Peter Alheit

The Unwanted Student: Closure tendencies in European universities. The case of Germany

Introduction

I begin my reflections with a quotation from the polemical essay *Youth of Yesterday* by Susanne Balthasar, which could be read some time ago in the German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*:

„The mid-twenties have been overtaken from behind by children who make career before driving a car. By Benjamin Lebert, who is writing a bestseller novel at the age of 16, or the countless boys and girlies who are TV stars before growing up and the children hackers who crack the Telecom code besides their homeworks or pull up an online service in daddy's garage. They make the trends and the TV, so they can read the signs of the times better than any twen. They have understood that times have changed."

A provocative scenario, without question - even if not all 16 year old boys write novels or crack the Telecom code. The diagnostic conclusion by Susanne Balthasar is certainly the **'sadness of the higher semesters'** who apparently missed the connection with the new times and put their labour market opportunities behind.

How worse must it be then for people who are beyond 30 or even 40 to choose a high school degree? Are they not absolutely out? Are not all those social-democratic educational utopias of second- or third-way education now a thing of the past? Especially after a

1

survey done by the *Agis-Institute* Hanover which ended up with the result that student milieus have been modernised dramatically - more precise even post-modernised: Trendsetter in the new millennium is - according to the *Agis* results - the **glamorous-academic group**, students who maintain an expensive academic lifestyle, want to come into the world around Oxford and Harvard, like to be generalist in their own field but never imitate the appearance of the traditional intellectuals. Relish, effective, and young - it seems to be the leading milieu of future students. And this image even meets the options from politics and business.

I allow myself a certain amount of skepticism about such a fashionable diagnosis. **Non-traditionals**, that means: older students with broken educational careers, have, at least in this scenario, no place. Of course, they are there. Statistically - depending on definition - about 5 to 10% of the students, an imbalance in the study subjects. And in a democratic society which is defining itself as a **Lifelong Learning Society** they have an important place.

I would like to introduce you into interesting selected results from our international research project that deals with this type of student. I will focus critically on **Germany**. The preliminary outcomes are based also on previous international comparative studies and are therefore protected empirically relatively well. Of course, the material presented is a selection.

What interests me in particular is the relationship between a structured framework (and the university is an arena for such

structures) and the individual influence of specific actors. **[Slide 2]** I want to have – on the basis of our qualitative data – a little closer look to the **'university',** and that means not only as an abstract institution, but as a practical field of action of actors. I'm brave enough to say: What interests me – a bit 'experimentally' spoken – is the university as a **'life world'** (1). And I will then pick out a certain type of actor who is for 'non-traditionals' of central importance: the **'gatekeeper'** of a chosen subject or discipline, the academic advisor or professional representative, who gives students access or reject them, encourages or excludes. What interests me is the reconstruction of the characteristic **'professional habitus'** which determines such selective practices (2). Finally, I would venture a diagnosis for the current academic field in Germany – of course, only based on my target group: the 'non-traditionals' (3).

My first consideration.

1. The German university as a pluralised 'universe of meaning'

To consider the idea of universities as **'life world'** has a cryptic charm. Of course, the German mass universities are nothing less than the life-world horizon of the great majority of their 'inmates'. Most of the students have other life items: jobs, certain scenes, the private sector. The teachers are oriented more to the outside: as a counselor or coach, as a consultant or subcontractor. The **Alma Mater** degenerates, it seems, to an instrumental 'learning workshop' at the periphery of the early careers.

And yet this half-ironic description, which flirts with the whole miserable public image of Higher Education especially in Germany, is only partly true. The very stimulating German study, done by Zinnecker and others, on **'University Learning and Biography'** shows convincingly that study environments can have considerable influence on students' biographies. The ongoing research by Bettina Dausien on 'learning biographies' within academic institutions - especially when groups of people come into focus who are usually at best expected to inventory: namely, secretaries - draws attention to the amazing effects of the inspiring symbolic milieu of reform universities.

So when the phenomenon 'life-world university' is not misunderstood as an ethnographic idyll of a merciless petty bourgeois arranged office of a typist or a janitor, when it ignores the intellectual insignia of the double-suite apartment of a prominent professor giving the association of a TV expert interview, when finally student toilet graffitis - how obvious they may seal the decline of academic culture - go into the background, if rather is meant a complex **'social construction'**; that is linked to biographical constructions of experience and education, work and career, then this approach would certainly be empirically useful.

However, what does *'university as a social construction'* actually mean? – Let us try to compare the term with the more familiar variant of *'gender as a social construction'*: We have learned that we are working diligently on the activity to produce and construct our gender. **Doing gender** is a ubiquitous, inescapable interactive

4

performance of everyday life. It is habitually so deeply imprinted that social patterns of expectation and the symbolic constructions of meaning to which we tie intuitively, are consciously no more available - except in trivial essentialist prejudices, which have indeed nothing to do with reality.

Fortunately, *doing university* claim no such ubiquity. There are areas of life, which are so to speak 'university free' (even if occasionally some institutional protagonists seem to prove the contrary through their behaviour). This has the analytical advantage that the symbolic universe **'university'** can be identified more easily than in the gender example. However, even this universe does not get its relative stability through entrenched normative ratios, but - as in the example of gender - through incessant interactive bargaining processes of the protagonists involved, as it were through **negotiated orders**.

This requires both inertia and change: *inertia*, because the symbolic power of tradition is reproduced by the relevant social actors, surprisingly, even if they turn explicitly against it. The limited effect of the student rebellion on 'traditional' universities is an example. *Change*, because macro-structural framework reforms (and there are quite significant impacts of the 68 movement) led to the modernisation of institutional settings, which could bring about a kind of pluralistic universa of HE in Germany.

