

Recruitment Processes to Teaching and Research Positions in Institutions of German Higher Education: Basic Features, Historical Perspectives and Present Problems

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The article sets out to analyse how academic research and teaching positions are being filled at German institutions of higher education. This requires a comparison of those recruitment processes with their equivalents in Europe and the US. For this, historical developments of the functional features of several university systems are being highlighted, in particular those of England, America, France, and Germany. This makes it possible to place the requirements and definitions of academic positions within the frameworks of given institutional and normative structures.

It turns out that the specific characteristics and problems of the higher education systems under considerations are varied and require differentiated analysis. While the German universities are still being hampered by Humboldtian traditions, which prevent a smooth reform of the system, including the implementation of the Bologna-process, also the English universities are possibly confronted with threatening changes of their traditions, not least because of their increasingly strong market-orientation. In several respects, these developments also affect the recruitment of researchers and academic teachers. Finally, a macro-societal feature continues to be highly relevant in this context. In most European university systems, including the Napoleonic systems of France and Italy, the role of the upper classes not only for the overall elite-recruitment, but also for the functional orientation of the universities, which includes their mechanisms of academic recruitment, continues to be predominant.

Introduction

The structural and functional changes occurring within the Western university systems have been manifold and considerable. However, many of these changes have largely remained dubious and opaque. For instance, the notion of the universities being above all research centres is sometimes treated almost like a sacred principle. Apart from the fact, however, that the European university for most of its history has been a place of training for practical purposes, and that the research function in many systems was introduced only about one and a half centuries ago, the scope and nature of those changes is difficult to determine. A similar situation prevails with regard to the tertiary institutions' role of professional training. There exists great uncertainty, what this function is or should be, whether it is to follow the expectations of the labour-market or not, or what these expectations are, for that matter. The same applies to the function of personality development,

which is well acknowledged in the English-speaking world, but hardly considered in countries like France, Italy or Germany.

All these functional aspects and traditions of European universities are closely intertwined with the respective phenomena of recruitment processes, within or outside the university sector. The research function is related to both areas, the inner field of higher education as well as research organisations outside, while the other dimensions of professional training are mostly concerned with labour market positions outside tertiary education. The same seems to apply to the above-mentioned aspect of personality development, which is largely disregarded in continental Europe and which only seems to apply to labour-market segments outside higher education. But, as we will see, this function is of vital relevance also for recruitment processes within the university systems, where it originated from, i.e. England and America.

Thus, the purpose of the present considerations, first, is to highlight some major structural differences in European higher education and to relate recent developments within the process of the Europeanisation of higher education to this institutional framework (cf. Gellert 1995; 1999). For this, we shall briefly look at the historical roots of some major models of higher education, viz. those of England, America, France and Germany. The (partial) incompatibility of these traditional normative orientations with some of the actual developments and modifications within national systems of higher education will be referred to. This will, second, enable us to take a closer look at the academic recruitment process and its implications for the functioning of the higher education system in Germany.

1. Historical Dimensions

Although the European universities since the first foundations of Bologna and Paris were for most of their history institutions of practical training and learning, they have undergone major modifications during the last one and a half centuries which have changed their self-definition and publicly perceived purposes in fundamental ways. Above all, the research function has assumed a central role. Therefore this function, in order to understand recent and ongoing transformations of European places of higher learning, requires particular consideration. In the following, we will briefly describe the conceptual origins of the research function in Germany, which will then be compared with two major historical modifications of that model, the English and the American ones. This does not mean to deny that the French model with its tendency towards institutional separation of research and teaching is just as paradigmatically relevant (not least with regard to the other Napoleonic systems, in particular Italy), as will be shown.

1.1 *The Research Model of the Humboldtian University*

In the German-speaking realm of higher education there has always existed a tradition of a functional unity of teaching and research, i.e. the teaching contents were supposed to be a direct result of the professors' research. The concept of the «unity of research and teaching» may thus be described as the normative expectation that the professional role of academics should be defined in such a way that the occupational aspect of teaching is closely intertwined with and directly based on the ongoing process of research of the individual academic. The idea, in its original form, not only maintains that university teachers should be involved in research at all, but that the specific insights and outcomes of their respective research activities should directly become the substance and contents of their teaching. This professional concentration on the research activity became, as we will see, a major determinate of the overall definition of the professorial role and career.

