

Diversity and Excellence in Higher Education

Can the Challenges be Reconciled?

Rosalind M. O. Pritchard, Matthias Klumpp and
Ulrich Teichler (Eds.)



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ELLEN HAZELKORN

PREFACE

The Ruhr valley, and the city of Essen – where EAIR 2014 was hosted by the University of Duisburg-Essen – has been at the epicentre of the German and European economy over the past centuries. Originally a seed-bed of the industrial revolution on the European continent and early battles between capital and labour, coal mines began production in the 18th century. By the mid-19th century, there were almost 300 mines feeding coking ovens that produced iron and steel. The Zollverein mine, depicted on the cover and now a UNESCO heritage site, was in operation from 1851 to the 1980s. The largest coal mine in Europe during this time, it is an architectural landmark in the Bauhaus style.

Now an urbanized and culturally diverse region, with a strong emphasis on services and technology, the region is also a microcosm of socio-political change. The 20th century witnessed the tumultuous events associated with WW1, the Weimar Republic, WW2 and the rise of Hitler, followed by the early days of the European Coal and Steel Pact and then the European Union. As demand for coal fell after 1958, society and the economy diversified making it a mega-region of approximately 11.5m people.

In many ways, these events parallel changes in education, and especially higher education. The first degree-granting university in Europe, and the world, was the University of Bologna (established 1088). While aloof from commercial activity, the early university encompassed the legal and political-administrative sciences as application-oriented fields in the belief that society should benefit from the scholarly expertise generated by the university. Over the next centuries, universities were created across Europe to help satisfy a thirst for knowledge, and provide the basis for resolving difficult problems.

In Germany, strongly influenced by the scientific revolution, the Humboldtian reforms coupled applied technical and engineering fields with basic disciplinary knowledge. This model of research-based education has become, in many ways, the idealised university model, especially for graduate schools, and implemented around the world. Over the decades a wider range of socio-economic and learner groups, educational requirements and rapidly expanding careers have underpinned the transformation, expansion and diversification of educational provision and its providers everywhere.

Today, the Ruhr region and higher education are part of a globalised world in which boundaries are increasingly porous and the pursuit of excellence reigns supreme.

E. HAZELKORN

There is a close interdependence between the interests of the region and those of higher education institutions; indeed, successful regions are those that draw upon the expertise of a diverse set of institutions and expertise at their disposal. Rather than seeing the global dimension as qualitatively more important, the local, regional, national and international are part of a balanced, complementary and synergistic set of portfolio activities. Excellence is amplified and strengthened by diversity.

The EAIR Forum 2014 touched on all these dimensions and more. Enjoy reading the insights and reflections contained within these covers. Many thanks to our hosts at the University of Duisburg-Essen, and our EAIR colleagues and participants, for making 2014 such an important and stimulating event.

Ellen Hazelkorn
President EAIR

ROSALIND PRITCHARD, MATTHIAS KLUMPP AND
ULRICH TEICHLER

THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY AND EXCELLENCE

TRENDS, POLICIES AND DISCOURSES

An Old and a New Theme

“Higher Education: Diversity and Excellence for Society” was the title of a recent conference. About 300 researchers, policy makers and practitioners met at the 36th Annual Forum of the EAIR – a European association promoting dialogues on research findings and practical challenges in the domain of higher education. This book presents a variety of articles based on presentations at this conference. The conference was held at the University of Duisburg-Essen – a suitable site for such reflection, because the history of this institution has been shaped by efforts to serve diversity. Initially, two institutions were founded in the 1970s with the aim of merging the characteristics of universities and of *Fachhochschulen*, the new practice-oriented higher education institutions, under the umbrella of *Gesamthochschule*; though the terminology has been changed, a close link between theory and practice has not vanished. Subsequently, another merger took place between the Universities of Duisburg and Essen, the two institutions located in neighbouring cities; the new institutional entity embarked on a range of forward-looking policies. Among others, diversity management is emphasised, i.e., serving a broad range of students with varied socio-biographic backgrounds, educational experiences and notions of their own present and future.

‘Diversity’ and ‘Excellence’ are by no means completely new or completely original themes. The discourse at this conference, however, supported the view of its initiators and organisers that these two terms depict a tension in higher education which has already been salient for quite a while, but has repeatedly changed in nature and continues to pose new challenges. Moreover, it is obvious that the two terms point to a state of affairs which affects many features of the daily life within higher education.

Looking Back

The qualities characterised by the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘excellence’ have been viewed as key issues for about five decades – when the expansion of higher education

in terms of enrolment rates moved into the limelight of higher education policy. The debate gained momentum at a time when the American sociologist Martin Trow put forward the developmental theory of ‘elite higher education’ – ‘mass higher education’ – ‘universal higher education.’ Accordingly, higher education has been more or less consistently characterised by a high quality pursuit of knowledge as well as by the education and personality enhancement of the academic and social elite, as long as the enrolment rates have been less than fifteen per cent of the corresponding age group. When expansion has surpassed this threshold, higher education diversifies into functional sectors: ‘mass higher education’ serving the talents, motives as well as the career and life perspectives of the additional students alongside ‘elite higher education’ serving the traditional functions. A third sector, i.e., ‘universal higher education’ was anticipated by Trow for the time when enrolment rates eventually will have surpassed fifty per cent – a stage of expansion which is now reached in many economically advanced countries.

This functional differentiation was expected to be universal in modern societies, unless no power intervened irrationally. However, the modes of diversity and the extent of diversity were not specified by Trow. His concept was often interpreted as having the U.S. system in mind as a model for the modern world, i.e., a system characterised by relatively extreme quality differences between individual institutions of higher education or often between departments within the same disciplinary area as well as by some institutions proud of fostering a specific profile of their own, e.g., emphasis on ‘liberal arts’, service to the region, ‘civic virtues’, elite personality, etc. In various European countries also the view had spread since the 1960s that more diversity would be needed in the process of expansion; however, priority was granted to a policy of creating clearly distinct sectors of higher education, whereby the differences were expected to be or to remain small within each sector.

In various countries, a system of different institutional types was established as the most visible element of diversity, for example ‘polytechnics’ alongside universities in the United Kingdom and *Fachhochschulen* alongside universities in Germany. Altogether, we note the growth of formal diversity in Europe from the 1960s onwards until the 1990s in terms of the functions of institutional types, and/or the length and character of schooling as entry qualification, and/or the length and nature of the study programmes.

Whatever mode of ‘formal’ (i.e., codified in laws or other official documents) or ‘informal’ programmes; of ‘vertical’ (i.e., level of ‘quality and reputation’) or ‘horizontal’ (i.e., substantive ‘profiles’) differentiation emerged in different countries – instability and pressure for new configurations of the higher education seem to be endemic. Four dynamics are named most frequently in respective analyses.

First, the system of varied institutions and study programmes was often destabilised by what was called ‘academic drift’ or could be more generally called ‘status drift’. The sector with less of a role in training the elite, less of an influence

upon academic reproduction, less involvement in research, more direct professional preparation, shorter study programmes, or whatever elements might create the feeling of being at a relatively lower status than the classical institutions tended to strive for a status increase by progressive assimilation to the more prestigious sector. The name change from 'polytechnics' to 'universities' in the UK in 1992 has been often cited as the most visible change of that kind.

Second, the more higher education expanded and the more it was viewed as an essential component of the 'knowledge society', the more attention was paid to more refined informal distinctions than those of institutional types or length of study programmes. Thereby, emphasis was placed almost exclusively on 'vertical' differences. The tendency to 'rank' institutions or other units has spread in various European countries since the 1980s, whereby emphasis increasingly moved over the years away from teaching and learning to research 'performance'.

Third, there were constant political discussions and actual changes as regards the three principles according to which education as well as social selection through higher education were organised. In all countries higher education seems in some respects to serve three principles concurrently: the privileging of the advantaged, the meritocratic principle of nurturing the most ambitious and successful students, and finally the concern for equality of opportunity, possibly by compensatory measures in favour of the underprivileged. The weight of these three principles is a topic of dispute. Similarly, we note a dispute as regards the extent to which the respective processes are viewed as 'transparent', 'fair' or 'just'.

Fourth, in spite of the frequent reference to the term 'autonomy', societal expectations became stronger as 'challenges' or 'pressures' on higher education. Words spread which are bluntly instrumental, e.g., 'employability' or 'knowledge economy' but also more noble expressions such as 'relevance' and 'knowledge society' suggest that the configuration of the higher education system and of the research, teaching and other functions of higher education are decreasingly shaped by the inner logic of knowledge production and dissemination, while the weight of external expectations is growing to serve society more directly, more visibly and in a more targeted manner.

Recent Developments and Issues

Since the beginning of the 21st century we note various moves towards further diversification of higher education as well as the growing virulence of the four dynamics named above. In some respects, the debate is similar to that in the preceding period as far as the issues are concerned, but is characterised by a stronger sense of urgency: higher education is more often envisaged as ending up in disaster, if it does not attend to the demands of the 'knowledge economy', if it does not strengthen 'employability', if it does not dramatically enhance 'quality', 'relevance' and 'efficiency' all at the same time. The recent public discourse, however, differs

from that of the preceding decades in two respects which are closely intertwined. First, three supra-national trends or policies are viewed as highly influential. Second, more attention is paid now to the issue of the relationships between ‘diversity’ and ‘excellence’.

Among recent supra-national trends and policies, the so-called ‘Bologna Process’ is one of the key components. The introduction of a ‘convergent’ model of tiers/levels of study programmes and degrees across European countries is a targeted policy for changing the formal configuration of the teaching and learning function in higher education. Levels of study programmes and degrees are expected to become the single most important element of formal diversity within higher education; thereby, it remains open whether varying institutional types will survive as a secondary element of formal diversity or vanish over time; it remains open as well, whether differences of curricular thrusts – e.g., ‘theoretical’ vs. ‘vocational’ thrusts – will remain in a subordinate role or eventually become eroded.

The so-called ‘Lisbon Process’ is another supra-national policy arena. The relevance of research for the future of modern societies is expected to increase substantially, and competition between scholars, institutions of higher education, research countries and supra-national regions seems to become fiercer and to form the basis of high quality and relevance. Closely linked to the increasing belief in competition as a driving force in higher education and research is a growing discussion about the most desirable extent and the most desirable modes of diversity; this framework also reflects concerns about the possible role of an ‘elite’ or ‘excellence’ sector within the higher education and research system.

