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‘Project Studies!’
Reform Experiments in Academic
Learning and Teaching in
the 1960s and 1970s

ABSTRACT

In the growing literature on the history of the student movement and university reform in the 1960s and 1970s, little emphasis is placed on the contested discourse surrounding academic learning and teaching. This article attempts to shed some light on the strong criticism that students directed at the traditional methods of teaching during this period, and on the subsequent proposals that emerged for a reform of tertiary education. After a short outline of the critical comments made by students and of the scattered attempts undertaken to initiate self-organised forms of learning, this paper analyses the reform proposals instigated by the assistant movement. At the heart of these proposals stood the highly ambitious concept of ‘project studies’ (*Projektstudium*), which in a number of places—especially at some of the newly founded universities—was put into effect in the early 1970s. The concluding remarks address obstacles and constraints that contributed to the limited success of the reform concept, which is currently experiencing a certain revival albeit in a modified form.

Keywords: student movement; assistant movement; criticism of academic teaching; reform of higher education; 68’ student protest; lecture reviews; ‘critical universities’; alternative forms of university courses; project-based learning; new universities

Introduction

In the history of German universities, rarely has there been a period that generated such an abundance of new concepts and ideas as the late 1960s and early 1970s. Numerous reform plans of varying range and depth emerged within a short span of time. Some focused on the overall structure of the university system, while others were directed at the rules of academic self-governance. Still others were concerned with questions of access to academic education, problems with university administration, or changes in the organisation and planning of research. An unprecedented number of new universities were founded, often

with the intention of implementing particular reform ideas of smaller or larger scale. New advisory councils and planning bodies blossomed, attracted public attention, and added their reform designs to the myriad of plans already presented by individual experts, professional associations, reform alliances, lobby groups, interest organisations, political parties, and governmental committees. Although many of these reform proposals have already been investigated by historical research, some are still waiting to be rediscovered.¹

This article focuses on an aspect that is sometimes neglected amidst the numerous grand designs of university reform, even though it lies at the very heart of higher education and ultimately represents the universities' *raison d'être*: the reform of the structure and content of the programmes of study. This article intends to highlight the debate on the practices of academic teaching and learning as a significant chapter in the history of university protest and university reform in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. Since a discussion of the entire range of reform proposals made in these turbulent times is hardly possible, I will use the idea of project studies (*Projektstudium*) as a kind of Ariadne's thread to navigate the labyrinth of reform schemes concerning academic learning and teaching.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, proposals to establish new forms of learning based on practical projects were first initiated by the university assistant movement.² The new concepts gained prominence as a reaction to the growing discontent of the student cohort with the standard of academic teaching. The proponents of project-based learning sought to answer increasing criticism regarding the heterogeneity, specialisation, and isolation of the scientific disciplines; they responded to the growing complaints about the heteronomy and irrelevance in practice of academic learning, and they attempted to react to the rising discomfort voiced by the students with the distance of academia from social and political life. The proposals of project-based learning resuscitated older pedagogical approaches of exemplary learning and project orientation. They also contained some elements of neo-Humboldtianism, while at the same time giving the learning process a sharp political edge. In the early 1970s, far-reaching proposals of that kind were not only discussed, but were, in some places, also implemented, albeit for only a short moment, before the same decade saw the window of opportunity for such experiments closing once again.

- 1 Examples of important studies of recent date are: Olaf Bartz: *Der Wissenschaftsrat: Entwicklungslinien der Wissenschaftspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1957–2007*, Stuttgart 2007; Anne Rohstock: *Von der "Ordinarienuniversität" zur "Revolutionszentrale"? Hochschulreform und Hochschulrevolte in Bayern und Hessen 1957–1976*, München 2010; Nikolai Wehrs: *Protest der Professoren: Der "Bund Freiheit der Wissenschaft" in den 1970er Jahren*, Göttingen 2014; Moritz Mälzer: *Auf der Suche nach der neuen Universität: Die Entstehung der "Reformuniversitäten" Konstanz und Bielefeld in den 1960er Jahren*, Göttingen 2016.
- 2 The university assistants at the German universities are the equivalent of the non-tenured staff below the rank of full or associated professor in the UK or the U.S.

In this examination of the reform experiment of project-based learning, three different groups of actors (and at least two social movements) will play a leading role: the student movement, the movement of the university assistants, and the planners of the new universities. The sources on which this study is based reflect the focus on these three groups of protagonists. To portray the students' perspective, this article draws primarily on student-run magazines and on the publications of the student movement. The proposals made by the assistant movement are mainly discussed on the basis of the publications of the *Bundesassistentenkonferenz* (the conference of university assistants). Drawing on the papers and reports of the local university planners, this paper concludes by analysing the experiments with project-based learning which were conducted at some of the newly founded universities in the 1970s. Ultimately, this paper attempts to answer the following four questions:

1. What were the major points of criticism concerning the traditional teaching formats as articulated by the students?
2. What was the theoretical background and didactical content of the alternative concepts promoted by the assistant movement?
3. Where and how were the concepts of project-based learning implemented? In the course of these experiments, what obstacles did they encounter?
4. Finally, why has the concept of project studies declined in the ensuing decades?

Students' Criticism of Academic Learning and Teaching: 'Lecture Reviews' and 'Critical Universities'

The new models of university studies conceived in the late 1960s were an answer to the growing discontent among students and younger scholars with the practice of academic teaching at German universities. As is well known, in the second half of the 1960s, German universities became the target of radical criticism that was focused particularly upon students' rights to participation in the governing bodies of universities (the controversial catchword being '*Drittelparität*'³). Criticism from the student movement also affected the form, substance and methods of academic teaching, which had become a major issue since the mid-1960s. One early starting point of the debate was the public controversy concerning the 'overcrowding' of universities that was prompted by the memorandum of

3 '*Drittelparität*' (one-third-parity) means the equal representation of three major membership groups of the university—professors, assistant scholars and researchers, and students—in the governing bodies of the university, with each having a third of the votes; cf. Detlev Albers: *Demokratisierung der Hochschule: Argumente zur Drittelparität*, Bonn 1968.

a government official of the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 1960 (at a time when some five per cent of the age-group were studying at university).⁴ Among other measures, the reforms detailed in the memorandum favoured a much more rigid process of selection by means of close assessments and examinations. The proposal elicited many objections, not least among the students.⁵ As a result, a debate gained momentum that circled around the question whether the response to the emerging ‘mass university’ should best be conceived in terms of a restriction of access, an expansion of capacities, or a reform of academic learning and teaching. In 1962, a commission of the *German Student Confederation* (*‘Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften’*, VDS) published a widely acclaimed analysis which deplored the “catastrophic conditions”⁶ of academic education. In the view of the VDS, who served as the official representation of students’ interests, the deficiencies prevailing at universities could not simply be explained by the phenomenon of ‘overcrowding’, but had to be put into a wider context of insufficiencies in academic teaching. A reform of universities, therefore, had to start with reorganising the modes of studying and teaching. To this end, the memorandum suggested to reduce the role of lectures and complement them with tutorials. Another proposal was to reinstate the research-related character of the seminars, as the ultimate goal of scientific studies was to enable the students to develop their independent and critical scientific thought and skills. The authors’ ultimate intention was to restore the time-honoured claim of German university to being founded on the unity of research, teaching and learning.⁷

- 4 Überfüllung der Hochschulen: Eine Studie über Studentenzahlen und Fassungsvermögen der deutschen Hochschulen, vorgelegt von Dr. K.Fr. Scheidemann, Ministerialrat im Bundesministerium des Innern, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch) B 138, No. 1871. The memorandum was published in: *Deutsche Universitäts-Zeitung* 15:1 (1960), pp. 9–16.
- 5 Wilfried Rudloff: Die Studienreform in der Hochphase der Hochschulexpansion: Zwischen Effektivierung und Projektstudium? in: Rainer Pöppinghege/Dietmar Klenke (eds.): *Hochschulreform früher und heute: Zwischen Autonomie und gesellschaftlichem Gestaltungsanspruch*, Köln 2011, pp. 186–216, pp. 188–192.
- 6 Studenten und die neue Universität: Gutachten einer Kommission des Verbandes Deutscher Studentenschaften zur Neugründung von Wissenschaftlichen Hochschulen, 2nd ed., Bonn 1966, p. 3.
- 7 Wolfgang Heinz/Heinz Theodor Jüchter: Studienreform 1965: Die aktuelle Diskussion—Perspektiven, Bonn 1965, p. 19; Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften: Beschlüsse der 15. Ordentlichen Mitgliederversammlung in Hamburg vom 4. bis 10. März 1963, in: *Deutsche Universitätszeitung* 18:5 (1963), pp. 34–43, p. 36; cf. also the expertise from a commission of the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS), the socialist association of students, which voiced some doubts concerning the feasibility of the Humboldtian idea of the unity of research and teaching under the contemporary conditions: Wolfgang Nitsch et al.: *Hochschule in der Demokratie: Kritische Beiträge zur Erbschaft und Reform der deutschen Universität*, 2nd ed., Berlin 1965, pp. 293–295; cf. for both documents Uwe Rohwedder: SDS-Hochschuldenkschrift und VDS-Neugründungsgutachten: Zwei studentische Beiträge zum Reformdiskurs der 1960er Jahre, in: Rainer Pöppinghege/Dietmar Klenke

With growing discontent among students, the question of reforming academic education gained further weight. In 1965/66, the debate was intensified by the attempt of two major faculties at the Free University in Berlin, the faculties of law and of medicine, to introduce a standard period of study. Exceeding this would lead to compulsory disenrollment (*'Zwangsexmatrikulation'*).⁸ For the student movement, phenomena like prolonged duration of study and the rising drop-out rate were consequences of ineffective and deficient teaching, rather than of a lack of qualification among the students. Countering many university teachers' conviction that the root of the crisis was in students' shortcomings, a leading exponent of the VDS stated, "What we face is a didactical crisis of academic teaching."⁹ The results and duration of academic studies were insufficient not because the students were poorly equipped intellectually, but because they were taught poorly. Hence, the methods of teaching had to be subjected to critical review.