I can confirm this difference with my own biographical experiences: After 25 years of activity at two reform universities, my entrance into

the symbolic universe of a very traditional university seemed to me like a change in the professional world, and it would be an exaggeration if I said I had really understood the 'logic' of the new academic world. The idea of the university as a social 'arena', as a symbolic space of relational placements, as Bourdieu developed in his study **Homo academicus** for the French universities, helps me, however, to understand, at least for me, the 'new' social construction **[Slide 3]**.

*Fig.1:* Symbolic space of the 'classical' (German) university
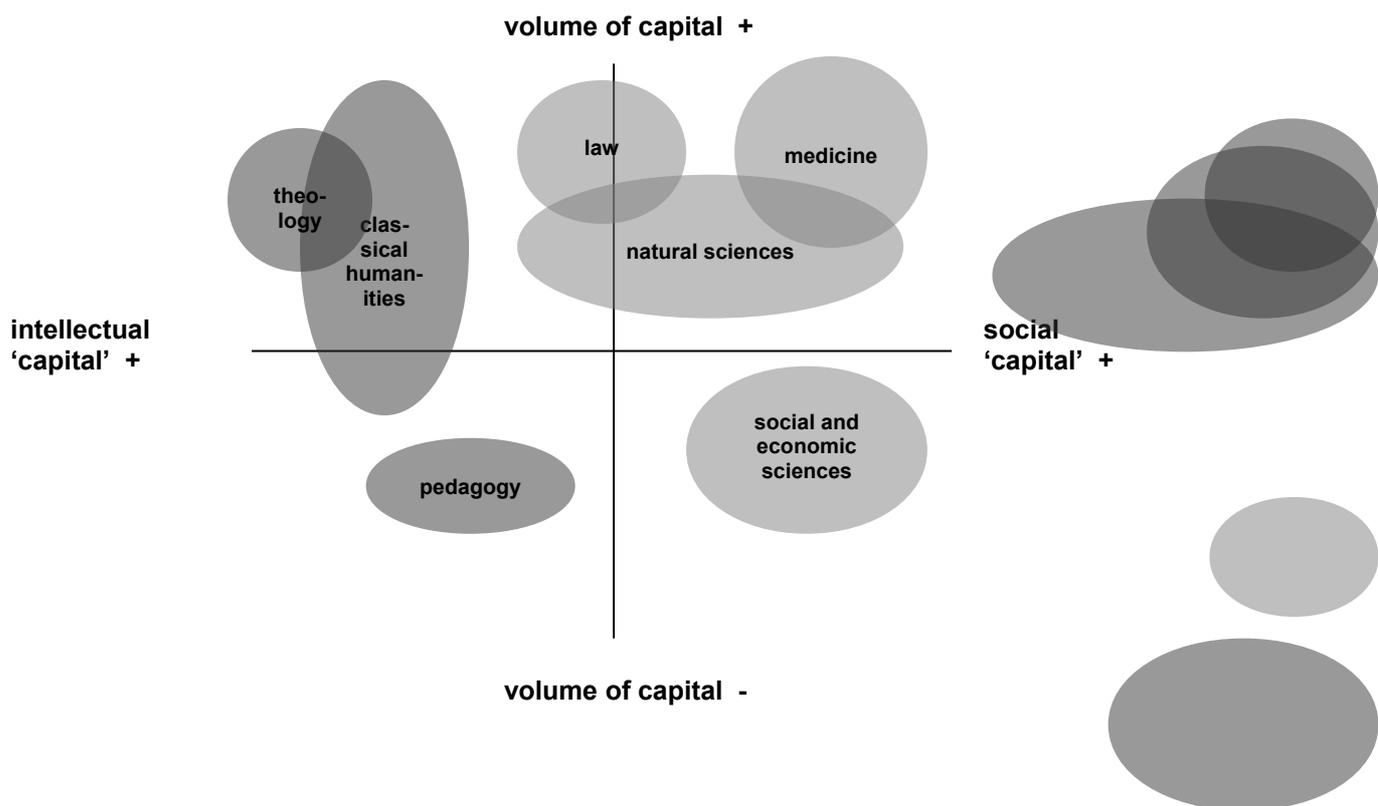
Here, the space of the 'classical' university is apparently determined through different 'symbolic capitals'. The ranking of the subjects and faculties varies with the always newly ratified amount of attributed 'social' and / or 'intellectual capital'. The result is a double polarity: a

contrast between the traditional disciplines (such as theology,

philosophy, law and medical faculty) in the upper area of the

symbolic space and modern subjects (such as social sciences and education) at the bottom. And a polarity between the humanities and the empirical sciences, which does not include the natural sciences in the narrow sense, but the medicine and the neuro-sciences as well which receive the highest symbolic value. Incidentally, the presented (relational) rankings are taken from assessments, which university actors from different disciplines have made themselves. They are 'constructions' but at the same time 'realities'.

