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## **INTRODUCTION: GERMAN-POLISH TRANSBORDER UNIVERSITIES IN A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT**

The special section of this journal is dedicated to the issue of German-Polish transborder universities. The articles are the results of the research project 'BORDERUNI' that was supported by the German-Polish Research Foundation (DPWS/PNFN). The main focus of this project was to study the specific role of cross-border university collaboration at the German-Polish border within a changing and challenging environment. The challenges encountered result mainly from the requirements all European institutions of higher education face in the evolving knowledge society and from intensifying globalization processes. It is education, and higher education in particular, that is taking on a far more important role in a knowledge-driven economy and is even regarded as the most important key to productivity. In the process of fostering competitiveness in the knowledge societies of the OECD countries, it is education that is both the raw material and motor of productivity. Thus, especially the European Union has given universities (through the Lisbon agenda) a crucial role. Other challenges result from the specific location of border universities on national peripheries; these spaces often suffer economically from structural weaknesses. Border universities therefore are often confronted with high expectations from local and regional actors and assumed to play an important role for regional economic development, as they are seen as an important partner of the "triple helix" (Etzkowitz) within regional governance processes. In the debate on European integration, border areas are ascribed special meanings regarding European social and cultural cohesion, as it is in these regions that different cultures and systems meet in close proximity. European border universities are often equated with laboratories for Europeanisation.

Despite the specific expectations that institutions of higher education on European borders have to deal with, and despite the difficult conditions they operate in, they still have to respond to the requirements of the devel-

opment of a joint Europe of Knowledge and the European Higher Education Area as envisaged in the Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process. In their entirety these challenges have led to the most profound changes in the system of European universities. In recent decades they have triggered important reform processes in the higher education systems of Europe. Nevertheless, universities in European border areas have often followed their own paths. They have developed a variety of inter-regional networks and cross-border partnerships and utilised these specific conditions of the state border as a unique selling point. Although the intensity and the shape of these transnational cooperations in higher education display a wide range of variation, their common goal is to make use of the development potentials on both sides of the border in order to increase their appeal. The legal basis of these modes of cooperation ranges from bilateral projects with contractual agreements between the cooperating universities to official agreements between participating countries.

In this project the research team was aware that border universities operate under very special circumstances, and that universities in those peripheral areas might have different functions so as to meet the social requirements and the specific needs in these regions. Border universities are acting under quite different conditions than universities in thriving economic agglomerations and metropolitan areas. Thus, assessing the performance of these border universities with existing benchmarks to evaluate their excellence might not be appropriate. New perspectives were therefore required so that the specific contribution of border universities in a challenging environment can be appropriately appreciated.

It was thus the aim of this research project to approach the specific performance of Polish-German border universities in an appropriate way. The participating research institutions AMU/CPPS and IRS were investigating the performance of these border universities from different perspectives by mutual exchange of their knowledge. Thus, the competences of the two participating research institutions were combined:

The *Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (IRS)*, with its expertise in spatial studies, border space research, governance analysis, institution building and intercultural communication, has focused on the issue of *internal interaction* in the course of Polish-German cross-border collaboration. Special attention has been given to the analysis of 'clashes' of different institutional systems and academic cultures. The focus has been placed on everyday learning processes and the evolution of new institutional arrangements between the collaborating educational systems. Of special interest have been hybrid rules and structures that developed as new institutional arrangements in order to manage the cooperation

process. An additional task was to assess the importance of these findings in the wider context of European integration in higher learning such as the development of the European Higher Education Area and the notion of a joint Europe of knowledge.

The *Center for Public Policy Studies of the Poznan University (CPPS/AMU)* has specific competence in the field of international comparative research on higher education, EU educational and research policies, university governance, academic entrepreneurship and university enterprise (public-private) partnerships and public sector reforms. This academic organisation has approached the processes of institutional learning and institution building with reference to the so-called “third mission” of universities. Especially the regional mission in the German-Polish border area is considered of critical importance in current debates on the future roles of universities within the targeted European Research Area and the proposed Higher Education Area. In this project special attention was given to institutional innovations in the form of academic entrepreneurship as developed by border universities.

With reference to the existing expertise in this project different research components were brought together. Research on the relationship between universities and economic competitiveness in the region, along with research on institutional and intercultural learning processes in these organizations was combined. Of special interest were moves to develop new institutional arrangements *within* the organizations of higher education and *between* the collaborating universities. It was assumed on the one hand that German-Polish border universities thus responded to the challenge of economic necessities and the need to ensure competitiveness in the emerging knowledge society, and on the other hand that they contribute to European integration via institutional and intercultural learning.

