove to be talk mostly without consequences. What is it good for if immediately before the decision the DFG’s coordinator declares that one has been both pleased and surprised by the high number of application sketches from the humanities (altogether one fourth of the applications, after all), and also was particularly proud of this, as the DFG had always been accused of “neglecting the humanities in comparison to other disciplines, when it comes to third-party funding”. After all, the decision definitely confirms this impression. Just that happened what the sceptics had feared. For the second round of funding, the humanities and social sciences played hardly a role anymore. The declaration made public by the “Wissenschaftsrat” two weeks later and saying that “supporting humanities at universities” was a “crucial matter” does not change a thing. It stays to be lip-service.

PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLE OR THE PRINCIPLE OF HE WHO HAS IS GIVEN

The above mentioned farewell address of the President of the DFG, Winnacker, includes two interesting passages dealing with the two most important objections against the Initiative of Excellency: is the excellency competition really a fair competition of performance? And what will be its results in respect of the social openness of German universities? Given the clear results of the first round, Winnacker here leaves away the remark which before had always been obligatory, that of course every university has its chance, and admits a grave distortion of competitive conditions. The different financial starting points in each federal state, he says, make “real competition for resources of all kind, not even for resources for research, impossible” and he admits that universities in the South of the Republic are decisively advantaged. Obviously, after the Excellence Initiative has been politically enforced, it is now possible to make realistic statements. Winnacker even raises the

question about the rules of the game because, as he says, it is always the same to win. His solution: a reform of regions. Only a reduction to only a few federal states could really reverse “the winner/loser relation with funding research” (Winnacker 2006: VI).

Whatever true Winnacker’s criticism of the German federal system may be³, he does not name the decisive point. Even if there were fewer federal states and the differences between their university budgets were smaller than today, the basic principle of the excellency competition, which is to make the strong even stronger, would have the same effect, after all. This is clearly shown by the example of Bavaria, being one of the richest federal states. As it was already clear for every informed observer, the two Munich universities are among the winners, whereas – and also this was quite obvious right from the beginning – the new foundations from the 1970s such as Bamberg, Bayreuth, or Passau are among the losers. Their basic conditions are simply much too different, reaching from being provided with funds via tradition (includ. the traditional relationships to important suppliers of third-party funding) as far as to the scientific environment (Max-Planck-Institutes, Fraunhofer Institutes aso.).

If Winnacker points out to the fact that already today almost one half of DFG funds go to less than 20 universities, this shows the historically developed differences. But it does tell much less about the actual performance than a first look at the figures might suggest. The well-known researcher Ulrich Teichler demonstrates this very impressingly by the example of the DFG fundings of the years 1999 to 2001. Then, 32 per cent of these funds went to those universities as being in the lead with this ranking, another 25 per cent to the following ten, i. e. 57 per cent went to the best 20 universities, only half of that went to the then following 20 universities, and only a total of eight per cent went to those being on positions 41 to 50 – this seems to give clear evidence to the enormous differences of performance in the German university system. If, however, one takes into account the number of scientists working at each university and does not count per university but

³ In this context it is worth mentioning that the great success of Baden Württemberg with four out of nine elite universities is also due to the fact that this federal state counts among the exporters of students. At its universities 7.2 per cent less students are trained than suggested by the number of entrance requirements achieved there. In North-Rhine Westphalia the situation is just the opposite (BMBF 2005: 198). Already in the past the universities in Baden-Württemberg have followed the maxime of preferring to train less students and to this way offer better conditions at the expense of other federal states.

per scientist, the picture will be much less clear. Indeed, the first ten universities with ca. 61,000 Euros per head are still clearly ahead, but the difference to those universities being on positions 41 to 50, still receiving ca. 32,000 Euros, is only half as big as the general shares suggest. If one leaves the first ten universities out of consideration, again the differences become clearly smaller. Then they are only between ca. 46,000 Euros for the second best and 32,000 Euros for the fifth group. If the distribution among subjects was taken into account, the difference would decrease even further. Teichler shows this by the example of North-Rhine Westphalia, where, if the groups of subjects are weighed, the least successful one of the multi-disciplinary universities was still able to raise 70 per cent of those funds as given to the most successful one (Teichler 2005: 269).