The remaining supra-national theme – the informal vertical diversity – is a global one. ‘Ranking’ lists of ‘world-class universities’ have been in the limelight of the higher education policy discourse since the early years of the 21st century. As many analyses have shown, these are not neutral instruments of information and ‘transparency’, but rather – intentionally or unintentionally – instruments for advertising and reinforcing the value judgements that a strong vertical diversification of higher education and research is desirable, that the ‘excellent’ sector is by far the most highly relevant for society, and that clustering the highest talents of academics and students within a limited number of institutions is serving the knowledge system and the society most appropriately.

Most of the recent trends and policies have contributed to increasing attention being paid to ‘vertical’ diversity. This does not mean that other objectives have vanished. For example, student mobility between higher education institutions of different countries can only be facilitated in the framework of the ‘Bologna Process’ if the national systems are not steeply stratified; they need to offer the students of each institution an opportunity to study for a period at a wide range of institutions in other countries. Yet, the growing emphasis on ‘vertical’ differences between higher education institutions has discouraged efforts to strive for horizontal diversity, i.e., for specific profiles, while imitating the top has become the clearly dominant dynamic. In terms of headline of this Introduction, we can

say: ‘Diversity’ and ‘Excellence’ seem to have more adversarial relationships nowadays than in preceding decades.

Beyond the Limelight of the Policy Discourse: The Varied Features of Diversity and Excellence in Higher Education

An international conference aimed at providing information on the issues of ‘diversity’ and ‘excellence’ and at discussing the challenges and their implications for shaping the future of higher education is itself a mirror of the variety of views, prevailing sentiments and actual activities in higher education across countries. The EAIR Forum 2014 has shown on the one hand that higher education is strongly challenged by the dominant ‘world-class university’ paradigm to strive for the top, to imitate the top, to consider the individual university as the key actor and unit of production, and to foster the quality of research even at the expense of the quality of teaching and of the relevance of both research and teaching. On the other hand, the EAIR Forum has shown that the actors involved do not want to yield to such a narrow approach and that most people analyse the situation from a wider perspective. First, the overall question is raised whether ‘diversity’ and ‘excellence’ are bound to have a clearly adversarial relationship, whether a ‘peaceful coexistence’ is possible, or whether one may even assume a mutually creative influence. Second, attention is paid to a multitude of interesting concepts and activities, which show that visions and realities are much broader than the fashionable discourse suggests.

Some contributions in this volume suggest, for example, that universities see inequality of opportunity and of actual participation in higher education nowadays as an even more striking challenge than ever before – in part, because hopes have faded that this problem would be easily solved due to the process of educational expansion and democratization of society, and in part, because concerns seem to grow about the social cohesion of society. Some contributions point out that not all institutions of higher education aim to occupy a certain rank in a highly stratified system, but on the contrary, intend to serve a broad spectrum of functions, qualities and student profiles. For example, mergers of institutions of higher education might be driven by concepts of economy of scale, broadening the spectrum of disciplines or serving regional expectations, but actually leading to an increasing intra-institutional diversity. Or institutions of higher education may opt for strategies often called ‘diversity management’, i.e., for a variety of measures which aim not only at improving the chances of ‘new students’ to succeed in their study, but also try to ensure that diversity provides a creative basis for experience and interaction which eventually lead to greater success than teaching and learning in relatively homogeneous environments. Some contributions focus on changes of steering and management in higher education which enable those responsible to shape higher education so as to address a broader spectrum of challenges and tasks than just those that predominate in current public discourse.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS VOLUME

The book is structured in three sections. The first discusses challenges resulting from the pressure of neo-liberal trends upon higher education systems. The second considers the impact of change upon students, focusing particularly upon issues of equity and justice; and the third discusses challenges to the functioning of the institutions with regard to management, governance and performance assessment.

New Challenges for Higher Education

The first section addresses the market-oriented forces that are causing change in higher education structures, and foregrounds the dangers that inhere in some of the financial trends. Four articles present a variety of perspectives.

Peter Scott presents a key overview paper in which he considers whether markets and heavy ‘managerialism’ necessarily need to go together. Lack of diversity has emerged as a political issue and the market seems to have become a form of hegemony that is assumed to promote differentiation. But Scott argues that the links are not inevitable. He is unconvinced that the ideology of a ‘market model’ is suitable for higher education in the first place; and even if it were, we ought not to assume that in order to promote diversity we have to encourage more market-like behaviour. Markets do not necessarily lead to diversity, and are just as likely to produce uniformity as to encourage differentiation. League tables and rankings may actually encourage uniformity in that the aspiration is often towards the same *kind* of excellence: usually research-based. Indeed, tighter institutional management may well encourage narrow and traditional criteria, and promote conformity, favouring ‘closed’ rather than ‘open’ systems. In short, the operation of markets may reinforce conformity rather than stimulating difference. Markets need managers, but managers may not necessarily need markets.

Yet differentiation of mission and profile in higher education institutions is widely seen as a means of adjusting higher education provision to the growing and increasingly diverse demands of the European labour markets that call for academically trained work forces. *Christiane Gaehtgens* discusses the ‘Excellence Initiative’ in Germany. She studies its effect on the institutions, giving special attention to its impact on small and medium sized universities in a competitive environment. Mostly it has been the large higher education institutions that have excelled in the Excellence Initiative, but Gaehtgens argues that there is a pressing need to define the ‘middle’ of a higher education system, to appreciate its role and to re-define institutional strategies to grow, improve and succeed. She concludes that smaller universities have an essential role in meeting the diverse, flexible, stakeholder-driven demand for academic teaching and innovation in our societies. But in order for them to fulfil that role, they will need to limit their research ambitions to selected areas of excellence and make greater use of strategic networks and cooperation. They will need support from policy makers and the public to achieve such a mission,

and will require a shift in priorities which allows areas other than research to become recognised in reputation building and funding.

Though Gaehtgens argues for the importance of smaller higher education institutions, many countries are using mergers as a way of creating larger institutions. However, mergers constitute a vast challenge with respect to governance, quality, diversity and economy. *Göran Melin* offers an analytical study of mergers that have occurred in Denmark and Sweden, conscious of the fact that mergers are almost always dramatic for those involved, and have long term effects on higher education institutions. His study reveals common patterns of merger processes and provides a synthesis of recommendations to consider when planning and implementing such amalgamations. He argues that there is an inverse relationship between the speed of merger and post-merger recovery: a short preparation phase before the actual merger requires relatively longer integration work afterwards; and vice versa. At first glance, it may look as if mergers lead to less diversity within higher education, but this is not necessarily so. Melin believes that strong institutions are better able to nurture diversity inside themselves, allowing small and emerging fields to grow, whereas financially poor institutions may have fewer opportunities to provide the kind of support that leads to increased diversity. But there is a “quality tunnel” that the merged institutions must go through right after the merger: the desired improvements will take some time and the rewards will not be immediate.

The section ends with a cautionary piece by *Carol Frances* from the United States who warns Europeans of the dangers they may encounter by emulating American higher education policies. She believes that it has been a great mistake to shift from making higher education primarily a public responsibility to putting more and more of the burden of paying for higher education onto students and their families. High tuition fees have been implemented but the policy of high student aid has (mostly) not been implemented. This has led to student borrowing with concomitant debt that profoundly affects life decisions; a graduate beginning employment with a heavy debt burden is at a considerable disadvantage compared with an economically buoyant graduate who is well placed to accumulate capital from his or her earnings. The shift to debt finance widens income inequality, and ultimately the quality of national life as reflected in the UN Human Development Index. It has fuelled the growth of for-profit higher education institutions, and has enabled at least one individual entrepreneur to become a billionaire. Frances calls for policy makers in other nations to become more aware of the unanticipated and unfavourable consequences of American policies and to pursue more positive national education policies based on comparative returns to greater investment in their people.

Impact of Changes on Students

In a mass higher education system, the social basis of the students necessarily diversifies. Not all are traditional students from educated backgrounds, and this poses new challenges for planners and managers. The second section of the book is unified

around the theme of social justice for students and addresses life cycle transitions from school to higher education, degree completion, postgraduate education and graduate employability.

Ashley Macrander concentrates upon geographic inequality in South Africa where 60% of Whites attend tertiary education, compared with only 11% of Black Africans: this is still the situation despite the government's strategic plan to change from apartheid to a non-racialised democratic State. She references research indicating that poverty, indigenous language use, inequity in primary and secondary education, and parental death are barriers to post-secondary education, specifically for Black African students. She uses geospatial analysis of the distribution of the Black African and White populations across South Africa to demonstrate an environment in which Black Africans have become relatively isolated. Within their communities, geographic space and social life mutually inform each other to create access barriers to higher education. Her analysis of socio-spatial (in)justice provides a more complete picture of the multiple sociological determinants of education that function concurrently to constrain Black African student access to tertiary education.

Luis Carvalho is also concerned with higher education access, this time in Portugal. It is a country where private schools tend to inflate their students' grades to maximise their chances of getting into university; and public universities lack autonomy to choose the students whom they admit. In a competitive world, student selection becomes an instrument that allows higher education institutions to increase their own status and productivity by filling their courses with able people who will do them credit. He focuses upon the most sought-after university in the country to research the question: how do academics define merit as it relates to student selection in higher education? He concludes that the present Portuguese access system is wasteful and leaves many programmes full of unmotivated candidates. Indeed the academics themselves consider that academic credentials, used without any other criteria, are often rather meaningless; these university teachers attribute more value to motivation, inquisitiveness and critical thinking, even though these dimensions are difficult to assess and indeed are *not* assessed under the current regime. Carvalho clearly thinks that they should be.

Ray Franke examines higher education in the United States where even with universal access for students seeking admittance to the higher education system, there has not been a concomitant increase in educational attainment nor a decrease in societal inequality. Franke therefore seeks to examine ways in which socioeconomic status and related measures affect students' likelihood of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. In a word, he examines student persistence and degree completion. His results show that students from the lower income spectrum are significantly less likely to graduate with a Bachelor's degree than their high-income peers, regardless of institution attended. Accumulated wealth positively affects degree attainment. Franke stresses that administrators, faculty, and policy makers *can* help reduce persistent gaps in educational attainment through measures that increase social integration on campus, reduce the need for gainful employment while studying,

provide adequate financial aid, and increase intellectual stimulus through diversity on campus.