Fig. 2: **Symbolic space oft the 'reform university'**
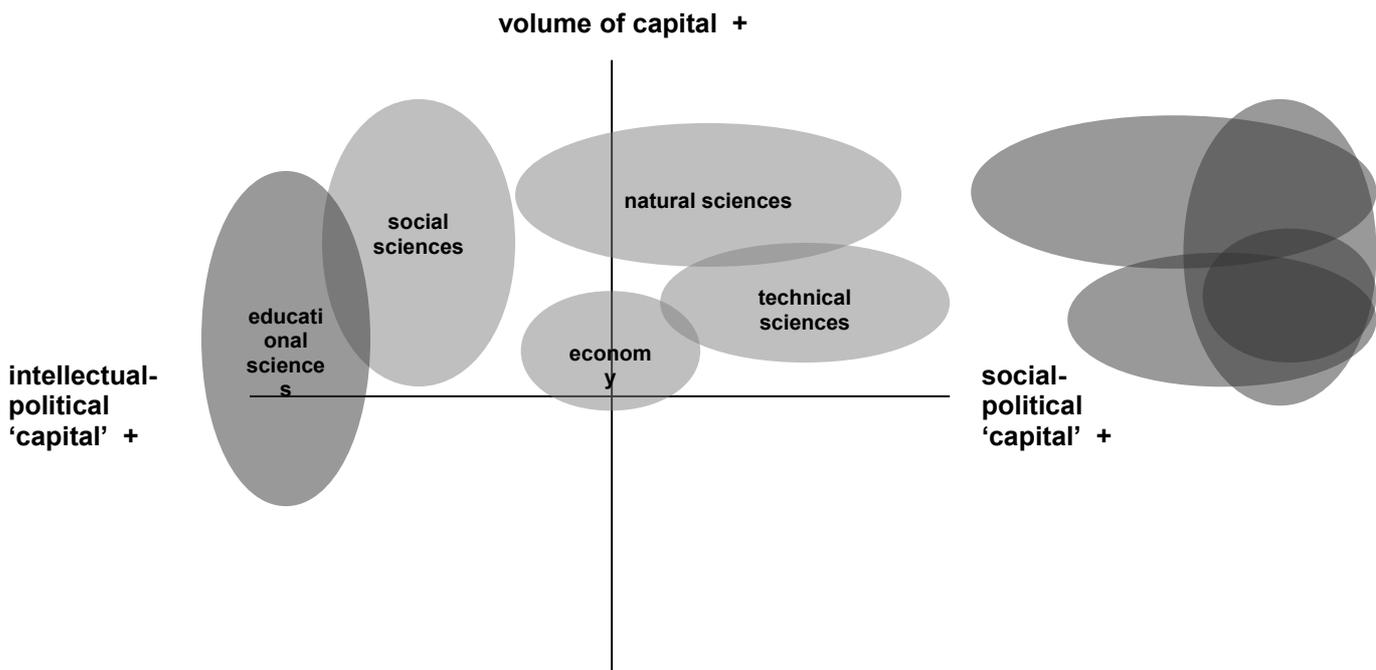
volume of capital -

University foundations in the 1970s, especially those expressed as reform universities or comprehensive universities, are changing the connotation of 'symbolic capitals'. Social and intellectual capital are coloured politically through the reformist ambitions of the education reform. This shifts the symbolic ranking of subjects not insignificantly: Since the classical disciplines (medicine, law and theology) step back and the natural sciences are inserted into the framework of teacher training, the symbolic value of educational science was increasing significantly. Symbolic leading subjects were, however, the social sciences. They represented a **modernisation of the internal space** of the university and also affected the identity of the other sciences.

What was more interesting still was the increase of reputation of technical subjects. This process was also a way of modernisation of the 'traditional' university.

We know that this symbolic reassessment was only a **temporary phenomenon**. Not only that it has touched the traditional universities marginally at best - the internal bargaining processes in the reformed universities themselves ended in a creeping **'retraditionalisation'**. The focus on teacher training had to be withdrawn for reasons of public savings. The orientation of the intellectual capital of the traditional disciplines increased again. The focus on the symbolic profile of the traditional university seemed to be obvious.

What is new, indeed, is the increasingly forced orientation at another sort of 'capital' which will also change the 'traditional' university: the gearing to the crude **economic capital**. With the globalisation of budgets and the so-called 'excellence competition', we are facing a sort of **'americanization'** of the German higher education system, which will also change the symbolic space of universities. The growing importance of technical subjects, economics, industry-related research and development will determine the university area in the following years - and as well a completely new management, which will turn the traditional interactive systems inside out **[Slide 5]**:

Fig. 3: **Symbolic space of the '(post)modernised' university**
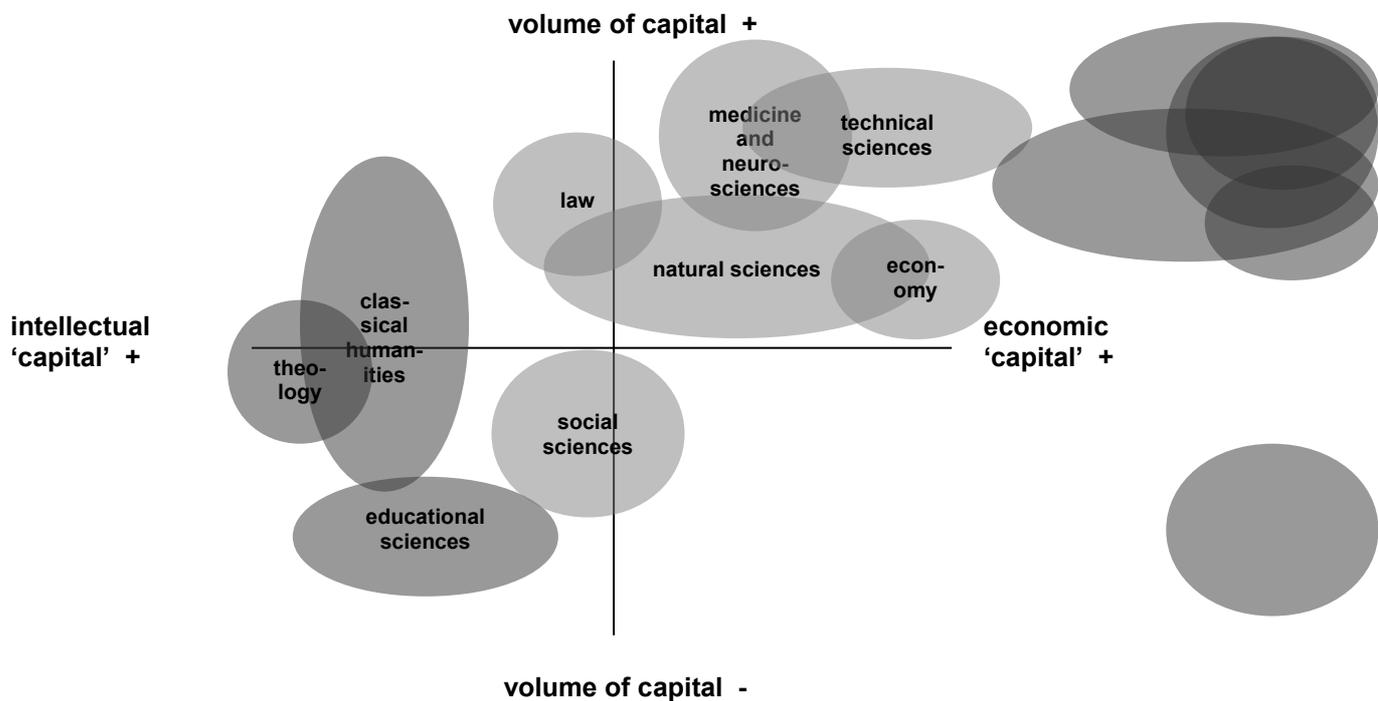
The graph shows a further marginalisation of the educational and social sciences and a 'slippage' of the classical humanities for the

benefit of the new medicine (including the neuro-sciences), technological disciplines and economics, that means: **a visible economisation of the academic field**. Undoubtedly, this is only a trend, but it documents - just like the reform period of the 1970s - that the 'social construction of the university' find itself - at least since the late sixties - in a process and that it is differentiated not just by changing of the political environment rather also through the interactive quarrels within the university area itself.

Why this excursion on the transformation of the symbolic space of German universities, which, of course, would need a much more precise analysis?

- *The most important thing first:* universities are no 'life-worlds', at least not as defined by Schuetz and Luckmann. They do not refer to the structures of basic certainties, but to an ongoing interactive negotiation process, driven by serious systemic penetrations. Universities are, so, fragile symbolic structures which may be perhaps compatible with 'life-world' needs, but perhaps also not.
- *Now the second point:* There is no longer a unique universe of meaning called 'university'. Through the differentiation of the academic world since the education reform, there exist **competing universes of meaning** that remain of course related to each other - based on the (post)modernised leading paradigm outlined above. This applies to the competing academic institutions. It applies, of course, also to the ranking of disciplines *within* the institutions themselves.

The result is a 'space of universities' which reflects the structural logic of the intra-university field in Germany [Slide 6]:

Fig. 4: Symbolic space of the German HE landscape
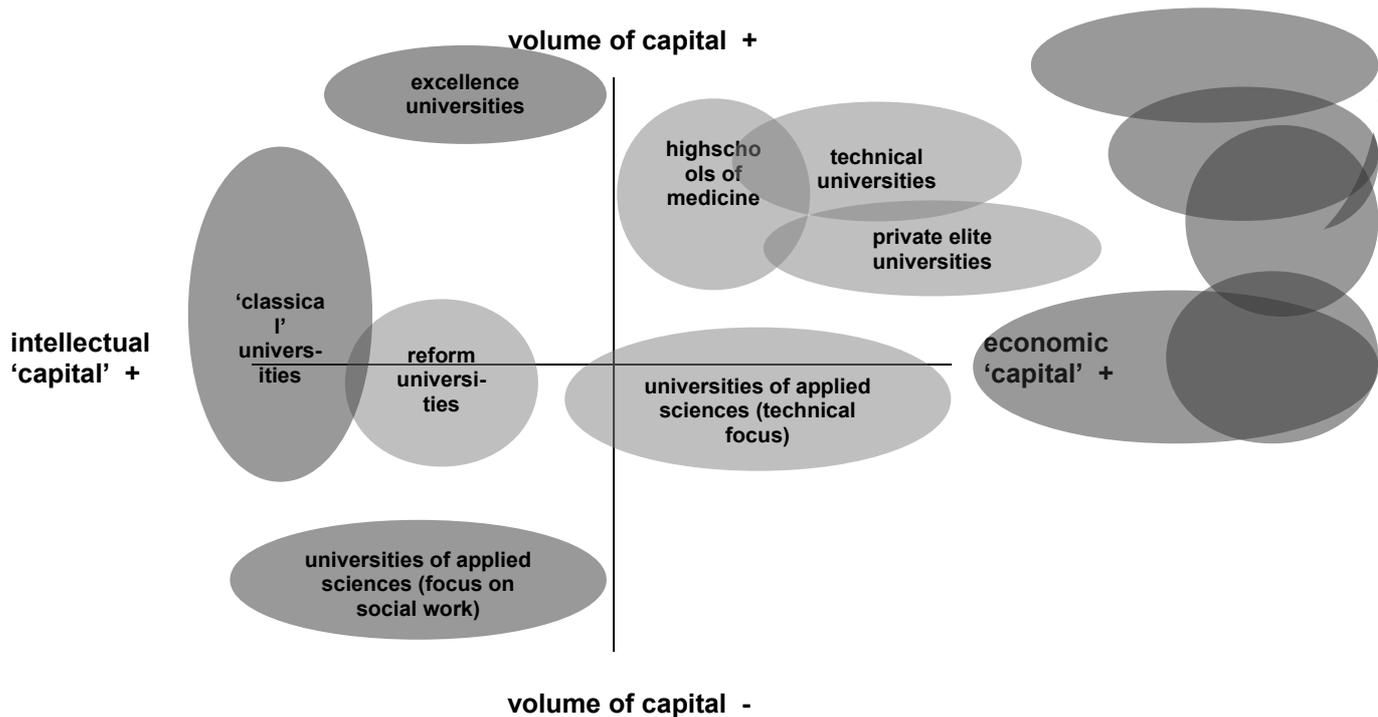
This space of competing and interrelated relational pluralised **universes of meaning** is now the field where students have to find 'life-world' agreeable and that means: **biographical** connections. How complicated this is, shows a closer look at the players, who permit or adjust access to the disciplines especially for non-traditional students. We have called them **'gatekeepers'** and we tried to decipher their professional habitus.