These figures do not suggest gigantic or decisive differences of performance. We must agree with Teichler when he judges that differences within the single faculties are usually much bigger than those between faculties or even universities. Not complete faculties or universities, he states, were judged as being excellent but always individual scientists. In future, as Teichler says, from strictly scientific points of view we must expect that the importance of scientific co-operation at the place and thus the value of universities as a whole will further decrease, due to increasing specialization and dramatically accelerated and easier possibilities of communication. Thus, he says, attempts at organizing faculties or even universities according to ranks are more and more similar to a "Glass Bead Game" (ibid.: 338f).

But this is exactly what the Excellence Initiative does. At the level of full scale universities it states fundamental differences between "excellent" on the one hand and "average" on the other hand, in other words between elite and mass, fixes them by ranking and on the long run further extends them. In the context of the initiative those almost 20 universities mentioned by Winnacker will not only collect almost one half but probably more than 80 per cent of all funds. Furthermore, and that is the more important aspect, the excellency competition will perpetuate the ranking. Those universities not counting among the winners now will also in future be irrevocably behind. At first, this is immediately true for funding, for the federal states will not only have to finance their share of 25 per cent of the costs of the Excellence Initiative in case one or more of their universities is successful, after the withdrawal of the Federal Government from building universities they will have to shoulder a much heavier financial burden than before. Furthermore, from 2017 on those universities being victorious in the competition will have to get along

with their own funds again, as then funding by the Excellence Initiative will come to an end. From then on, in order of keeping their level they will most probably receive more funds from their federal state. From a realistic point of view this means: to be able to spend this money the federal states will have to save money elsewhere. Despite all current announcements, this may be supposed to happen at the expense of the losers of the competition. The fact that contrary official statements are predominantly meant for calming down and usually have not got much to do with reality is shown by experiences from the past few years. Meanwhile, every member of a university can sing his sad song about broken university pacts and other agreements between governments of federal states and universities which were not kept.

Additionally to the immediate financial effects of the new principle of distribution there are those effects are being at the level of the federal states. Those universities counting among the winners will be much better off than the rest. The performance-oriented distribution of funds valid in North-Rhine Westphalia since 2004 gives an idea of the effects of the future principle of distribution. In North-Rhine Westphalia all funds – that is every fifth Euro coming to the universities from the Federal State's budget – are distributed to this principle. Whereas in the past the number of scientists and the amount of raised third-party funds were weighed equally – 20 per cent each – since 2004 the former factor makes only 7.5 per cent of the calculation, third-party funds, on the other hand, make 27.5 per cent. This counts the more as today in addition to costs for research and teaching also the money for general tasks, such as libraries or computer centres as well as costs for administration and energy, must be paid from this budget. The university to make the most profit of this model of distributing funds as being used in North-Rhine Westphalia will again be the RWTH Aachen, receiving a share of more than one quarter of the income from third-party funds of all 25 North-Rhine Westphalian universities and technical colleges. The losers will most of all be the newly founded universities and the former "Gesamthochschulen" (amalgamated universities). In January, 2006, the chancellor of the University of Wuppertal characterized the effects for his university by saying that "year after year" Wuppertal "will be losing considerable funds, like tripping down the stairs to the cellar, like being charged negative compound interest", and that then other universities would benefit from these funds. What was happening at the moment was "a re-distribution all over the Federal State". The Excellence Initiative will further accelerate and increase this development. It

is only the Initiative to create those fundamental differences it pretends to measure.