This research-oriented aim was clearly formulated by the German philosophers of Idealism and the Prussian administrators who were responsible for the fundamental reform of the universities in the beginning of the nineteenth century. For them, the training of students to become civil servants, teachers, doctors, etc., had to take the form of a seemingly purpose-free process of searching for truth. This required, on the one hand, a large degree of independence for the universities from state interference (cf. Schleiermacher 1956, 272). On the other hand, it presupposed an internal reorganization of universities in such a way that students and professors could pursue an understanding of «objective truths» in a combined effort. Wilhelm von Humboldt, who called this aim *Bildung durch Wissenschaft* (education through academic knowledge), was convinced that the traditional relationship of authority between pupils and teachers had to be replaced by the undirected and free co-operation between students of different levels of knowledge: «Therefore the university teacher is not any longer teacher, the student not any more just learning, but the latter researches himself and the professor only directs and supports his research.» (W. v. Humboldt 1920, 261). In contrast, for instance, to England, not the student, but the subject was to receive primary attention. As Humboldt put it: «The relationship between teacher and student... is changing. The former does not exist for the sake of the latter. They are both at the university for the sake of science and scholarship.» (W. v. Humboldt 1964, 256).

Since the search for truth was not to be restricted by considerations of time, immediate occupational purposes or state control, professors as well as students had to be enabled to teach and learn what they were interested in. This led to the students' «freedom of learning» (the freedom to select freely from what was offered in various disciplines, to change universities whenever they liked, and to

take their final exams when they felt ready for them) as well as to the principle of «freedom of teaching» for the professors, i.e. to offer in their lectures and seminars exclusively what they were interested in, without any consideration of a common curriculum within the faculty. These «Humboldtian principles» remained in force at German universities until very recently.

The actual development of the German universities during the nineteenth century in some respects confirmed the intentions of the early reformers and proved their concepts to be successful. As a consequence of the rapid industrialisation and the emerging imperialism of the German Reich, the universities became true research universities. There was a permanent demand for results in fundamental research, particularly in the natural sciences, not least for military purposes (cf. Prahl 1978, 227f.). The powerful university professors (*Ordinarien*) were engaged in a continuous process of redefining the frontiers of knowledge. The fields of knowledge were constantly changing and expanding. There seemed to be no need for a clear-cut definition of established scholarly results, nor for specific university curricula. In this situation, the principle of a unity of research and teaching was a natural consequence, since the training of the scholar-students followed the permanent flow of results in fundamental research.

The success of the German universities in specialized scientific and scholarly research even led to a significant influence on other systems of higher education. As Ben-David has observed, «until about the 1870's, the German universities were virtually the only institutions in the world in which a student could obtain training in how to do scientific or scholarly research.» (Ben-David 1977, 22) This applied less to Scottish universities who had a strong research tradition anyway (cf. Davie 1961; for the USA cf. Diehl 1978; for the English case, cf. Ashby 1967, 3-17.) However, at that time it went largely unnoticed that the German universities had by the end of century developed into rigidly structured, hierarchical «institutes» (departments), which consisted of an all-powerful professor and a number of assistants and *Privatdozenten*, who had to obey to the authoritarian regime of the *Ordinarius*. These *Privatdozenten* (literally «private lecturers») played until today a crucial role in the historically determined recruitment system at German universities, as will be described later.

1.2 Gentlemanly Ideal and Personality Development in England

The ways in which the idea of a «unity of research and teaching» was introduced to English and American universities, is however a major indication of the fact that the German ideal has by no means become a universal principle. In the English case, there prevailed a strong tradition of orienting university education to

the personal development of the student rather than to disciplinary requirements, as in Germany. Although the old ideal of character formation was transformed into the concept of «liberal education», which put considerable emphasis on scientific and academic training, the intellectual aspect of learning always remained embedded in the broader function of improving an individual's personality (cf. Gellert 1988, 27f.). Because of this, the English universities were able to do both: to define clear areas of established knowledge, which were organized as binding curricula, and to encourage their academics to engage in research as part of their defined duties. The latter did or did not coincide with the teachers' topical teaching programme. There was no obligatory link between the two. The question remains whether this traditional bachelor conception is now also reflected in the intentions of the European Bologna process. We therefore need to take a closer look at the central functional aspect of the English university tradition, viz. that of personality development.

