

# Chapter 33

## The Decline of an Academic Oligarchy. The Bologna Process and ‘Humboldt’s Last Warriors’

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### 33.1 What Explains the Strong Resistance to Bologna in Austria and Germany?

All over Europe student representatives voiced some criticism about Bologna. For example, the European student union (ESU) criticized that they were only marginally included in the decision making process. But this organization is not fundamentally opposed to the Bologna philosophy. ESU is concerned that in many countries the level of attention given to employability is not yet sufficient (ESU 2009, 137). In contrast, German and Austrian student representatives reject the Bologna process in principle. They are in particular opposed to the very concept of employability which in their view subordinates universities to the demands of the labor market. This paper will discuss the connections between this fundamentalist opposition and the Humboldtian legacy.

In 2009, Austria and Germany experienced strong student protests over several weeks. The Bologna process was a key target of criticism (‘Bologna burns’). The mood of this opposition is aptly symbolized by a slogan at student protest rallies, claiming: ‘In former times I was a poet and a philosopher<sup>1</sup>; now I am a Bachelor’. Another popular slogan juxtaposes the spiritual sphere of cultivation with the vulgar sphere of commerce; the Bachelor, of course, is associated with the vulgar: ‘rather a poet and a philosopher than a banker and a Bachelor’.

Many academics in Germany and Austria – at least those who actively participate in the debate about Bologna – join the criticism of students. According to

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<sup>1</sup>Germany used to praise itself as ‘the country of poets and philosophers’.

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Wolfgang Frühwald, the former president of German research Council said the “mental resistance to this reform is huge. I hardly know anyone – to be honest, no one – who is inspired by the change to Bachelor and Master courses. (...) The reforms are pushed by university managers, higher education organizations, and policymakers. The gap between those who design the reform and academics at the bottom is huge” (DIE ZEIT, 17.01.2008).

Opponents claim that Bologna has resulted in a substantial deterioration of study conditions. They argue that many outcomes of the reform are the exact opposite of its original goals. This criticism refers to the workload for students, to academic mobility of students, and to employability of Bachelors.

- Instead of making the workload for students more transparent, the Bologna process has increased the workload and thus intensified the ‘time burden’ on students.
- Instead of facilitating mobility of students, the new study architecture has resulted in a decrease of student mobility.
- Instead of improving the employability of graduates, Bologna has created a new degree that is not accepted in the labour market.

Each of these claims is disputed. A recently published study (Schulmeister and Metzger 2011) provides empirical evidence to the factual workload in bachelor programs. Schulmeister, a sceptical of Bologna himself, originally intended to prove that Bologna has increased the workload of students. The empirical bases of his study are very detailed diaries of students in which they report all their activities (those related to studies and others) during a day. The results surprised researchers and participating students alike. It turned out that there was a huge gap between the general estimate of students of the time they spent for their studies and the detailed accounts of their time protocolled in their diaries. The latter were significantly lower than the former. In other words, students consistently overestimate the time they devote to their studies. The subjective feeling of being burdened is much stronger than the objective time they spend either at the university or studying at home. Schulmeister and his co-authors voice a lot of criticism to the organization of the study courses. But the problems they point to can hardly be attributed to the Bologna philosophy.

The amount of student mobility is equally controversial. A recent mobility study by the German Hochschul-Informationssystem (HIS) was a subject of dispute before it was published.<sup>2</sup> Critics of Bologna assert that the study provides evidence for a decline in student mobility. The authors themselves say that the overall mobility in the new bachelor’s and master’s programs is as high as it was in the pre-Bologna study courses. It is undisputable, however, that student mobility at the bachelor level is low.

An important goal of Bologna is the improvement of employability of graduates. So far, the status of the Bachelor’s degree is still vague and employers are rather sceptical. Ironically, although employers’ associations are among the most vigorous

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. <http://www.zeit.de/wissen/2011-08/studie-mobilitaet>

advocates of the new study architecture – because they strive for shorter study duration – individual employers still tend to prefer a master’s degree. It does not help to overcome this scepticism that the government, which is one of the most important employers of graduates in Austria, gives a bad example by not recognizing the Bachelor’s degree for high level civil service positions. It is equally counter-productive that representatives of academics and students frequently downgrade the value of the Bachelor in the public debate. It is often presented as an “intermediate degree” on the way to the master’s degree, not as a degree in its own right. This dismissive assessment by significant parts of the academic community functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Many employers believe that only the master is a ‘real’ academic degree. Students act accordingly: the huge majority continues with a master program to complete their bachelor’s degree.

### ***33.1.1 Mistakes in the Implementation of Bologna***

Even the advocates of Bologna admit that the implementation of the reform was overshadowed by many mistakes and that there is need for improvement (‘Bologna reloaded’). It would be naïve to believe that a reform of this magnitude could be implemented without start-up problems. Furthermore, many of the actors responsible for implementing Bologna had either an indifferent or even negative attitude to the reform; or they had second motives that were unrelated to the creation of an EHEA. By some governments Bologna was used to push national policies, for instance, the ambition of the Austrian government to reduce the duration of studies resulted in a rigid legal regulation allowing only Bachelor courses with the duration of 3 years.