In the coming years the winners of the excellency competition will be able to extend their superior position also when competing for good scientists and good students. Due to being noticeably better provided with funds and considerably improving their image, their attractiveness for both groups will be clearly increasing. By way of the now common inner-university selection processes they have the great chance to filter out for themselves those students showing the best performance. This way, at the same time they will be able to achieve a second objective, that is considerably reducing the number of university places. If furthermore they succeed with abandoning the capacity decree, it will be possible for them to establish exclusive elite courses with a very small number of students, without having to observe previous restrictions. Small but sweet, that is the new slogan. Consequently, the President of the University of Mannheim, the jurist Wolfgang Arndt, believes the demand for extending the capacity of universities due to the expected rise of the numbers of students to be absurd and unnecessary because, as he says, the mass university is “completely outmoded”. Kurt von Figura, the President of the University of Göttingen, wants to reduce the numbers of students at his university by one third in the medium term, in order of improving its image of being a research-intensive and medicine/natural sciences-oriented university.

The introduction of university fees supports this development because on the long run it will result in differentiating fees for each university. The course of the future development is indicated by the first draft legislation for the “Studienbeitragsgesetz” (university contribution act) in the federal state of Hesse. It stated that after winter term 2007/08 the universities would be allowed to demand a maximum of 1,500 Euros for all non-consecutive master courses (after winter term 2010/11 also for all consecutive ones), for all doctorate courses, and from all non-EU foreigners. Although by help of massive protests at the universities of Hesse it was possible to prevent these ideas from being directly implemented for the final draft, these plans are still in the Ministries’ drawers. In future, a future elite university will be able to demand considerably higher fees than a “normal” mass university⁴ and, fol-

⁴ Accordingly, in the most recent CHE study on university fees in Germany, one of the crucial criteria is that universities must be given as much leeway as possible, in order of this way being able to “support competition and prestige among universities”. Accordingly, the

lowing the example of the USA, to offer more favourable conditions for studying in return. The mass universities, on the other hand, will have to offer even worse conditions than today, but would be more inexpensive than the top addresses. The split of the university landscape would be driven on even further.

In every respect, the losers of the excellency competition will lose ground. Thus, there cannot at all be speaking of another chance “the next time”. If politicians and representatives of the leading scientific organisations (Wissenschaftsrat and DFG) again and again emphasize that – as exclusively performance is said to be decisive – a university which today is not among the winners will definitely be able to still achieve the goal by its own efforts, this has not got much to do with reality. There cannot at all be speaking of a possible reverse of the relation between winners and losers. Who is up once, will usually stay up. This is clearly shown by the elite universities in other leading industrial countries (Hartmann 2006: 61ff). The same is true for the single disciplines. Also here, there cannot be speaking of equal chances. The criteria of the excellency competition have already provided for this. It is much easier to fulfil the demand of “international visibility”, which was set as a decisive criterion by the agreement between Federal Government and the federal states, in the natural and technical sciences as well as in medicine, where internationally well known awards (such as the Nobel Prize most of all) are awarded and where national language and culture do not play any role at all or a very minor one at best, than in humanities and social sciences. It is also much easier for them to prove the “economic relevance” which is demanded as an important precondition by that same agreement. The fact that even before applications were handed in the President of the DFG, Ernst-Ludwig Winnacker, said that the excellency cluster should “mostly” be according “to the model of DFG research units” should have made us prick up our ears, as of the currently supported centres none belongs to the field of humanities and social sciences.

If in the “Tagesspiegel” from January 27th, 2005, the historian Ulrich Herbert, one of the humanities scholars in the commission, openly declares that the Excellence Initiative was “not the place to make the strong points of humanities become obvious” and at the same time praises their performance in international comparison by saying that “nowhere in the world the density

CHE considers it “best law” if the governments of the federal states leave the decision about fees to each single university without any restriction (Müller [et al.] 2006: 6, 14).

and quality of this group of subjects is as high as in Germany, one thing becomes clear: the failure of both humanities and social sciences was not due to lack of quality but to the structural demands of the entire competition. The Initiative's public demand, saying that it was exclusively about performance and nothing else, is obviously not according to reality, as nobody could seriously claim that medical research in Germany was three times as efficient than that of the entire humanities and social sciences.