To this my second consideration.

2. The different 'habits' in faculty cultures

When I speak of faculty cultures I take up a plausible concept of Becher, who combined the categories *'pure'* vs. *'applied'* and *'hard'* vs. *'soft'* as heuristic aids to a four-field table **[Slide 7]**:

Figure 5: **Four-field scheme of the faculty cultures (according to Becher, 1987)**

categories	*'hard'*	*'soft'*
'pure'	e.g. physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics	e.g. history, philosophy, literature
'applied'	e.g. mechanical engineering, electrical engineering	e.g. social sciences, education, social work etc.

The *natural sciences* recognise the combination *'hard'/'pure'*. Their method of understanding is described as cumulative, fragmented, universalist, quantitative, simplifying and abstracting. The goal of knowledge is the discovery and causal explanation. Its social forms are seen as convergent, closely linked, politically well organised, competitive and goal-orientated. The scientific output is a high rate of publication. Physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics are seen as typical representatives of this.

In the combinations *'soft'/'pure'* the *humanities* and parts of the social sciences are to be found – with the distinguishing mark holistic, idiographic, particularising and case-oriented, qualitative and complicating. The goal of knowledge is understanding and interpretation. The social forms are divergent, individualistic, loosely structured and person-orientated. The rate of publication is by

comparison lower than in the sciences. History, theology, German literature, philosophy, but also partial areas as in sociology are seen as typical representatives of this.

For the combination *'hard'/'applied'* we have the *technical sciences*, which are goal-centred and pragmatic, functional and effective, also heuristic and concerned with quantity and which intervene in the physical environment. The goal of their knowledge is the development and application of techniques and products. They are described as entrepreneur-like and cosmopolitan, role-orientated with professional norms. Patents count here in lieu of the rate of publication. Mechanical and electrical engineering are seen as typical representatives.

The combination *'soft'/'applied'* stands finally for the *applied social sciences*. They have an orientation in terms of both function and practice. It is a matter of professional practice in interactions. The goal is the drawing up of reports and procedural plans. They are aimed externally, locally linked and for the most part directed at the state. Instead of publications counselling is often at the forefront. Typical representatives are here social work and social education, the education sciences in their teaching aspects and to some extent jurisprudence as well.

This arrangement is of course rather rough and stereotyped. It does not cover all subject cultures evenly. It is difficult to place in these fields the complex phenomenon of the medical faculty culture. The increasing significance of the economic sciences cannot be covered

properly in this scheme either. Nevertheless, the arrangement does give us the opportunity of an initial approach which facilitates our dealing with the case studies referred to above. We are concerned with interviews with experts in each case, four representatives of the faculty cultures described.

2.1 *'Hard' and 'pure': the 'exclusive habitus'*

Professor Schmidt is a highly renowned representative of natural scientific psychology at a traditional university with a historical reputation. He describes his scientific career as follows **[Slide 8]**:

> *'Well, H-town is really the end of a long way. I have already had chairs at many other universities. I studied in Hamburg, did my doctor's degree and got my post-doctoral qualification in Kiel and then became professor for psychology. Then I had various offers – at the TH Aachen, then at the University of Düsseldorf. That is where I had my first chair. Then I was offered a professorship back in Aachen. Then I had here, erm, here again a chair, but the people at Aachen called me back again. And from there in, erm, 1982 I was called to H-town. In between I was called to Würzburg, well, before that I did work at a number of other universities and finally I just found myself here in H-town. But then, that was because I really wanted to come here. Well, that's it really, that's the way things went.'*

Successful scientific careers in a 'pure' and 'hard' faculty seem to require a 'long way'. But it is not the experiences which are made on this way which are significant, but clearly the quantity of the stations. Our hero accumulates 8 calls for a professorship. Insiders know that this, at the latest since his third call, means not only 'intellectual' but also 'economic capital'. But that is not the point for 'Herr Schmidt'. He gives the impression – notwithstanding the reputation he has acquired – of being fairly reserved. True, it appears to him to be important to emphasise his third call as his 'first chair'. All the other ones are of course further 'chairs'. His coquetry with the *just found myself here* at the end of the passage is deliberate understatement. H-town is the crowning of an extremely successful career. Here he builds up a research institute with an international reputation and he trebles the number of people working in his subject. Schmidt finds his self-esteem by no means just by his own achievements. It is the subject itself which marks him out **[Slide 9]**:

> *'Our faculty is very popular, er, we can only take every fourth student. And they are all well above average. You've got to be firm in the saddle in the natural sciences, erm, statistics for example, plays a central part here. Basic knowledge in mathematics is also an important prerequisite. The English language too is essential for us because most of the literature is written in English today. The Germans too write mostly in English. In other words, our demands on the students are high. We have a reputation to lose.'*