1.2.1 Gentleman-Ideals and Character Formation

While the Bologna-process suggests a comparability of aims and purposes in European higher education, we are in reality dealing with fundamental differences. These differences exist above all between continental Europe and England. Besides the fairly late implementation of the research function at English universities (towards the end of the 19th century), there has always existed an important additional system aim, viz. personality development, originally called character formation and now, not least in the US, referred to as liberal education (Gellert 1990). This functional aim was, since the 17th century, imbedded in specific class-related behavioural ideals, which in Germany were hardly taken into account. It was originally oriented to the ethical code of the landed gentry and aimed at social abilities and personal attributes like self-discipline, good behaviour, leadership-qualities, and the like. It served the transmission of the upper-class culture and was, in contrast to Humboldt's «education through academic knowledge», not oriented to intellectual or scientific standards (cf. Gellert 1990). As in private boarding schools, the universities, particularly the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge, were meant to bring about specific socialisation effects of a communal life-style of students and lecturers, and of manifold extra-curricular activities (cf. Halsey 1961). Cardinal Newman (a leading figure of the «Oxford movement»), even proclaimed that science and research should not be pursued in universities, but had their proper place in academies outside (Newman 1852). Even though in reality the consequences were not quite as harsh, today liberal education is still a central university function in England (and America). Many architectural and organisa-

tional measures exist to support a broad range of extra-curricular activities. More than half of the students in England live on campus, in the US even more. Clubs, common-rooms, sports-facilities, cafeterias, etc. bring about permanent informal interaction and communication processes (which, incidentally, also help to resolve many social or academic problems on an informal level).

1.2.2 Origins of the Gentleman-Ideal

In the «Common Law» aristocracy and bourgeoisie created the basis for a traditionally oriented development of state and society. This implied for everybody an acceptance of the hierarchical order of authority, supported by Anglican church, education system and family socialisation (characterised by strictness, impersonal attitudes, discipline and respect for authorities). R.H. Wilkinson (1970) in his analysis of the gentleman-ideal emphasizes that the traditional values of the country aristocrats were more important than material interests of civic merchants. According to him, gentlemen had two major attributes: education in classics (Latin and Greek), as well as «elegant ease» and «leisure time» in their life-style. The studies of classics were not meant as professional training, but as character formation, in order to bring about moral and aesthetic abilities. Nevertheless, the knowledge of classics was a presupposition for acceptance at public schools (i.e. private boarding schools), which could only be learnt at private «prep schools». This reveals the socially selective elite-orientation of these ideals (cf. Gellert 2006, 2008a, 2008b). Also the inclination towards public service, a further characteristic of the gentleman, was not for earning money, but in order to do something useful – it became a status symbol.

This development required a social climate in which the existence of a social elite which provides moral standards was accepted by the non-elite, i.e. the rest of society. For the elite itself, privileges and duties were two sides of the same thing. By a broad range of social codes, e.g. manners and good taste (learned at schools and in Oxbridge), the gentleman's political role was formed, not least the amateur ideal: «in nothing too much». Furthermore, concepts like that of a «well-rounded man», or the sports ethics of a «good loser», with emphasis on moderation and compromise, aim at social harmony. All these personality ideals are also nowadays basic norms in universities, since they are not just individual attributes, but fundamental structural components of colleges and society at large. Nevertheless, in many areas English gentlemen displayed unusual activities: they were the founders of alpine sports, pioneers of ethnology and social anthropology, or it was a fellow of King's College Cambridge who cracked the Enigma code in WWII.