It was not only the didactical ineffectiveness of the university courses that attracted students' criticism. As the student movement became more radicalised, criticism delved much deeper.¹⁰ In the eyes of the radical students of the late 1960s, the forms and methods of academic teaching were a typical expression of the 'ivory tower' character of universities. The courses were divested of any critical attitude towards the existing social order, and they were far too detached from the reality of the class society, abstaining from all attempts to respond to the 'objective' needs of the underprivileged classes. The criticism of the university thereby became increasingly interwoven with the criticism of the existing social order, of which universities were an integral part. In the eyes of New Left protagonists, criticizing the character of academic studies also had to mean questioning the predominant function of the university: to produce a highly adapted, highly conformist class of one-track specialists susceptible to manipulation (*'Fachidioten'*). Thus, the radical students' campaign for a reform of academic studies went beyond a

(eds.): Hochschulreform früher und heute: Zwischen Autonomie und gesellschaftlichem Gestaltungsanspruch, pp. 158–172.

- 8 Ludwig von Friedeburg et.al.: Freie Universität und politisches Potential der Studenten: Über die Entwicklung des Berliner Modells und den Anfang der Studentenbewegung in Deutschland, Neuwied/Berlin 1968, pp. 311–324; Boris Spix: Abschied vom Elfenbeinturm? Politisches Verhalten Studierender 1957–1967: Berlin und Nordrhein-Westfalen im Vergleich, Essen 2008, pp. 534–541 and 605–609.
- 9 Heinz Jüchter: Studieren an neuen Universitäten: Wege zur didaktischen Reform akademischer Lehre, in: Deutsche Universitäts-Zeitung 20:12 (1965), pp. 16–21, p. 16. In the following, all quotations from original German sources are translations by the author.
- 10 Stephan Leibfried (ed.): Wider die Untertanenfabrik: Handbuch zur Demokratisierung der Hochschule, Cologne 1967; Peter Marwedel: Die Veränderung der Studienreformdiskussion, in: Thomas Kieselbach/Peter Marwedel (eds.): Emanzipation oder Disziplinierung: Zur Studienreform 1966/67, Köln 1969, pp. 7–34; for an overview cf. Henning Luther: Hochschule und Bildung: Für ein Geschichtsbewusstsein in der Hochschuldidaktik, Hamburg 1979, pp. 92–110.

fundamental reshaping of the courses in form and substance, and instead gained a clear political impulse. One of its main targets was the affirmative character of scientific thought as taught and practiced at universities. For the radical students, the dominant modes of academic knowledge production were subordinated to the interest of the ruling capitalist classes—in defiance of all pretensions of Weberian-inspired ‘freedom from value judgement’ (*Werturteilsfreiheit*). A positivistic and “value-free” science, it was argued, would be an even stronger accomplice of the ruling interests and ideologies, as ‘value-neutrality’ also meant surrendering control over the use and misuse of knowledge by the dominating power groups.¹¹ After all, the university had to be a place of unremitting criticism of the social order, not an oasis of scientific neutrality. Thus, students’ critical reasoning had successively expanded its scope from a criticism of the didactical form and material substance of learning—and often also of the widespread absence of references to professional practice—to a much more comprehensive criticism of the predominant concept of science, the role of the university in society and ultimately of the entire social order.

More than any other form of academic teaching and learning, it was the lecture which stood at the centre of criticism.¹² The debate among students, which eventually extended to include a number of university teachers as well, was whether a lecture could still be regarded as an appropriate form of teaching, and if so, how it could be improved and adapted to the conditions of rapidly increasing student figures. In 1970, an instructor at the Technical University Aachen suggested that the central introductory lecture into a wider field of research (*Große Vorlesung*) was becoming more and more obsolete.¹³ Inevitably doomed to vanish,¹⁴ this type of lecture would, sooner or later, be replaced by new forms of computer-based ‘programmed learning’. Until then, the effectiveness of the *Große Vorlesung* had to be increased by new didactic tools such as group work in tutorials, additional scripts distributed by the lecturers, and an institutionalised feedback by the students. This largely negative evaluation of the lecture as a format of instruction was

- 11 In this sense cf. already Wolfgang Nitsch et. al: Hochschule in der Demokratie: Kritische Beiträge zur Erbschaft und Reform der deutschen Universität, pp. 281–289.
- 12 Hans-Jürgen Apel: Die Vorlesung: Einführung in eine akademische Lehrform, Köln/Weimar/Wien 1999, pp. 32–34.
- 13 Brigitte Eckstein: Die Effizienz der “Großen Vorlesung“, in: Deutsche Universitätszeitung 25:3 (1970), pp. 3–5.
- 14 The death of the lecture was for example also predicted by Helmut Seiffert: Hochschuldidaktik und Hochschulpolitik: Der Hochschulunterricht und seine politischen, wissenschaftstheoretischen und sozialen Voraussetzungen, Darmstadt/Berlin 1969, p. 107.

hardly shared by the majority of the university teachers. However, while most of those who took part in the debate stressed the continuing value of the lecture format, many also admitted that a methodological update was urgently due and necessary.¹⁵

Starting at the Free University in Berlin in 1966,¹⁶ the publication of critical reviews written by students on individual lectures (*'Vorlesungskritiken'*) became a common feature of many universities' student-run magazines in the following years.¹⁷ Most of these reviews were published anonymously. In some cases, the criticism was mainly concerned with the didactical and methodological quality of the lectures; in others, it focused rather on the analytical framework, material contents, and even their scientific currency.¹⁸ The editors of

- 15 R. Gross/H. Linker: Für und wider die "Große Vorlesung", in: Deutsche Universitätszeitung 25:9/10 (1970), pp. 20–22; Hellmut Brunner: Plädoyer für die Große Vorlesung, in: Deutsche Universitätszeitung 25:6 (1970), pp. 12–13; Peter Klose: Diskussionsbericht, in: Hans Stock (ed.): Hochschuldidaktik: Bericht über den 7. Pädagogischen Hochschultag vom 13. bis 16. Oktober 1968 in Bremen (Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, Beiheft 8), Weinheim/Berlin/Basel 1969, pp. 83–85.
- 16 Sandra Kraft: Vom Hörsaal auf die Anklagebank: Die 68er und das Establishment in Deutschland und den USA, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2010, pp. 137–140; Anne Rohstock: Von der "Ordinarienuiversität" zur "Revolutionszentrale"? Hochschulreform und Hochschulrevolte in Bayern und Hessen 1957–1976, München 2010, p. 61.
- 17 Wolfgang Nitsch: Vorlesungsrezension als Hochschulkritik, in: Stephan Leibfried (ed.): Wider die Untertanenfabrik: Handbuch zur Demokratisierung der Hochschule, Cologne 1967, pp. 220–245 (paper sent to the editors of student magazines by the "Verband Deutscher Studentenschaften" in May 1966). The first forerunners of the new genre of student-written reviews had been published in the student-magazine of the University of Göttingen in 1964; cf. also Ludwig Huber: Zwischen "Unterrichtskritik" und "Selbstevaluation von Lehrveranstaltungen": Zur Entwicklung und gegenwärtigen Lage in der Bundesrepublik, in: Ludwig Huber et al. (eds.): Auswertung, Rückmeldung, Kritik im Hochschulunterricht, vol. 1. Einführung und Überblick, Hamburg 1978, pp. 6–28, with a surprising assessment of the positive didactical impact the criticism of the students had on the various types of university courses (pp. 8–12).
- 18 Vorlesungskritik an der Ruhr-Universität: Wie wir hoffen, eine Provokation, in: Ruhr-Reflexe: Zeitschrift der Bochumer Studentenschaft 1:3 (1966/1967), pp. 11–13; Falk Rieß: Vorlesung in der Krise, in: dsd - Die Darmstädter Studentenzeitung 14:84 (1966), p. 8; Helmut Dreßler: Die Vorlesung muß weg: Wissensvermittlung—antiquiert und ineffektiv, in: ibid. 16:97 (1968), p. 11; Rezension akademischer Lehrveranstaltungen: Anregungen zum Inhalt, in: Skizze—Studentenzeitung an der Universität Kiel 15:4 (1966), p. 2 (a catalogue of possible aspects and criteria for reviews of lectures and courses); for a number of reviews with rather mixed conclusions and recommendations, varying from "not recommendable" to rather positive, and for some remarks on the methodology of the reviews which were made at the University of Heidelberg cf. Info: Informationen für Studenten der Universität Heidelberg Nr. 78 vom 26.2.1968, pp. 4–5.; Regula Langbein: Arbeitskreis zur Methode und Koordination der Vorlesungskritik, in: ibid., p. 6; Juan Gutierrez: Vorlesungskritik: Bericht aus Hamburg über eine studentische Initiative, in: Deutsche Universitätszeitung 23:2 (1968), pp. 14–15.

