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Expanding the University System (September 3, 1966)

The overcrowding of existing universities, the desire to create new types of higher education institutions, and the effort to improve regional education led (as in the case of the founding of the University of Bielefeld) to the expansion of the university system in the 1960s and 1970s.

Where the Cows are still out to Pasture ...

The contours of the Bielefeld alma mater are slowly taking shape

Bielefeld is impatiently preparing itself for its new role as a university town. The plot of land for North Rhine-Westphalia's seventh institution of higher learning is already firmly in public hands and the chancellor-to-be, Freiherr von Medem, has already inspected his new sphere of influence with his wife and has started looking for a place to live.

But the state government in Düsseldorf – the sponsor and financial backer of the newest alma mater – is still on summer break. But even when the state capital goes back to work in a couple of weeks, it is likely that political disputes between the relatively weak government of Franz Meyers and the 99 members of the Social Democratic opposition (as well as the state's financial worries) will force Bielefelders to remain patient.

And this although Westphalians have been waiting for their new university for years – all in order to restore the parity between their part of the state and the Rhineland. Ever since the [newly formed] hyphenated state of North Rhine-Westphalia was established by the English twenty years ago, Westphalians have always felt slightly neglected by the state government in the Rhine metropolis of Düsseldorf.

In their view, their second-class status was evident not least in the fact that Rhinelanders had their universities in Bonn and Cologne, while Westphalians only had a single college in Münster. University founder and Minister of Culture Paul Mikat finally [rectified the situation] by creating universities in [the Westphalian cities of] Bochum and Dortmund, but shortly thereafter he also awarded the Medical Academy in Düsseldorf the status of a university. But since the renaming of the Technical College in Aachen and the founding of East Westphalian University, the score has been 44 for the Rhineland and Westphalia.

Above all, the area of East Westphalia, in the northeastern reaches of the state, had been a bit neglected up to this point, which is why Bielefelders are now working particularly eagerly to pave the way for “their” university. “The bulk of the land is already ours at a fixed price. The only thing missing is state approval,” said Bielefeld’s municipal director [Heinz-Robert] Kuhn to this newspaper. Since no funds were allocated for the land purchase in this year’s state budget, the city will agree to provide “interim financing.”

The plot covers 75 hectares [i.e. approximately 185 acres], and there is currently a farm on it. As a “dowry,” the city is giving the state another farm with another plot of land, upon which the university’s “Development and Provisions Center” [*Aufbau- und Verfügungszentrum*] is supposed to be built. “The property is at the edge of a residential area and is connected to public utilities and ready for construction,” explained Kuhn. He added that construction has to start next spring if the first students are [supposed] to start classes in 1968 as planned.

Only Three Departments

The university is supposed to spring up gradually around this center. The first office planned for this center is the seat of the university administration, which will be presided over by the current chancellor of the University of Bonn, Freiherr von Medem. This center will also house the construction planning offices and the first institutes, which will form the nuclei of the new university. Unlike universities to date, the University of Bielefeld will only have three departments [*Fakultäten*]: law and political science, philosophy, and the natural sciences.

From the very start, there will be a *numerus clausus*, that is, a cap on the number of students admitted, so that the student-professor ratio will be 30:1 and real contact between faculty and students will be guaranteed. Provisions have been made for 150 professorships, which means that, according to the planners’ conception, the university will be able to admit 4,500 students. Some who are familiar with the situation, however, doubt whether holding to these numbers is realistic. As in Bochum, most of the students in Bielefeld will come from the surrounding areas.

The founders’ committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Mikat, is planning a whole host of further reforms in order to make the university truly unique. For example, professors here are supposed to devote significantly more time to research than elsewhere – with research and teaching alternating on an annual basis. Extreme specialization is supposed to be balanced by a “Center for Interdisciplinary Research.” This is where joint research projects are supposed to be undertaken.

By limiting the duration of these research projects, the planners hope to prevent them from becoming institutionalized, which would again create “permanent specialists” in some intermediary subject area. After collaborating on interdisciplinary research for a period of time, scholars are supposed to return to their respective departments at the project’s end, perhaps to come together with other colleagues for another special project at a later date.

Lectures will also depart from the standard conventions at traditional universities. Material that students can learn on their own by reading should not be read to them by the professor as well. Instead of reciting from one's own or other people's books (which is often done), the professor is supposed to focus on subject matter that is best conveyed verbally. In the mind of the university planners, this will not only optimize the professors' time but will also intensify and concentrate students' course of study. The basic undergraduate courses [*Grundstudium*], covering clearly defined subject matter, will be completed in four to five semesters.

The construction of the university is supposed to be completed in 1971. By then, the cost of construction and setting up the institutes will have reached at least one billion Marks, according to conservative estimates. But for now, the cows are still grazing on the future campus.

Source: Wolfgang Kuballa, "Wo heute noch die Kühe weiden ..." ["Where the Cows are still out to Pasture ..."], *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 3, 1966.

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