1.2.3 Gentleman-Ideal, Social Classes and Elite-Recruitment

Despite its successful penetration of private schools and universities, the gentleman-ideal had also dysfunctional consequences. Social selectivity and hereditary privileges have been decisive components of the mysticism surrounding gentlemen. They brought about a closed system of elite-oriented educational ideals, e.g. knowledge of Latin for entry to public schools (private boarding schools). Since that was not taught in state schools, social selection was transferred from Oxbridge colleges to public schools. While there continued to exist the influence of the «ruling class» (Rex 1974, Scott 1991, 1996, Paxman 1995, Adonis/Pollard 1997, Giddens 1974, 1981, Gellert 1996, 2002, and others), education generally helped to legitimize the given social order. Christopher Lasch's critique of «symbolic analysts» and functional elites as well as the instrumentalisation of social mobility additionally demystified modern interpretations of the class structure (Lasch 1995). Potentials of the traditional upper classes to implement their interests are recognisable everywhere (cf. for instance Boyd 1973). Gentleman-ideals, in particular the emphasis on social harmony help to cement one-sided privileges at the expense of furthermore disadvantaged parts of the population. The produced loyalty with given social structures hindered the critical analysis of developments up to 20th century. Decisive for the acquisition of leading positions are often still criteria of character formation and not professional or technical knowledge (Münch 2007). Although Oxford and Cambridge as well as half a dozen of other universities in England belong worldwide to leading institutions of research and teaching, the educational system there nevertheless is one of the socially most selective ones in the world (Adonis/Pollard 1997).

1.2.4 Relationship to Schools, Organisation of Teaching, Role of Professional Associations

Finally, for an understanding of the bachelor system in England three more aspects are also vital: the close relationship between universities and schools, the strict organisation of teaching and learning, and the role of professional associations. These functional attributes can only briefly be dealt with here (cf. Gellert 1988). First, there is the institutional autonomy of English universities, from the selection of students and personnel to all matters of teaching and research (cf. Gellert 1985). This has led to a direct influence on syllabi and A-level-requirements at upper-secondary level, as well as *vice versa* a curricular orientation to universities and specialisation at schools. Thus, pupils have to take A-levels in the subjects they intend to study at university. (In contrast, there is e.g. a general secondary-school qualification in Germany, which qualifies for any course at university, even

though at upper-secondary level pupils there also specialize in only a few subjects). Second, the modes of instruction at English universities are much stricter than at most continental European universities. Teaching happens in small tutorials or seminars, whereby the number of students in each subject area is limited according to the given personnel. Personal tutors for all students and counselling services supplement the teaching process. And finally, the role of professional associations requires particular attention, because, after the bachelor, the graduates leave university in most cases without specialised knowledge or abilities in the respective profession. Less than 10 per cent continue to do a masters or Ph.D.- degree. Instead, they consequently work in the desired professional area for several years under the auspices of the particular professional association (for law, medicine, architecture, etc.), which then requires them to pass a final examination, before the candidates can become members in the relevant profession. In other words, a large part of the professional training in England happens outside the universities.

1.3 Functional Differentiation in the US

In the United States, the German research example was also adopted towards the end of the nineteenth century. But there, in contrast to England, the consequences for the organization of university teaching and research were more radical. Apart from a complex process of differentiation in the overall system of higher education (cf. Clark 1983), the sector which is comparable to European universities, i.e. the «research universities», was characterized by a gradual process of organizational and functional segregation from within. The three major functions of the leading American universities today seem to correspond to a threefold structural segmentation: the function of liberal education, in many respects similar to its British counterpart, is almost exclusively reserved for the undergraduate level (in contrast, however, to the European systems, with a strong inter-disciplinary element in the undergraduate curriculum); the function of professional training is placed in specialized professional graduate schools; and the research function is exercised mainly within the academic graduate schools of arts and science, the sector within the American research universities, which has most preserved and developed the German heritage (cf. Wasser and Fortier 2007). In several important respects, the American research universities already represent, what the European higher education system is still hoping to achieve: clearly structured study programmes, transparency in the overall system, enabling overall student mobility, integration (although in distinctive organisational segments) of professional training, liberal education and the research function as major institutional goals, economic and technological aims in the research process (cf. Gellert 1993b). Therefore, the

higher education system of the US rightly serves as an institutional and organisational paradigm for Europe.