It should be no surprise, that implementation of a policy is likely to fail when those who are in charge reject that policy – in many cases the content of the former 4 years course was squeezed into a 3 years Bachelor course. The opponents were quite successful to assimilate the new degree to the traditional one tier framework. In many cases the reform was implemented in a way that contradicts the spirit of the Bologna declaration. In some cases, Bachelor’s programs are set up by simply dividing a “Diplomstudiengang” (the old type of one tier master’s program, taken after completion of secondary school) into two parts. The curriculum of the Bachelor’s program is not shaped by the logic of a two tier system, but remains rooted in one tier logic.

### ***33.1.2 A Clash of Values***

However, such mistakes cannot fully explain the strong emotional and ideological resistance of many academics and students. This paper will focus on the normative tensions between Bologna and the Humboldtian values that are still present (if only as jargon) in the higher education debate in the Germanic countries (cf. Schultheis et al. 2008).

Schimank (2009) has interpreted this conflict as a battle between the educated elite (*Bildungsbürgertum*) that tries to maintain its privileges on the one hand, the lower middle classes that are interested to use higher education for upward mobility on the other hand. The former do not worry about employability because they occupy positions in the cultural sector of society – or so they hope. This is an occupational sector that used to be generously supported and funded by various levels of government. This support declined during the last few decades, due to (a) cuts as a result of fiscal austerity and (b) a more severe and fundamental policy shift towards new public management. It goes without saying that the educated elite is strongly opposed to any decline in governmental support of high culture and to the abandonment of governments from their cultural mission. From their view Bologna is strongly linked to new public management approaches. Both are utilitarian approaches that threaten the cultural profile and identity of the Germanic tradition.

The controversy over Bologna is not the first ‘clash of values’ of this kind. For more than a hundred years the guardians of the Humboldtian tradition in the German speaking countries are in defence against modernization of their education system. The campaign of universities and *Gymnasien* against technical schools and higher education institutions during the second half of the nineteenth century provides a striking parallel to the present controversies. Ringer’s classic study about the decline of the German mandarins (1969) is an impressive account of the ideological motives that form the basis of this defence against modernization. Ringer’s analysis focuses on the period between 1890 and 1933. In the next section I will summarize his argument and will then analyze how the Mandarin ideology advanced after 1945.

### 33.2 The Rise and Decline of the Mandarin Ideology

Ringer’s book is a contribution to the extensive literature on “German exceptionalism” – the “special path” (*Sonderweg*) that eventually led to the political catastrophes of the twentieth century. One aspect of exceptionalism that is emphasized by Ringer is the unparalleled social standing of the educated middle classes in nineteenth century Germany. This class is called ‘*Bildungsbürgertum*’ – a term without equivalent in any other language. This educated middle class was shaped by the neo-humanist concept of *Bildung*, which emphasizes the non-utilitarian self-cultivation of the mind. Inspired by Max Weber’s portrait of the Chinese literati, Ringer calls this group ‘mandarins’ and defines them as a “social and cultural elite which owes its status primarily to education qualifications, but rather than to hereditary rights or wealth. (...) The ‘Mandarin intellectuals’, chiefly the university professors, are concerned with the educational diet of the elite. They uphold the standards of qualification for membership in the group, and they act as its spokesmen in cultural questions” (Ringer 1969, 6).

Ringer and other historians have pointed to the links between Pietism – a religious reform movement within the Lutheran church, emphasizing ‘inner growth’ – and

the quasi religious character of the idea of cultivation. Accordingly, universities were not considered significant to society because they trained practically skills but because they fostered ‘inner growth’ at cultivated citizens. It is also noticeable that a “striking number of scholars came from clerical families and had originally planned to study theology”; they experienced a “transition from love and service of God to love and service of knowledge (...); this religious element helped to raise professorial status as against the nobility, insofar as it laid stress on the belief that the scholars served God rather than men” (O’Boyle 1983, 10).

The emphasis on non-utilitarian values endorsed the pretension of the educated middle class to be an aristocracy of the mind. The ideal of cultivation for its own sake helped “to move from a lowly class of origin to a position of alliance with a governing class of aristocrats and patricians. (...) association with manual labor and the kinds of material reward satisfying to lesser men was eliminated. (...) the focus on abstract principles and forms in the philological disciplines was viewed as a concern with the general (...) as parts of a whole rather than as isolated facts of the sort that distracted most men and indeed absorbed their lives” (O’Boyle 1983, 8).