The volume begins with an article by Marek Kwiek entitled “*Polish universities, their regions and their impact on economic growth*”. It discusses the regional engagement of Polish universities and their performance regarding economic competitiveness in a knowledge-driven economy. Kwiek refers to a debate within academic and political discourse in which the universities are afforded an additional regional mission, besides their original tasks of teaching and research. This additional mission, the regional engagement between Polish universities, occurs rather in teaching than in research. According to Kwiek, the reason for the sluggish regional engagement of these universities can be found in the weakness of the Polish national economy. Regional research engagement of universities requires a research intensive national economy. Poland has not yet evolved into a knowledge-driven economy and numerous other features that support economic growth are

still lagging (e.g. infrastructure development). Assessment of Polish university performance that is based on international comparative data and analyses of knowledge intensive economies thus may not fit into evaluation schemes developed for measuring regional research performance. Therefore, regional engagement of Polish universities requires more research-intensive regional economies that are components of a more research-intensive national economy.

In the following article "*The Theory and Practice of Academic Entrepreneurship: the Case of Transborder Polish-German Institutions*" Marek Kwiek discusses academic entrepreneurship in the empirical context of Polish-German transborder universities. In the debate on the growing importance of a third mission of universities the feature of academic entrepreneurship seems to be an increasingly important point of reference for international and European-level policy discussions about the future of higher education. In his article Kwiek outlines how Polish-German transborder universities respond to the challenges of a changing environment and discusses to what extent they are able to determine their future. Based on guiding definitions in the academic debate on academic entrepreneurship he analyses the performance of two case studies. These are two institutions of higher education at the Polish-German border, namely the European University Viadrina and the joint Polish-German university Collegium Polonicum.

The two articles by Heidi Fichter-Wolf are dedicated to the question of how and in which way German-Polish border universities may contribute to cultural spatial change of border areas and thus to the process of Europeanisation. The research presented here is based on the hypothesis that European border areas provide a context for learning processes between institutions of higher education with different cultural backgrounds and rules. It is assumed that the knowledge gained in these processes is of great importance, not only for creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as envisaged in the Bologna process but also for the European integration process in general.

In her first paper, "*Towards Europeanisation as a Cultural Spatial Change. Some Theory Based Considerations on the Role of Intercultural Learning and Institution Building for the Social (Re)Construction of Border Areas*", Heidi Fichter-Wolf devises the theoretical basis for the understanding of Europeanisation as spatial cultural change in this project. This theory based article aims to outline the underlying rationale for one of the leading research questions of this project, namely how Polish-German cross-border cooperation in the field of higher learning may contribute to Europeanisation. She details and discusses the most important elements of cultural spatial change by considering the role of social practices and their interrelations with knowledge

and institutional learning. By taking the perspective of social constructivism she considers these elements as constitutive building blocks for cultural spatial change. Her theoretical considerations are followed by the presentation of a model that serves as a conceptual approach in order to empirically reconstruct the socio-cultural changes of border areas. With selected examples from the empirical findings in this project she explains this approach that should serve to better understand Europeanisation that evolves within everyday processes.

With the title *“Intercultural Learning regarding Europeanisation in Higher Education. Influence of University Cooperation in the Polish-German Border Area”* Heidi Fichter-Wolf presents her second article that is based mainly on empirical research undertaken in this project. She describes the development of university collaborations on the Polish-German border and places her focus especially on the social practices in everyday situations. The questions of interest were the problems and challenges faced in the daily encounters in the context of such collaboration as well as the solutions developed within a mutual intercultural learning process. She concludes this article by working out key-elements of intercultural learning processes. She argues that intercultural learning through university cross-border collaboration can be considered as a crucial additional path towards the creation of the EHEA. She argues also, however, that this process will not succeed and not be sustainable in regard to Europeanisation if intercultural learning among higher education systems and between academics is neglected.

In the last article of this section of the volume, *“Interculturality and Transculturality as Norm and Practice: A Reading of German-Polish bordering”*, Hans-Joachim Bürkner adopts a critical perspective to the notions and policy ideas on interculturality that characterise mainstream political thinking on European integration. An assumption that dominates this discussion is that cross-border cooperation would pave the way for a new European identity and a peaceful cross-border neighbourhood. Bürkner takes the EU Eastern enlargement as a crucial test of this thesis, focussing in particular on the German-Polish border region that has turned out to be a significant case for several reasons. By doing so, Bürkner compares the empirical findings on cross-border collaboration in this project with other empirical evidence of cross-border cooperation at the Polish-German border compiled before and after Poland’s EU accession. His own empirical investigations indicate that in this specific cross-border context the notion of interculturality refers strongly to asymmetric social relationships, causing diverse responses to the opening of the border on both “national” sides. Hence, Europeanisation from below, everyday bordering (i.e. the social construction and reconstruction of borders) and emerging interculturality make up a contested discursive

sive field. Its controversial nature involves specific ramifications of social disparities, socio-cultural barriers and even resistance to modernization – all of which have to be considered carefully when empirically reconstructing crossborder relationships.

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