the Berlin student magazine, for instance, motivated critical reviews, perhaps surprisingly, by referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt and his idea of the university. Thus, they paid reverence to what was still regarded as the identity core of the German university system. According to Humboldt, it was argued, the university had to be understood as a body in which the students, equipped with the same status as the professors, were asked to consistently criticise and challenge their professors in order to motivate them in their quest for scientific improvement.¹⁹ Yet, given the difficulties of supporting a Socratic dialogue between students and professors under the conditions of mass education, the students argued that their reviews could be regarded as a form of participation in the scientific process that was adapted to the social realities of present university studies.²⁰

The reference to the Humboldtian tradition, however, did not always fit well with the often provocative and sometimes even rude tone of students' criticism.²¹ As much as an offshoot of the debate on the reform of academic learning and teaching, lecture reviews became a part of the provocation strategy adopted by the student movement in the later 1960s. Although some of the professors reacted in a rather restrained and unexcited manner, in many cases the students' comments evoked massive indignation on the part of the reviewed, who were neither accustomed to that kind of critical assessment nor ready to accept it.²² Therefore, the reviews soon became a political issue.²³ At a press conference in February 1966, the rector of the Free University mentioned that seven professors had requested an early retirement, suggesting that their decision had been triggered by the tensions provoked by the lecture reviews.²⁴ For a brief period, the new genre also

- 19 Cf. Helmut Schelsky: *Einsamkeit und Freiheit: Idee und Gestalt der deutschen Universität und ihrer Reformen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1963, pp. 91–99; for the reference to Humboldt cf. also Friedhelm Nyssen: *Kritische Rezensionen akademischer Lehrveranstaltungen: Eine "erschreckende Gewissenlosigkeit"?*, in: *Skizze—Studentenzeitung an der Universität Kiel* 15:2 (1966), pp. 6–7.
- 20 *Öffentliche Kritik von Lehrveranstaltungen—Anmaßung einer arroganten Ignoranz? Begründung von Vorlesungskritiken*, in: *FU-Spiegel* 50 (February 1966), pp. 14–15.
- 21 Cf. for an example Reinhold Oberlercher: *Wenke—oder die Unmöglichkeit einer Rezension*, in: *auditorium* 50 (1967), p. 11 (Hans Wenke was a professor of pedagogy at the University of Hamburg and an influential figure in education politics; the author of the review later became an exponent of the extreme right); for the background of the review and its turbulent repercussions cf. Manuel Seitenbecher: *Mahler, Maschke & Co: Rechtes Denken in der 68-Bewegung?* Paderborn 2012, pp. 104–118.
- 22 Cf. for example Simone Ladwig-Winters: *Ernst Fraenkel: Ein politisches Leben*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2009, pp. 318–321; Christian Hillgruber: *Die Studentenrevolte in Bonn: Vorgeschichte, Verlauf und Folgen*, in: Thomas Becker (ed.): *Bonna Perl am grünen Rheine: Studieren in Bonn von 1818 bis zur Gegenwart*, Göttingen 2013, pp. 189–215, pp. 193–194.
- 23 Jürgen Habermas: *Studentenproteste in der Bundesrepublik*, in: Jürgen Habermas: *Protestbewegung und Hochschulreform*, Frankfurt a.M. 1969, pp. 153–177, p. 163.
- 24 Siegward Lönnendonker/Tilman Fichter (eds.): *Freie Universität Berlin 1948–1973: Hochschule im Umbruch*, Vol. IV: *Die Krise (1964–1967)*, Berlin 1975, p. 74. The verity

attracted the attention of a wider public. In a commentary for the weekly *Die Zeit*, Dieter E. Zimmer, editor of the feuilleton, drew a sharp distinction between criticism of the didactic quality of the lectures and a judgment on their scientific value, considering the first legitimate and useful, but the latter an inappropriate presumption of competences.²⁵

On a general level, the criticism of lectures as articulated by the students can be summarised into four central points. The lecture was regarded as an authoritarian form of one-way communication, which avoided any form of discussion. It was, therefore, interpreted as a characteristic expression of the monocratic structure of the German university. Moreover, students saw lectures as relics from a time long past when printed introductions into many fields of research had been lacking. Since the shortage of handbooks had long since been overcome for most subjects, critical voices regarded the lecture as an obsolete form of teaching.

The lectures were not only perceived as a manifestation of German professors' autocratic understanding of their role, but also as a proof of an outdated authoritarian conception of knowledge and science. The lectures seemed to be based on a specific notion of the process of teaching, in which an unquestioned bearer of knowledge conveyed an undisputed *ex-cathedra* truth. Knowledge was conceived of as something absolute and definite that could be appropriated without taking a critical stance towards it, not as something that had to be constantly questioned, discussed and revised.

Consequentially, lectures were suspected of reproducing a role model in which students adopted a passive, obedient and repetitive manner of learning. The knowledge they acquired would be uncritically memorised in order to pass the exams, in which professors would expect them to repeat the contents of their lectures. The critics argued that the passive consumer attitude thus adopted by the students was less and less suited to the multiple, mobile und flexible requirements of professional life.

From a more political perspective, the practice of lecturing was often seen as being substantially out of date, politically and socially irrelevant, and ultimately affirmative towards the existing social order. A typical example of such criticism and an elaboration on the shortcomings of academic teaching appeared in the student periodical of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau in February 1969.²⁶ It listed all the aforementioned objections and extended the criticism to include the seminars as another form of academic teaching

of this statement, however, was doubted since it was impossible to find out who these professors were, cf. Freie Universität: Herd der Revolution? Spiegel-Gespräch mit dem Berliner Universitätsprofessor Dr. Kurt Sontheimer, in: Der Spiegel Nr. 21, 16 May 1966, pp. 148–152, pp. 151–152.

- 25 Dieter E. Zimmer: Anonyme Schmierfinken? Vorlesungskritik an der FU, in: Die Zeit, 27 May 1966; cf. also Nina Grunenberg: Zensuren für Professoren: Ein Wagestück der Studentenzeitung der Freien Universität Berlin, in: Die Zeit, 1 April 1966.
- 26 B.E.: Seit der Erfindung des Buchdrucks ist die Vorlesung überflüssig, in: Freiburger Studentenzeitung extra 19 (1969), p. 1.

with significant didactical pitfalls. The article did not leave it at that but delved further into outlining an alternative concept of learning in higher education. The complementary course system that the article proposed would largely be self-organised by the students, yet financially supported and fully acknowledged by the university, thereby offering the chance to gain regular credits. The number of participants would be small, with all participants, whether scholar or student, placed on an equal footing. It would be up to them to decide collectively which topics should be discussed, thus guaranteeing that all course members shared a common interest in the topics.²⁷ The author assumed that this procedure, in turn, would ensure that only concrete problems with direct reference to social reality would be treated. As a result, the outcome of the courses was expected to be not only politically relevant but also practically applicable. Through this search for practical relevance, customary attitudes of passive reception were hoped to be superseded by a new mind-set of independent critical thinking.

In the course of the radicalisation process after the events of 2 July 1967 (the demonstration against the visit of the *shāh* and the killing of student Benno Ohnesorg by the police), student activists took the challenge to the institutions of academic learning and teaching one step further and attempted to develop a self-governed, autonomous and alternative programme of studies: the so called ‘Critical University’ (*Kritische Universität*, KU). Herbert Marcuse had recommended the founding of such a counter-institution when talking to the students at the Free University Berlin in July 1967.²⁸ In many respects, the courses of the KU continued and extended what had already been practised before by working groups and lecture circles of such leftist organisations as the *Socialist German Student Union* (SDS) and the *Republican Clubs* (*Republikanische Clubs*).²⁹ The ‘Free University’ in Berkeley and similar forms of self-organised institutions set up by the American student movement also provided an important impulse for the founding of the KU in Berlin.³⁰ Like their American counterparts, the German students intended

- 27 For a further radicalisation of the concept of an ‘autonomous sphere’ of courses self-organised by the students cf. P.M. Zoller (ed.): *Aktiver Streik: Dokumentation zu einem Jahr Hochschulpolitik am Beispiel der Universität Frankfurt am Main*, Darmstadt 1969, pp. 9–11, pp. 67–69, p. 91 and pp. 194–202.
- 28 Studenten planen “Kritische Universität”: Professor Marcuse: Geeignetes Mittel zur Vorbereitung einer Krise des Systems, in: *Die Welt*, 13 July 1967.
- 29 Tilman P. Fichter/Siegward Lönnendonker: *Kleine Geschichte des SDS: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund von Helmut Schmidt bis Rudi Dutschke*, Bonn 2008, pp. 180 and 196.
- 30 Michael Schmidtke: *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz: Die 68er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und den USA*, pp. 225–240, especially pp. 234–240 (Schmidtke also stresses the differences between the ‘Free Universities’ and the ‘Kritische Universitäten’); Gerd-Rainer Horn: *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*, Oxford 2007, pp. 197–206 (Horn gives further examples of ‘critical’ or ‘free’ universities in England, the Netherlands and particularly France and Italy); Norman Birnbaum: *Gegenuniversitäten*

to give the self-organised courses a clear political edge. They wanted the criticism to become practical and the practice to become critical. Radical exponents of the student movement (which, in large parts, had embarked on a course of revolutionary rhetoric by the late sixties) claimed that by viewing science in the critical light of practice, the 'Critical Universities' had transcended the sphere of mere reformism.³¹