1.4 The Napoleonic Systems of France and the Mediterranean

The French system, finally, is often referred to as the Napoleonic model, because of its strict hierarchical state subordination. It is, however, difficult to distinguish individual higher education systems on the basis of their degree of autonomy from state interference. Particularly because of the federal structure of some nations this approach is only of limited use. Because a system like the German one, which does not have a strong central state impact in educational matters, only appears to be less government regulated than a hierarchical structure like the French one. In international comparison, the former is in fact sometimes considered to be the higher education system with the smallest amount of institutional freedom from state interventionism (cf. e.g. Gellert, 1985, 283-293.). Some observers have characterized the French system by a high degree of institutional segmentation between «science in» and «science out», i.e. the fact that much of the research activities happen outside the university sector, particularly in the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). And the French system can be regarded as being almost unique in yet another respect, viz. the existence of the elite-sector of *Grandes Écoles* besides the universities.

From a functional perspective, the last two aspects are however also relevant in another respect. On the one hand, the existence of a strong element of «science out» means that the university system itself is predominantly concerned with the function of professional training. And besides the often referred to aspect of being centres for elite recruitment, the *Grandes Écoles* also possess the major characteristic of being primarily places of teaching for top professional positions. Thus we may conclude that the French university system as a whole is more than other systems emphasizing the function of professional training.

The four «Napoleonic» systems of the Mediterranean (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) also fit into the above scheme. Not primarily because of the tradition of a state hierarchy as such, but because of the implicitly strong leaning towards professional training, these systems have so far also seen fairly weak non-university sectors (cf. Gatullo 1989, OECD 1991, Gellert 1993a). Rather than being concerned much with building up attractive alternatives to universities in higher education, the Mediterranean countries seem to have put particular emphasis on overall quality and efficiency improvement in recent years. «It is possible to detect in all of them an effort to modernize the role of the university vis-a-vis a changing society, basically by (i) breaking down the traditional centralized organization of the

higher education system, and (ii) attributing greater relevance to the role of higher education in the political scene.» (Moscati 1988, 191). Also in Italy there occurred a major debate about quality concerns. The «laurea» has been criticized, because the time involved in order to obtain this (first) degree, i.e. it is deemed too long for a more technically/vocationally oriented course, and too short for a proper scientific diploma. Furthermore, «it was pointed out that, chiefly because of the persistence of the idealistic tradition, the studies for the laurea gave too much emphasis to general culture and often neglected any elements of professional training.» (Luzzatto, 1988, 238; cf. also Gattullo, 1989, 60-61). During the last thirty years, many reforms have influenced Italian university life, and one of the effects was the growth in the number of councils and other governing bodies (cf. Izzo 1993). The old structures however have not been abolished and still exist alongside the new ones (cf. Vaira 2003). Overlapping power structures caused a loss of enthusiasm for management of universities by staff itself, and diminished the effectiveness of the new bodies. Thus, it is no coincidence that the Italian higher education system is still characterised by a high drop-out rate or only limited job opportunities for young academic staff (cf. Freschi and Santoro 2010). Open competition for professorships on the basis of internationally accepted quality standards hardly exists. The influence of social networks is still strong. «Professional ethics», as Freschi and Santoro call it, in academia as a whole is underdeveloped. Therefore, neither the implementation of the Bologna process, nor the aims of the Lisbon agenda, seem to have improved the situation of the Italian system of higher education (cf. F. Rossi 2009, Keeling 2006, G. Capano 2010).

2. Academic Recruitment at German Institutions of Higher Education

Also in Germany, the expansion of the university system after World War II has led to an awkward structural and functional muddle. The old ideal of a unity of research and teaching is still part of the official value frame of reference at universities. But in recent decades there occurred frictions in this system because of an increasing discrepancy between the traditional research orientation of university teachers and their factual involvement in professional or even vocational training of large numbers. The decision to participate in the Bologna process has in several respects exacerbated the situation.

The system of academic recruitment has hardly changed since the 19th century. Doctorates have always been obligatory for academic appointments practically in all subject-areas. This has, until recently, been a distinct contrast to the English situation, where doctorates have until a few decades ago not been considered necessary for recruitment in academia. The first step on the academic career ladder