Mr Schmidt has fantasies of exclusiveness. His ideal students belong to the scientific elite. He brings up criteria: '*firm in the saddle in the natural sciences', 'basic knowledge in mathematics', 'the English language'.* His experience with 'non-traditionals' makes him sceptical as to whether the older students can fulfil the high demands of the faculty. As proof of this he gives two examples [Slide 10]:

> *'I remember two ladies. One, I think, had not quite finished, who after a period of study which had lasted much too long, with dreadful, really a dreadful amount of effort, has done her best to finish. I think she'll probably manage it, but it's real torture and what comes out in the end will probably be pretty under-average. Another has just given up. We tried to make her change her mind. She had got quite a long way. She had written, er, a diploma thesis, which she really couldn't manage. We gave her a hand, er, just as far as we could. But then she said she really didn't want to carry on with this stress.'*

The picture of the *dreadful amount of effort* points clearly to the desirable alternative: the highly intelligent student who tackles the considerable demands of the faculty with interest and without any problems. The dimension of the 'hard' and the 'pure' has without doubt a male connotation. Women are in such faculties under-represented. So it is not surprising that Mr. Schmidt can think of *two ladies* who fail to meet these demands. But even the social gesture of *giving a hand* has a patriarchal basis and carries a pejorative note.

Professor Schmidt is a vigorous exponent of the excellence initiative at his university. His wish is for his subject to be able in the near future to choose its students itself. 'Non-traditionals' would then certainly be welcome – provided that they fulfil all the criteria facing the elite of the normal students. Mr. Schmidt is interested in **'exclusiveness'**.

2.2 *'Soft' and 'pure': the 'ambivalent habitus'*

Professor Mueller is a theoretically oriented sociologist at a place with a high reputation in his subject at a classical university. His career is certainly not as brilliant as that of Mr. Schmidt. But he has also applied for various '*chairs*', although not with success. He attributes the failure of his ambitions to the fact that, as he puts it himself, he comes '*from a left-wing corner*'. He makes it his business to bring his faculty, which also on account of his 'left-wing' profile only has a marginal position, more into the centre of attention. And that he seems to have achieved **[Slide 11]**:

> *'And now the position is that our subject and our faculty is in the first place no longer an outsider, is no longer out in the wings and secondly has given up the left-wing profile. It has become more normal and therefore more recognised.'*

One could see this process as a subtle move towards conformity, since the change of profile of the subject also has effects on teaching. Professor Mueller states that students in previous years

were more politically involved, but in a scientific sense not really enlightened. It is now in his opinion a matter of raising the scientific demands and presenting a clear *'curricular structure'.* This is particularly relevant in the case of the mature students, who do bring in important experiences, but who often cannot let go of these experiences. They must therefore have a firm methodical scientific grounding and also intensive training in sociological theory. '*Sociology is not social work and not spontaneous action eithe*r', says Mueller, '*but a demanding science calling for intelligent and responsible students*'.

An unconventionally pretentious attitude can be detected in these statements. It is not the straightforward distinctive exclusiveness of Professor Schmidt. Mueller firmly emphasises that sociology must remain open for unconventional student careers. But between the lines one notices a sort of socially implied 'excellence bias' – which is however fatal for precisely the 'non-traditionals'. They experience a climate in the faculty full of double-bind messages: *'You are welcome, but not, if you please, the way you are.'* The faculty habitus is **ambivalent**. The socio-political openness of the faculty is countered by the studied concern for institutional recognition.

'Hard' and 'applied': the 'pragmatic habitus'

Professor Zimmermann is a 'hands-on' person. What concerns him is the subject, not his own person. In his self-presentation he does not talk about his career, but he constructs, as it were, his 'world' **[Slide 12]**:

> *'Okay, my special subject is here Technical Mechanics. I myself, er, studied Mechanical Engineering with all theoretical branches of mechanics.*
> *Mechanical engineering is divided up into a large number of special subjects. I'd say the most important branches of engineering are on the one side construction, on the other calculation and perhaps on a third side the science of materials. And for me, well, I'd fall into calculation with my special subject – and of course inside calculation into the theoretical groundwork.*
> *Mechanics is a subject coming from physics, and physics belongs to the natural sciences. The natural sciences describe nature. But the engineering sciences, they do not only describe nature, but change nature somehow. Engineers build machines for example and buildings, and mechanical engineers build machines for some purpose. And for this they need the principles of physics, especially the principles of mechanics. Mechanics is, er, the science of movement. Movement covers also the special case of non-movement. This is a partial area of mechanics, which one calls statics. Statics is, well, a very broad area, which is handled by construction engineers – because*

buildings are supposed to move about as little as possible. In mechanical engineering on the other hand there is a lot more movement, that's why there is a lot of interest in so-called dynamics, another area we have to cope with. This means that the subject which I represent is so to speak in the middle, connecting natural sciences and the practice of engineering.'

In this fascinating account of the world one cannot help but be reminded of an association from the kindergarten, that convincing statement of Gyro Gearloose: *'To the engineer it's always clear'* (rough translation of a famous self-ironic joke-rhyme in German: *'Dem Ingenieur ist nichts zu schwör.'*). And yet one does not get the impression from Mr. Zimmermann that he wants to claim with it any exclusiveness for his subject. It is a matter of 'feasibility' and – interestingly – also of 'maintenance'. This metaphor (which, by the way, also touches an educational utopia) expresses empathy for the subject, a certain love for the subject, which possibly takes some of its 'hardness'.