ELITE UNIVERSITIES IN THE USA

The USA with their hierarchically deeply structured university system and their rankings, which are deeply rooted in the public opinion, show very clearly what the effects of the mechanism will be which is now arriving in Germany in the context of the Excellence Initiative. Since the U. S. News & World Report published the first ranking in the mid-1980s, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, being the three richest universities of the country, have almost constantly been on the first three places. Only Stanford and the California Institute of Technology (CalTech) have once broken this phalanx and been able to reach the top. Also at the other places there is usually only a change among always the same universities, among them always all eight Ivy League universities. E.g. the University of Pennsylvania is constantly changing between Positions 4 and 10, and Cornell between Positions 9 and 14. During the past two decades there have only been two changes worth mentioning. On the one hand, among the top universities the number of public institutions has constantly been declining. If initially six of them were among the first 20, now not one is found there. For years, Berkeley as the best state university has been at Position 21. State institutions have been replaced by private universities such as CalTech (Pos. 21 in 1987), Emory (Pos. 25 in 1987), or the Notre Dame and Vanderbilt universities which then were not at all among the top 25. On the other hand, by the end of the 1990s Stanford as well as CalTech and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for some time represented a total of three technology-oriented universities among the first six. As their core, both developments are due to the same reason, that is the financial resources at hand for each university. The decline of state universities happened parallel to clearly reducing the states' university budgets, and the rise of Stanford, but even more of CalTech and MIT, was inseparably connected to the high tech and Internet boom of the

late 1990s and the possibilities of gaining income resulting from it (most of all in the form of donations from successful graduates in the relevant fields). Also for the USA it is true that those having most of the money will achieve the best results with ranking.

Those differences as being due to historic development – e.g. the Ivy League universities as traditional places of education for the upper class – are further increased and fixed by the meanwhile well established U. S. News & World Report ranking. This is most of all due to the prestige, that is first of all the ranking position, which the preferred university has gained meanwhile⁵. Prestige has become the most important factor, even more important than academic quality. It is the more dominating, the more renowned the university is. E.g. at Harvard prestige is said to be very or extremely important by 80% of applicants, academic quality, on the other hand, only by two thirds (Greene/Greene 1999: 20f, 264ff). The decisive cause for this must be seen in the fact that graduating at one of those universities being at the top of the ranking will later open up the best career prospects, and this is true even independently of the actual quality of education.

As a matter of fact, quite often education in the field of undergraduates is much worse than to be expected given the renowned names (Kirp 2003: 66ff; Newman [at al.] 2004: 51ff, 137 ff.). Great parts of teaching are taken over by graduate students and badly paid temporary lecturers, at some well-known universities the latter do up to 70% of teaching (Kirp 2003: 68; Newman [et al.] 2004: 58f). Professors, most of all the more famous of them, do hardly see any undergraduates during their teaching. The more renowned and thus more demanded a professor is, the bigger is the probability for him to be released from his (anyway not very extended) teaching duties. Consequently, when examining the teaching quality of 50 renowned universities the well respected American Council of Trustees and Alumni granted a C for only two

⁵ The famous writer, Tom Wolfe, has strikingly characterized the significance of ranking and prestige by the following words: „The matter of how this third-rate news magazine, forever swallowing the dust from the feet of *Time* and *Newsweek*, managed to jack itself up to the eminence of ringmaster of American college education, forcing both parents and college administrators to jump through their hoops and rings of fire, is a long and perfectly ludicrous story that would inevitably reduce one to helpless laughter and distract us from the matter at hand. In any event, the result was that parents caught up in the madness of it all – and, as I say, it had become, and remains, a pandemic – were utterly consumed by a single passion: getting in [...] preferably Harvard, or, if not Harvard, Yale; or, if not Yale, Princeton; or, if not Harvard, Yale, or Princeton, then ...” (Wolfe 2005: xf.).

of the eight Ivy League universities. All the others achieved only grades between D and F. Even Berkeley, Northwestern, or Wisconsin-Madison were all granted an F. According to an observer, the public debate is only interested in the admission process, that is in the question of how you get to these universities, and in career prospects, that is the question of what one could do with one's graduation. This, as he has it drastically, is a "national scandal" (Fallows 2005: 44f). The fact that there is only paying little attention to teaching is a direct result of its importance for ranking. Directly, it does not play any role at all, indirectly only by way of the criteria of size of classes and students/teacher relation. Altogether, they make no more than 10% for evaluation. The criterion of the final grade, which at first sight also counts among teaching and with 16% is more important, does by itself not reveal very much about the quality of teaching. As Richard Hersh, former director of the Harvard Center of Moral Education and President of well-respected universities, expresses it, this reflects only the principle of "diamonds in, diamonds out, garbage in, garbage out" (Hersh 2005: 230).

