

# Pursuing Specific Profiles of Individual Universities or University Networks – Problems and Opportunities

---

Contribution to the Mini-Seminar and Round Table Discussion  
of the University of the Arctic  
“Structural Changes in Higher Education across the  
Circumpolar World”

University of Tromsø, Tromsø (Norwegen)  
24-25 January 2011

by Ulrich Teichler

INCHER-KASSEL  
University of Kassel, 34109 Kassel  
Germany  
Tel. ++49-561-804 2415  
Fax ++49-561-804 7415  
E-mail: [teichler@incher-uni-kassel.de](mailto:teichler@incher-uni-kassel.de)

# The Objectives of this Presentation

1. Not to contribute to the discussion of the specific profile "Arctic Universities"
2. to give an account of the changing debate on "diversity" and "profiles"
3. to address briefly the role of university networks

## Historical Pattern of Higher Education Systems in European Countries

- A “Leitidee” of the character of the university (Humboldt, Napoleon, Oxbridge)
- Key elements: Multi-disciplinarity, link between teaching and research, high quality, academic freedom
- Other higher education institutions: mono-disciplinary institutions, less academic institutions
- As a rule no strong emphasis on profiles and moderate hierarchy according to “quality”

## Higher Education in Europe and Other Parts of the World

- Higher education in Europe was the model for the world (moderate diversity)
- Since about the 1960s: Models from other parts of the world – from the evolutionist paradigm of diversity in the U.S. and strong hierarchical paradigm in Japan and China – increase their influence on Europe (higher extent of diversity, vertical stratification)
- The emphasis on profiles: A U.S. tradition (based on substantial vertical and horizontal diversity)?

# Implicit Assumptions of the Diversity Debates Since the 1960s

- Individuals and institutions are embedded into a “system”
- The system constantly expands (universities, higher education, tertiary education)
- The local aggregates and averages within the individual institution of higher education have a strong impact on the individual scholar and student

# The Desirable Configuration of the Higher Education System

## Popular views since the 1960s

- Expansion of student enrolment is desirable; expansion is linked to diversity
- Diversity of higher education institutions and study programmes is the response to the increasing diversity of motives, talents and career perspective of students
- There is a trend towards increasing diversity
- Research quality is the single most powerful element of diversification in Europe: vertical diversification among universities, segmentation between universities both in charge of research and teaching and other HEIs without a major research function
- The vertical dimension shapes discourse and action as regards diversity more strongly than the horizontal dimension

# Diverse Concepts and Classifications as Regards Diversity in Higher Education (I)

- The international organisations: university education, higher education, tertiary education
- Many European actors: universities, other higher education institutions
- Trow: Elite, mass and universal higher education (co-existence, no historical substitution)

## Diverse Concepts and Classifications as Regards Diversity in Higher Education (II)

- Birnbaum: Systemic, structural, programmatic, procedural, reputation-based, value-based etc. diversity (this includes organisational diversity)
- Teichler: Structural diversity according to types of higher education institutions and study programmes, level/cycles of study programmes and degrees, "vertical" (quality levels) vs. "horizontal" (profiles) diversity, formal (e.g. legally fixed) vs. informal (e.g. reputational rank) diversity



## Three Generations of Diversity Discourses and Trends in Europe

- 1960s and early 1970s: Diversification according to sectors, notably types of higher education institutions
- Mid-1970s and 1980s: Moderate inter-institutional diversity according to types of higher education institutions, vertical ranks and occasional profiles
- Since the 1990s: Stronger vertical stratification, establishment or extension of intra-institutional diversity of study programmes through a cycle system (Bologna), stratification goes global, lip-service for profile diversity

# The Context of the Third Diversification Era

- Further expansion of student enrolment
- New steering and management approaches
- More emphasis on market regulation and incentive steering
- More emphasis on competition (rather than achievement and quality)
- More international mobility and cooperation
- Globalisation and worldwide competition
- Knowledge society and knowledge economy
- New information and communication technologies

# The new Zeitgeist at the Time of the Third Diversification Era

- The more diversity the better (a change for profiles ?)
- Emphasis of steep stratification
- Growing belief that steep stratification contributes to quality, relevance and efficiency of the higher education system
- Increasing attention paid to ranks at the top and increasing belief that success at the top is important ("elite knowledge society"?)
- Assumption that top universities do not play anymore in national leagues, but rather in global leagues ("world-class universities")

