



International Trends

Europe's Overcrowded Universities: Mass Higher Education Has Its Price

■ Axel Markert

A couple of years ago, someone strolling from the medieval center of Tübingen to the University's main building through the small park formerly known as the Botanical Garden of Eberhard-Karls-Universität, would have made an unusual discovery. Students had erected a huge tent in the middle of the park as a protest against the housing situation. They slept in the tent and tried to alert passersby to the untenable housing situation in this small town with a big university.

When frosty nights forced the tent dwellers to decamp a few weeks later, another group of more radical students then occupied a medical school building. The building, scheduled for renovation, had been left empty for just one night. After lengthy negotiations with university and police officials, the protesters departed—leaving behind many aggressive graffiti on the walls.

These are examples of a phenomenon which has its parallels in French, Italian and Spanish university towns: overcrowding in higher education on the Continent.

Of course, the housing situation is only the most visible aspect of this unfortunate development, which has also created unsatisfactory student-staff ratios and inadequate finances. It is certainly also the aspect which is felt most acutely by foreign students who, if housing has not been reserved for them ahead of time, have more difficulty in finding reasonably-priced rooms than the natives.

The enormous growth in student mobility stimulated by recent programs

such as ERASMUS has European students venturing into other European Community (EC) countries and has led, in turn, to worries among the well-established (and not-so-well-established) American study abroad programs, who already see their charges being flushed out of dorms by the European flood.

Of course, the problem is not all that new on our Continent. "Big" universities, comparatively speaking, already existed in the Middle Ages. Paris had over 5,000 students in the 13th century, and Bologna had more than 10,000, but these were the exceptions. Until the end of the 19th century, the bulk of European universities had but a few hundred students, or a few thousand at most.

The decisive expansion or, rather, explosion of higher education came in the decades after the Second World War.

Schools for the elite developed into mass universities and the idyllic calm of the classical centers of higher education gave way to boisterous activity by the mid-1960s, much to the regret of many who had enjoyed the privileges of the "old" system.

Growth rates in European higher education were indeed spectacular between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s. Student enrollment rose

- from 150,000 to 1,300,000 in France;
- from 140,000 to 1,150,000 in Italy;
- from 175,000 to 1,550,000 in Germany, which means a

growth factor of eight to nine times, similar to those found in Finland, Switzerland or the United Kingdom—where it was somewhat lower—and to Austria and Sweden, where the rate was a bit higher. In Spain, however, student numbers grew from 65,000 to 950,000, or nearly fifteenfold!

During this period, the enrollment of the age cohort from 20-24 rose in Germany from 4 percent to over 25 percent.

In all these countries, which have predominantly state-supported higher educational systems, financial contributions could not, as a rule, keep pace with this rapid expansion.

Also, because these national systems had always assumed they would be dealing with mature, self-sufficient students;

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While Africa's Needs are Greatest, Focus of Aid Shifts to Eastern European Bloc

In a 1988 study entitled *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, the World Bank reported that university enrollments in Africa grew from 21,000 in 1960 to more than 430,000 in 1983. A further 100,000 were studying abroad, with large numbers in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

In 20 years, enrollment in higher education increased by a factor of 40 in Francophone Africa and a factor of 15 in Anglophone countries. By any measure, this would have been regarded as a significant accomplishment except that since the early 1980s, all of Africa has been suffering from a severe economic crisis which has seriously damaged the entire education system. An explosive birthrate further exacerbates the problem as more and more children need to be educated.

The World Bank Report recommended that educational assistance be re-targeted by strengthening departments of business, economics and public administration in African universities in order to align higher education with national development needs. A joint effort of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and the African Development Bank established a modest "seed fund" of \$100 million toward this goal, with the hope that other sources would be spurred to make their own contributions.

That was before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dizzying pace of political upheavals in Eastern and Central Europe and the USSR.

Everything has changed. Many of Africa's former benefactors in the Eastern bloc are now themselves in need of economic assistance. Western nations are showing signs of what has been dubbed "donor fatigue" before the seemingly intractable problems of the Continent, while international organizations have new demands being placed on their resources.

In all the international turmoil, Africa is simply being left out of the global economic loop when its needs are perhaps the greatest.