Two factors are really decisive for the ranking position, academic reputation as a single criterion with 25 per cent and the financial resources with a total of again ca. 25 per cent, the latter being distributed among salaries of university teachers, expenses for students, and incoming donations. Both of them massively favour those universities, such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, having a long tradition of educating the upper class offspring and accordingly having extended stocks of money as well as a number of financially strong donors. It is not only that they have most of the money, it is thus also that in the competition for demanded scientists they are more successful than their competitors, as shown by the complaints of comparatively poor and increasingly falling behind Berkeley, and this way they are able to continuously increase their reputation⁶. Financial power and reputation form a continuously increasing circle which by way of the ranking decisively determine and include the third most important factor, having a share of 16 per cent, which is selectivity for choosing students. The more financially powerful a university is and the higher its reputation, the higher its ranking position and the number of applicants with exquisite test results with the country-wide aptitude tests (SAT) as well as the percentage of these particularly qualified applicants who will still be rejected at last. The higher this

⁶ The evaluation happened by way of a survey among Presidents, Chancellors, and the Heads of Admission Committees in charge of selecting applicants at US universities.

quota is, the better for the ranking, which again increases the number of particularly performative but also particularly wealthy applicants and thus increases financial resources and so on and on – a perfect mechanism from the winners’ point of view, a hellish one from the losers’ point of view. There cannot be speaking of equal opportunity for all or at least a majority of the competing universities. Not the performance principle is decisive but the principle of who has will be given.

INCREASE OF SOCIAL SELECTIVITY

On the question of how the splitting up of the university system will affect the social recruitment of German students, Winnacker in his speech at first makes the terse remark that this development “is not [necessarily] a contradiction to the justified demand of opening up our universities to students from all social classes” and goes on with saying that one was well advised “to offer those possibilities of education to all graduates of one year which are appropriate to their respective intellectual capacity” but that, however, “the human potential to serve 90 top universities in Germany” was “simply not there” (Winnacker 2006: X).

Even if doubtlessly the last part of this statement is correct – however, nobody makes such a claim and no country in the world would be able to meet such a demand – there is still the question of what the consequences of the Excellence Initiative will actually be for the social accessibility of universities. What is the concrete meaning of saying that the described development will not necessarily be “a contradiction” to the demand of open access for all classes and that appropriate possibilities of education must be offered to all graduates? Also here a look at the USA, which is the explicit or at least implicit example for most of the re-structuring of the German university system, is worth the effort, to have an idea of where the journey will go to or what is meant by such rather cryptical formulations.

In the USA students are distributed among more than 4,000 universities of completely different quality, from two-years Community Colleges, which are at the level of German Secondary Highschools, via four-years public colleges, their quality reaching from engineering schools to vocational academies, as well as state and private universities at college level, as far as to the famous towers of science. About 250 of these institutions can be compared to German technical colleges of higher education, about 150 to German

universities, which are the so called doctoral/research universities - extensive. Generally there is the rule that the social structure of students at these universities is the more exclusive, the higher their rank is and the more expensive they are. The lower half of the population sends almost 90 per cent of their children to those of more than 4,000 universities which at best are at the level of vocational academies. Almost every second of these children only attends one of the two-years colleges. No more than 3 per cent of them make it to the expensive private universities. Of the offspring of rich families, on the other hand, every fifth attends them (Hartmann 2005b: 441f). The social structure of students is according to this. At the already mentioned ca. 150 research universities, less than 10 per cent come from the lower half of the population, 74 per cent come from the upper quarter (Carnevale/Rose 2004: 106; CollegeBoard 2004: 33). Thus, recruitment is considerably more selective than at German universities, where, however, already two thirds come from the upper third of the population. The private elite universities are much more exclusive. Four out of five students there come from the upper fifth of society. Every fifth even comes from the topmost two per cent with a family income of more than 200,000 Dollars. Thus, the upper two per cent of the population provide exactly as many students as the lower four fifths (Hartmann 2005b: 454; Hill et al. 2004: 6).