The first attempt to set up a KU took place in Berlin during the winter term 1967/68.³² The KU of Berlin set itself a threefold task. It was intended to put the ideas promoted by radical students for a reform of academic education into practice, a reform which had to be based on a fundamental criticism of the existing university and had to be understood as a model for a future restructuring of academic learning and teaching. Furthermore, the KU had to lay the ground for students' political activities outside university and to legitimise these activities by giving them a scientific underpinning. Finally, the KU was thought to prepare the students, in political terms, for the emancipatory role they were expected to adopt in their future professional practice, as they assumed the task of reducing and dismantling any form of unjustified rule in working life.³³ The concrete utopia of

in den USA, in: AStA der Freien Universität Berlin (ed.): *Kritische Universität: Freie Studienorganisation der Studenten in den Hoch- und Fachschulen von Westberlin: Programm und Verzeichnis der Studienveranstaltungen im Wintersemester 1967/68*, Berlin 1967, pp. 26–28. For a report on the London Anti-University and some comparative remarks relating to the 'Kritische Universitäten', cf. Tobias Strunk/Peter Münder: *Erinnerungen an die KU beim Besuch der Londoner Anti-University*, in: auditorium 53 (1968), p. 17.

- 31 Thomas Neumann: *Das wichtigste Ereignis der studentischen Widerstandsbewegung bisher war die Gründung kritischer und politischer Universitäten*, in: Thomas Kieselbach/Peter Marwedel (eds.): *Emanzipation oder Disziplinierung: Zur Studienreform 1966/67*, Köln 1969, pp. 45–49.
- 32 Siegwald Lönnendonker/Tilman Fichter/Jochen Staadt (eds.): *Freie Universität Berlin 1948–1973: Hochschule im Umbruch, Vol. V: Gewalt und Gegengewalt (1967–1969)*, Berlin 1983, Dok. 804, pp. 248–249; Sigrid Fronius: *Bericht über die Gründungsveranstaltung der Kritischen Universität, 1.11.1967*, and Dok. 805, pp. 249–250; *Entwurf für eine Resolution: Ziele und Organisation der Kritischen Universität*; cf. also Sandra Kraft: *Vom Hörsaal auf die Anklagebank*, pp. 151–152; Joachim Scharloth: *1968: Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte*, München 2011, pp. 181–187; Tilman P. Fichter/Siegward Lönnendonker: *Kleine Geschichte des SDS: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund von Helmut Schmidt bis Rudi Dutschke*, pp. 179–181; Ludwig von Friedeburg et al.: *Freie Universität und politisches Potential der Studenten: Über die Entwicklung des Berliner Modells und den Anfang der Studentenbewegung in Deutschland*, Neuwied/Berlin 1968, pp. 402–415.
- 33 *Was ist die Kritische Universität?* in: Stefan Leibfried: *Wider die Untertanenfabrik. Handbuch zur Demokratisierung der Hochschule*, pp. 321–330; cf. also Wolfgang Nitsch: *Argumente für eine "Kritische Universität"*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 331–334, in a longer version also in: Siegwald Lönnendonker/Tilman Fichter/Jochen Staadt (eds.): *Freie Universität Berlin 1948–1973: Hochschule im Umbruch, Vol. V: Gewalt und Gegengewalt (1967–1969)*, Dok. 766, pp. 201–203; *Ziele und Organisation der Kritischen Universität*, in: AStA der Freien Universität Berlin (ed.): *Kritische Universität: Freie Studienorganisation der*

the KU was thus based on a number of extremely ambitious aims and wide-reaching intentions,³⁴ which revolved around an overarching desire to abolish the “sclerotic rituals of the established teaching routines”.³⁵ In the courses of the KU, all forms of dependency had to be dismantled, all signs of authoritarian behaviour had to be eradicated, and all participants would be given an equal say. Lectures would disappear and the open discussion of all participants would replace the one-way-street of a single person’s monologue in the manner of a secular sermon (“monologisierende Säkular-Predigten”³⁶). Since the courses were intended to deal with problems chosen according to their social and political relevance, the methodological approaches of a variety of scientific disciplines would be included. Under the umbrella of the KU, knowledge production would not be pursued for its own sake, but with the political aim to dispel social dependencies and overcome the existing power structures. Subjects and topics which usually had been omitted in the university courses or had been covered only insufficiently would be addressed. Thus, the KU was conceived as a counter-model to the traditional university.³⁷ It confronted the ‘technocratic’ model of a reform (as it was termed by the radical students) proposed by the established protagonists of higher education policies with a utopia of experimental, self-governed and autonomous forms of learning. It rejected the notion of an alleged political neutrality and ‘value-freeness’ of scientific research and instead declared the democratisation of the existing university and the politicisation of the studies—indeed of the whole society—as its aim. It counted on the subversive power of science, when organised in a critical public sphere, to constitute a countervailing force against the functionalisation of science in the service of the ruling classes.³⁸

In a handful of cases, the example of the KU Berlin encouraged students at other universities to launch similar initiatives. According to a resolution passed by a general meeting of the VDS in March 1968, the founding of the KU in Berlin had been the most important experiment of higher education reform since 1945. The VDS therefore recommended other students to follow its example. The resolution demanded that the KU

Studenten in den Hoch- und Fachschulen von Westberlin: Programm und Verzeichnis der Studienveranstaltungen im Wintersemester 1967/68, Berlin 1967, pp. 44–46.

34 For the following cf. Siegwald Lönnendonker/Tilman Fichter/Jochen Staadt (eds.): *Freie Universität Berlin 1948–1973: Hochschule im Umbruch*, Vol. V: *Gewalt und Gegengewalt (1967–1969)*, Dok. 821, p. 263; leaflet “Kritische Universität—Praktizierte Studienreform”, October/November 1967.

35 *Wie wird die Kritische Universität arbeiten?*, in: *AStA der Freien Universität Berlin* (ed.): *Kritische Universität*, pp. 42–44, p. 42.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*, Dok. 769, pp. 204–206; Stephan Leibfried: *Protokoll einer Beratung über eine Gegenuniversität am 18.6.1967*.

38 Oskar Negt: *Über die Idee einer kritischen und antiautoritären Universität*, in: Horst Baier (ed.): *Studenten in Opposition: Beiträge zur Soziologie der deutschen Hochschule*, Bielefeld 1968, pp. 25–46.

be based on democratic self-organisation, on public and open discussion of all schemes and projects, on non-coercive forms of learning and interdisciplinary cooperation, on a reflection of the real needs of society and on the firm intention to put results into practice.³⁹ The intention was to create an intellectual space where it was possible to initiate a “hierarchy-free discussion”.⁴⁰ Criticism of lectures were to be complemented by reviews of the seminars; the regular courses were to be paralleled by autonomous working groups of students, and all efforts were to be bound together by the alternative curriculum of the KU.⁴¹ Attempts to establish a KU, however, were made only in a few cities, especially in Hamburg⁴² and Heidelberg and on a smaller scale in Münster (here named ‘*Wissenschaftspolitischer Club*’).⁴³

Besides their limited number, the counter-institutions also turned out to be temporally ephemeral. While the experiment in Berlin lasted only for one term, the ‘Political University’ in Frankfurt persisted for not much longer than one day: It was spontaneously proclaimed in the course of the students’ occupation of the university in May 1968 and it ended with the clearing of the building by police.⁴⁴ In other places, the counter-institution suffered a sharp decline because it failed to meet the high expectations it had raised in terms of practical organisation and active participation. Not long after the founding of the KU in Heidelberg, a leaflet by the organising ‘Initiative Committee’, for instance, deplored that many of the ideas which had accompanied the birth of the KU had remained unfulfilled.⁴⁵

- 39 Gründung von Kritischen Universitäten: Beschluss der 20. o.MV des VDS März 1968 in München), in: Demokratische Universität: Kritische Arbeitskreise in München, herausgegeben von der ADU (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Demokratische Universität), München 1968, pp. 23–26.
- 40 Kritische Universität: teach-in am Freitag, 2. Februar 1968, in: info, Sondernummer, 29 January 1968.
- 41 Gründung von Kritischen Universitäten: Beschluss der 20. o.MV des VDS März 1968 in München, in: Demokratische Universität: Kritische Arbeitskreise in München. Herausgegeben von der ADU (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Demokratische Universität), München 1968, pp. 23–26.
- 42 Studenten gründeten “Kritische Universität”, in: Hamburger Abendblatt Nr. 244, 19 October 1967.
- 43 As an overview cf. Peter Schütt: Kritische Universität und Universitätskritik, in: auditorium 49 (1967), pp. 6–7; Friedrich Mager/Ulrich Spinnarke: Was wollen die Studenten? Frankfurt am Main/Hamburg 1967, pp. 103–106; Kritische Universitäten: Sprich Ka-U, in: Der Spiegel, 6 November 1967, pp. 198–202.
- 44 Anne Rohstock: Von der “Ordinarienuniversität” zur “Revolutionszentrale”? Hochschulreform und Hochschulrevolte in Bayern und Hessen 1957–1976, pp. 193–199; Detlev Claussen: Einleitung, in: Detlev Claussen/Regine Dermittel (eds.): Universität und Widerstand: Versuch einer Politischen Universität in Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main 1968, pp. 7–18; the programme of courses scheduled at the “Politische Universität” is reproduced in the same volume (pp. 42–43).
- 45 Flugblatt des Initiativausschusses der Kritischen Universität Heidelberg, 9 July 1967, at: https://www.mao-projekt.de/BRD/BW/KAR/Heidelberg_004/Heidelberg_VDS_Universitaet_1968_07.shtml (accessed on 10 August 2018).