Tony Strike looks at access, not for undergraduates, but for postgraduates in that bastion of neo-liberal values, England. In the United Kingdom, there is already a three-cycle structure of Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral degrees which the 'Bologna Process' seeks to introduce on a wide scale in countries of the European Union. English universities charge very high fees for their programmes, and many students emerge from their first study cycle laden with financial debt. It is perhaps not a cause for surprise that progress from undergraduate to postgraduate programmes has been faltering in recent years. Graduates from Master's courses have better earning potential, and Strike is interested in the extent to which opportunities are available for all those with the ability and ambition to progress their studies. He examines the 'widening participation' agenda for people from backgrounds under-represented at university, particularly as regards their access to postgraduate study. He finds that opportunities for progression vary between different socio-economic groups and that a disadvantaged socio-economic situation is the main obstacle to postgraduate participation. He reports on a major project addressing the developing postgraduate deficit, and calls for a targeted national postgraduate scholarship scheme to be administered by higher education institutions. This would, he believes, help to ensure fair access to study and the professions.

The final contribution in the second section addresses the issue of employability in Bulgaria. *Pepka Boyadjieva and Petya Ilieva-Trichkova* explore the impact which the institutional profiles of higher education institutions have on the graduates' early employment history, in the context of expansion and differentiation of higher education. They argue that graduate employability is strongly influenced by institutional characteristics resulting from various modes of differentiation leading to diversity (structural, quality-related and symbolic). They show that only by taking into account the institutional profiles can we understand the influence of higher education institutions upon graduates' life chances. Their assumption is that we should use this understanding to develop adequate higher education policies; and that we need a new combined theoretical framework taking into account both the individual's capabilities, and the relationship between higher education and the labour market.

Impact of Changes on the Functioning of Institutions

The greater the diversity of a higher education system, the greater the need for skillful management systems and sensitive forms of performance assessment. The third section of the book deals with aspects of institutional functioning in view of the challenges posed by diversification.

Barbara Ehrenstorfer, Stefanie Sterrer, Silke Preymann, Regina Aichinger and Martina Gaisch explore the ways in which leadership styles and approaches are applied in higher education. Taking two different types of higher education institutions

in Austria as their example, they study the competencies required by manager academics in each particular institutional environment. One of the institutions is a traditional university whereas the other focuses upon applied sciences. The necessary skills are multi-faceted and differ somewhat in each institutional type; not all can be imparted by training. There is evidence to suggest that a distributed leadership approach is the most successful at personal and organizational levels, and the five authors propose a specific set of leadership values on the basis of their research. In order to promote leadership competencies, there is clearly a need for more predictable manager career plans incorporating proper training opportunities with availability of institutionalised mentoring and coaching. Recruiting practices have not kept up with the requirements of manager academics; they still tend to focus on professional and academic skills, with leadership and management skills being considered merely as a desirable add-on. Improvement at a number of levels is needed to manage this sort of diversity.

Ton Kallenberg also addresses himself to the role of middle managers, this time in the Netherlands. He distinguishes a typology of four roles that are particularly important during strategic innovations: namely Guard, Constructor, Diplomat and Guide. The Guard revitalises, the Constructor transforms and the Diplomat explores. The Guide is people-oriented rather than result-oriented, and is committed to staff in all types of innovation. Academic middle managers are able to see opportunities for synergy where the various practices and skills can reinforce one another. Especially when the organisation innovates, they can potentially play a central role. They have what the author terms a ‘prism-effect’: they absorb, reflect, refract and transform information from many different sources, selecting, interpreting, filtering and slanting it positively or negatively. They use the input in a slightly different way to that in which they have originally received it, and because of this capacity, they can exercise great influence on strategic innovation. The challenge is to link the distinctive style of academic middle manager with the appropriate type of strategic innovation. A mismatch will lead to a troublesome innovation process plagued by complaints from different quarters within the organisation.

Norbert Sabic studies governance in Romania, a country that has consciously sought to diversify its higher education system by using a classification and ranking exercise. The Romanian government considered the homogeneity of its system a barrier to achieving excellence in an increasingly globalised world, and adopted diversification as one of its main policy objectives. It aimed to use transparency tools as instruments of governance and link them to the allocation of publicly funded study places and other financial incentives. Its attempt to evaluate institutional performance against its own indicators has been severely criticised as an attempt to instrumentalise universities for national political agendas and make them compete against each other. Though the harshest dimensions of this policy have now eased, the new forms of governance appear to be a hybrid combination of a market model and of a sovereign state model in which the former can be made to serve the latter.

The Romanian reform represents a unique case since it was one of the first attempts in Europe actually to use a classification and ranking exercise for such broad purposes.

René Krempkow is also concerned with performance based funding which he believes may become increasingly the norm, even if it is not yet widely implemented in Germany, his home country. He points out that performance ratings need to take account of the basic human ‘material’ with which the institutions work: namely students. The social background of students varies greatly between institutions, and those from higher strata tend to perform more strongly with concomitant influence upon the reputation of the higher education institutions where they study. After all, diversified higher education institutions have to fulfil needs of different target groups, and some higher education institutions have a majority of students who are the first in their family to attend university, whereas others – typically the most high-prestige, research-oriented – may have a majority of students whose parents and even grandparents were higher education graduates. He examines the Australian method of analysing how institutions add educational value to maximise the performance of students beyond what might normally be expected from their social and academic background. He advocates that higher education institutions should be rewarded financially for their strong ‘added-value’ performance, and that the Australian model could, with advantage, be applied to Germany and other countries where performance ratings play a vitally important role.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we have stated, this broad and interesting book regarding diversity and excellence in higher education is based on the 2014 EAIR Forum in Essen, Germany. Therefore, the editors wish to thank all the supporters of the conference event. We are especially grateful to those who engaged in discussion with the authors of chapters presented here, and thereby took the theme of the conference a step further.

Also, the programme committee for the 2014 EAIR Forum has to be mentioned for its hard work (starting in 2012) and insight in selecting the conference contributions as well as providing individual feedback before the event: Prof. Dr. Ulrich Radtke, Prof. Dr. Volker Clausen, Prof. Dr. Stephan Zelewski, Dr. Attila Pausits and Dr. Oliver Locker-Grütjen.

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PART 1

NEW CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

PETER SCOTT

1. MARKETS AND MANAGERIALISM

Enhancing Diversity or Promoting Conformity?

INTRODUCTION

Best-selling ‘guru’ books, often aimed at business people transiting through airports, love alliterative lists – the three ‘S’s, the four ‘C’s, the six ‘R’s and so on. The choice of bulleted advice, it sometimes seems, is constrained by their initial letters. In the same spirit this chapter is about the two ‘M’s – markets and managerialism – both of course boo-words in the traditional academy (Brown & Carasso, 2013; McGettigan, 2013). Often in the context of the evolution of modern higher education systems these two are elided. Markets need managers, and managers require entrepreneurial spaces in which to showcase their skills. The argument presented here is different, that the management revolution that has taken place in higher education over the past two or three decades may be (roughly speaking) synchronous with, but it is not necessarily synonymous with, the somewhat stuttering advance towards greater reliance on more explicit market mechanisms in the funding and organisation of higher education. Markets may indeed need managers, but the reverse is not invariably or necessarily true.

This chapter also addresses a second theme, the assumed dichotomy between convergence and divergence or homogeneity – ‘one size fits all’ (or most) – and differentiation. ‘Assumed’ because it is not always clear that higher education institutions are actually becoming more alike, although standardised state funding systems and levelling markets may provide an incentive for them to do so. In terms of their institutional types mass higher education systems appear to be less differentiated than the elite university systems they replaced, a trend that some have found counter-intuitive. But in terms of their organisational cultures, professional and pedagogic practices, knowledge traditions and (crucially) social bases, mass systems are clearly more diverse than elite systems. However, for reasons that may have much to do with the desire of elite research universities to distinguish themselves from other institutions (now much more likely to share the ‘university’ title) and perhaps to kill off any competition that these other institutions may represent, the alleged lack of ‘diversity’ in modern higher education has emerged as a political issue. And it is argued, in general rather than specific terms, that market systems may be able to deliver greater differentiation.

In order to illuminate these two paired (and conveniently alliterative) issues – markets and managerialism; and convergence/conformity and divergence/differentiation – three questions will be considered:

Is there an inevitability about the apparent drift from ‘mass’ systems of higher education that are publicly oriented (if not publicly directed) and largely publicly funded to ‘market’ systems (or maybe networks is a better word than systems) composed of ‘entrepreneurial’ universities and increasingly dependent on ‘cost-sharing’ (in other words, fees paid by students)?

Are these ‘market’ systems (or networks of ‘entrepreneurial’ institutions – or maybe even ‘knowledge businesses’) – whether historically inevitable or merely ideologically contingent – well designed to encourage greater diversity or are they likely, on the contrary, to reward conformity?

To what extent do the ‘market’ systems that are emerging in many parts of the world, most strongly in England within Europe but also in Australia, New Zealand and many countries in East Asia, really constitute a genuine market? In the absence of a significant private for-profit sector (as opposed to well established private but not-for-profit institutions that have much in common with their publicly funded peers), does it matter that viable pricing, usually regarded as central to the operation of genuine markets, seems to be weakly developed? Or are these ‘market’ systems so hedged around by regulatory constraints, and so dependent on (indirect) public funding, that the label is misleading?

‘MASSIFICATION’ AND ‘MARKETISATION’

The first question, then, is whether the drift to ‘markets’ is inevitable, and what relationship it has with the development of mass higher education. Is ‘marketisation’ a higher (or lower!) form of ‘massification’, or something different? Often both are glossed in terms of ‘modernising’ or ‘liberalising’ higher education systems, with the former more closely linked perhaps to the development of mass higher education and the latter with the drift towards market systems (Scott, 1994; Marginson, 1997). The new ingredient, which may have tilted development in a more explicitly market direction, is the increasingly unchallenged hegemony of an aggressive free-market neo-conservative ideology.