Apart from very high costs of studying, at the US elite universities most of all the selection procedures provide for massive social selectivity. The decision about being accepted or rejected happens according to two crucial criteria: the intellectual performance of the applicants, which is mostly measured by the SAT scores, and their personality. The second criterion was introduced in the 1920s, at first at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (as shown by a study on the admission procedures at these universities in the 20th century, Karabel 2005). In the face of the great success of Jewish applicants, who would have been able to increase their share to one fifth, there was the threat of traditional upper class children going away, as was already being observed at Columbia University. Due to this, one went away from the selection mode which before had almost exclusively been orientated at intellectual performance. Personality became the new, decisive criterion. This way one was able to secure that the share of Jewish students did not very much exceed the mark of 10 per cent and that still places were mostly given to the offspring of the wealthy families of the country. Given sometimes harsh protest by many alumni, this seemed to be necessary if one did not want to risk a severe decrease of the flow of donations.

Until today, this principle has not fundamentally changed, despite again placing more emphasis on intellectual performance since the 1970s. Karabel shows this very impressively. Officially emphasized are (as done by Harvard President, Neil Rudenstine, who held office throughout the entire 1990s) desired characteristics such as “character”, “energy”, “curiosity”, and “determination”. What, however, is actually awarded by those alumni and members of the Admission Committee being in charge of selecting candidates is most of all one thing: congruency with their own attitudes, ways of behaviour and thinking, that is social similarity after all⁷. Karabel quotes passages from the records of the Admission Committees from those days showing more than clearly how superficial and influenced by personal prejudices or preferences judgements sometimes were. E.g. there we find comments such as “short with big ears” or “a young man with spiked hair”, comments which hardly give away anything substantial in respect of the officially emphasized characteristics. The following judgement reveals the selection principle particularly clearly: “This young woman could be one of the brightest applicants in the pool but there are several references to shyness, and the alumni IV [interviewer] is not” (Karabel 2005: 509f). If one imagines in what way somebody coming from a family of farmers or workers and maybe also coming from a small town in the Midwest will present him/herself in such a selection interview, it is not difficult to have an idea of where the criticized shyness comes from. A Wall Street banker’s or a professor’s child may be supposed to present him/herself in a completely different way, as usually he/she has not only internalized the relevant codes since early childhood but as also his/her knowledge of the concrete procedure will be greater and he/she will be accordingly less afraid⁸. Thus, even if the preconditions for acquiring intellectual skills, which are very different according to social origin, are left out of consideration, there cannot be speaking of equal opportunity for all applicants. For the application process, class membership does not only have an indirect but an immediate effect.

Given the US experience, Winnacker’s statement that the development connected to the Excellence Initiative will not necessarily be a contradiction to the social openness of universities and that everybody must be offered the possibility of education which is appropriate to his/her intellectual abilities

⁷ On the effectiveness of such mechanisms for institutions of elite education see Bourdieu 1996 and for access to elite positions see Hartmann 2002 and 2006.

⁸ On this see Hartmann 2002: 117ff

is not really convincing or reassuring. Also in Germany, on the long run the hierarchization of the university landscape will result in students at the future elite and research universities coming from upper middle class and academic families much more than today, and the children of the rest of the population being found at the mass universities and (as already today) at the technical colleges of higher education. Following the example of the USA, this will be provided for most of all by admission procedures⁹, maybe in combination with the introduction of admission tests which are liable to costs¹⁰, and rising university fees. Indeed, elite universities have most of all a social function. They provide for stabilizing the given societal power relations and thus the structures of social inequality.