Perhaps it is no accident that Zimmermann's remarks on teaching, and precisely with regard to students with unconventional educational backgrounds, display a similar outlook. He emphasises at the outset how important to him the students are who bring practical experience with them. *'That is a fantastic prerequisite for our work climate'*, he says. But he does not neglect to say that this group as a rule shows considerable gaps in knowledge, especially in mathematics. His way of handling this problem is however neither distinctive nor pretentious, but pragmatic. He sets up so-called

'bridging courses... which', as he says, *'bridge the gap between school and the requirements of the university'*.

The picture of the bridge is certainly not chosen at random. It is a central symbol of the engineer's art, but the metaphor takes over the function of '*communication*': communication between science and practice. There is behind this 'bridge-building' by no means just a project related to the subject, but a social one too. Professor Zimmermann proves that he is therefore also a successful **'engineer in matters of university didactics'**.

2.4 *'Soft' and 'applied': the 'inclusive habitus'*

The fourth 'gatekeeper', Mr. Graf, is typically not a professor. He has not even a doctor's degree and works as a teaching social worker at a reform university **[Slide 13]**.

> *'I am a social worker by background: first of all Abitur, then I studied social work, was a social worker for some years, had here contact with the university through projects with students, as supervisor and then found myself here in the reform process of the university.'*

The formulation '*a social worker by background'* shows more than a professional placing. The statement could almost be read as social positioning. Graf was, as he emphasises, *'for 20 years consultant for professional practice studies'*. And he identifies himself in his

present position as the *'Dean's consultant'* still with the social work 'milieu of origin'. In his description of the professional field he displays a similar empathy like Professor Zimmermann in Engineering. However it is here not 'feasibility' which is with him in the forefront, but 'responsibility'. *'For this profession you must have a certain amount of experience in life and above all a sense of responsibility'*, he says. And this is precisely what in his opinion qualifies unconventional students for study. But Graf does not deny the problems of this special group **[Slide 14]**:

> *'Well, one of the greatest problems we have is the key qualification, which means handling texts. Students with professional experience cannot do this at all. And we face difficulties here right up to the exam... And the other thing is this vagueness. We do not have here any leading subject, there is no science of social work, though there is a crown of auxiliary sciences which one can draw upon from all sciences. Anyone studying here will be first of all completely confused... and there is no foundation there for understanding that.'*

Graf describes the problems, however he does not place the responsibility with the students, but with structural dilemmas of the subject, and he develops an idea about the way in which these difficulties can be resolved **[Slide 15]**:

> *'Well, my theory is, and I come from the field of practice myself, that in social work and everywhere where it's a matter of developments, of educational processes, that there*

23

relationships play an important part. .. My strategy is, I manage to establish a relationship with the students, which makes it possible for them to accept me as a model on the one hand and on the other for them to want to show: 'I can do that too.' Perhaps this would in former times been called educational tact, I call it building up relationships and it works.'

'Educational tact' is a wonderful characterisation for a 'habitus', which can only be described as 'inclusive'.

This brings me to my final thoughts:

## 3. The 'prestige suction' of the university space

Now it might seem reasonable to compare systematically the four habitus configurations laid out above and to qualify them from an educational standpoint. But that would not be very convincing from a sociological point of view. We did not have to wait for Bourdieu's amusing polemical study on the *Homo academicus* to discover that there are different places of rank in a relationship matrix. Physics and increasingly the neuro-sciences are at the forefront, while social education and social work come right at the bottom.

In other words, the *'inclusive habitus'* of a gatekeeper in social work, which is probably most attractive to ourselves, must be qualified against the backcloth of the low prestige of the subject which exercises little influence. The *'exclusive habitus'* of the natural

science psychologist links up with the prestige of the 'powerful subjects' and shines out therefore over the whole university field. We can observe this influence very well in the *'ambivalent habitus'* of the sociologist, who achieves the growing recognition of his subject only through conforming or, as he puts it himself, through **'normalisation'***.*

If we imagine the social space of the university once more and - following Bourdieu - identify the symbolic capital which is due to the subject cultures, then the four-field diagram presented at the outset turns into a convincing educational and power-political figure of relationships **[Slide 16]**.