At the KU in Hamburg in 1967/68, the eleven working groups that had been established were soon in decline. Since participation in the courses had to take place in addition to the regular courses, many students left the working groups when the double effort became too burdensome. It also turned out that only few students felt able to discuss the complicated topics chosen as subjects of the KU courses, leaving a small new “doctrinaire elite”⁴⁶ dominating the working groups. The Critical Universities in Berlin and Hamburg failed in their efforts to attract the working class youth to its courses—in stark contrast to the idea of a counter-university as had been envisaged by student leader Rudi Dutschke.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in spite of all its flaws and failures, conceptually, the KU represented the most ample, the most politically ambitious, and the most radical attempt to develop a counter-model to the existing university during the peak years of the student movement. Some of its programmatic premises and postulates would resurface in the context of subsequent discussions concerning the reform of academic learning and teaching.

The Assistants’ Movement: Neo-Humboldtianism and Project-Based Learning

In the quest for a reform of tertiary studies, one of the most active groups was the university assistants. In 1968, the newly founded Federal Conference of the University Assistants (*‘Bundesassistentenkonferenz’*, hereafter BAK) entered the stage of higher education politics. Even though it succeeded in playing an important role in university politics, the new protagonists’ presence was short-lived. Only six years after its founding, the BAK decided to dissolve due to mounting internal struggles. Politically, it had oscillated between the representation of professional group interests, left-liberal reform idealism and, increasingly, the advocacy of an anti-capitalist transformation of the ‘system’. From its beginnings, however, the conference had also championed a fundamental reform of academic learning and teaching as an integral part of university reform.⁴⁸

- 46 Wolfgang Krohn: Die Konzeption der Hamburger KU, in: Thomas Kieselbach/Peter Marwedel (eds.): *Emanzipation oder Disziplinierung: Zur Studienreform 1966/67*, Köln 1969, pp. 50–54, p. 51.
- 47 Gerhard Bauß: *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin: Ein Handbuch*, Köln 1977, pp. 255–259; cf. “Wir fordern die Enteignung Axel Springers”: SPIEGEL-Gespräch mit dem Berliner FU-Studenten Rudi Dutschke (SDS), in: *Der Spiegel*, 10 July 1967, pp. 29–33, p. 31; Was ist eine ‘Kritische Universität’, in: Rudi Dutschke: *Mein langer Marsch: Reden, Schriften und Tagebücher aus zwanzig Jahren*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1980, pp. 63–65.
- 48 Ludwig Huber: *Entwicklung und Wirkung der Bundesassistentenkonferenz*, in: Stephan Freiger/Michael Groß/Christoph Oehler (eds.): *Wissenschaftlicher Nachwuchs ohne Zukunft? Bundesassistentenkonferenz/Hochschulentwicklung/Junge Wissenschaftler heute*,

It was the emphasis on the inner reform of the studies, which distinguished the contributions of the BAK from those of many other protagonists of the reform debate - a debate in which the BAK became one of the most innovative participants. The impact of university assistants on the reform movement became particularly visible in the context of the foundation of new universities in Bremen and Kassel, Osnabrück and Oldenburg, where exponents of the BAK gained a strong influence on the modelling of the planning concepts and where ideas which the BAK had been promulgating played a considerable role in the founding process. It was mostly here that the reform proposals of the BAK were put to the test.

Partly due to the commitment of the BAK, the didactics of university teaching as a new sub-discipline of pedagogy began to bloom in the early 1970s, after having previously faced massive difficulties in finding any attention at German universities. At the Technical University of Berlin, a new *Institute for University Didactics* was founded in 1969, while an *Interdisciplinary Centre for University Didactics* was established at the University of Hamburg in 1970. Similar institutes soon followed at other universities: in Tübingen in 1971, in Augsburg and Göttingen the following year, and in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1974 at four different places. It was no coincidence that some activists of the BAK were among the scholars who took positions at these new institutions.⁴⁹ However, it did not take long for the new interest in the didactics of university teaching to fade away once again.⁵⁰

At the centre of the concept of studies proposed by the BAK stood the idea of 'learning by research' (*forschendes Lernen*).⁵¹ At a time when serious doubts were expressed regarding whether the Humboldtian postulate of the unity of research and teaching was still—or

Kassel 1986, pp. 31–44; Bodo von Borries: Die Arbeit der Bundesassistentenkonferenz, in: *ibid.*, pp. 45–63.

49 Ludwig Huber: Wurzeln der Hochschuldidaktik im Westen: Die Bundesassistentenkonferenz oder: Kühne Absichten—noch unerledigte Aufgaben, in: Karin Reiber/Regine Richter (eds.): *Entwicklungslinien der Hochschuldidaktik: Ein Blick zurück nach vorn*, Berlin 2007, pp. 77–105, p. 97.

50 Erich Leitner: Hochschulpädagogik: Zur Genese und Funktion der Hochschul-Pädagogik im Rahmen der Entwicklung der deutschen Universität 1800–1968, Frankfurt am Main et al. 1984, pp. 311–312. At the end of the decade, 21 centres, chairs or working groups for the didactics of university teaching were counted; Ludwig Huber: Hochschuldidaktik als Theorie der Bildung und Ausbildung, in: idem (ed.): *Ausbildung und Sozialisation in der Hochschule (Enzyklopädie Erziehungswissenschaft 10)*, Stuttgart 1983, pp. 114–138, p. 115; for the situation in 1982 cf. also Konrad Zillober: *Einführung in die Hochschuldidaktik*, Darmstadt 1984, pp. 206–207.

51 *Forschendes Lernen—Wissenschaftliches Prüfen: Ergebnisse der Arbeit des Ausschusses für Hochschuldidaktik (Schriften der Bundesassistentenkonferenz 5)*, 2nd ed., Bonn 1970.

had ever been—grounded in the reality of university teaching, it was the movement of the assistants that appeared most determined to revive and vindicate the dignified identity formula of the German university.

In daily reality, ‘unity of research and teaching’ at best indicated that the subjects of learning were chosen according to the lecturer’s individual research interests. For the BAK, ‘learning by research’, instead, meant that students should actively take part in the process of scientific research and that this active participation was at the core of reading a subject. The division of roles between the authoritarian figure of the teaching researcher and of the receptive student that had been lamented by the students’ movement had to be mitigated. The concept of the BAK was hence directed against gradual ‘schoolification’ (*‘Verschulung’*) of the courses of study, the overburdening of courses with ever more extensive ranges of topics, and against the prevalence of a purely receptive canon of authoritatively predetermined knowledge. Instead, emphasis was on independent choice of subjects, methods and experimental arrangements by the students, including an “unlimited risk of mistakes and detours”.⁵² As claimed in a widely received booklet of the BAK (distributed in 100,000 copies), students had to be offered the chance to take part in the process of research not only at an advanced stage, but from the onset of their studies. It was expected that the previously heteronomous and passive attitude among students, caused by the conventional forms of studying (the need to pass exams and gain credits), would thus be replaced by a more intrinsic and active motivation triggered by the participatory character of the courses.⁵³ Courses founded on ‘learning by research’ would be characterised by the active, *project-related*, problem-based and application-orientated participation of the students in research activities of interdisciplinary nature, research activities which would be predominantly organised on the basis of group-work.⁵⁴

It must be taken into consideration that at the time when the BAK was drafting its reform concept, a vigorous debate had just taken place of a proposal by the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) concerning a reform of study courses. The proposal, published in 1966, distinguished between a four-years-cycle of studies, leading to a first degree, and a second stage, reserved for a restricted number of highly qualified students, leading to a second and advanced degree. Only the second stage was intended to entail a closer contact to research.⁵⁵ The idea met fierce criticism, especially from the faculties of philosophy. Many critics suspected that the recommendation, if carried out, meant the

52 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

53 Brigitte Eckstein: Einmaleins der Hochschullehre: Praktische Einführung in die Grundlagen und Methoden, München 1978, p. 134.

54 Forschendes Lernen—Wissenschaftliches Prüfen: Ergebnisse der Arbeit des Ausschusses für Hochschuldidaktik, p. 27; Ludwig Huber: Forschendes Lernen: Bericht und Diskussion über ein hochschuldidaktisches Prinzip, in: Neue Sammlung 10 (1970), pp. 227–244.