But, whatever sequence is preferred, there are some common features. The first is the trend towards greater institutional autonomy, and the second is a (rather less certain) trend towards ‘cost-sharing’ (or charging, or increasing, tuition fees paid by students). The two are often lumped together as a single phenomenon, although here they will be treated separately. There is also a third trend: the growing prominence of publicly available rankings, performance indicators and, in particular, league tables which have fuelled ‘brand wars’ among institutions. Finally, there is a fourth trend, away from passive collegio-bureaucratic forms of university governance to more managerialist, and latterly entrepreneurial, modes.

Institutional Autonomy

The trend towards greater institutional autonomy can be explained in terms of two ideas, one rather old and the other comparatively recent.

The ‘old’ idea is that in an open society universities – traditional universities, at any rate – can only fulfil their full potential if they are autonomous institutions (and, therefore, able to ensure the twin freedoms of teaching and research). In its original formulation this idea goes back to the Humboldtian ideal supposedly embodied in the German universities of the 19th century; English and French higher education were perhaps more compromised by their role in the reproduction of elites, social elites in the case of the former and professional elites in the case of the latter, while higher education in the United States was always more utilitarian in its orientation. More recently a clear distinction has been drawn between the territory and competence of the state, the domain of the private – or ‘market’ – sector and the intermediate (and intermediary) territory of so-called ‘civil society’ that is neither ‘state’ nor ‘private’. Universities are firmly located in this third sector of ‘civil society’

The ‘new’ idea is that in the high-technology (and, arguably, post-industrial) economy of the 21st century, scientific, professional and technical knowledge have become a primary resource – and, therefore, that knowledge-producing organisations (which include universities and other higher education institutions) have become primary producers of economic wealth (not just, as in former eras, of cultural capital and socio-political esteem). More recently perhaps this idea has been expressed in less triumphant and categorical terms, as it has become clear that raw materials (especially forms of energy) and capital, in its monetary or tradable forms, have retained their importance even in the most knowledge-intensive economies. But it remains a potent idea that explains the proliferation of ‘skills agendas’ in most countries, developed or developing, and the drive to emphasise the applications, or impact, of research. To realise their full potential, higher education institutions must be flexible, adaptable or (in the favourite word) ‘entrepreneurial’. But, so it is argued, they can only act in this way if they are given greater autonomy.

These two ideas, ‘old’ and ‘new’, have come together to power the drive towards greater institutional autonomy – although it is probably fair to say that the second has been much more influential than the first. The forms of institutional autonomy that have become popular across Europe – and have been encouraged globally by organisations such as the World Bank and OECD – place a much greater emphasis on the freedom of institutional leaders to manage without unnecessary political or bureaucratic constraints than they do on the traditional freedoms to teach and research celebrated in the Humboldtian ideal (although the latter are absolutely crucial in terms of promoting scientific curiosity and intellectual creativity, which are the real engines of innovation in contemporary societies). We are talking about the freedom to manage not the freedom to think.

Yet both ideas, ‘old’ and ‘new’, can be related to the development of ‘market’ systems of higher education. In both cases the state, especially in its extended form

as the 20th-century ‘welfare state’ or ‘social market’, is defined as the ‘other’ – as a constraint on the university’s traditional freedoms to teach and research (although usually for reasons of administrative conformity rather than from a wish to impose any form of political censorship); and as an equally significant obstacle to the freedom of higher education institutions to spread their ‘entrepreneurial’ wings in order to contribute fully to the global ‘knowledge’ economy. In other words, in the context of the ‘market’ higher education of the 21st century, the state is the problem not the solution as it was conceived to be in the case of the ‘mass’ systems that developed in the second half of the 20th century.

Of course, the state has not disappeared from higher education – and never will. It has simply changed its clothes. The ‘welfare state’ that itself directly provided ‘public’ services such as higher education (often in the cause of nation building or, after 1945/1960, social solidarity) has been replaced by the ‘audit’ or ‘regulation state’ that now safeguards the interests of ‘customers’, invests in scientific capacity (or, if you like, intellectual infrastructure) and ensures ‘value for money’. In its new clothes the state may exercise even greater power and influence over the scale, character and direction of higher education than its ‘welfare state’ ever aspired to wield. This means that the trend towards greater institutional autonomy, although undoubtedly an important element in the evolution of ‘market’ systems of higher education, must be carefully evaluated. Autonomy for whom and in what interests are important questions.

‘Cost-Sharing’

The second trend is towards ‘cost-sharing’, a euphemism used to describe policies that lead to a reduction in direct state funding of universities and their increasing dependence on tuition fees paid by students. As has already been suggested, this is a less well-established trend. Within Europe it has made limited progress. In most European countries where fees (or student charges under different labels) have been charged, they have stayed low. In some key countries, notably in Scandinavia, higher education continues to be ‘free’. And in Germany there has actually been a retreat from ‘cost-sharing’: those *Länder* that did charge fees have abandoned them. Within Europe England is the only country to move towards much higher fees (currently capped at 9,000£ a year). Other parts of the United Kingdom have not followed England: there are no fees in Scotland; Wales and Northern Ireland have kept fees low.

Outside Europe the picture is also mixed. In countries with well-established private universities, for example Korea or Japan, fees have remained common – but have not tended to increase nor has ‘cost-sharing’ tended to spread. In the United States above-inflation tuition fee increases have provoked a powerful political backlash. In poor countries with weak state structures which, combined with endemic corruption, have produced wholly inadequate tax bases, there has often

been no realistic alternative income apart from student fees. But none of this adds up to an irresistible global trend towards ‘cost-sharing’.

Where fees have been increased, it has often been because the imposition of austerity policies following the 2008 financial crisis, and consequent economic recession (and increasing state indebtedness as tax income has reduced) has left no alternative. Rarely have there been much evidence of a political will, or ideological drive, to shift the burden of higher education from taxpayers to students (and graduates). There have simply been more pressing claims on (shrinking) public expenditure, notably health and social security. In other words higher tuition fees have largely been collateral damage.

It is also significant that, despite (sadly) an increasing tolerance of growing inequality in many advanced societies, the demands of social equity have remained sufficiently strong to ensure that the financial impact of higher fees has been mitigated by a range of measures. These include low-interest loans (which may never be repaid in full) and scholarships and bursaries for students from disadvantaged social groups. This has had two effects. The first is that the overall total, and proportion, of publicly provided funding made available to higher education has hardly changed – although it may now be included under different categories in national accounts. In other words, the state is still contributing just as much as before (and, consequently, its influence over the development of higher education, although exercised in different ways, has not been diminished). The second effect is that most fee regimes are really a combination of voucher systems (whereby public funding is channelled through students rather than directly to institutions) and graduate taxes (because up-front loans are provided to pay loans and recovered through deductions from the salaries of graduates). Both effects make it doubtful whether the cost of higher education has truly been shifted from taxpayers to ‘users’. In short, ‘cost-sharing’ is often a sham.

In truth, both trends – towards greater institutional autonomy (the ‘right of managers to manage’, of course, not enhanced freedoms to teach and research), and towards ‘cost-sharing’ (and higher student fees) – are perhaps better understood not as home-grown higher education policies but as the collateral consequences of a shift in the way the 21st-century state is conceived and organised. One of the most conspicuous features of that shift is the rapid growth of a new ‘third sector’ – not, of course, the traditional ‘third sector’ as represented by ‘civil society’ but the para-state produced by the privatisation and out-sourcing of once ‘public’ services to commercial organisations that has created an expanding, but shadowy, borderland between the state and the private (or market) sector.

Perhaps the development of so-called ‘market’ higher education systems is best understood in this context – conceptually, because the evolution of the para-state and universities’ role within it (as ‘delivery’ organisations of nationally mandated ‘contracts’) probably makes better sense than simply to view them rather idealistically (and naively?) as powerful ‘knowledge’ organisations within a global ‘knowledge society’ and also practically, because higher education institutions

must now navigate their courses through the mass of audit and regulation that is the fate of other state ‘contractors’ such as energy companies or airlines. The new responsibilities thrust on managers in higher education are to manoeuvre, as advantageously as possible, within this constrained (and politicised) environment and to play the ‘compliance game’ successfully – rather than the more open strategic responsibilities characteristic of truly market organisations.

‘Brand Wars’

The third trend associated with the shift to ‘market’ higher education is the growing number of publicly available rankings, performance indicators and ‘league tables’ (Drori et al., 2013). The last of these, in particular, now shape institutional strategies in ways that many regard as exaggerated and even unhealthy (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). Two effects can be observed.

The first is the increasing emphasis now placed on institutional ‘brands’ (and perhaps disproportionate resources now devoted to public relations and marketing – at the expense of mainstream teaching and research). This has given rise to a phenomenon that has been labelled ‘brand wars’ among institutions – even when the areas in which there is genuine competition between them is in fact highly constrained.

The second effect is the popularity of a new language, the discourse of ‘world-class universities’. At a national level this discourse shapes priorities, as states pride themselves on having more than their ‘share’ of such institutions – or focus funding more selectively in order to establish, and sustain, ‘world-class universities’. At an institutional level the impact of this discourse is also apparent in the development of strategies to be among the ‘top 10/50/100’ in the world. As with brands this competitive behaviour flourishes even in the absence of real competition – most of all, because globally excellent research depends far more on collaboration than competition (and research excellence is the real denominator of ‘world-class’-ness).

The extent to which rankings and the rest, and the ‘branding wars’ and ‘world-class universities’ discourse to which they give rise, can properly be regarded as evidence of a shift towards ‘market’ higher education systems is also open to doubt. It is important to recognise that rankings can equally plausibly be recognised as characteristic of ‘mass’ systems – for a number of reasons.

- First, they were – and are – a reflection of the political drive towards greater transparency in the allocation of public funding. As elite university systems, characterised by high levels of trust, were transformed into mass higher education systems, in which trust inevitably diminished, demands for greater transparency and accountability inevitably grew – as they did across the whole of the public sector.
- Secondly, rankings also reflect the greater differentiation of institutional missions within mass systems – especially with regard to research. If only a minority of

institutions is seriously to engage in research at a high level, selective funding systems have to be devised – and justified by transparent rankings.

- Finally, of course, as state budgets become more constrained (because of the rising cost of mass systems and also the shift away from high-tax ‘welfare states’), questions of efficiency, effectiveness and value-for-money become more urgent – so more explicit evaluation and ranking systems are essential tools.