Fig. 6: **The space of faculty cultures**
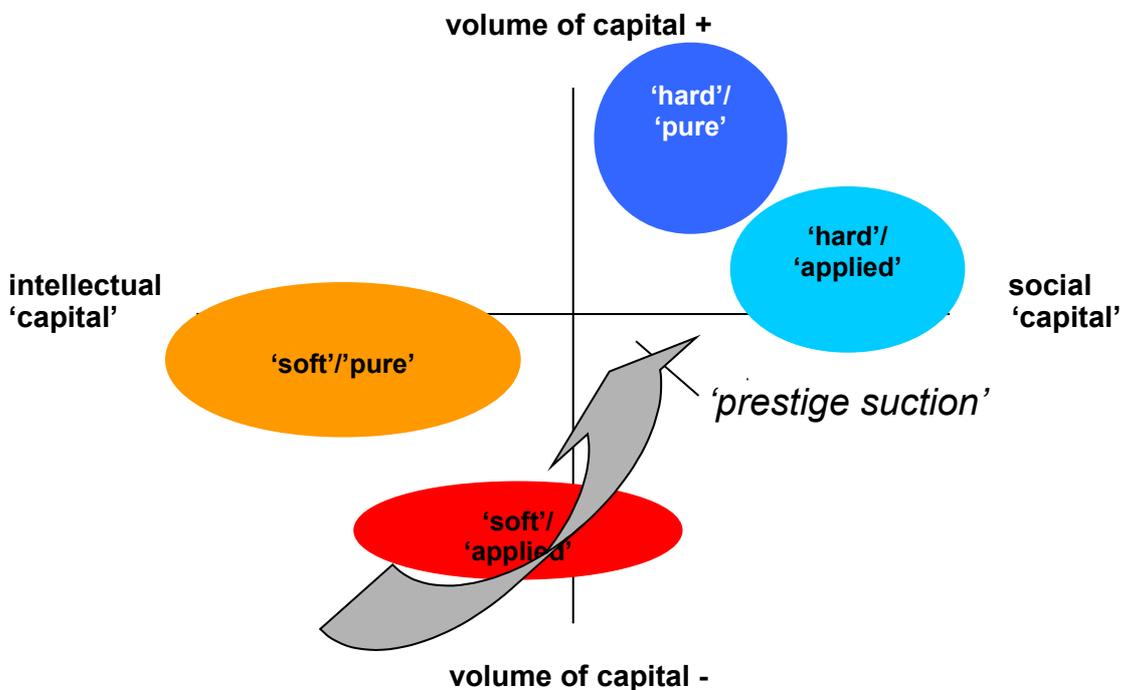
The 'soft' subject cultures, which certainly have intellectual capital, fall clearly back behind the 'hard' subject cultures, which have much more social capital and not only inside the university field. Parameters outside the university - such as the support policies of the German Research Foundation or the new government initiatives of excellence - strengthen the process of segregation, which itself produces a **'prestige suction'** in the direction of the 'exclusive habitus', which is just turning into the *'university habitus'*.

I should just like in conclusion to make this clear with an empirical observation, which has to do with this group of 'non-traditionals' which we have been thinking about [Slide 17]:

Fig. 7: **Access channels of 'non-traditional students'**
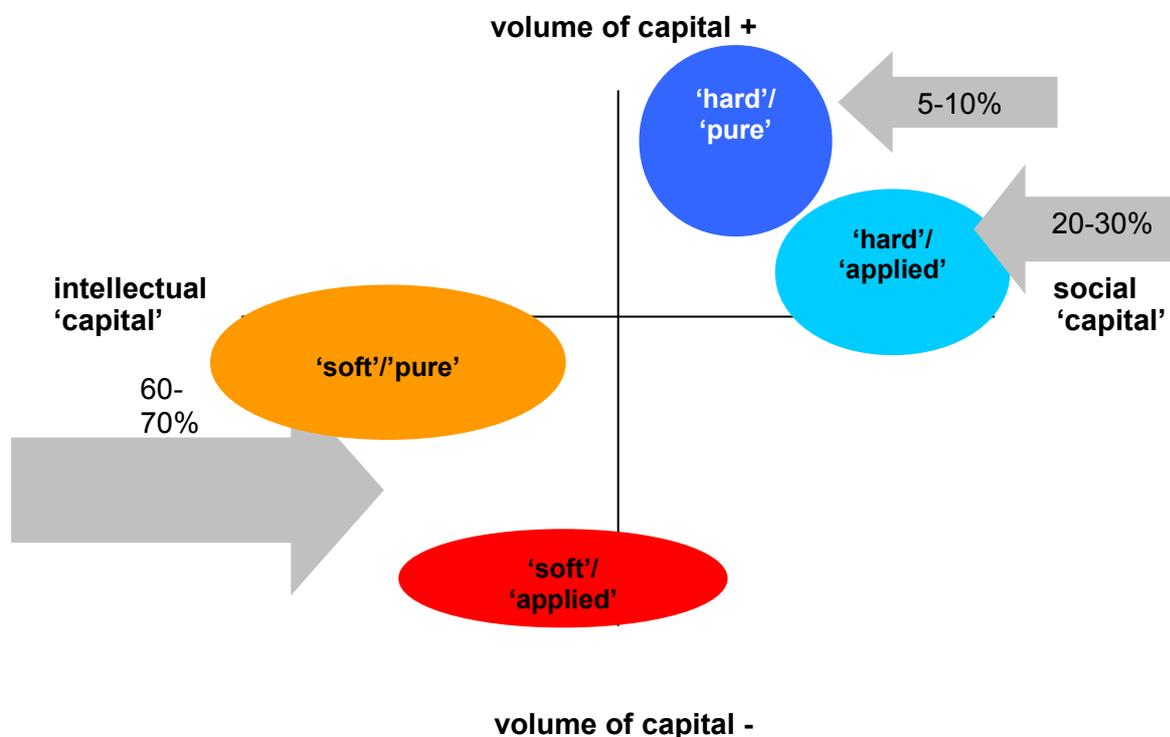
It is by no means surprising that the great majority of the 'non-traditionals' decides for the subjects with low prestige. Provocative, however, is the fact that in this group success in study is lower than with those who choose the hard subjects. The reason given by those concerned is to be found in the irritating double-bind messages which we met in the analysis of the *'ambivalent habitus'*, those hidden claims of exclusiveness which are covered up by superficial offers of opening. In other words, the 'prestige suction' towards exclusiveness damages the climate of study precisely in the soft subjects. The *'university habitus'* is clearly a ubiquitous phenomenon at German universities.

All this is still no definitive proof, but a symptom of a latent symbolic closing of the German university system. The educational consensus in Germany is not (like in Norway or Sweden) to qualify scientifically as much people as possible (and this includes, of course, the openness for late students), but the selection of a relatively small elite. The 'habitus of the university' - this is a rather sceptical forecast - remains extremely distinctive. Democratic opening trends will be the exception. And in this process 'non-traditionals' are transformed into **'unwanted students'**.