### 33.2.1 A Historic ‘Window of Opportunity’

Ringer explains this uniqueness of the *Bildungsbürgertum* as a result of a peculiar historic situation: an “intermediate stage” of economic development, in which “the ownership of liquid capital has not yet become either widespread or widely accepted as a qualification for social status, and hereditary titles based on landholding, while still relevant, are no longer absolute prerequisites” (Ringer 1969, 7). The relative economic and political backwardness of Germany compared to Western Europe limited the sphere of action for ambitious young men to the field of culture. Governments in the German states were large and in need of qualified bureaucrats. This specific constellation opened the opportunity for social upward mobility for the educated middle class.

The early 1800s were an area of modernization and reorganization of the social order. The feudal social estates based on birth (*Geburtsstände*) lost their significance as the principal criterion of societal order and hierarchy; they were gradually replaced by social estates based on vocation (*Berufsstände*). “A new division of society by profession and education and thus came to run parallel to the traditional stratification by birth” (Ringer 1969, 16). The educated middle classes achieved to establish themselves as the leading estate (*Bildungsstand*=cultivated estate) with the highest social prestige and considerable privileges. Because this cultivated estate was strongly interconnected with the state bureaucracy (gradually replacing aristocracy) Ringer describes it as a functional ruling class. The neo-humanist philosophy is the ideological fundament, the educational infrastructure (Humboldtian Gymnasium and university) are the institutional basis of their hegemony.

Governance of universities was based on the concept of a ‘cultural state’ that gave universities the financial stability of a state agency but limited the interference

of the government to ‘external affairs’ while leaving the internal governance to the academic oligarchy. The academic culture at universities strongly accentuated freedom of teaching and learning thus underlining the independence of both, academics and students, from formal rules. Both aspects – governance and the culture of teaching and learning – will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The early 1800s were the period when the cultivated elite rose in social status; it established a hegemonial position in culture and it represented the political interest of all classes that were opposed to the landed aristocracy. The claim of social leadership based on cultivation was broadly accepted among the emerging bourgeois society. Academics and other professional men played a decisive role in the revolution of 1848. The political goal of that period was to abolish the aristocratic privilege of birth.

This was also the time when the German research university rose to its pre-eminence and became a global role model. The new paradigm – research being no longer an off time and part time activity, but an integral part of the academic vocation – unleashed unprecedented scientific growth. It is worthwhile to note, however, that this success was mainly based on developments that were in contradiction with neo-humanist principles. German universities in the mid-1800s became the home of specialized research, most visibly in the sciences. That was in conflict with the neo-humanist principles of ‘unity of research’ and its preference for the humanities.

### ***33.2.2 Horizontal Segmentation of the Middle Classes***

In all European societies of that time there was a differentiation between commercial and educated middle classes. But in Germany the difference between these groups was more accentuated than elsewhere. In his later work that focused on the comparative history of education Ringer found that in France the education system could be characterized as ‘vertical segmentation’ with the whole bourgeoisie attending the same type of school whereas in Germany he found a ‘horizontal segmentation’ with educated and commercial middle classes attending different types of school (Ringer 1969, 1979). Max Weber’s distinction between social class and social status (Weber 1972, 177) is an important sociological concept that helps to understand this segmentation. Class refers to the position in the system of economic production; status (social estate) refers to the distinctive style of life with a corresponding code of honour. The ideal of non-utilitarian cultivation emphasizes the status dimension. The educated middle classes in Germany succeeded in appropriating the education system for the reproduction of social status based on cultivation. “In democratic and highly industrialised societies a university degree or position competes with several other measures of social value and esteem, the most important of them being political and economic in origin. In Germany before 1890, by contrast, academic values bore the stamp of public and official recognition” (Ringer 1969, 38).

Weber himself has characterized the neo-humanist ideals as a mechanism of social distinction. “Differences of education are one of the strongest social barriers, especially in Germany, where almost all privileged positions inside and outside the civil service are tied to qualifications involving not only specialized knowledge but also ‘general cultivation’ and where the whole school and university system has been put into the service of this ideal of general cultivation” (quoted by Ringer 1969, 35).

The unique social standing of the cultivated elite is confirmed by Friedrich Paulsen, the authoritative historian of German education in the early 1900s. “The academically educated constitute a kind of intellectual and spiritual aristocracy. (...) Conversely, anyone in Germany who has no academic education lacks something which wealth and high birth cannot fully replace” (Ringer 1969, 35). There is no other country where the following statement of Paulsen would make any sense: “Educated and uneducated, these are the two halves into which society is at present divided. They have gradually caused older divisions to be forgotten” (quoted by O’Boyle 1978, 246).

### ***33.2.3 The Decline of the Mandarins and the First Wave of ‘Humboldt Myth’***

However, at the turn of the century, when Paulsen celebrated the social status of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, its hegemony was already in peril. Central to Ringer’s argument is the shift of power between the different factions of the middle classes and a corresponding change in the political mood of the cultured elite. As long as the Humboldtian model was in line with the overall social and economic development, the mood of the mandarins was optimistic, politically progressive (liberal), and socially inclusive. This was the historic era that Ringer calls the ‘early industrial phase’. During the ‘high industrial phase’, starting in the 1860s according to Ringer, the neo-humanist model reached its limits. Notwithstanding the high social standing of the mandarins at the late 1800s – at this time their prestige reached its peak – they could witness that new social groups – the ‘industrial classes’ – were on the rise and they could anticipate that in the long run their status would decline.