Managerialism

The fourth trend, although predating the current preoccupation with ‘market’ systems of higher education, is the development of more robust management systems, and cultures, within institutions (Deem et al., 2007). This development has had a number of strands. One is the devolution of administrative responsibilities that had once resided in ministries to individual institutions, which has already been discussed. Another is the replacement of university councils that had a large number of members, including elected staff and student representatives, a participatory if not democratic orientation and a ‘trusteeship’ ethos by smaller more executive-style boards often with reduced representation and a more corporate orientation. A third is redefinition of the role of the rector, president or vice-chancellor. Once regarded as the head of an academic collegium, at the most *primus inter pares*, the rector is now increasingly seen as the chief executive officer of an entrepreneurial ‘knowledge’ corporation. This redefinition of the role of rector has been accompanied by the emergence of senior management teams comprising both vice-rectors (pro-vice-chancellors) with executive responsibilities and senior finance and human resources professionals who are now more confident to trespass on what would once have been regarded as purely academic judgments. This development of more robust management structures has not proceeded at the same pace across Europe. Generally speaking it has been more pronounced in northern (and, in particular, north-west) Europe and has encountered the most resistance in southern Europe. But the overall direction, if not the pace, of travel seems clear (Enders et al., 2011).

However, the links between this managerial revolution and the pressure to promote ‘market’ solutions in the funding and organisation of higher education are – at best – loose. The major driver of this revolution has been the growth of much more complex and heterogeneous systems (and also of much larger and more complex institutions) – in short, mass higher education. In turn this has been driven by the desire to open up higher education to much wider social groups, itself an aspect of the post-war democratic revolution, which has produced spectacular quantitative growth, and the emergence of a knowledge economy, and the desire of many (most) European countries to build high-skill, high-tech and high value-added economies, which have led to radical qualitative changes in the mission and orientation of universities that emphasise the utility and impact of investment in higher education and science. In the context of these new demands universities have had to develop greater management capacity, regardless of whether dealing with state bureaucracies

of which they no longer legally formed a part and Governments with other, urgent and competing priorities or struggling to cope with the challenges of a new higher education 'market'.

It is also worth emphasising that this managerial revolution was closely aligned with what became labelled as the 'new public management' (NPM), in other words the application of corporate strategies and management techniques to the delivery of public services (Hood & Dunleavy, 1994; Ferlie et al., 1996). As such, universities inevitably adopted many of the private-sector practices current in the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, the idea of NPM has tended to be superseded by other models – for example, so-called 'network management' – that emphasises the negotiated management of multiple (external) relationships rather than the construction of (internal) command-and-control systems (Ferlie et al., 2011). These new models reflected in part the looser and more creative management cultures that have developed in some of the most dynamic 21st-century companies, especially in high-technology and knowledge-intensive sectors. It may be that universities have been slow to adapt their management structures to these new models, despite the fact that their traditional organisational cultures and their creative and entrepreneurial orientation appear to be better aligned with these new models than corporate-style NPM.

DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENTIATION OR CONFORMITY

The second question is whether 'market' systems, whatever constraints they must operate under, are more – or less – likely to produce differentiation of institutional missions and practice than the 'mass' systems they are supposedly replacing? But, before addressing that question, let me ask two other questions. First, what evidence is there that current higher education systems are not sufficiently differentiated? And, if they are not, in what respects is there a lack of diversity (or, to put it more simply, needs, whether from potential students, of forms of delivery or of subjects, are not being adequately met by current systems)? It is important to ask these questions because often it seems to be taken for granted that higher education is not sufficiently diverse, and that greater institutional differentiation is required, without any serious examination of the available evidence.

Arguably there are three ways in which current higher education systems lack diversity.

- First, students from less socially advantaged groups (and also perhaps ethnic and cultural minorities) are under-represented. This may be the result of either active or passive discrimination – in other words, because of biases in favour of the admission of students from bourgeois backgrounds; or because current forms of higher education make participation less attractive to under-represented groups.
- Secondly, the ways in which higher education is currently delivered are not flexible enough. It is still generally assumed that 'standard' students are young

adults who are studying full-time before entering employment or embarking on their professional careers. As a result modes of delivery, in terms of pedagogy, scheduling, organisation, location, perhaps technology, are still designed to meet the needs of these ‘standard’ students – to the detriment of ‘non-standard’ students (who may actually be a majority in some institutions and subjects).

- Thirdly, it is alleged there is a bias against more vocational and applied subjects, which as a result either command less prestige (and consequently attract fewer – good – students and graduates are paid lower salaries) and/or are concentrated in less prestigious (and less generously funded) institutions. Sometimes an ideological gloss is added, suggesting that traditional universities and traditional academics disdain links with industry and business – and also local and regional communities.

Logically a properly functioning market in higher education should work to remedy these ‘deficits’ – if they are indeed the major respects in which higher education lacks diversity. On the first there is little evidence that this is happening, despite the fact that it is beyond dispute that students from disadvantaged groups are under-represented in almost every higher education system. (The bias against them is even greater in less developed countries, and may be increasing everywhere as higher levels of inequality are tolerated in most countries.) In political discourse much less attention is now paid to the unmet needs of such students, because to do so is regarded as meddling by the state and as interference with institutional autonomy. In my own country the focus on so-called ‘widening participation’ has sharply declined – as student fees have sharply increased (coincidentally?). This points to another problem. ‘Markets’ tend to favour the articulate and the wealthy; the less articulate and the poor must fend for themselves. The increasing emphasis on ‘reputation’ and ‘comparative advantage’, encouraged by the rise of rankings and league tables, has had the same effect. The most prestigious universities are almost without exception the most unequal in terms of their social bases; and the lesson has not been lost on those institutions striving to emulate them. For all these reasons ‘market’ systems of higher education are likely to offer little to under-represented groups.

But what about the second area where there seems to be a *prima facie* case for a lack of diversity, the comparative lack of flexible provision? Here, perhaps, there is more to be said for the positive contribution of markets. Properly organised part-time provision (as opposed to full-time provision that accepts many students will need to work as well as study) is comparatively rare in many higher education systems, despite their mass scale – although an important reason is that more flexible provision is more difficult to fund in a systematic manner (in terms of both fairness and accountability). There may be two respects in which more market-oriented higher education may help to deliver more flexible provision. The first is by exploiting new learning technologies more aggressively than may be feasible in traditional universities (with their less flexible academic structures and unionised

workforces) – although it is important to note that the much-hyped MOOCs (massive open online courses) attract those who have already had high levels of education (and accordingly possess high levels also of social and cultural capital). The second is by providing lower-cost no-frills higher education, often focused narrowly on skills acquisition (that confer little social and cultural capital).

The third alleged ‘deficit’, the bias against vocational and applied subjects, is less easy to prove. In one sense it is false. The mass higher education systems that developed with gathering pace from 1960 onwards were – and are – markedly less ‘academic’ than the elite university systems they superseded. The majority subjects today are business and management, education and health studies, not physics or philosophy. In this respect mass systems have proved to be highly responsive to shifting patterns of student demand – and also changing patterns of employment. But in another sense the bias is half-true. Vocational and applied subjects, apart from venerable professional disciplines such as law and medicine, tend to be concentrated in less prestigious, often non-university, institutions – although every aspiring ‘world-class university’ now has, or wants, its business school. But two points deserve to be made. First, the evolution of mass higher education systems has tended to mitigate this bias because they have incorporated non-university institutions alongside traditional universities (and in some cases, such as the United Kingdom, they have even been ‘promoted’ to become universities). Nor has so-called ‘academic drift’ been all been one-way because traditional universities now offer more vocational subjects (and teach ‘academic’ subjects in a more ‘vocational’ way – for example, by stressing the links between studying the humanities and working in the creative/cultural industries). Secondly, there is almost no evidence that ‘market’ systems would further mitigate this bias; indeed, the signs are that the opposite could happen as for-profit private institutions (and even the more entrepreneurially inclined public ones) developed low-cost (and lower-prestige?) courses in many vocational subjects. The result could be that subjects like education or nursing could be ‘down-graded’ – in terms of professional status.

So – having considered the preliminary question of whether, and in what respects, current higher education is not sufficiently diverse, back to the main question: are ‘market’ higher education systems more likely than ‘mass’ systems to promote differentiation? The available evidence is certainly not strong enough to support the politically and ideologically fashionable view that ‘market’ systems are inevitably more differentiated. In the first place, in all markets there is a hierarchy of needs some of which it is more profitable, and easier, to meet than others. It is for this reason that regulation is imposed on markets – and also why historically public provision has been developed alongside market provision to meet needs that markets, by themselves, have little or no incentive to meet. Secondly, the operation of markets is just as likely to reinforce conformity as to stimulate difference. Certainly two of the characteristics of ‘market’ higher education systems – the trend towards greater (managerial) autonomy and the increasing popularity of rankings, performance indicators and league tables – seem likely to produce greater homogeneity.

But much depends on the way in which the market actually operates; to what extent can the ‘market’ practices that are developing in many higher education systems (and are widely assumed to be the inevitable, and desirable, direction for the evolution of 21st-century higher education systems, a ‘single path’ of development) constitute a genuine market.

QUASI-MARKETS, MANAGED MARKETS AND ‘TRUE’ MARKETS

So it is necessary to consider the nature of ‘markets’ in higher education, the third topic of this chapter. Right at the start it is important to recognise that, in the real world, there are no ‘perfect’ markets; all markets are flawed if judged against some ideal theoretical standard. So it is not sufficient for opponents of the ‘marketisation’ of higher education simply to point out that ‘markets’ in higher education are bound to be imperfect. So are all markets.

However, there are three special characteristics of higher education markets that do need to be emphasised.