55 Wissenschaftsrat: Empfehlungen zur Neuordnung des Studiums an den wissenschaftlichen Hochschulen, Bonn 1966.

end of a research-oriented type of study for the majority of students.⁵⁶ It was against this backdrop that the idea of ‘learning by research’ was drawn up by the BAK, as an answer to attempts of perceived ‘technocratic’ rationalisation of academic learning and teaching. It turned against the state of affairs in current university teaching and in ‘bourgeoise science’ (*‘bürgerliche Wissenschaft’*). Yet in contrast to the Humboldtian concept of a study in “loneliness and freedom”⁵⁷, as it had famously—and somehow melancholically—been depicted by the sociologist Helmut Schelsky, the BAK favoured an approach based upon group work. In order to prevent any form of authoritarian conduct, a leading advocate of the didactics of university teaching among the assistants insisted that “no one may be represented in the group who already knows the solution to the problem and simulates a research process only for the others”.⁵⁸

Departing from the basic idea of ‘learning by research’, the BAK sketched the concept of the ‘project studies’. If ‘learning by research’ was thought to be the pivotal concept of the intended reform of university didactics, the crucial working principle would be the ‘project’. Yet, by unifying scientific analysis with political engagement, ‘project studies’ went further than ‘learning by research’. By transforming theoretical work into practical activities, the project transcended the purely science-based approach of ‘learning by research’. The project-based approach aimed to overcome the political abstinence of academic learning, which, as mentioned above, was increasingly criticised by students and assistants: becoming practical meant becoming political.⁵⁹ One basic principle of project-based learning was that the learning processes would no longer be orientated towards the systematic order of a particular scientific field but, like most research, towards a specific problem which was jointly chosen by the participants.⁶⁰ Depending on the character of the problems dealt with, there would be various scientific disciplines involved

- 56 Wilfried Rudloff: Ansatzpunkte und Hindernisse der Hochschulreform in der Bundesrepublik der sechziger Jahre: Studienreform und Gesamthochschule, in: *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte* 8 (2005), pp. 71–90, pp. 74–75; Stefanie Lechner: Gesellschaftsbilder in der deutschen Hochschulpolitik: Das Beispiel des Wissenschaftsrates in den 1960er Jahren, in: Andreas Franzmann/Barbara Wolbring (eds.): *Zwischen Idee und Zweckorientierung: Vorbilder und Motive von Hochschulreformen seit 1945*, Berlin 2007, pp. 103–120, pp. 112–133.
- 57 Helmut Schelsky: *Einsamkeit und Freiheit: Idee und Gestalt der deutschen Universität und ihrer Reformen*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1963.
- 58 Ludwig Huber: *Forschendes Lernen: Bericht und Diskussion über ein hochschuldidaktisches Prinzip*, p. 233.
- 59 Ludwig Huber: *Forschungsbasiertes, Forschungsorientiertes, Forschendes Lernen: alles dasselbe? Ein Plädoyer für eine Verständigung über Begriffe und Unterscheidungen im Feld forschungsnahen Lehrens und Lernens*, in: *Das Hochschulwesen* 62 (2014), pp. 32–39, p. 36.
- 60 Bundesassistentenkonferenz: *Studium in Forschungsprojektgruppen*, in: *Beiträge zur Studienreform: Didaktische Aufgaben einer Gesamthochschule: Ergebnisse der Arbeit des Ausschusses für Hochschuldidaktik (Materialien der Bundesassistentenkonferenz 6)*, Bonn 1970, pp. 9–52, p. 44.

and preferably also a combination of lecturers representing different subject areas. The lecturers, however, had to step back and give as much room as possible to the students' self-reliant and self-dependent activities. Thereby, students would develop solutions by themselves and enhance their abilities to communicate, to interact, and to work as a team. By trying to solve the problem to which it was dedicated, the course became a project.⁶¹ Practical problems, taken from social reality, had to be both the starting point of the 'project studies' and its integrative moment. To add a further dimension, problems addressed were also meant to test the relevance of the learning processes initiated.⁶² The students would be better equipped for the professional role they would have to adopt in their working life, not just functionally, but rather in a critical sense. The blinkered specialist produced by universities so far, would turn into an advocate of social progress in his area of interest.⁶³

Overall, the most prominent keywords that appeared in conceptual papers dedicated to the 'project' idea in the early 1970s were: 'problem orientation', 'practical activation', 'social relevance', 'group work', 'interdisciplinarity', and 'methodical pluralism'. The model of instruction gave room to manifold interpretations which in some cases stressed its political-critical meaning, its innovative didactical meaning in others, or its pragmatic-practical meaning. In the first case, it was mainly understood as an instrument for the transformation of the social order,⁶⁴ in the second as a major step towards a reform of study courses, and in the last as a method of linking higher education more closely with working life and to prepare students more appropriately for their professional role.

Reform Model Put to the Test: Rise and Decline of the '*Projektstudium*'

In practice, the concept of 'project studies' became a major issue only at some newly founded German universities where the movements of both the assistants and the students managed to exert a deeper influence on the reform of study programmes. This was most evident in the case of the new university founded in Bremen in 1970. The planners of Bremen University emphasised that the founding concept would mainly have to

61 Ibid., p. 21.

62 *Forschendes Lernen—Wissenschaftliches Prüfen: Ergebnisse der Arbeit des Ausschusses für Hochschuldidaktik*, p. 27.

63 Roland Bislich et al.: *Zur praktischen Einführung des Projektstudiums*, in: *Bundesassistentenkonferenz: Materialien zum Projektstudium (Materialien der Bundesassistentenkonferenz 11)*, Bonn 1973, pp. 38–58, p. 42.

64 For a criticism of the project studies from an anti-capitalistic perspective cf. Egon Becker/Gerd Jungblut/Ludwig Voegelin: *Projektorientierung als Strategie der Studienreform*, s.l. 1972.

address the issue of restructuring the courses of study, instead of indulging too much in questions of the formal structure of the university.⁶⁵ A number of new ideas concerning the courses of study were tested. This included the ‘social science-based entry stage’ of one year (*Integriertes Sozialwissenschaftliches Eingangsstudium*), which all students of economics, social sciences and law had to pass before proceeding to their subject-specific (disciplinary) curriculum.⁶⁶ Other innovations were the integrated teacher training for all types of schools, or the single phase study of law.⁶⁷ The cornerstone of the ‘Bremen model’, however, was the concept of ‘project studies’. Although seminar-like courses were offered in addition to ‘project studies’, the ‘great lecture’ seemed doomed to vanish. The construction planning for the new university buildings did not even provide for a lecture theatre suitable for greater audiences.⁶⁸

Among the German universities, it was only in Bremen that ‘project studies’ was meant to become the basic form and dominant structure of courses of study. The planners envisaged that the courses of study should no longer be based on the logics of hermetically separated disciplines. Instead, the organisation and content of the courses would depend on the nature of the problems dealt with. These problems had to be chosen according to their ‘social relevance’. As a result, the perspectives and methods of different scientific disciplines would be incorporated. The projects would be organised on the basis of small working groups. The participants had to reflect on their future professional activities by considering the restraints and social contradictions they would be confronted with in working life. The projects, it was assumed, would thereby gain a strong emancipatory thrust.⁶⁹ Alternatives to current work practices would be explored in order to detect points of leverage for change in both professional practice and social structures. Courses would last two or three terms and would combine manifold types of learning.⁷⁰

65 Bericht über den Aufbau der Universität Bremen, Stand: Oktober 1970, pp. 7–8, BArch B 138/11423.

66 Christian Joerges: Über die Notwendigkeit und die Schwierigkeit der Selbstkritik in der Ausbildungsreform: Das Beispiel der Kontroverse um das Integrierte Sozialwissenschaftliche Eingangsstudium (ISES), in: Zehn Jahre Universität Bremen: Keine Festschrift (Diskurs: Bremer Beiträge zu Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft 7), Bremen 1982, pp. 405–409; Ulrich Mückenberger: Ein Versprechen, das noch der Einlösung bedarf: Integriertes Sozialwissenschaftliches Eingangsstudium (ISES), in: *ibid.*, pp. 410–415.

67 Cf. Birte Gräfin: Tradition Reform: Die Universität Bremen 1971–2001, Bremen 2012, pp. 192–199 and pp. 207–214; Thomas von der Vring: Hochschulreform in Bremen, Frankfurt a.M./Köln 1975, pp. 84–95.

68 Thomas von der Vring: Hochschulreform in Bremen, p. 83.

69 Planungskommission Lehrerbildung: Zum Projektstudium an der Universität Bremen (1970), in: Elin-Birgit Berndt et al.: Erziehung der Erzieher: Das Bremer Reformmodell: Ein Lehrstück der Bildungspolitik, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1972, pp. 184–189.