The late 1800s was a time of remarkable economic growth. The transformation of Germany to a strongly industrialized capitalist society was accompanied by substantial social change. On the one hand, the growing group of wealthy industrialists gained political power; on the other hand, the working and lower middle classes demanded social and political rights. The cultivated elite was squeezed between the two opponents of the industrial age. It experienced a status contest and the danger of downward mobility. Modernization, fuelled by economic growth and the political organization of the lower classes threatened to undermine the stable order of social estates in which the educated middle classes enjoyed cultural hegemony.

From the mandarins perspective these developments constituted a ‘cultural crisis’. Their ideology now turned defensive, backward looking, politically conservative, and

socially exclusive (cf. Bollenbeck 1996). Moreover, it became increasingly chauvinistic. The distinction of a ‘spiritual German culture’ from the ‘shallow civilization’ of the western countries, in particular England, provided ideological support for the aggressive imperialistic politics of Germany at the turn of the century.

Most disturbing for the mandarins were the growing tensions between the neo-humanist emphasis on non-utilitarian values and new social and economic demands on education. Technical schools and institutes that had for a long time subordinated to Mandarin hegemony requested equal standing with *Gymnasien* and universities. The mandarins refused claims for more practical and utilitarian forms of education as ‘usefulness in the vulgar sense’. The non-classical schools were downgraded as ‘schools of useful junk’ (Ringer 1969, 29). The quest for academic standing of technical institutes was rejected. Moreover, the mandarins attacked specialized research at universities.<sup>3</sup> “The universities had lost their moral and cultural leadership in a society that was increasingly dominated by shallow utilitarianism and materialism, by the unprincipled interest politics of the mass parties, by the power of money, and by the monotony of the machine age. What was needed was a revitalization of German learning, and a recovery of its philosophical roots in the German neo-humanist and idealist tradition” (Ringer 1986, 157).

The first wave of ‘Humboldt myth’ (Ash 1997) played an important role in this quest for revitalization. At the turn of the century a Humboldt’s essay ‘On the internal and external organization of higher academic institutions in Berlin’, unpublished and unknown until then, was discovered.<sup>4</sup> This document hit the nerve of the time and triggered the ‘invention of Humboldt’. Under reference to Humboldt the mandarins called not only for a renewal of the university. They aimed for a ‘spiritual rebirth’ of the nation (themselves being the midwives) that would re-establish their hegemony.

### 33.2.4 Weimar Republic: Climax of the ‘Cultural Crisis’

The First World War did not lead to a spiritual rebirth of the nation, but to an unprecedented humiliation of Germany. The home of poets and philosophers was defeated by the powers of shallow civilization. Even worse, the material well-being of the middle classes – simply taking for granted notwithstanding all polemics against

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<sup>3</sup> It is remarkable that the mandarins were alarmed by a cultural crisis just at the time when their core institutions, the German research universities were at the peak of their international reputation. Global university rankings did not exist in those days but on the bases of the Noble prizes that were already awarded it is obvious that the reputation of the leading German universities were comparable to today’s American Ivy League institutions.

<sup>4</sup> “Throughout the nineteenth century the term ‘Humboldtian university’ was not used to characterize the German university system. In the definitions of *Universität* in encyclopaedias, books or speeches of that time, the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt does not even appear. The idea of a new humanistic university appears only marginally, if at all” (Paletschek 2001, 38).

materialism – severely deteriorated. With the exception of a few wartime profiteers the whole country was negatively affected by the economic crisis of the post-war years. But in relative terms the middle classes were hit especially strong. “In 1913 a German higher official earned seven times as much and in 1922 only twice as much as an unskilled labourer. (...) The German government were forced to restrict very severely their expenditures for cultural purposes” (Ringer 1969, 64).

Fiscal crisis led to a deterioration of academic salaries and working conditions at Universities. Prospects for graduates who hoped for employment in the civil service were bleak. The response of academics and students was a fierce opposition to the new government. Right wing extremism spread among students. Mandarins were less radical but they contributed to delegitimize the Democratic regime – of course by referring to Humboldt and the spiritual power of cultivation that was irreconcilable with democracy.<sup>5</sup> “Until 1933, the difference between the intellectual elite of Germany and the extremist right-wing intellectuals was largely a matter of style and tone – for example, the mandarins’ main objection to the nationalistic students was that they politicized the university. They regarded the heart of the national movement as “sound”. If the anti-intellectual forces had not appeared in jackboots, the mandarins would have appreciated (and misunderstood) them as sharing their own outlook” (Habermans 1971, 426).