- The first is that, with very few exceptions, higher education is a one-off experience (or ‘purchase’) – unlike a car that is changed every few years (or smart phones that are changed every few months). Although students may also take postgraduate courses, generally they do not repeat the cycles of higher education – unless they have dropped out or failed. Also, unlike many consumer goods, higher education does not become obsolete and need to be replaced by a ‘newer model’ or a more technologically sophisticated product. Or, rather, it becomes obsolete in a different sense, as skills and knowledge change (as does the wider socio-economic environment) leading to a permanent need for updating.
- The second characteristic is that, by and large, higher education is a positional good, its value being defined predominantly in terms of its accessibility and/or scarcity. Of course, a university education is an absolute good in terms of the enlightenment of individual human beings and the transformation of their lives. But its marketability lies largely in its value as a positional good, which is why league tables and brands are so important. ‘World class’ translates, potentially at any rate, into the ability to charge higher fees – to heighten prestige (and consumer attractiveness); also graduates of elite universities secure a better rate of return on their individual investment in higher education.
- The third characteristic is that in higher education the sovereignty of the consumer (student) is necessarily constrained. There are three strands of this constraint. The first strand is that students cannot know best, because they are junior partners in a complex learning environment (and also joint partners in a collective learning process, if peer learning is emphasised). So it follows that their ‘demands’ cannot simply be satisfied in a simple linear way; instead their ‘needs’ must be negotiated in a highly reflexive (even dialectical) relationship with their teachers. The second strand is that academic qualifications are not

‘for sale’ – outside the semi-criminal ‘degree mill’ sector; and despite the strong correlation between socio-economic status and access to elite universities (which may charge no fees or, in cases where fees are charged, have ‘blind’ admissions policies that, at any rate formally, ignore the ability to pay). They must be ‘earned’ by sustained study, and whether students are successful or not is subject to a process of assessment and examination. There are not many markets in which ‘products’ which consumers have ‘purchased’ can nevertheless be denied to them. But the ultimate value of the higher education ‘product’ depends on the fact it must be ‘earned’ – not simply because standards need to be kept in order to maintain its market value, but in an even more important sense because the effort expended by students is fundamental to the creation of the ‘good’. The third strand is that the value of higher education can only be defined over the long haul. That value is constantly being adjusted over the whole lifespan of graduates; it cannot be reduced to the starting salaries of new graduates. But it is notoriously difficult to ‘price’ goods, the value of which is not only determined over very long time-spans but is also subject to volatile change – as has been frequently demonstrated by large-scale infrastructure projects such as nuclear power. ‘Net present values’ can be calculated but are subject to so many (arbitrary) assumptions as to be close to meaningless.

The question, therefore, is whether these special characteristics of higher education ‘markets’ mean that there are strict limits to how developed these markets can become – such strict limits as come close to invalidating the whole idea of a ‘market’. Generally, functioning markets must have a number of defining characteristics. Up to eight have been defined, four for the consumers and four for the providers (Jongbloed, 2003). But here only three key components will be considered.

The first is consumer choice. Are potential students able to choose between courses and institutions? Only up to a point... It may even be that they were freer to choose within public higher education systems that guaranteed access for all successful secondary school graduates. League tables and rankings may have had the perverse effect of restricting choice because institutions struggle to improve their standing by recruiting ‘higher quality’ students. It is important not to confuse the increasing paraphernalia of consumer information for enhanced student choice.

The second component of markets is an effective price mechanism. Yet most of the ‘markets’ that have been created out of formerly public higher education systems, notably in England and Australia, have defined tuition fees not as a true reflection of the cost of higher education but simply as a ‘contribution’ by students (really, graduates) to that cost. But defining fees in this way as a ‘contribution’ rather than as a ‘full cost’ has sharply reduced the incentive, and the case, for charging differential ‘prices’ – even without taking into account the reputational incentive to charge high fees and the cartel-like instincts that prevail among institutions.

The third is reasonable access for new providers. But access to the higher education ‘market’ is – necessarily – severely constrained by two factors. The first factor is the slow historical accretion of reputation that is the basis of the prestige hierarchy among institutions; few ‘newcomer’ institutions can compete in these terms. Of course, this also applies in commercial markets where some industries are dominated by global high-status companies – for example, Apple and Microsoft in computing or Mercedes Benz and Toyota in automobiles. The second is the need to maintain academic standards, made more insistent by the development of mass higher education systems; arguably quality regimes have become more explicit and intrusive, placing greater obstacles in the way of ‘opening up’ higher education. Regulation in other sectors rarely plays such a powerful ‘blocking’ role.

In truth there may be no properly functioning ‘market’ systems of higher education. Even in those systems with substantial (and prestigious) private sectors (such as the United States, Japan or Korea) the majority of institutions continue to be public, enrolling the majority of students. In the ‘market’ experiments that have been undertaken in countries where nearly all institutions were (and generally still are) public, the result has been to create public-private hybrid systems in which students/graduates are, in effect, ‘taxed’ by being obliged to make increased ‘contributions’ and (usually a limited number of) private for-profit institutions are allowed access to public funding to which previously only public institutions were entitled.

Although there have been important ways in which higher education has been liberalised, the most appropriate conceptual frameworks for describing such liberalisation are perhaps not so much the ‘market’ as such – but, rather the increasing permeability of the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ domains; the emergence of an influential new ‘third sector’ of privatised and out-sourced ‘services’ (not just, or particularly, in higher education); a pragmatic rebalancing of public and private contributions to the cost of higher education as a response to state mandated ‘austerity’ (individual contributions have always been substantial in terms of initial income foregone and enhanced future tax contributions); and the renegotiation of the status (formal and informal) of institutions.

MARKETS AND MANAGERS

In the introduction to this chapter it was stated that often there is an implicit assumption that managers need markets and markets managers. Is that right? Yes, in the sense that the greater autonomy institutions enjoy, the more robust their strategic planning and management systems must become. This need has been reinforced by the growing scale and heterogeneity of institutions, as a result of the development of mass higher education systems enrolling millions of students. Arguably it has been further reinforced by the shift towards more entrepreneurial modes of higher education – although, as I have tried to demonstrate, the entrepreneurial university and the ‘market’ university are not necessarily the same thing. As a result of all these

trends the 21st-century university – mass or ‘market’, entrepreneurial or engaged – is undoubtedly a more managed institution than its traditional predecessor.

So there appears to be a powerful case for arguing that there are the strong links between ‘markets’ and ‘managerialism’. But a counter-argument can be made. First, it is evident that the most successful entrepreneurial organisations, at the cutting edge of the market economy, are often characterised by flat, open, loosely coupled, network structures. Some argue that traditional, pre-managerial, universities had many of these same characteristics. It is certainly true that the ‘top’ universities, globally recognised research-intensive institutions, also tend to be those in which academic self-government is still strong. In that sense ‘managerialism’ may be antithetical to the growth of the ‘market’ spirit in higher education. Up to a point, perhaps... The multi-national corporations that dominate the global economy are tightly managed organisations – and the ‘markets’ that exist, or might develop in higher education are far from free-wheeling; instead they are highly constrained.

Secondly, it is equally evident that, given their scale, complexity and multiple forms of engagement, contemporary universities must be, to some degree, managed institutions – even if there is no intention of introducing a ‘market’ in higher education. Indeed it can be argued that public universities with their multiple accountabilities – to state bureaucracies, to regional economies, to local communities, to their students – may even need to have more robust managerial structures. It can even be argued, somewhat hopefully, that universities that only need to respond to the ‘hidden hand’ of the market may be able to dispense with top-heavy and top-down management. Again I am personally unconvinced by this assertion – and for the same reason; the actual ‘markets’ in which universities operate (or are likely to operate) have a lot in common with the constrained political environments characterised of public higher education systems. *Plus ça change...*

In conclusion two points can be made. The first is that it may be both right, and wrong, to link ‘markets’ with ‘managerialism.’ As with so many phenomena in contemporary higher education their relationship is highly reflexive, synergies coexisting with contradictions. Just as it is misleading to treat elite and mass higher education as linear opposites, or to regard the ‘public’ and ‘market’ university as rivals or alternatives. All are also parts of their ‘others.’ The second point is that, in the same spirit, we should resist the instinct to link together, semi-automatically, markets, managerialism and diversity (or differentiation). Too often we assume that to promote diversity it is necessary to encourage more market-like behaviour (if not actually markets in a true sense) and to tighten institutional management. But markets are agnostic on the issue of diversity; they are just as likely to produce uniformity as to encourage differentiation – as, perhaps, is tighter institutional management which probably encourages universities to struggle to be more ‘successful’ according to rather narrow and traditional criteria. Managerialism may tend to promote conformity – and, therefore, favour ‘closed’ rather than ‘open’ systems.

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2. DOES SIZE MATTER? – THE EXAMPLE OF THE “EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE” AND ITS IMPACT ON SMALLER UNIVERSITIES IN GERMANY

BACKGROUND

The German Excellence Initiative (GEI) was introduced in 2007 with the aim of considerably increasing excellence in university research. It is a strategic, government-led response to the fact that research and higher education are becoming increasingly global, competitive for reputation, funding, professors and students – and therefore dependent on the prestige and visibility of the institutions in which they are carried out.

In a nutshell, the GEI can be characterised as follows:

- GEI is targeted, in its core element of ‘institutional excellence’, at entire universities, not individual Schools or departments, with the intention of creating ‘top world-class-universities’ in Germany. *Fachhochschulen* – universities of applied science – which focus mainly on teaching and applied research, cannot apply. Networks of cooperating universities, e.g., the three major universities in Berlin (Humboldt, Free and Technical University) or the two in Munich (LMU/TUM), are also excluded, as the primary intention was to encourage competition between institutions.
- It is focused almost exclusively on research performance. Teaching and learning have been only marginally recognized in the second round of the competition.
- The programme brings additional ‘fresh’ money into the universities: an extra 1.9 bn. € for the first funding period of five years, another 2.7 bn. € for the second period from 2012–2017.
- GEI is funded jointly by the federal state (*Bund*) (75%) and the *Länder* (25%), thus allowing the *Bund* to circumvent constitutional restrictions and pour additional money into the underfunded HE system.¹

When the programme in its current shape runs out in 2017, it will have brought an additional 4.6 bn. € into German universities. Within the federal Constitution of Germany the right to and responsibility for institutional funding of higher education institutions (HEIs) lies exclusively with the *Länder*, who traditionally hold in high regard their independence in matters of education and culture. The GEI is an exception to this rule as it is a joint financial effort of the federal government and

the *Länder*. This has created an opportunity to compensate for the imbalance in HE funding caused by differences in economic strength of *Länder*. Perhaps even more importantly, it has set a precedent for a constitutional reform that came into place in December 2014 (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, 2015). The GEI also has moral support from all major non-university research organisations in Germany such as Max Planck, Helmholtz or Fraunhofer-Institutes. This is remarkable, as much of the world-class research in Germany is conducted in research institutes outside the universities, which makes them both competitors and cooperation partners for universities. In supporting the GEI, these organisations recognise the central role of universities in the research system and their need for additional support.