70 *Ibid.*; Planungskommission Lehrerbildung: Ergänzungen zum Papier “Projektstudium” der PKL (1971), in: *ibid.*, pp. 189–191; cf. also: Das Programm der Bremer Universität zur Studienreform: das Projektstudium, in: Bundesassistentenkonferenz (ed.): Materialien zum

The University of Bremen was the spearhead of the university reform on the left side of the political spectrum. For the founding rector of the university, Thomas von der Vring, what really mattered

in the framework of the study was that the students learned and practiced egalitarian and cooperative patterns of behaviour, which were appropriate for science and at the same time suitable for a human society, leading them in their later activities in the sphere of social production to resist the constraint of reality and become an agent of progress.⁷¹

In the planning groups that drafted the first concepts for the project studies courses, the neo-Marxist language of the radical student movement became the language of the planners.⁷² Therefore, it did not take long for the project studies to become part of the political conflicts that erupted over the new university. A discussion paper of the working group on higher education of the Bremen CDU (*Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, Christian Democratic Union of Germany) in the mid-1970s summed up many opponents' criticism.⁷³ Though the authors asserted that they did not reject the approach of project-based learning in principle, they contested the political meaning it assumed at the new university, particularly in combination with the further postulate of a partisanship for the underprivileged classes. Taking the example of the project study in "Political Economy", the report assumed that the basic claim of problem-orientation produced a lopsided perspective on social reality - a perspective which first and foremost aimed at a radical change of the social order. In the eyes of these critics, the projects made sense only if understood as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, the

Projektstudium (Materialien der Bundesassistentenkonferenz 11), Bonn 1973, pp. 59–82, p. 66; for the example of a project in chemistry cf. Birte Gräfin: Tradition Reform: Die Universität Bremen 1971–2001, pp. 205–207; for projects in the field of teacher training cf. Elin-Birgit Berndt: Zur Entwicklung der Studienreform im Bereich Kommunikation/Ästhetik (K/Ä), in: Elin-Birgit Berndt et al.: *Erziehung der Erzieher: Das Bremer Reformmodell: Ein Lehrstück der Bildungspolitik*, pp. 66–123, pp. 108–123.

71 Thomas von der Vring: Theoretische Überlegungen zum Problem der Universitätsgründung, in: Thomas von der Vring: *Hochschulreform in Bremen*, Frankfurt am Main/Köln 1975, pp. 253–261, p. 255.

72 Cf. Elin-Birgit Berndt et al.: *Erziehung der Erzieher: Das Bremer Reformmodell: Ein Lehrstück der Bildungspolitik*.

73 Hochschulpolitischer Arbeitskreis der CDU im Landesverband Bremen: Kritik und Alternativen zum Projektstudium an der Universität Bremen, in: Annemarie Kaiser/Franz-Josef Kaiser (eds.): *Projektstudium und Projektarbeit in der Schule*, Bad Heilbrunn 1977, pp. 60–73.

traditional types of courses. The conventional forms of studying appeared indispensable for acquiring the stock of subject-related knowledge which students would need in their later professional life.

In fact, in order to ensure that such an inventory of systematic disciplinary knowledge was acquired in the respective subjects, the traditional formats of study soon gained new importance. The idea of the project itself took a much more pragmatic shape than had been envisioned. Thus, project studies gradually lost the dominant status they had possessed in the founding period of the University of Bremen. By the 1990s, they were reduced to a marginal role.

The reasons for the decline of project studies were manifold. The need for coordination among the teachers involved in the projects was felt to be rather cumbersome, interdisciplinarity turned out to be a pledge difficult to redeem. It had been challenging enough—in fact, hardly possible—to meet the most basic prerequisite for a successful implementation of the new concept: ensuring sufficient identification with the new concept on the part of the newly appointed professors. Among the students, a change of perspective was observed in the later 1970s. In light of worsening conditions on the labour market, social criticism and emancipatory partisanship lost importance as focal points of the students' study interest. Much more relevant, instead, became the question of how useful and relevant the competences acquired would be on the labour market and in working life: that was what working life-orientation now meant in the first instance.⁷⁴ Additionally, there were various problems in the didactic structure of project studies. One of these problems was, as has already been pointed out, the tension between the principle of exemplary learning on the one hand and the necessary endowment with systematic subject-related knowledge on the other. Critics complained that the project-based method of learning did not introduce the students adequately to the systematic knowledge of their discipline.⁷⁵ The dilemma could be directed against one of the premises of 'project studies' itself, as its basic idea already took for granted what the students still had to gain in reality; the independent choice of objects and methods by the students required a knowledge of the existing options provided by the respective sciences which could only be the result of studying, not its precondition.

74 Projektstudium als Beitrag zur Praxisorientierung des Studiums: Das Beispiel Ausbildung für das Lehramt an berufsbildenden Schulen an der Universität Bremen, in: Norbert Kluge/Aylâ Neusel/Ulrich Teichler: Beispiele praxisorientierten Studiums, Bonn 1981, pp. 77–98; Wiltrud Ulrike Drechsel/Bodo Voigt: Projektstudium in der Lehrerbildung: Erfahrungen und Vorschläge, in: Wolfgang Nitsch et al.: Reform-Ruinen: Bremen, Oldenburg, Roskilde, pp. 113–147, p. 121.

75 The problem had been discussed among the planners of the curricula, too. Cf. Anke Nevermann: Probleme der Bremer Konzeptionen für eine Reform der Lehrerbildung, in: Elin-Birgit Berndt et al.: Erziehung der Erzieher: Das Bremer Reformmodell: Ein Lehrstück der Bildungspolitik, pp. 26–35, p. 29.

Bremen was the most ambitious attempt to give life to the idea of project studies. Yet, it did not remain the only place where the new model was implemented. At the Gesamthochschule Kassel (founded in 1971), too, project-based courses were strongly supported by the assistants' movement and became a pillar of the concepts of reform of study programmes. In Kassel, 'project studies' were predicated on a very similar theoretical bases as in Bremen. In the end, however, the idea was only adopted as a limited component of the new concept of study programmes, namely as an integral and obligatory part of the curriculum in the study programmes of social work, architecture, city planning, and landscape planning. It also featured in engineering, while it remained optional in teacher training.⁷⁶ In contrast to Bremen, project-based courses in Kassel remained one type of course among others. On the other hand, project studies at the University of Kassel were far less controversial than in Bremen.

Similar to Bremen, 'project studies' in Kassel were initially imbued with strong elements of leftist ideology. Also in Kassel, however, the meaning of the project studies changed over time. The primary understanding of the projects as an instrument of emancipatory political practice, directed against the constraints of capitalism, was more and more superseded by an understanding which emphasized the function of a more effective preparation for the later professional work practice. And similarly, what once had been the expression of a fundamental criticism of the dominating concepts of science had now been reduced to mainly an alternative didactical approach.

Apart from scattered attempts at reserving a key role for project studies—or at least an integral part⁷⁷—in the programmes of study, project work on a more occasional and optional basis was slightly more wide-spread at German universities. Project-based courses of a more supplementary character were by no means limited to the humanities or to the social sciences but could likewise be found in the natural and technical sciences. At the beginning of the 1980s, a survey of 300 departments of engineering, economics and natural science of German universities listed 40 project studies endeavours at a dozen

76 Klaus Heipcke/Rudolf Messner: Entstehung, Situation und Perspektiven der Kasseler Stufenlehrausbildung, in: *ibid.*, pp. 263–298, pp. 283–285; Helmut Winkler: Integrierte Studiengänge im Technikbereich, in: *ibid.*, pp. 141–162, pp. 147–148 and 153; Harry Hermanns: Projektstudium—Ergebnis und Instrument der Studienreform: Erfahrungen eines Soziologen mit Projektarbeit in den integrierten Technikstudiengängen der Gesamthochschule Kassel, in: Sabine Herings/Harry Hermanns (eds.): *Lernen und Verändern: Zur Theorie und Praxis des Projektstudiums*, Hamburg 1978, pp. 66–101, pp. 71–72.

77 Other examples among the newly founded universities that focused on project studies were the universities of Osnabrück and Oldenburg; cf. Horst Wetterling: *Die Gründung der Universität Osnabrück 1970–1975*, Osnabrück 1977, pp. 68–97 *passim*; Bundesassistentenkonferenz (ed.): *Materialien zum Projektstudium*. (Materialien der Bundesassistentenkonferenz 11), Bonn 1973, pp. 108–141.

universities.⁷⁸ This was hardly more than a small niche. The authors of the survey noted that, compared to its heyday in the 1970s, the number of project-orientated courses was in steady decline. At many universities, the new type of course had already been abandoned. As a general rule, the more fraught with tradition and the more scientifically and institutionally established the departments were, the more difficult it appeared to set up courses that were project-orientated. Where attempted, the emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation was often met with considerable resistance from the teaching staff who did not feel sufficiently equipped for such an approach that transcended the customary boundaries of disciplines.⁷⁹

Experiments with project-based learning did not only take place in Germany. The best-known example of application outside Germany was the programme of studies established at the University of Roskilde in Denmark (founded in 1972), which had been breaking new ground by introducing project-based learning as the key constituent of all its study programmes.⁸⁰ The founders drew heavily on ideas of the Danish student movement that had advocated “pedagogical reforms based on student-centred and collective work formats, interdisciplinary studies combined with practical social, and political engagement, and participatory institutional democracy with equal participation of students, professors, and administrative staff.”⁸¹ The reform ideas displayed remarkable

