The Challenges of the Excellence Initiative in Germany

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Outline

- Data on the Excellence Initiative
- Focus on Transintentional Consequences
- Main Point: New Concept ("Social Innovation") and Diffusion of Competitive Paradigm, but no Radical Transformation of the German Higher Education System Due to Countervailing Forces at National and Organizational Level
The German Excellence Initiative

Competitive Funding for Research Excellence (2006–ongoing)

Co-funded by Federal and State Governments

Distribution of Resources through the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the German Council of Science and Humanities

Based on International Peer Review
The German Excellence Initiative

Three Funding Lines:
- Graduate Schools
- Clusters of Research Excellence
- Institutional Strategies

Funding:
2006 – 2011: € 1.9 Billion
2012 – 2017: € 2.7 Billion

Social Innovations:
- Competitive Large-Scale Funding for Research Excellence at Universities;
- Promotion of Institutional Strategies ("Excellence Universities")
The German Excellence Initiative

Source: German Research Foundation (DFG), Bonn, updated 19 July 2012
Excellence Initiative as a Social Innovation at National Level: Explicit Focus on Competition and Stratification (vs. Equality Myth of “the” German University)

Critique:

- Demotivation among Losers
- Focus on Research, not Teaching
- Better Suited to Natural Sciences and Engineering as Compared to the Humanities
- Problematic Dynamics of Growth of Research Units
Excellence Initiative as a Social Innovation at National Level: Explicit Focus on Competition and Stratification (vs. Equality Myth of “the” German University)

Diffusion of Competitive Paradigm, Countervailing Forces:
- New Research Funding Programs at State Level
- Year of the Humanities in 2007 and Related Initiatives
- Increase of Individualized Programs
- Greater Emphasis on Research–related Teaching
- Quality Pact for Teaching (€ 2.0 Billion Funding)
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<th>Excellence Initiative:</th>
<th>Quality Pact for Teaching:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Start:</strong></td>
<td>**111 Public Higher</td>
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<td>18 Universities (Graduate Schools/Research Clusters)</td>
<td>Education Institutions</td>
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<td>3 Universities: Institutional Strategies (“Excellence</td>
<td>**186 Public Higher</td>
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<td>Universities”)</td>
<td>Education Institutions</td>
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<td><strong>Now:</strong></td>
<td><strong>78 Universities</strong></td>
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<td>44 Universities (Graduate Schools/Research Clusters)</td>
<td><strong>78 Univ. of Appl. Sciences</strong></td>
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<td>11 Universities: Institutional Strategies (“Excellence</td>
<td><strong>30 Colleges of Art/Music</strong></td>
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<td>Universities”)</td>
<td>=&gt; Covers 77 %</td>
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Excellence Initiative as a Social Innovation at Organizational Level of Universities

The University as an Organizational and Competitive Actor

- Role of University Leadership and Top Down-Steering
- Definition of Organizational Goals and Missions (vs. “the” University)
- Increasing Importance of Administrative Management
Excellence Initiative as a Social Innovation at Organizational Level of Universities

Countervailing Forces:

- Emergence of Strong Veto Players among the Professoriate
- Goals and Missions Hardly New, but Based on History
- Strong Role of the Professoriate vis-á-vis Administration (see German Constitution)
Summary and Discussion

Excellence Initiative Fostering Change and Competitive Paradigm, but German System with a Variety of Countervailing Forces against Radical Transformation

- Broader Cultural Assumptions: Egalitarian Heritage, Limits to Stratification
- Legal Framework: Federal and State Governments, Role of Professoriate
- Decentralized Federal System: Variety of Initiatives
- Intermediary Organizations at Science–Politics Interface: German Council of Science and Humanities
Summary and Discussion

International Comparative Perspectives:
- Importance of Institutional Preconditions for Policies Fostering Research Excellence
- Variety of Transintentional Consequences
- Sustainability of Excellence Initiative and Related Initiatives
Thank You!