

# **What are the key factors for being a reform catalysator in higher education**

The university unbound – 2006

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The reform of Higher Education in Germany which I have followed closely and somehow driven since 1994 stimulated a number of things. The vision of the “university unbound” outlines seven approaches how the Higher Education Institution (HEI) of the future should look like to master the upcoming challenges at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These seven inter-related dimensions comprise that HEIs will

- develop their performance in competition with each other,
- arrange the input of resources cost-effectively,
- act internationally,
- seize the chances of new media virtually,
- find their new identity through profile-building
- develop their resources, their personnel, and their organisation autonomously
- perform their task scientifically in research, teaching and continuing education.

In 2006, the reform has been implemented to a great extent at least according to the basic ideas. This is surprising because of the standard speed of change of social systems:

Competition...

between HEIs dominates the sector. The fiction of “all HEIs in Germany are equal” has dissolved. Elite research universities have been identified and financed additionally by an unprecedented competition for excellence. University access has changed. The element of force in access procedures has been replaced by the right of the HEIs to select a considerable number of their students. And finally, we arguably have the best imaginable transparency of scientific performance in research and teaching because of lot of evaluation processes and last but not least

because of the CHE-Ranking, which is unique in methodology and copied explicitly by Canadian researchers.

Cost effectiveness...

has clearly increased. The state has moved from an input-oriented ex-ante micro-control level with interventions in single processes of universities to an output-oriented ex-post macro-control level with a regulatory setting of legal and contractual frameworks. Both, performance-oriented allocation and lump sum budgets have led to a goal-oriented and transparent use of scarce financial resources. Tuition fees have diversified the revenues and have diminished the financial dependence on the state.

Internationality...

of HEIs became a vital impulse. Bachelor and master study programmes are being implemented all over the country according to the Bologna process. The rate of foreign students is as high as never before. And most importantly: Not only in research, but also in teaching people are geared more and more towards international benchmarks.

Virtuality...

in teaching has been pushed by numerous programmes of the federal and state governments and last but not least by computer enthusiasts who teach at universities. The process of integration of e-learning elements into the regular curricula is positive but it has, however, not yet been completed.

Profile-Building...

of universities has become an accepted measure for strategic enhancement. Strengths will be elicited and extended, weaknesses reduced. Common goals, purposes and identity of the institution will be achieved by mission statements. Board members, university and department leaders as well as all other members of the university cooperate in this area – sometimes more effectively, sometimes less – but they cooperate.

Autonomy...

of higher education institutions is the dominant idea of Higher Education politics these days. The preconditions to act inside of universities have been created in most of the State Acts by new governance structures. HEIs act as active and independent actors towards state and society: They develop their goals and strategies by their own, manage their funds autonomously and create study programmes independently. The separation of administration and supervision has been implemented..

Contract management is an adequate instrument of steering and coordination between autonomous and equal partners. Therefore, they are used both inside the university and between universities and the state. And finally, new forms of personnel management are implemented ranging from performance-oriented professorial payment to junior professorship.

Scientific focus...

has become the approved paradigm of HEIs. Performance, excellence, quality in research, teaching and continuing education are the main demand on universities. Equal opportunities, democratising of society and support of international clientel became important, but secondary goals. Autonomy by its own does not ensure good quality. Therefore, a broad variety of instruments for ensuring good quality in addition to appointments are introduced. HEIs use and test various instruments and implement different and active quality management systems.

Summarising the results, I can state with a doubt: The German Higher Education system has changed essentially concerning the structure and the main ideas, according to both given facts and the picture in the mind of the people. Thus the reform of Higher Education is far ahead of other reform of our state from the fiscal reform via the pension scheme to the health care system.

Let me come to some new challenges, I see in the future for the German Higher Education System. But as the German Higher Education System is no longer alone, the mentioned challenges will be of HEIs all over the world.

### **Challenge I: Transcending disciplinary boundaries**

Scientific progress proceeds most where various competences and qualifications are brought together at the cut edge of the scientific fields. HEIs should support this development. In order to achieve this, they must become more flexible in their organisational structure and execute a more rapid change not only on the management level. They also have to enable this by models even inside research and teaching which have until now been an exception in Germany. Matrix structures which relate to “products” of science in research and teaching, shall not only increase the performance and mobilise a higher degree of ability to react and organise. They shall also satisfy the development towards inter-disciplinarity and problem-oriented science more than before. Positive examples for this development can be found abroad, e. g. in the Netherlands. But also in Germany there are accordant approaches, e. g.

at the Technical University Munich or the Technical University Hamburg-Harburg. Also organisational units like the centres for teacher training which evolve in many places prove that inter-disciplinarity and problem-orientation can be supported organisationally.

## **Challenge II: Organising life-long learning**

HEIs have the duty to organise life-long learning in a way that is still underestimated. However, the task is to preserve the abilities of persons whose academic or non-academic secondary or tertiary education dates back farer every year. Furthermore, HEIs have to focus on the sector of study programmes for senior citizens. The idea of lifelong learning shows that tertiary education can not only be based on the idea of studying before the first entry into working life, but that a continuous inter-penetration of professional phases and work-oriented periods of continuing education can and maybe must be the standard case. Therefore, the European process of change towards a consecutive study structure with bachelor and master degrees is an important step. It shall not only enable people to enter working life early and strengthen the orientation by competences, but it shall also provide the entry into a differentiated system of various study programmes and biographies of education.

## **Challenge III: Supporting penetrability of the education system**

It is also part of the organisation of lifelong learning that higher education institutions create general penetrability for different biographies of education (*Bildungsbiographien*) while at the same time developing elements which enable the customers to compensate with respect to different educational chances. Borders between near-illiterate and well-educated social classes have to be overcome. The transition towards flexible access to Higher Education advanced considerably during the last years. In some *Länder*, flexible rules replaced the previous dogma of the German *Abitur* as the exclusive access criteria to attend university. Accordingly, HEIs by themselves start to take the responsibility for the students who attend their study programmes. The HEIs can and must choose their study programmes which are tailor-made for the accepted students and vice versa. To achieve this, they need to develop corresponding routines and measures. Transition to flexible formal requirements and the right of free choice, however, are not sufficient. A corresponding development of curricula, support structures and counselling and a Higher Education marketing strategy which reflects these developments are necessary.

## **Challenge IV: Regarding Europe as a single university area (EHEA)**

Political frontiers between nations certainly are still important in many regards, but for science, education and economy these frontiers have mostly vanished. This becomes obvious in the idea of new international reference areas that become relevant for HEIs in Europe. Since 1998, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has been started to be developed flanked by the European Research Area (ERA). Mobility of scientists and students are envisioned to become a common aspect of Higher Education life in Europe. The so-called Lisbon strategy of the European Union explicitly states that competition takes place in a broader than national framework. Thus, to develop Europe into one of the most competitive global regions has been set as a main strategic target. This means that competition between Europe, North America and Southeast Asia and not inside of Europe is relevant. Accordingly, the relations of cooperation and competition re-configure. Certainly, we are at the dawn of this development, but it becomes clear that new markets will determine the world of Higher Education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the same way as the world of economy.

So far the next challenges, I see.

Summarizing the success factors of CHE as change agent in the past, I would like to fix the following topics:

- Have a vision
- Carry out pilotprojects with universities as well as governments in the different fields of reform to create best practice examples
- Communicate with the community on the university level as well as governmental level and administration. Use Symposiums, workshops, seminars, podium discussions, leading newspapers and so on.
- Last but not least: organise the change agent institution in flexible teams, acting according the vision but following windows of opportunities in the change process with highly motivated experts as employees.