- 78 Manfred Hamann/Wolfgang Neef: Projektstudium in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Berlin (West): Ergebnisse einer Umfrage in vier Fächerbereichen, in: Wolfgang Neef/Manfred Hamann (eds.): Projektstudium in der Ausbildung von Ingenieuren, Wirtschafts- und Naturwissenschaftlern, Alsbach/Bergstraße 1983, pp. 7–31. One area of studies where ‘project studies’ were established at some universities was architecture and spatial planning; cf. for the Technical Universities in Dortmund and Berlin: Sandra Huning/Frank Schulz: Das Projektstudium: Eine ‘weltfremde’ Utopie? Zwischen gesellschaftskritischem Reformanspruch und wissenschaftsbasierter Berufsvorbereitung, in: sub|urban. zeitschrift für kritische stadtforschung 4:2/3 (2016), pp. 265–274; Nina Gribat/Philipp Misselwitz/Matthias Görlich (eds.): Vergessene Schulen. Architekturlehre zwischen Reform und Revolte um 1986, Leipzig 2017.
- 79 Ibid., pp. 14–16.
- 80 Katrin Beyer et al.: Projektstudium an der Universität Roskilde, in: Friedemann Schmithals/Malcolm G. Cornwall (eds.): Projektstudium in den Naturwissenschaften, Hamburg 1977, pp. 43–53; Jens Bjerg/Henning Silberbrandt: Universitätszentrum Roskilde: Ein dänisches Experiment im Hochschulbereich, in: Wolfgang Nitsch et al.: Reform-Ruinen: Bremen, Oldenburg, Roskilde, Hamburg 1982, pp. 74–112; Anders Siig Anderson: The History of Roskilde University, in: idem/Simon B. Heilsen (eds.): The Roskilde Model: Problem-Oriented Learning and Project Work, Cham et al. 2015, pp. 63–77.
- 81 Anders Siig Anderson/Simon B. Heilsen: The Problem-Oriented Project Work (PPL) Alternative in Self-Directed Higher Education, in: Patrick Blessinger/John M. Carfora (eds.): Inquiry-Based Learning for Multidisciplinary Programs: A Conceptual and Practical Resource for Educators, Bingley 2015, pp. 23–41, p. 27; Anders Siig Andersen/Tinne Hoff Kjeldsen: Theoretical Foundations of PPL at Roskilde University, in: Anders Siig Andersen/Simon B. Heilsen (eds.): The Roskilde Model: Problem-Oriented Learning and Project Work, pp. 3–16.

similarities with the concepts developed contemporaneously by the German student and assistant movements. It seems that the ideas of the Danish student movement were, indeed, to some degree inspired by the ideas of their German counterparts.⁸² Furthermore, the founding concept of Roskilde was also influenced by the German sociologist Oskar Negt's writing on the principle of exemplary learning⁸³, besides older authors such as John Dewey and Kurt Lewin. In Roskilde, project work amounted to 50 per cent of the whole studies programme, the rest being spent on more traditional types of courses. Faculty members acted more as supervisors and counsellors than as teachers in the traditional sense. Like many 'left' universities in Germany, Roskilde was highly disputed politically. Nevertheless, the project-based and problem-based approach persisted and continues to form the basis for programmes of study in Roskilde today.

Besides Roskilde, problem-based and project-based learning was also firmly established at the University of Aalborg, another newly founded Danish university (1974). In Britain, by contrast, the North East London Polytechnic (1968–1992) remained the only example of a higher education institution in the 1970s that based its study programmes primarily on project-orientated courses.⁸⁴ In the Netherlands, interesting parallels existed with the 'science shops' founded in the 1970s, which intended to strengthen the ties between universities and civil society by giving local communities access to academic research capacities. In this case, too, the initial impulse came from the student movement. The project-groups of researchers and students, which were set up *ad hoc*, were dedicated to solving concrete problems articulated on the local level.⁸⁵ These projects, however, remained at the periphery of the traditional formats of study dominating the universities. This changed when the University of Maastricht was founded in 1976, which became known for the problem-orientated approach of learning that was applied across all of its faculties as the basic principle of study programmes.

82 Anders Siig Anderson: The History of Roskilde University, in: idem/Simon B. Heilsen (eds.): The Roskilde Model: Problem-Oriented Learning and Project Work, pp. 63–77, p. 65.

83 Oskar Negt: Soziologische Phantasie und exemplarisches Lernen: Zur Theorie der Arbeiterbildung, Frankfurt am Main 1968; Danish translation: Sociologisk fantasi og eksemplarisk indlæring, Copenhagen 1971. The book, which dealt with workers education, proposed to base the learning processes on exemplary learning that leads to collective self-determination and emancipation.

84 Malcolm G. Cornwall: Einige europäische PoSt-Innovationen, Erfahrungen und Reflexionen, in: Wolfgang Neef/Manfred Hamann (eds.): Projektstudium in der Ausbildung von Ingenieuren, Wirtschafts- und Naturwissenschaftlern, pp. 111–122.

85 Ad Meertens/Onno Nieman: The Amsterdam Science Shop. Doing Science for the People, in: Science for the People 11:5 (1979), pp. 15–17 and pp. 36–37; see also the introduction to this issue by Susanne Schregel.

Conclusion

There were many reasons why project studies as an alternative model of teaching and learning remained marginal within the framework of the programmes of study at West German universities.

1. Paradoxically, one reason for its decline had initially been a condition for its success—its first appearance in the context of the student revolt and the affinity of the concept to the didactical and conceptual convictions articulated by the students. Yet, precisely because it was so strongly charged with the ideological beliefs of the left, it inevitably appeared as a Trojan horse to its opponents, designed to infiltrate the university with subversive Marxist thinking. And since it was associated with the rise of the Left, the concept found itself on the defensive, as soon as both the student and assistant movements lost their momentum. Subsequently, it survived and resurfaced precisely to the extent to which it managed to de-politicise and pragmatise itself.
2. Apart from these aspects of political nature, there were a number of innate didactical and organisational problems, which often could not be sufficiently resolved. One was the considerable organisational complexity of the courses and the high investments of time and efforts required from both teaching staff and students. Another was the problem of the relationship and appropriate balance between exemplary learning on the one hand and the need to acquire a systematic canon of knowledge in the respective branch of study on the other. This proved a problem that never came to rest in the 1970s.
3. Another barrier lay in the restraints imposed by the fact that the reform universities had to cooperate with the older, more established universities in many respects. They were therefore exposed to continuous pressure to adapt to the standards of the academic mainstream. Other universities might indicate that they would not recognise the degrees received from a programme of study based on project-based learning. Gatekeeper-organisations like the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgesellschaft*, DFG) could refuse to grant universities with divergent patterns of regulation full membership (this happened to Bremen and Kassel for many years). Moreover, with the drop of reform enthusiasm in the middle of the 1970s, the older universities once again recuperated their traditional role as a dominant institutional model in higher education. Thus, the pressure on the ‘outsider’ universities to reduce possible forms of ‘deviating behaviour’ (such as project studies) increased.

4. Given the deeply ingrained reputation system of the German universities, which awarded efforts in research and thereby (indirectly) tended to penalise commitment to teaching, it was difficult to convince the incoming teaching staff to engage in such an insecure and time-consuming venture as project-based learning. It was even more difficult to win over the older faculty members who were used to teaching in the traditional manner since the beginning of their academic career.

Despite these obstacles, the concept of project-based learning was not extinguished completely. With most of its original political connotations jettisoned, it continued to exist, confined to the very periphery of study programmes. In 2012, a study which was based on an examination of 125 module manuals (concerning 39 different degree programmes) came to the conclusion that project studies accounted for 2.5 per cent of the courses identified.⁸⁶ Project-based learning has even experienced a certain revival in more recent times, especially, but not exclusively, in the technical disciplines.⁸⁷ Given that many of the premises underlying the original concept of the project studies—premises such as practical relevance, teamwork, multidisciplinary, problem-solving orientation, and active, self-reliant studies instead of passive, receptive learning—are more topical than ever, this is not even surprising.

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- 86 Michael Kerres/Andreas Schmidt: Zur Anatomie von Bologna-Studiengängen: Eine empirische Analyse von Modulhandbüchern, in: *Die Hochschule* 20:2 (2011), pp. 173–191, p. 180.
- 87 Wim Görts: *Projektveranstaltungen—und wie man sie richtig macht*, Bielefeld 2009; Wim Görts (ed.): *Projektveranstaltungen in Mathematik, Informatik und Ingenieurwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2003; Wim Görts (ed.): *Projektveranstaltungen in den Sozialwissenschaften*, Bielefeld 2003; Günter Pritschow (ed.): *Projektarbeiten in der Ingenieursausbildung: Sammlung beispielgebender Projektarbeiten an Technischen Universitäten in Deutschland*, Stuttgart 2005; Monika Rummler (ed.): *Innovative Lehrformen: Projektarbeit in der Hochschule: Projektbasiertes und problemorientiertes Lehren und Lernen*, Weinheim/Basel 2012; cf. also Harald A. Mieg/Judith Lehmann (eds.): *Forschendes Lernen: Wie die Lehre in Universitäten und Fachhochschulen erneuert werden kann*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 2017; Ludwig Huber/Julia Hellmer/Friederike Schneider (eds.): *Forschendes Lernen im Studium: Aktuelle Konzepte und Erfahrungen*, Bielefeld 2009.