### 33.2.5 *The Mandarin Ideology After 1945*

Ringer’s narrative ends at 1933. But, as Habermans (1971) emphasized in his review of Ringer’s book, this was not the end of the Mandarin ideology. Rather 1945 was the birth of the new wave of the “Humboldt myth”. The very fact, that the Nazi regime politicized the universities and brutally interfered into academic affairs gave the mandarins ammunition in their request to re-establish the old academic regime.

Although the Mandarin ideology played an important role in undermining the democratic government of the Weimar Republic, it reappeared virtually undamaged after the war and gained hegemony in academe for another two decades. The mandarins successfully downplayed their antidemocratic attitudes during the Weimar Republic and portrayed themselves as victims of the Nazi regime.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> According to the educational philosopher Eduard Spranger, “the German universities had been disrupted by the ‘accelerated speed of the industrial and technological era’. In his opinion, the university crisis could also be attributed to the democratization of education and the ‘inevitable reduction in quality associated with it’” (Paletschek 2001, 42).

<sup>6</sup> “According to Jaspers ‘it has not yet been possible to destroy the academic spirit’. Until the 1960s and in some aspects until the 1900s, this idea prevented further questions about the previous academic alignment with National Socialism and with racist and völkisch premises. Though many professors had conformed to National Socialism during the Third Reich, they could now hide behind the ‘timeless’ ideal of Humboldt” (Paletschek 2001, 53).

The Humboldt myth helped to reject the attempts of the occupational powers, in particular the Americans, to democratize the German education system. During the first years after the war the policy of ‘re-education’ had a high priority because the Allies emphasized the connection between the authoritarian and social selective education system and the antidemocratic features of German society (Schildt and Siegfried 2009, 45). In the late 1940s this policy was discontinued, first because the Allies could not overcome the strong resistance of the Mandarin intellectuals; second because the beginning of the cold war changed the political priorities.

Thus the mandarins successfully re-established the old regime of higher learning at the *Gymnasium* and the university. Habermas – in the review of Ringer’s book – confirmed that the Mandarin culture was “still in existence and taken for granted when I was a student in the early 1950s” (Habermas 1971, 423). The post-war years were characterized by a tension between a dynamic political and economic development on the one hand and a cultural stagnation on the other hand. The transformation of Germany and Austria to democracies and welfare economies raised the level of political participation and affluence of the general population. But in the cultural sphere the Mandarin hegemony led to the persistence of an elite pattern that reserved higher learning for an aristocracy of the mind. It took two more decades to leverage mass participation in higher education.

### 33.3 NPM, Bologna, and the ‘Death of Humboldt’

The 1960s marked a definitive turning point in the academic culture of the Germanic countries. The long perseverance of Mandarin hegemony came to an end. This was partly caused by legal reforms, such as the reform of university governance that weakened the dominance of the academic oligarchy by including junior faculty and students into collegial bodies. Most important, however, was the rapid expansion of student enrolments that inevitably eroded the elite model aiming for an intellectual aristocracy. Although massification of higher education was slow in Germany and Austria compared to most other OECD countries, it was sufficient to irreversibly change the teaching conditions.

And yet the neo-humanist model did not disappear completely. It survived in a paradoxical form, as an ideologically façade, increasingly being in contradiction with the realities of mass higher education, but nevertheless influencing the teaching conditions. It served as an ideology that denied the need for change and delayed structural reforms. The concept of the cultural state, a key factor of the neo-humanist model, was maintained although the premises and prerequisites of that concept were no longer valid. Governments were no longer benevolent patrons that funded universities without any strings attached but they increasingly demanded economic relevance. However, the majority of academics (in particular at humanities and social sciences) still insisted that Universities are institutions of non-utilitarian cultivation. It was easy to ignore external requests for relevance as long as the old governance model was maintained. Policy makers and state bureaucrats had no

power to enforce their demands because they had no effective influence on internal academic decisions. Tensions increased<sup>7</sup> but that individual autonomy of academics was still protected by constitutional law.

The consequence was an increasing alienation between the academic and the political sphere and an erosion of mutual trust. Trust, however, is the indispensable prerequisite for the functioning of the cultural state model. Austria and Germany thus entered the period of mass higher education with a governance model that has lost its functionality.

It was only in the 1990s when a new wave of governmental reforms seriously challenged the core concept of the neo-humanist ideology. There were two main roads of reform that are, however, closely interconnected: a new governance regime that ended a 200 years dominance of the cultural state and introduced new public management (NPM) to the world of higher learning. And a fundamental reform of the “study architecture” that was undertaken at the European level (Bologna process). Both reforms were and are strongly rejected by the majority of academics and also by most of those students who are actively involved in higher education policy (which is, however, a minority of students). This resistance triggered a new wave of the “Humboldt myth”. The following sections will discuss why NPM and Bologna are regarded as a violation of traditional academic values.