ELITE UNIVERSITIES

– BEING ON THE WAY TOWARDS HIGHER SCIENTIFIC PERFORMANCE OR BEING ON THE WRONG TRACK?

But even if most of all we concentrate on that argument which is named by the supporters of the Excellence Initiative to be crucial for establishing elite universities – the promised increase of the scientific performance of the university system – a look “across the Ocean” reveals grave weak spots of

⁹ Sometimes the social selectivity of selection interviews is openly revealed. E.g. during the selection procedure at the Institute of Political Sciences of the TU Darmstadt there was asking: “Which foreign newspapers do you read?” In which German households are daily newspapers such as New York Times or International Herald Tribune read, after all? Most times, however, this aspect stays hidden and becomes obvious only at close sight, like e.g. in the new selection procedure of that same institute. As most of those “elite students” one had hoped for and selected have preferred other universities, now the selection happens by way of a less time-consuming procedure, by way of a combination of the marks of the “Abitur” (secondary high-school certificate) and evaluating a written application where there shall be giving reasons for the choice of subject and place of studying. Most of all giving reasons for the choice of the place of studying, however, still favours applicants from families of academics. As it is improbable that someone will only apply for the TU Darmstadt, the basic idea is to feign interest by a written application which in this way is non-existent at all. After all, formulation skills and knowledge of university rules are tested, something which considerably puts the offspring of so called “uneducated” families at disadvantage.

¹⁰ Given the clear increase of applications (often at several universities), the Vice-President of the FU Berlin, Werner Vöth, openly takes this idea into consideration. In the USA this has meanwhile become common at many universities. Given the average amount of 100 Dollars, several applications will result in a total which will considerably restrict the number of possible applications for children from poorer families.

this concept. For, even in this respect the example of US top universities is not as splendid as it is said, and, which is more important, it cannot be copied that easily. Talking about the first point, particularly in the field of natural and technical sciences (always particularly emphasized in the debate overhere) the situation is by far not as satisfying as generally thought. In these disciplines the number of graduations increased only by one third between 1975 and 2000. In contrast to this, in most of the bigger industrial countries the increase was between 100 and 500 per cent. Consequently, in respect of this point the USA have fallen behind from the 3rd to the 15th, that is the third last position. By way of important scientific publications in this field it is already possible to see the results of this. In the USA, their number has not risen since the beginning of the 1990s, in contrast to this it has risen by more than 60 per cent in Western Europe. Meanwhile, Western Europe has clearly overtaken the USA (Bowen et al. 2005: 48f, 58f). If we take into consideration that at US elite universities more than half of natural and technical scientists comes from abroad¹¹, the end result is even worse because as long as they are working in the USA their publications count as American. This is the backside of the elite system. On the one hand, it directs students towards those subjects promising the highest income and the best possibilities for amortizing the extremely high costs of studying, and they are Economics, Law, and Medicine. On the other hand, the enormous concentration of funds at only a few universities undermines the level at most of the others.

In the USA this problem is at least defused by the worldwide buying of top scientist from all fields, particularly from the natural and technical sciences; something which Germany will not be able to do. Due to insufficient financial resources, the US model cannot be copied. Despite the Excellence Initiative, also in the future there will not be enough money to keep up with Harvard & Co. in the competition for demanded scientists. This is even admitted by committed supporters of the current re-structuring of the German university system. For example, in August 2005 the head of the CHE (Center of Higher Education Development), Detlev Müller-Böling, in the magazine "Karriere" very illustratively compared the differences in financial power between Stanford and the FU Berlin to the difference between Bayern Mün-

¹¹ In the past decade more than one third of doctorates in the USA were granted to foreigners. In the natural and technical sciences they were up to 50 per cent, in single subjects, such as Electronics, they were even two thirds (Janson [et al.] 2006: 40).

chen and Alemannia Aachen, then still in the Second Division. Hans Weiler, former Stanford professor and influential advisor of the Federal Government and of many state governments for university matters, made a similar statements in the *Tagesspiegel* from March 21st, 2006. He pointed out to the simple fact that Stanford for its ca. 16,000 students has a yearly budget which is according to the entire higher education budget of the richest federal state, Baden-Württemberg. Given such relations, it is certainly not possible to speak of a competition at eye level.