# The Biased Diversity Discourse on the Part of Ranking and Classification Advocates (I)

- Polarisation: Either you are in favour of my notion of desirable diversity or you defend counter-productive homogeneity of higher education systems (disregards of different extents of diversity).
- Extremism: The more diversity the better (steep diversity is beneficial, moderate diversity is old-fashioned)
- Normative bias: Diversity is vertical diversity, and vertical diversity is the sexy game of today – Marginson: “compelling popularity of vertical diversity” (horizontal diversity is negligible)

# The Biased Diversity Discourse on the Part of Ranking and Classification Advocates (II)

- Preoccupation with inter-institutional diversity (neglect of intra-institutional diversity)
- Biased claim of transparency (only partially transparent, driven by availability of data)
- Claim of benefits with at most reference to “unintended consequences” (neglect of endemic weaknesses of the various models of diversity)

## Major Arguments in Favour of a Steep, Mostly Vertical Diversification (I)

- Learning is more successful in relatively homogenous environments
- The HE institution as a whole is crucial for the quality of academic work of its parts (the quality of the academic work of the individual depends to a large extent on the institution)
- A steeper stratification of resources is needed to ensure quality at the top

## Major Arguments in Favour of a Steep, Mostly Vertical Diversification (II)

- The demand for research in higher education institutions is smaller than the demand for teaching
- Quality of research is more steeply stratified than quality of teaching
- A transparent steep hierarchy is a strong motivator for enhancement all over the higher education system

## Major Counter-Arguments Against a Steep, Mostly Vertical Diversification

- Learning benefits from moderate diversity
- There is always a certain degree of intra-institutional diversity
- “Over-competition” undermines the valuable potentials of HE
- In the global ICT-based society, quality of academic work is less dependent than ever before on the physical locality
- Steep vertical diversity undermines horizontal diversity (imitation of the top instead of variety of profiles)



# The Discourse about “Rankings”: Key Literature (I)

- Kehm, B. M./Stensaker, B. (eds.) (2009). *University Rankings, Diversity and the Landscape of Higher Education*. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers.
- Marginson, S. (2008). *The New World Order in Higher Education: Research Rankings, Outcome Measures and Institutional Classifications*. Victoria: University of Melbourne, Centre for the Study of Higher Education.
- Sadlak, J./Liu, N.C. (eds.) (2007). *The World-Class University and Ranking: Aiming Beyond Status*. Cluj: Cluj University Press.

## The Discourse about “Rankings”: Key Literature (II)

- Shin, J.C./Toukoushian, R.K./Teichler, U. (eds.) (2011). *University Rankings: Theoretical Basis, Methodology, and Impact on Global Higher Education*. Dordrecht: Springer (in press).
- Usher, A./Savino, M. (2006). *A World of Difference: A Global Survey of University League Tables*. Toronto: Educational Policy Institute.

# Nine Frequently Named Endemic Weaknesses of Rankings (Teichler 2011) (I)

1. Vicious circle of increasing distortion (search of success according to indicators)
2. Endemic weaknesses of data and indicators (burden of good data collection, under-complexity, driven by availability, cheating, etc.)
3. Lack of agreement about "quality"
4. Imperialism through ranking
5. Systematic biases (negative assessment of HEIs with other functions than the mainstream, underestimation and discrimination of horizontal diversity, small institutions, humanities and teaching in general, reinforcement of dominant paradigms)

# Nine Frequently Named Endemic Weaknesses of Rankings (Teichler 2011) (II)

6. Pre-occupation with institutional aggregates
7. Praise of and push towards concentration of resources and quality
8. Reinforcement and push towards steeply stratified systems
9. Rankings undermine meritocracy (reinforcement of past reputation, anti-meritocratic selection of students: “picking the potential winners”, more frequent inclination of students to “buy” entry to prestigious institutions, no reward of “value added” but visible edge at entry and exit, discrimination of high quality scholars in average quality institutions, cheating, indicator-driven success race rather than race for high quality.