in Germany in most cases consisted of an assistantship (mostly in a position of immediate dependence upon a professor), usually for a limited period of three to five years. Academic careers in this system have, however, involved even longer processes of subordination and adaptation. Because in addition to the doctorate, also a *Habilitation* (higher doctorate) in most German *Länder* (regions) still is (at least unofficially) a required qualification for professorial appointments. This qualification is usually worked on during the employment as an assistant (for which the doctorate is normally a precondition). Since the *Habilitation* is often only achieved in the candidate's (late) thirties, the period it takes to even formally qualify for a candidacy for a professorship is an extremely long preparatory time for the candidates, which, because of the personal dependence upon a professor, has in the past often led to considerable personal sacrifices or compromises on behalf of the future professors. In recent years, this problem has at least to some extent been resolved, since the candidates for an academic career are now often not any longer dependent upon a particular professor, but are responsible in their positions as assistants directly to the faculty. The *Habilitation*, in any case, besides being a formal requirement for a professorship, initially only entitles to the unremunerated position of *Privatdozent*. Since, at least in the past, people worked for many years in such a position, without any certainty of a proper appointment at a later stage, it is obvious that also in this system a bias towards the social elite was involved.

The internal selection of candidates by faculties and the respective university results normally in a list of three propositions. The appointments of professors are then, on the basis of negotiations with the candidate (normally the first one of the three university proposals), made by (*Länder*-) ministries; the ministers are, however, not bound by the list of the university. Besides, there has always existed a prohibition of *Hausberufung* (appointment within the university). This is usually being observed, but exceptions are possible.

Besides professorships there are hardly any permanent academic positions. This applies also to non-university tertiary institutions like the *Fachhochschulen* or art academies. There are, however, some differences, for instance the fact that the latter hardly have temporary positions like assistantships. Also the *Habilitation* is there less frequently required. And for university chair-holders already in office, the only means to raise their salary are negotiations with the ministry on the basis of an offer from another university. In 2005, finally, a new salary-system for professors has been installed. It provides a lower basic salary for new appointments, plus the possibility of additional income on the basis of merit. However, this law was quashed by the Constitutional Court in 2012 (because it had apparently led in some cases to professorial salaries lower than those of elementary school teachers).

3. Conclusion

Generally, we can therefore conclude that the Italian situation in its system of higher education, in contrast to England and Germany, is not mostly hampered by traditional normative, historically developed structures, but derives its ongoing problems through a fundamental difficulty in society at large to disentangle vested interests, and to allow the institutions of the higher education system to organize themselves according to internationally given standards with regard to the organisation of teaching and learning as well as the recruitment of academic staff and research personnel. But also with regard to England and Germany, we have to differentiate. Because, while it is true that the Germany universities are still suffering from the old Humboldtian ideology, in particular the concept of «freedom of teaching and learning», which is still used by both, students as well as professors, to avoid efficient teaching and learning situations, which is also one of the main reasons why the new bachelor and master structure only works sub-optimally, the situation in England is of course not jeopardized by the Bologna process, since the bachelor and master programmes have already existed there before. But nevertheless it remains to be seen to what extent the intended Europeanisation of the higher education system is possibly detrimental to the core function of the English system, i.e. personality development. Already, there are some observers who criticise the strong market orientation of English universities in recent years and the consequential financial implications for the funding of the institution which increasingly depends on high student fees. It remains to be seen to what extent such developments happen at the expense of organisational features such as a communal lifestyle and a collegiate ideal of higher education, which are vital prerequisites for the continued process of extra-curricular activities and other aspects of the conditions for the functioning of personality training at English universities.

Generally, the expansion and differentiation of the higher education system in the Western world over the last decades has increased the educational opportunities for large sections of formerly disadvantaged groups of society. At the same time, the basic structures of inequality seem not to have considerably changed. Many contemporary theorists of social inequality (not only in Germany) fail to grasp the significance and role of the upper class in that context. There are indications that the role of the upper classes in countries like Germany, France, Italy or Britain, has not much changed with regard to their structural potential for political, socio-economic and cultural influence, or in terms of their capacity for systematic self-recruitment.

A major result from the above considerations, finally, is the methodological need of putting less emphasis in future analyses of this European research field on for-

mal aspects of the teaching process or the funding of research programmes, but to take into account historically informed features of tertiary education and research institutions. Particularly, it should be attempted to distinguish more rigorously the genuine characteristics of the institutions in question from outside societal norms, values and expectations, including the aims of an Europeanisation of the systems of higher education. This does not mean to say that such external political or social concerns are less significant. But it means that by confusing those norms with the functional requirements of universities and other institutions of higher education, the task of analysing higher education in a comparative perspective is becoming more difficult.

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