After 30 years of corrupt regimes, virtually all African countries share some common traits: larger but poorer populations, huge armies and massive foreign debt. Today, 30 percent of the economic output of Sub-Saharan Africa goes to pay this heavy foreign debt, and there is no relief in sight.

Years of failed experiments in development assistance have clearly demonstrated that Africans must find their own solutions. Other countries have become extremely successful without natural resources. But none have developed without a well-educated population. Education *must* become Africa's priority for the 1990s.



■ Publisher's Corner

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Country Updates

□ Australia

THE LIST OF AUSTRALIA'S TOP EXPORTER EARNERS is showing a new and perhaps surprising entrant—the nation's State-owned universities.

The growth in courses sold to overseas students has been the most successful enterprise of universities increasingly being encouraged to adopt the culture and methods of the business world.

Most tertiary institutions are taking thousands of full-fee students, particularly from Southeast Asia, and count the income in seven figures.

The latest figures for 1990 released by the Dept. of Employment, Education and Training show there were 15,081 international students enrolled in higher education who paid the institutions \$154 million. For 1991, enrollments have reached 21,527 students for likely revenues of more than \$200 million.

Top earners are: University of New South Wales, \$22 million; RMIT, \$14 million; Curtin University of Technology, \$11 million; University of Western Australia, \$10 million; Edith Cowan University, \$5 million; and La Trobe University, \$4 million.

International students at the University of New South Wales come mainly from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia, but there has been a steady growth from Taiwan, Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and the Middle East, particularly Iran.

The head of NSW's international programs said, "We think that discussion of education as an export industry is anathema. We don't see ourselves as exporters. We are educators and we are helping to provide an international education. In doing that, we are only recovering from students sufficient fees to meet costs, and no more." (*The Australian*, 8/7/91)

A TASK FORCE ON ENGINEERING

education has called for urgent reforms to prevent Australian engineers from becoming "one-dimensional technocrats" who lack the breadth of vision needed by industry.

The task force, established by the Institution of Engineers, Australia, says an annual increase of \$50 million in government funding is needed to provide 350 more engineering academics, and asks for an additional \$25 million to update antiquated teaching equipment.

In addition to calling for more money for better teachers, the task force recommended recruiting more women, restoring the student/staff ratio to 10.5, establishing feeder schools to teach the first years of an engineering major, forming advanced engineering centers to form links between industry and engineering schools, and providing supplementary funding for returning students.

Task Force Chairman David Skillington said, "Industry wants more rounded engineering graduates who have an ability to produce well-reasoned, well-written reports and a grasp of financial skills and, importantly, interpersonal skills."

In response to the demands of the Institution, Education Minister Baldwin said the costs of engineering education should be borne in part by industry investment in engineering training because there was "a lot of competition for the higher education dollar" during a period of fiscal restraint. (*The Australian*, 7/17/91 and 7/24/91)

SEEING MONEY TO BE MADE FROM AUSTRALIA'S CROWDED CAMPUSES, Japanese interests have committed an estimated \$800 million to various education projects around the country. Australia's first private university, Bond University on the Queensland Gold Coast, is financed by the EIE International Corporation, a Japanese backer which is pouring \$300,000 a week into the three-year-old university

and does not expect to break even until at least 1996.

Australia's third private university will be built by the Tokyo-based Hills Education Foundation in southern Queensland at Jimboomba, 25 miles southwest of Brisbane. The \$80 million campus set on a 350-acre site will include a golf course, where 5,000 students will be coached and will have the opportunity to play regularly.

The new university will have its own feeder secondary schools: the South Queensland Academy for Japanese students and the South Queensland International College for Australian students. There will also be a primary school and kindergarden. The complex will offer instruction from kindergarden to university level for the first time in Australia, and has been hailed as a significant step in advancing good will between Australia and Japan. (*The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 7/19/91)

□ Bulgaria

THE FIRST AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN EASTERN EUROPE, the American University of Blagoevgrad, opened in September 1991 with an initial enrollment of 200 students. The University of Maine is designing the academic, administrative and support structure for the new university, and the city of Blagoevgrad has donated the buildings.

Four to five majors will be offered, and all classes will be taught in English. Within four years, it is planned to expand the enrollment to 1,200.