The GEI provides funding for three programme lines:

- *Graduate Schools* with an annual sum of 1–2.5 million € and a total budget of 100 million € over all funding periods 2007–2017.
- *Research Clusters* (large networks of cooperation between university, research institutes and industry) with an annual sum of ca. 6.5 million € and a total budget of 487 million €.
- *Institutional excellence (Eliteuniversitäten)*, rewarding innovative strategic concepts and institutional management with the aim of securing sustainability with an annual sum of about 13–20 million € and a total budget of 352 million € (see Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskommission, 2005; Wissenschaftsrat, 2009; Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2010).

Initial target numbers were for 40 graduate schools, 30 research clusters and 10 awards for institutional excellence.

The GEI has attracted a lot of attention from policy makers in other countries such as France, Spain, China, Korea and Japan, all of which have initiated their own programmes to build “world class universities” (Shin & Kehm, 2013). But compared to other programmes it is unique in a number of ways:

- Unlike the RAE/REF in the UK, which is also focused on rewarding excellence in university research but does so by re-distributing an existing budget, the GEI brings a substantial amount of additional funding into the universities (see Wissenschaftsrat, 2015).
- The sums handed out are large enough to give institutions a real boost beyond the gain in reputation and visibility, unlike the much smaller schemes in France or Spain.
- Still the GEI, being an open competition, is much less rigorous than similar plans in China, which have a very clear focus on creating a few permanent elite institutions.
- Unlike the Netherlands, Germany does not aim to improve the system as a whole (Klump et al., 2014).

SIZE MATTERS: CORNERSTONES OF A POLICY OF VERTICAL STRATIFICATION

Ever since the early 1990s, policy makers and peer-led advisory councils in Germany as well as at European level have called for measures to increase the global competitiveness of universities, building a few very large, internationally visible and exceptionally well-funded ‘beacon’-universities and encouraging business-like management structures. This policy was based on an assumption that was never seriously challenged, namely that the size of an HEI determines its ability to achieve excellence, and that only the largest universities (in terms of student numbers, range of disciplines, staff and, above all, funding) would ever be able to compete for world class status. As early as 2006 the then President of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG), the main distributor of federal research funding for universities, set the agenda by saying: “Among the 50 best universities of the world there can be no more than two or three in Germany” (Winnacker, 2006). Initially, there was little doubt about what it would take to create such world-class universities. The strategy was determined by the reputation race in international rankings. The priorities are: first, a focus on entire institutions rather than schools or departments, as reflected in virtually all international rankings, and, second, a selection process of ‘informed peer-review’ including classic performance indicators such as the total volume of third-party research funding, impact factors and citations as the main excellence criteria.

As a consequence, financially powerful large universities with technical and medical (life-science) schools have a great advantage over smaller universities with a focus on the less financially potent humanities and social sciences with less money and public visibility (Gerhards, 2013). The consensus underlying the GEI and the shift from a competition of researchers and projects (as for DFG-funding) to a competition of entire institutions has been very adequately described as follows:

The Excellence Initiative, jointly supported by the *Bund* and the *Länder*, is an ambitious programme for the support of top class research in Germany. It is evidence of a paradigm change in German higher education policy. Up to now, this was governed by the underlying assumption of egalitarianism... Under those conditions, differences in profile and quality had but little opportunity to develop, while now the EI encourages competitive, research-led differentiation within the higher education system. (IAG, 2010, p. 35)

The GEI has sparked a substantial and remarkably critical debate on the role of institutions vs. individual research, on the growing impact of external governance by policy makers at national and European level, and on the challenges to internal governance for HEIs in times of increased international competition. Critics (e.g., Münch, 2007) have pointed to the dangers of a shift from the quality and impact of the actual research/researcher to size and visibility of institutions. Even if one does not share the severe criticism of “neo-liberal” concepts (Shin & Kehm, 2013, p. 1) in

higher education policy, it has been shown that a policy targeted at creating world-class institutions rather than research projects becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as it will be easier for large, well reputed universities to attract funds, staff, students and partners for research cooperation (Schreiterer, 2010, pp. 103–104).

But there are more issues that may trouble the GEI: for once, the German Constitution is very clear about the independence of teaching and research in German higher education. This means that linear, business-like managerial structures and strong institutional leadership cannot be introduced even in very large universities in Germany, as is the case in Anglo-Saxon universities, and as were introduced in Denmark some years ago. All leadership and all strategic and financial decisions that concern teaching and research need to be validated by representatives of the academics in each university, i.e. by the Academic Senate. This was only very recently confirmed by a ruling against a professional governing board in one of Germany's major medical schools (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2014). It has been pointed out by Salmi (2009) that the three most relevant preconditions for world-class universities are: concentration of talent, abundant resources and favourable governance. The federal higher education system in Germany has considerable weaknesses in all of these areas. These will not be fundamentally remedied by the GEI, as the funding there, even though it is substantial, comes only for a limited period and universities will be thrown back upon their own resources afterwards.

DISCUSSION: REFORMING THE REFORM – NEW PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR SMALLER UNIVERSITIES

The GEI in its current shape will come to an end in 2017, and it is still largely undecided what exactly will follow. The first outlines of a new policy are just emerging, the cornerstone being no less than the above-mentioned change in the German Constitution that will make it easier permanently to channel additional, federal funding into the *Länder*-governed universities. There is also talk about paying more attention to teaching, and the influential Council of the Sciences and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat, 2013) is tirelessly recommending more attention to 'functional' horizontal stratification in addition to vertical competition. But currently the debate has not addressed what may be the key issue: what kind of a research and higher education system is it that Germany really needs, that fits the strengths and characteristics of the traditionally de-centralised German system? Smaller universities are a key player in higher education worldwide, and it is high time to address their role and their potential contribution to the German higher education system in their own right.

Taking a Fresh Look at Vertical Stratification

The GEI drew a lot of public, political and international attention to the higher education sector. Therefore it was very effective in encouraging vertical stratification,

leaving especially those universities that were successful in the third round as the top winners with a substantial reputational head-start in future competition (Schreiterer, 2010, pp. 103–104). Even professionals had underestimated the impact of the “excellence” label, the reward for institutional excellence in the third GEI round, both nationally and internationally. The press reported almost solely on these universities: “red carpets were rolled out” for the winners, as the then Rector of one of the successful institutions put it, for cooperation agreement from leading institutions worldwide. The former President of *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG), Matthias Kleiner, and of the *Wissenschaftsrat*, Peter Strohschneider frequently urged journalists, politicians and academics in press conferences and speeches to avoid the term “elite university”, reminding press and public that much of the actual research excellence was identified in the less prestigious “Cluster” and “Graduate School” programmes.

Second thoughts arose soon despite the general enthusiasm: what about the importance of encouraging excellent teaching, what about the Humanities, what about the smaller universities that have traditionally formed the backbone of Humboldtian academic excellence in the federally organised state of Germany? Some of these concerns were taken on board when re-shaping the GEI for a second round in 2012. But the real shock came when it emerged that some of the *Exzellenzuniversitäten* had not been able to renew their status, as was the case with Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), the first merger of a university and a Helmholtz-Institute, or with the University of Göttingen. The Excellence Initiative is meant to be an on-going open competition in which universities can rise or fall, effectively ‘downgrading’ them. A formal evaluation will be conducted in 2015, but it has already become obvious to insiders and experts (Schreiterer, 2010, p. 112) that to lose the ‘excellence’ seal may be potentially more damaging than the initial gain in reputation upon winning. It affects, to name just a few of the impacts, the ability to make permanent academic appointments, to attract additional funding and to enter into prestigious international partnerships.

In December 2014 a consensus was reached to continue the GEI after 2017 (Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskommission, 2014), but it is still to be determined what conclusions policy-makers will draw from the evaluation and current research on the impact of GEI. Beyond trying to save and continue some of the most successful projects, it is becoming obvious that the formerly homogeneous university sector itself is breaking up into competing pressure groups. The large, research-intensive and rich universities have organised themselves into the “U15” group; the large technical universities are represented as “TU9”. These universities are lobbying jointly, using their influence to ensure that the bulk of state funding will go to them and that public funding efforts will focus on them to help achieve world class status.

This has – not unexpectedly – sparked severe public criticism from the other institutions, which find themselves deprived of the opportunities they feel they deserve. A peer-group of medium-sized universities, which had formed after the first GEI round in 2007, has been revived recently but has not yet defined an agenda.

Similarly, out of the *Fachhochschule*-sector, a group of seven research-active institutions (UAS7) formed some years ago, is claiming their right to be more than ‘teaching-only’ institutions and insisting that their funding and legal framework should be reformed accordingly. This has led to some changes, allowing universities of applied science to be more research-active and facilitating cooperation with universities in doctoral training; but, in general, the binary system is still in place.

All this shows very clearly that Germany needs a strategy for the higher education sector as a whole which defines complementary roles for all types of institutions and reduces competition to the areas in which it is productive and beneficial.

Re-Discovering the ‘Middle’

The winners of the GEI were very clearly the big, research-intensive ‘*Volluniversitäten*’ that cover a wide range of disciplines including the particularly well-funded medical and technical sciences. In the run-up to the second competition, for which results were announced in 2012, concerns about unintended side effects on teaching within smaller institutions had been raised. There were only two mid-sized universities (Bremen and Tübingen with less than 25,000 students each) and a small one (Konstanz with less than 9,000 students) among the winners.

It is remarkable and unique in international comparison that, despite this increase in competitiveness, the German HE system tends to be viewed not so much as that of a linear ranking but rather as that of a pyramid, with a broad base narrowing into a narrow tip. There have been efforts to draw attention to the ‘middle’ of that pyramid, trying to get away from the notion that ‘middle’ equals ‘mediocrity’. This has led to some remarkable mixed metaphors, most famously by Andreas Voßkuhle (2011), President of the Constitutional Court and President of Freiburg University, before he was appointed to the third most important position in the State. He coined the oxymoron of a ‘broad tip’ which is fed and supported by a fertile intermediate level: “It is particularly the middle that gives room to individualisation and multiple developments. It is the soil on which not only few but very many can develop with their specific talents and abilities, thus creating a broad tip.” The dilemma which Voßkuhle addresses here is crucial when considering the lessons to learn from the GEI: the need to define the ‘middle’ of a higher education system, to appreciate its role and to re-define institutional strategies to grow, improve and succeed in accordance with their mission.

