

Conference in Berlin 2010

Elitist institutions in egalitarian societies? – visions and realities of Nordic Universities.

10.-12.November 2010, Berlin

Hosted by Humboldt universität Berlin, Nordeuropainsitut and Forum for universitetshistorie, Oslo and the Finnland-Institut, Berlin.

The Humboldt University in Berlin will celebrate its bicentennial in 2010. In 2011, the University in Oslo will do the same. University anniversaries have since the 16th century been occasions for self reflection, including elements of memorialising, celebrating and idealising the past –and even at times also entailing critical reinterpretation of history and tradition. Such festive jubilees also invoke reflection upon the future of these institutions. The university is one of the oldest institutions in Western society; it enjoys a seeming remarkable continuity though also exhibiting a powerful capability for self renewal, transformation and adaptation. The motto for the Humboldt celebration “Das Moderne Original” conveys clearly a historical consciousness and a sense of ownership over a set of university ideals that in some way or another have had, or is strongly believed to have had a broad international influence through their diffusion and reception around the world.

With these two anniversaries coming up – we thought it a good idea to gather scholars in Berlin in September or November 2010 to present and discuss some aspects of the history of universities, higher education and research in the Nordic countries.

Nordic universities and academies are manifestations of national, regional and local as well as international formative processes. We want to discuss the influence and transfer of ideas and models from outside, mainly the German Bildungs- und Wissenschaftstradition, and the Anglo-American traditions of Liberal Arts and Science. In university history, a repercussive theme is the relationship between ideals and reality. A large body of literature on university history written the past two or three decades has been particularly conscious of the dangers of reproducing idealized notions of university life, and confusing them with reality. Historically formulated ideas about the University have, even today a strong influence, powering the thinking of university leaders, academics and politicians. But much less is known about the actual day to day routines, rituals and scientific practices within the university and how these developed over time. Indeed recent historical scholarship has often aimed at replacing myth, legend and rhetorical slogans with insight and knowledge.

The historical evolution, social function and cultural significance of institutions of higher learning and research can be analysed as an interplay between visionary goals, practical solutions to contingently arising problems, ideas and ideals from abroad, as well as their adaptations to local contexts. The university lends itself particularly well to such examinations, because it is an institution that from its very origin and up to this day, can be said to have the distinct characteristics of being anchored both nationally and to various degrees also internationally.

Call for papers:

For the proposed symposium in 2010, we invite call for presentations of paper. Some suggested themes for presentations are listed below, and we will give priority to proposals within these themes, but we are also open to other suggestions. A committee will decide the final program after the dead line for proposals. The proposals/abstracts should be no more than one page; the presentations should be kept within the limit of 30 minutes. The conference proceedings will be published – that means that the participants will be asked to submit an article version of their papers after the conference.

Dead line for submitting of abstract is 1. Mai 2010.

Suggested themes for proposed papers:

- 1 Interdependences of universities and nation building
 - Nation building, social engineering and the development of the welfare state. The distinctive contribution of the universities to the historical path taken by various Nordic countries.
 - What do nations owe their universities? How have academic research and writing contributed the formation of nations?
 - What do universities owe their nations? How/to what extent should society profit from the academic research?

- 2 Normative orientation of universities: What are the *Bildungsideale* (educational ideals?) and the respective cleavages of today?
 - Bildung, bildning, dannelse is a central ideal for university education – what kind of *Bildungsideale* can be connected to the Scandinavian university traditions in different periods?
 - Universities as (re)producing social elites – or arenas for social mobility, - democratization of education
 - The Bologna process: turning away from the model Humboldt?

- 3 Interaction, integration, and conflicts of universities with/in society
 - University life in literature, film and popular culture
 - Totalitarian ideologies and student politics: national socialism and communism and 1968 (Maoism) at universities in Scandinavia

- 4 The challenges of Nordic universities today: where are we going to?
 - The rhetoric of excellence and politics for achieving “excellence” is a central issue both regarding the self-understanding and priorities of most universities. Yet the Nordic societies have allegedly celebrated egalitarian norms and non-hierarchical values. To what extent have such conflicting norm systems been reconciled in university life?
 - The duties and missions of universities today: - where do they go from here?

The keynote speakers who have been invited and have accepted:

Prof. Matti Klinge, Helsinki
Prof. John P. Collett, Oslo
Prof. Ditlev Tamm, Kopenhagen
Prof. Sverker Sörlin, Stockholm
Prof. Gudmundur Halfdanarson, Rejkjavik

The summit /conference will be organized between Forum for university history, University in Oslo, represented by Prof. John Peter Collett and the Nordeuropainstitut (NI) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, represented by Head of Department Prof. Bernd Henningsen, and Prof. Jorunn Sem Fure who currently holds a guest professorship at the NI and a senior research position at FFU, and the Finnland-Institut, Berlin represented by Dr. Anna-Maija Mertens.

Proposals will be evaluated according to their focus on the topic. Please e-mail your abstract as an e-mail attachment by 1. Mai 2010 to furejoru@cms.hu-berlin.de or anna-maija.mertens@finstitut.de.

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