# Classifications Systems: A Way of Rating Diversity Without Vertical Bias?

The European Commission supports a project on the "classification" of higher education institutions

## Literature

The concept:

- Van Vught, F. (2008). "Mission Diversity and Reputation in Higher Education", *Higher Education Policy* 21 (2), 151-174.

The classification study:

- *Mapping Diversity: Developing a European Classification of Higher Education Institutions*. Enschede: University of Twente, Center for Higher Education Policy Studies, 2008.

# Claim of the Strengths of “Classifications” as Compared to “Rankings”

- Multi-dimensional instead of aggregation to a single list
- Non-hierarchical in terms of dimensions, criteria and categories
- Capturing real performance instead of reputation etc.
- Inclusive of all institutions

## Dimensions and Indicators Employed in the "European Classification (I)

1. Types of degrees (e.g. proportion of degrees in advanced programmes)
2. Range of subjects (e.g. number of study programmes)
3. Orientation of degrees (e.g. employment success, % of graduates in fields leading to regulated professions)
4. Involvement in life long learning
5. Research intensiveness
6. Innovation intensiveness
7. International orientation of teaching and staff

## Dimensions and Indicators Employed in the “European Classification (II)

8. International orientation of research
9. Size
10. Mode of delivery (distance learning)
11. Public/private character (e.g. sources of funding)
12. Legal status
13. Cultural engagement (e.g. concerts and exhibitions)
14. Regional engagement (e.g. start-ups and partnerships with business)



## Survey of HEIs: Dimensions of the “Classification” Essential for the Profile of the HEI

- Frequently named (60% and more): international orientation, research intensity, size, highest degrees, public/private
- Middle range (40%-60%): range of subjects, innovation intensity, academic orientation, mode of delivery
- Seldom named: regional engagement, European research profile, life long learning, cultural engagement

# A Provisional Assessment of the Classification Approach

- Similar demagoguery as ranking approaches (only eu-functions claimed and neglect of endemic weaknesses, highest possible diversity is beautiful, belief in institutional power of shaping academic performance, mantra of transparency)
- Disregard of the issue of horizontal diversity, instead: multi-dimensional vertical ranking
- The majority of dimensions included are closely correlated to dimensions usually employed in ranking studies
- Most of the dimensions not clearly linked to those in rankings studies are seldom viewed as relevant by the representatives of HEIs surveyed
- In sum: a weak approach as far as attention to and reinforcement of horizontal diversity and the attention to and reinforcement of institutional profiles are concerned

# Is There Hope for the Pursuit of Specific Profiles? (I)

## Scepticism

- The strong “world-class university” drift (instead of the old “academic drift”) can be viewed as a discouragement as far as specific profiles are concerned.
- The Bologna structure might have an effect of reinforcing vertical diversity by weakening the role of institutions types and type profiles.
- The increasing emphasis on competition does not seem to encourage the search for profiles as much as it reinforces a rat-race in vertical adaptation.
- (Cf. Teichler, U. (2007). *Higher Education Systems: Conceptual Frameworks, Comparative Perspectives, Empirical Findings*. Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense, chapter 8)

# Is There Hope for the Pursuit of Specific Profiles? (II)

## Arguments supporting hope

- “The overburdened university” (the reader could rename B. Clark’s book “The Entrepreneurial University” that way) calls for a “division of labour” between institutions of higher education and thus for profiles.
- The “knowledge society” paradigm is a stronger call for varied profiles than the quality paradigm in the inner-academic discourse.
- The debates about strong management, incentives, marketization, competition etc. were based on a historical step back towards the belief in the homo oeconomicus of the industrial society. This could be substituted by a break-through of “post-industrial values” which are likely to support diverse profiles in higher education.

# Potentials of Networks

- Collaborations in the domains linked to the profile
- Encouragement through neighbour role models ("we are not alone")
- Strengthening opportunities of making the profile widely visible

# The Role of Networks of Universities with Specific Profiles

- Different bases of university networks
- Symbolic networks with small range of collaboration
- Ambitious networks with questionable basis for common views and actions (cf. the analysis by E. Beerkens of the "Network of Entrepreneurial Universities" as compared to the Coimbra Network and similar networks)
- The network with a genuine common or similar approach