As long as policy makers, funding bodies and university administrators strictly and uniformly adhere to a reputational hierarchy focused on size, research intensiveness and funds, those who do not make it to the top in such ranking will be primarily perceived – and perceive themselves – as losing out: either because they did not even feel able to apply in the GEI, or because they were not among the winners. Voßkuhle (following the *Wissenschaftsrat*’s recommendations from as early as 2000) suggests adopting a policy by which the ‘middle’ carries responsibility for training future top researchers and developing ideas on which the few world class universities can

draw for talent and research innovation. This would be a dual role, as it would also encompass a strong commitment to teaching and some regional involvement. This seems feasible, especially as – unlike in the US and UK – the German market for academic careers is still quite open and allows for upward mobility between ‘middle’ and ‘top’ universities (see Baier & Münch, 2013, pp. 131–132).

This may be a realistic option for many institutions. They are smaller, poorer, less research-intensive, more teaching oriented, more regional, more applied; and they differ from top universities in terms of the number of students, the student-staff ratio, the range of disciplines, the number of programmes offered, research co-operation, involvement in knowledge transfer, regional involvement, outreach activities, internationalisation, financial situation or extent of institutional autonomy. Yet, some of these differences might be viewed as strengths and ‘unique selling points’, though not adequately recognised by policy makers, academic leaders and the public in Germany. As Klumpp et al. (2014) show, the Netherlands were relatively more successful even in international rankings through a policy that aimed to support the diversity of institutional profiles rather than top universities only. It can justly be assumed that a strategy for a successful higher education system needs to build on the recognition and encouragement of all these characteristics (and more) as strengths rather than weaknesses, if it is to be successful in the long term perspective. But much depends on the vision and strategy that smaller universities choose for themselves. It is a positive unintended side-effect of the GEI that smaller universities have been encouraged to re-think their role and to identify strategies for themselves that enable them to excel in competition with larger institutions. On a very general note, three such approaches can be identified:

- Expanding: Creating relevant size through cooperation.
- Focusing: Concentrating resources and strategic efforts in a few (cooperating) disciplinary fields of excellence in order to become globally competitive in these fields.
- Marketing: Smaller universities can provide a more personal style in management and student supervision; they feature flat hierarchies and a general atmosphere of personal attention, involvement and participation for staff and students, thus creating a positive spirit that may be beneficial for recruitment and academic productivity.

A successful strategy often is a mix of these approaches. It is worthwhile to look at them individually as they require different means.

Expanding: Creating ‘Critical Mass’

For many years it has been a largely undisputed axiom of higher education policy that institutional size is perhaps *the* indispensable prerequisite for excellence. The notions associated with ‘size’ are visibility, reputation, privileged access to funding, political influence and attractiveness to external partners and highly qualified staff and

students. Thus in a creative interpretation the term ‘critical mass’ was borrowed from physics to describe an effect by which universities had to grow beyond a certain (yet undefined) limit in terms of money, professorships, students and disciplines to stand even a chance of competing successfully in the league of ‘world-class-universities’. In response to this analysis a number of countries, among them Germany, France and Japan, adopted a strategy of ‘capacity upgrading’ to empower their universities, while other countries chose alternative routes of enforced internationalisation and capacity “incubation” (Shin & Kehm, 2013, p. 10), both of which are also available to less economically powerful systems.

Yet long before the GEI focused on strengthening a few individual universities, policy makers in Germany discussed the possibility of improving the HEIs’ academic potential by creating “critical mass” through cooperation rather than through enforced competition, giving smaller universities and research institutes the opportunity to realise and boost their potential. Already in the year 2000 the *Wissenschaftsrat* published “Theses on the Future Development of the Higher Education and Research System in Germany”, which called for better cooperation between universities, *Fachhochschulen*, research institutes and the private sector. It recommended that additional funding should be made available to boost research capacity in joint projects, make attractive offers to top people and improve knowledge transfer.

Much of this agenda has become reality over the last 15 years in Germany. But the change has largely gone unnoticed, as it was not reflected in rankings that attracted the attention of a wider public. With the support of national funding programmes such as the “*Pakt für Forschung und Innovation*” (Pact for Research and Innovation) universities and research institutes have initiated projects and established graduate Schools, even institutionalising their cooperation in some six “Science Campi” – the number is growing. Two universities, Karlsruhe University and the largest Medical School, the Charité in Berlin, have been merged with Helmholtz Institutes. Expertise in Health Research has been consolidated in so-called “*Zentren für Gesundheitsforschung*” (Centres for Health-related Research), large-scale cooperation between the public and the private research sector is encouraged through a national programme, and these so-called “Clusters” also form one line of the GEI. But although smaller universities are successfully competing in these initiatives, there is no evidence that they have been able to capitalise on their success in the reputation race.

The cooperation with research institutes like Max Planck, Helmholtz, Fraunhofer and Leibniz-*Gemeinschaft* offers flexibility and better funding opportunities to many of the financially starved universities. Those institutions, on the other hand, already compete among each other for their share in the market and for the best relations with universities which supply them with young talents. This looks like a classical win-win-situation, but unfortunately there are side effects that make the picture look less rosy. Academics in joint appointments often carry less teaching responsibility

if based at an external institution. Universities are in danger of being drained of staff (offering less attractive working conditions), projects and even entire research units by their independent partners who are much better funded (largely by the federal ministry). Financially strained *Länder* like Bremen even deliberate openly the option of handing excellent university research units over to those organisations in order to save funds.

A second set of ‘strings attached’ concerns the internal governance of the cooperating structures. Traditionally the German university is not a place of linear hierarchy and accountability. Decision making powers in all academic issues are subject to double legitimation by senior management and the Academic Senate, thus reflecting the strong position of academic freedom as laid down in Article 5.3 of the German constitution. This situation becomes more complicated if a university develops a number of additional ‘centres of gravity’ in addition to the traditional structure of faculties and departments. Successful research centres with external partners will tend to set their own agenda; they will bring different institutional cultures into the university; and their leaders, especially the successful ones, will see it as their natural right to influence institutional decisions so as to benefit their project – and they will have the power to do so (Gaetgens, 2010, pp. 50–51).

To conclude: Increasing visibility and research potential through cooperation is certainly one of the best options for smaller universities that wish to develop their potential. But it is a strategy that will backfire unless the university is very much in the driving seat with a mature concept and an internal consensus about the road to take. If the university can capitalise on its strengths, set the agenda, choose the partners that meet its requirements, consciously agree on the necessary compromise in Senior Management and Academic Senate and adjust its internal governance, it will be a strong partner in the cooperation, which will be to the benefit of all partners involved.

Focus on Areas of Excellence

A realistic alternative to growth is, for some universities at least, the option to build excellence in a limited range of activities, carrying these to international competitiveness by bundling resources and consciously reducing activities in other areas. There are a number of options for this strategy:

- Focus the mode of academic involvement: It has been suggested that smaller universities that are not competitive in international research should focus on research-informed teaching and carry that to excellence (Wissenschaftsrat, 2013, pp. 49–50). Smaller universities tend to see this option as a danger looming, the reason being that there is currently no reward system or incentive that will recognise teaching at university level to the same extent as research. By taking such a step, universities would currently lose reputation and be perceived by their members and stakeholders as being ‘reduced’ to *Fachhochschule*-status.

- Focus on one group of disciplines such as medicine, law or economics. This is a model that a number of private universities such as *Bucerius Law School* in Hamburg and the *Frankfurt School of Finance and Management* have adopted quite successfully. In the public sector this mono-disciplinary structure is a tradition for schools of sports, art and music, but less for the traditional academic disciplines. The concept of *universitas* in university is still very strong. Even medical schools tend to maintain their complex relationship with other parts of the university for reasons of research integration.
- Building profile by prioritising: This is a path on which a number of smaller universities have embarked with considerable success. Good examples are the University of Bielefeld, which has been a hub for the social sciences for several decades without giving up its range of disciplines including teacher training, or Konstanz University, which was the only small university to win excellence status as a centre for the humanities.
- Other universities are beginning to mix disciplinary focus with a specific profile in the mode of delivery. Lüneburg University for example introduced new modes of teaching such as a first-year general course and is now at the forefront of introducing MOOCs; or Freiburg University, which gained excellence status for its integrated concept of graduate teaching and postgraduate research.
- Some universities are experimenting with other profiles, often as ‘added value’ to a specific teaching or research-profile, such as diversity, internationalisation, ecological concepts or bilateral cooperation; or they aim to attract staff and students by building an effective, efficient and caring environment.

CONCLUSION: FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO VERTICAL STRATIFICATION

Despite many valuable insights into the need to develop the German higher education system as a whole, the incentives and reward systems currently do not encourage multidimensional development. As has been shown in this article, there are two strategic approaches competing rather than complementing each other: There are those that believe that building a few world-class universities with top positions in the international rankings will create enough academic and economic impact to uplift the entire system, and there are those who promote diversity and functional differentiation. In truth, these are not alternatives but two sides of a coin. It is by no means new to say this, but neither institutional nor political policies seem to take it seriously. What can be seen in Germany is a cultural gap between those who adhere strictly to the traditional ideal of independent, curiosity-driven research as an aim and value in its own right, and those (among them many stakeholders) who focus on the wide range of contributions that universities make to society at large: in research and innovation, teaching, training and knowledge transfer.

The lesson to learn from GEI is clear: Only if this gap can be bridged, if a consensus on the multiple values that universities of all sizes provide for society

can be reached, it will be possible to create incentives and rewards that will make it attractive for universities to really choose between different profiles. The GEI created one single pyramid which represents research performance. That is better than linear rankings, since it draws attention to the base and middle. But only if there are several pyramids of equal reward and visibility, reflecting excellence in the various functions that universities perform for society, will it be possible to effectively reward universities of smaller size and excellence in specific areas.

NOTE

- ¹ In most recent OECD-statistics, Germany still ranks only 22nd of 30 countries on expenditure for tertiary education as a percentage of GDP and clearly below the OECD average (see OECD. *Education at a Glance 2014*. Paris, France: OECD).

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