This, however, means that overhere one is ready to broadly sacrifice the high quality which is still existing despite the numerous cost-cutting measures without being able to offer at least halfways adequate replacement. The minority of universities counting among the winners of the current development may be supposed to be able to compensate for the loss of research quality by which the rest is threatened. Then, a small university in the East of the Republic will have no chance at all to accomodate a top scientist, as still today the TH Ilmenau is able to do with the inventor of MP3, Karlheinz Brandenburg. This is much more true for the quality of teaching. If the Ministries in charge believe or hope to be able to cope with the oncoming increase of students of ca. 30 per cent with the current funds¹² and to smuggle the overwhelming majority through university by way of Bachelor courses and without spending too much money, this is a grave error. The intended reduction of the number of students at many of the future elite or research universities will even increase the problem, so that for graduates as a whole a clear decrease of quality must be expected.

Furthermore, the hierachization of universities following the US model will also result in a hierarchization of chances on the labour market. For the time being, due to the relatively balanced quality of university education it does not matter in Germany where one has been studying when applying for a job. This was clearly shown by my own studies on the careers of different groups of academics, most of all by an analysis of the careers of engineers, jurists, and econmics scientists with a doctorate between 1955 and 1999 (Hartmann 2002: 106f, 2005a: 265). Among staff managers all universities are (still) considered equal. This is even true for the careers of top managers. E.g. the new chief executive of DaimlerChrysler, Dieter Zetsche, achieved his doctorate at the Gesamthochschule (meanwhile University) of Paderborn in

¹² In 2004 state funds for universities have even nominally decreased for the first time, from 17.8 bill. to 17.1 bill. Euro, a decrease of four per cent, afterall.

1982. Still it is of no interest if somebody has graduated from one of the future elite universities such as Munich, Heidelberg, or Aachen or from a new foundation from the 1970s such as Dortmund, Oldenburg, or Passau. In the future this will be different. Like in the USA, in France, Great Britain, or Japan, most of all the name of the university will open up or close doors. Then, the decision about future careers will already be made very early also in the university system (as it is already the case at school), intellectual potential will thus be given away. Additionally, there is the socially gravest aspect: the increase in social selectivity which must be expected. Altogether, we must thus doubt that the track on which we are now is the right one.

The belief or hope to be able to cope with the problem of underfunding of the entire university system by concentrating the funds at hand on a few universities, also the economic patterns of thinking as meanwhile being predominant even in the field of universities – Winnacker in his speech speaks of research result as products “having to prove themselves on a market” (Winnacker 2006: V) – are misleading in every respect. Scientific competition cannot be compared to competition among enterprises, and scientific insights are not goods which must be sold on a market like cars or TV sets. As a general conclusion there stays: at best, the Excellence Initiative will be able to cover the real problems of our universities by help of the media attention it attracts, it does not offer any contribution to solving them. Just the contrary, it will even increase these problems.

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DOSKONAŁA INICJATYWA
– ZMIANA PARADYGMATU POLITYKI NIEMIECKIEGO UNIWERSYTETU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule został zaprezentowany problem reform szkolnictwa wyższego. Autor skoncentrował się na reformach w Niemczech. Przedstawił zaproponowany projekt reformy szkolnictwa z 2004 roku, który miał na celu wybór z grupy stu istniejących uniwersytetów w Niemczech kilku najlepszych placówek naukowych. Zdaniem autora taka sytuacja uderza w egalitarny charakter społeczeństwa niemieckiego oraz osłabia społeczno-kolegialny model szkolnictwa wyższego w Niemczech.

Słowa kluczowe: elitarne uniwersytety, pozabudżetowe finansowanie badań, opłaty za studia, nauki humanistyczne.

Key words: elite universities, extra-budget financing of research, tuition fees, humanities.