### 33.3.1 *NPM – A Farewell to the ‘Cultural State’*

In the neo-humanist concept, governance of universities is based on the idealist notion of a benevolent state paternalism. Academic freedom has not to be defended against the state but is guaranteed by the state. The cultural state is not a threat to academic autonomy, but rather its guardian. “The important point is that the nation and, through it, the state were defined as creatures and as agents of the mandarins’ cultural ideas” (Ringer 1969, 117). The claim by neo-humanists is that funding universities by public money without any strings attached is ultimately in the best interest of the state. “It would become a vehicle, a worldly agent of form for the preservation and dissemination of spiritual values. Indeed, it would seek its legitimacy in this action, and it would be rewarded by finding it there. The state earns the support of the learned elite, who would serve it not only as trained officials but also as theoretical sponsors and defenders” (Ringer 1969, 116). The autonomous university protected by the enlightened government against interference of particularistic interests (meaning utilitarian goals) gives legitimacy to the state and trains its civil servants and teachers.

Humboldt originally favoured a different concept. He suggested that the university should be made financially independent from the state. The state should

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<sup>7</sup> “The clash of cultures could not be stronger: what one side views as a necessary condition for work that benefits society at large, the other interprets as a profound lack of interest in the needs of society. Deeply distrustful, policy-makers have come to read ‘autonomy’ as ‘irresponsibility’” (Schimank 2005, 372).

provide a grant and the university should subsequently be able to administer this endowment autonomously. This liberal concept that has great affinity with the funding arrangements for public universities in North America was rejected by the Prussian minister of the interior on the grounds that it would be too dangerous for the government to grant academic and financial autonomy at the same time. In his words: “However exalted the heads may be, the stomachs we always maintain their rights against them .... He who rules the latter will always be able to deal with the former” (Ringer 1969, 112). For Humboldt – whose liberal attitudes were similar to those of Adam Smith – the paternalistic concept of the cultural state was a ‘plan B’ after his original proposal of a financially autonomous university failed. Nevertheless the cultural state has become one of the cornerstones of every version of the Humboldt myth that has evolved since the early 1900s.

Based on this concept the university had a dual nature: it was a state agency, subject to political regulation, and at the same time an autonomous corporation, governed by the academic oligarchy. “The Universities had the statutory right to manage their own purely academic affairs; but only full professors participated in the exercise of this partial autonomy. From among themselves, the professors at each institution elected a rector and a Senate every year. Neither had anything like the powers of an American college president or faculty; but the Rector did function as a general representative and spokes man for the university and the Senate ruled in matters of academic discipline” (Ringer 1969, 36).

This governance pattern requires a high level of trust between state and universities. This prerequisite was not always fulfilled. During the first half of the nineteenth century government officials were quite suspicious of politically progressive academics. After all, the leaders of the revolution of 1848 came predominantly from the educated middle classes, many of them being academics. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Mandarin culture has by and large embraced the values of the authoritarian government, resulting in a high level of mutual trust. There was no need for governments to violate academic freedom because academics on their own discriminated against Jews and Social Democrats.<sup>8</sup> One of the very few academics who openly addressed this hypocrisy was Max Weber who declared in an open letter that “the freedom of learning exists only within the limits of officially accepted political and religious views” (cf. Ringer 1969, 143). During the Weimar Republic the trust between the new Democratic government and the majority of academics eroded. The rejection of democracy by the Mandarin culture significantly contributed to the weakening and undermining of the new political regime. After the war, relationships improved and it seemed that governments again acted as benevolent patrons. Starting with the late 1960s, the initiatives by governments to increase post-secondary participation and to democratize universities created new fields of conflict. These contradict eventually led to the substitution of the cultural state model by NPM.

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<sup>8</sup> Ringer (1969) has documented several ‘cases’ of that kind: Valentin case (p. 57), Arons case (p. 141), Spahn case (p. 142), Michels case (p. 143).

NPM introduced two kinds of radical change: firstly, a reconstruction of the relationship between state and universities. Funding is no longer based on state paternalism but on performance contracts. Secondly, a modification in internal governance. The old type of rector who was a ‘*primus inter pares*’ without decision making power was substituted by a university management similar to that of public universities in North America (Pechar 2005). NPM was implemented more radical in Austria than in Germany (Lanzendorf 2006) but the direction of the reform is the same in both countries.

Academics and students strongly oppose to this reform. Obviously NPM violates the neo-humanist principles of cultivation for its own sake. For academics, in particular for full professors, NPM means a limitation of individual autonomy. In the old regime “institutional autonomy of the university is low, whilst the autonomy of individual professors is high. (...) With their ‘freedom of teaching and research’, chair-holders are comparable to small businessmen with staffs of subordinates. But as civil servants, they also enjoy the special rights of an occupational group that has complete job security. To put it in a nutshell, chair-holders are small businessmen who cannot go bankrupt” (Schimank 2005, 363). In NPM, institutional autonomy is increased at the expense of individual autonomy. The management increasingly concludes performance contracts within the institution and enforces a culture of accountability.