A health center, an agriculture experimental station and an intensive English language institute are planned for the university. Scholarships and work-study programs are being developed, and affordable tuition has been set. (*Citizens Democracy Corps* newsletter, 8/91)

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□ China

STUDENTS AGED SIX TO 18 will be required to spend more time studying the history of communist China starting this autumn, according to new rules from the State Education Commission.

Faculty heads will be required to undergo a television training course to prepare for the autumn semester and would then train their subordinates.

Elementary, junior high and high schools will add one more hour of modern history to the present two hours of instruction.

Since the student-led protests in 1989, Chinese authorities have stepped up ideological education in universities and required entering freshmen to undergo military training of up to one year. The new rules indicate that China's octogenarian leaders are becoming more worried about the alienation of the nation's youth, many of whom express little interest in communist doctrine. (*South China Morning Post*, 7/10/91)

A NEW PROFICIENCY TEST SYSTEM has been introduced in some middle schools to de-emphasize college entrance examinations. Because of undue emphasis on passing these examinations, middle schools have gradually shifted their attention from training qualified high school graduates to preparing students for the entrance examinations. The new proficiency tests are meant to rectify this trend.

Proficiency tests were begun on an experimental basis in some middle schools in Zhejiang Province in 1988, and will be introduced in all middle schools across the country by 1994.

Unlike college entrance examinations, which take place over a period of three days and test knowledge in all subjects, proficiency examinations take place over a period of three years, testing a few subjects each year. In Zhejiang, for example, history is tested in the first year; chemistry, biology and geography in the second; and political science, Chinese, foreign languages,

mathematics and physics in the third year. A certificate is awarded to those who pass these tests.

The new system is said to have brought great changes to the middle schools in Zhejiang Province. In the past, most of those who successfully passed the college entrance examinations came from about 100 key schools in the province. Very few applicants from the 480 other middle schools were successful.

After proficiency tests were introduced, 94 percent of all students passed the tests. About 1,800 did so well that they were able to enter college directly without taking the entrance examinations. The students' marks were also considered important criteria by enterprises and by colleges planning to enroll new members.

Starting from 1991, provinces that have already adopted the proficiency tests have a new set of college entrance examinations for high school graduates. Examinations are divided into two categories: science and arts, with each category divided into two groups.

All students take four examinations: Group A, mathematics, physics, a foreign language and Chinese; Group B, mathematics, chemistry, biology and a foreign language; Group C, Chinese, history, foreign language and political science; and Group D, Chinese, foreign language, geography and mathematics.

This is an effort to standardize the examinations and make grading more equitable. (*China Daily*, 8/5/91)

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE HAS REFUSED TO RENEW an annual \$400,000 contribution to a business school program at the Dalian University of Technology. The 11-year-old MBA program was unique: a Government-to-Government arrangement, financed partly by each country, that offered management courses to officials from many of China's top enterprises.

It offered regular American MBA degrees under a program run by the State University of New York at Buf-

Updates *continued*

falo, which provided the curriculum and professors. The program at this campus in Dalian, a port city in China's industrial northeast, the region once known as Manchuria, also took senior Chinese officials and offered them midcareer training in U.S. management techniques.

The majority of the Dalian program's graduates returned to their state-owned enterprises, introducing American methods directly into the heart of communist China.

The United States' decision to pull the plug on the MBA program reflects political realities as the American love affair with China continues the cooling-off that started with the killings of pro-democracy demonstrators two years ago in Tiananmen Square. The Commerce Department now says the money would be better spent in Eastern Europe.

Although the U.S. government has encouraged American corporations to consider picking up the modest cost of the program, it is the loss of the Government as chief sponsor which will really hurt.

Zhu Shunqing, an economist who is the dean of Dalian University of Technology's School of Management, said, "China has really opened to these ideas. It is not a good choice for you to close that door." (*The New York Times*, 7/27/91)

THE CHINA COMMITTEE ON CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHING ABROAD (CCCLTA) and the Beijing Languages Institute administered China's standard language skills proficiency examination for the first time outside the PRC in June. The examination was held in Singapore. Subsequent examinations are to be held in Australia and Japan on October 15.

This examination, similar to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), is used to gauge the Chinese language proficiency level of a non-native speaker. Unlike TOEFL, where only scaled scores are received, the CCCLTA will set minimum passing scores and will issue "Chinese language