From the perspective of students the new governance model is ambiguous. On the one hand it will increase the service orientation of universities with students being the main beneficiaries. On the other hand the new university management is eager to abolish the *laissez-faire* culture of teaching and learning that is legitimized with reference to Humboldt. While it is questionable whether this culture really serves the interests students (after all it results in an excessive duration of studies and high dropout), many students love it because it allows procrastination. The Bologna process can be regarded as the intersection of these two strands of reform.

### 33.3.2 *The Bologna Philosophy: Laissez-Faire Culture Under Attack*

The lack of effective leadership in universities – due to the perseverance of the traditional governance model – retarded structural reforms that would allow to cope with the new realities of mass higher education. The mandarins could not prevent massification of universities but they were successful in maintaining a culture of teaching and learning that is inadequate for mass participation. It is the neo-humanist *laissez-faire* approach<sup>9</sup> for teaching and learning that was tailored for small elite universities.

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<sup>9</sup>This *laissez-faire* approach is equally attractive to left wing academics and students. They have a completely different notion of ‘cultivation’ – not to immerse oneself in classical cultures, but to sharpen ‘critical thinking’; but like the Mandarins they regard the non-utilitarian character of the curriculum as a safeguard for academic freedom.

Ringer describes the culture of teaching and learning during the nineteenth century as follows: universities “did not supervise their students programs of study, nor did they test or grade class performance. They had to enrol any applicant who had earned the privilege on the basis of the classical Abitur (...). Once registered, a student could prepare himself in whatever way he chose for the next step along the road of examinations and privileges. Usually, his first concern was to pass one of the standard state examinations and thus to earn the official “diploma” in his field of study” (Ringer 1969, 32).

The *laissez-faire* culture provided a splendid environment for intellectual growth for a few highly talented students; it is not suited for less able students. As long as universities were elite institutions that were supposed to cater only for the very best, the *laissez-faire* culture was consistent with the profile of universities and the societal expectations upon them. With the advent of mass higher education, universities were confronted with new demands and expectations. Even at a time when the substance of the neo-humanist concept of higher learning was eroded by the pressures of massification, the façade that was still left served as an excuse for avoiding structural reforms (in course structure and in the delivery of content) that would adjust the Germanic universities to the requirements of mass higher education.

The Humboldtian narratives serve as a powerful legitimation for resistance of structural reforms. This of course did not prevent structural change, but this change happened in rather chaotic form, it was an unwelcome by-product of ever growing student’s enrolment. In particular the formula of “unity of teaching and research” is used as a defence against initiatives to improve the quality of teaching. It serves as an excuse for regarding teaching as a by-product of research that does not deserve special attention in its own right. This is most obvious in the refusal of didactics at universities, which is regarded as a mechanism of making the curriculum more school like. From a Humboldtian view, however, it is the very nature of higher learning that students must acquire the full scholarly content without “artificial” didactical auxiliary means.

We should, however, not over emphasize the neglect of teaching as a special feature of the Germanic academic culture. In all countries academics at research universities typically value research higher than teaching – not only due to their intrinsic interest and curiosity, but also due to the reward structures of this profession. For that reason, complaints of students, policymakers, and the general public about universities neglecting their teaching duties sound familiar all over the world. However, in many other countries there are counter-forces that balance the academic preference for research: universities compete for students rather than trying to avoid them; and this competitive struggle is endorsed by a strong management. All these factors were missing in the traditional Humboldtian university. The Humboldtian tradition provides exceptionally strong ideological ammunition against structural reforms.

Let us – as one example – look to the resistance against the modularization of study courses in the Bologna study architecture:

- Modules have to be organized in a meaningful structure; typically this structure serves as a guideline for the sequence in which the single modules should be

taken. This contradicts the emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility of students in the Humboldtian concept. Hence the refusal of structured curricula, which regarded as “school-like”, is one source of opposition against modularization.

- Modularization is regarded as a destruction of a holistic and integrated form of cultivation of the mind. It is viewed as disintegrating the content of higher learning into unrelated little bits and bytes that prevent a deeper understanding of the knowledge base.
- The hidden implication of this view is a confirmation of the elite nature of higher education. The opposition to modularization is fully consistent with the idea that only a small elite can achieve a truly cultivated mind. This elitist concept is not compatible with the idea of incremental steps (= accumulation of credits), it is based on that assumption that one either can have a full education or no education at all (either the whole thing or nothing). In this way, it significantly raises the risk of an investment in higher education and thus protects the educated upper middle class against upward mobility from the lower social strata.

Equally strong is the resistance against a clear structure of study courses at the bachelor level that limits the freedom of students to decide when they take exams, how long they stay enrolled etc. “Humboldtian values encompass two freedoms: those of teaching and learning. The professors must be free to teach truth and knowledge as they see it, and the students must be free to learn independently and grow without being spoon-fed (*verschult*) or constantly tested. Allegiance to the Humboldtian concept of freedom underlies the academic conventions of allowing students to take their examinations when they feel ready to do so (rather than at times set by the university), and of being reluctant to present them with fixed course length, content and timetables” (Pritchard 2006, 510).

The Bologna architecture is not compatible with this concept of freedom. To a large extent students’ resistance to Bologna is due to this ‘clash of values’. A good example is the present controversy in the German universities about the forced exmatriculation of long-term students. In Germany about 40,000 students, that is 3% of the whole students enrollment, is enrolled for more than 20 semesters.<sup>10</sup> By increasing efficiency and complying with the regime of performance contracts most universities try to get rid of these ‘dinosaurs’. Many students see the freedom of teaching and research endangered by this movement. Recently a student who is enrolled for 48 semesters lost a lawsuit against his University that has exmatriculated him.<sup>11</sup> The most extreme case is the student who is enrolled for 108 semesters.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/0,1518,764373,00.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/0,1518,787449,00.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/0,1518,784016,00.html>

### 33.4 Conclusion

In all academic cultures educational institutions, universities in particular, mostly react with delay and opposition to social and economic change. And yet the resistance of the higher education community in German-speaking countries against the Bologna process and governance reforms stands out due to its fundamentalist nature fueled by the Humboldtian legacy. This paper has argued that the realities of mass higher education in Austria and Germany are in sharp contrast with the neo-humanist concept of higher learning. But despite this, the Humboldtian concept has survived in the odd form of a jargon that has developed a life on its own. It constitutes a parallel universe in order to escape the pressures of mass higher education.

The core of the Humboldtian ideology is the insistence on the exceptional nature of cultivation in universities that is supposedly incomparable to any other form of learning. The learning experience in universities is not interpreted in terms of gradual differences to other types of education, but as something qualitatively unmatched. Today it would be politically unacceptable to express this view in the phrase of an 'intellectual aristocracy'. But the connecting line to this ideology of the nineteenth century is obvious. The Humboldtian ideology will neither acknowledge that academics in mass higher education systems can no longer act as 'god among the angels' (cf. Amaral et al. 2012), nor that student exceptionalism disappears when the participation rate exceeds a certain threshold (cf. Klemenčič 2012).

This ideology is incapable to deal with the trade-offs with which decision makers in complex higher education systems are necessarily faced. As a consequence, many controversial issues in higher education policy are over many years caught in a deadlock, characterized by irreconcilable fronts. Examples are the fundamentalist debates on tuition fees in Germany and Austria or the heated conflict on admission policy in Austria (Pechar 2009). In each of these cases higher education appears as an unmatched good for which the ordinary rules of social and economic life are invalidated.

The opposition to the Bologna process and to governance reforms is just another example of this pattern. Complex policies of that kind require a balance of pros and cons. Recent research has pointed to some negative side effects and unintended consequences of these reforms (cf. Amaral et al. 2012; Moscati 2012). A productive theoretical discussion of such problems that eventually might result in policy measures requires a balanced approach, not a fundamentalist opposition.

Will the Humboldt myth resist the present wave of policy reforms? This ideology was often pronounced dead and yet has surprised by its longevity. Nevertheless one might argue that the controversy about Bologna and NPM could be the final battle of the 'Humboldt warriors'. It could be that the abolition of the 'cultural state' by the NPM reform has dispossessed the institutional base for advocates of the Humboldtian ideology. After all the cultural state – separating external and internal academic affairs – was a precondition for the neo-humanist façade that has for many years obscured the realities of mass higher education. The state bureaucracy micro-managed the external affairs (financial and administrative matters) while academics maintained the *laissez-faire* culture of teaching and learning. The new governance

pattern that internalizes the financial and administrative responsibility is less conducive to this laissez-faire culture. The new rectors who no longer feel 'first among equals' but have managerial power are interested in increasing the efficiency of teaching and in reducing drop out and the duration of studies. Unlike the state bureaucracy that had the same interest during the old governance regime, the new rectors have much more influence on the internal academic affairs and are able to change the culture of teaching and learning.

It is this change in the academic culture that has triggered a new wave of the Humboldt myth. However, it the older cohorts of academics who predominantly oppose to these reforms with reference to the Humboldtian legacy. For the professional socialization of these cohorts the neo-humanist jargon was much more influential than for younger academics. Furthermore, a higher percentage of these younger academic cohorts has international experience (e.g. as post-docs) and is acquainted with other academic cultures. They have on average a more positive attitude to Bologna and the new governance regime and are less in favour of the Humboldt myth.<sup>13</sup> As the attitudes of students are strongly influenced by their academic teachers, one might expect that the impact of the Humboldtian legacy on higher education policy will decline in the years to come.

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<sup>13</sup> A recent survey among Austrian academics reveals strong differences in the attitudes towards the new governance model. Older academic cohorts (who are still civil servants) are more likely to dismiss this model than younger cohorts with private employment contracts.

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