



National Report on Institutional Co-operation between Universities and Trade Unions in Germany

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Overview of the Kooperationsstellen Hochschule-Gewerkschaften (cooperation centres between universities and trade union)

This report will focus on the work of the well-established Kooperationsstellen Hochschule-Gewerkschaften (cooperation centres between universities and trade union), because an intensive study on their work has been made by Klaus Kock, financed by the Hans-Böckler-Foundation (Klaus Kock "Between Chairs and Work Benches" 2007). This foundation especially supports in many ways the mutual work of universities and trade unions, students through scholarships and seminars. From very early on, the topic "Access to Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students" was on the foundation's agenda and it supported research on the topic.

Of course there are numerous collaborative activities in Germany between universities and trade unions, which cannot easily be collected and reported. We will collect examples for the next National Report. Especially the topic of "work based life long learning" is an important one, also outside of the work of the co-operation centres. At Higher Education Institutions, where there are no co-operation centres, there are also projects on work based LLL. We will try to publish additional experiences during the process of Tulip on the Tulip website.

The research report (referred to above) to has the following topics:

- general tasks of co-operation centres as active mediators between academia and labour
- consideration of the intermediary position of co-operation centres
- important aspects of the functioning of co-operation centres
- discussion of the institution itself as an agency
- social benefits for labour and academia

The full report written by Klaus Kock "Between Chairs and Work Benches" can be read on the TULIP website as an appendix to this report and also in the bibliography section.

In the report you can look up the details of the topics mentioned above.

Here we want to give an overview of the conclusions of the report, showing the wide spectrum of chances and challenges of mutual work of Higher Education and trade unions and the answer to the question:

"What is the use of co-operation centres?"

After analysing the cooperative work in all its different facets and local peculiarities this question can be answered more precisely.

Academia and labour are still different social fields and their actors act according to different rules and logics. If employees or their lobby reflect upon their practice and are willing to change by not only absorbing academic knowledge, but by actively engaging in its production and findings, they go beyond their own routines and daily life. Academics, too, can only achieve their aims of gaining an appropriate understanding of labour and to produce practice-oriented knowledge if they change their classical methods and procedures. A cooperation centre, which is “at home” in both fields can contribute to academic findings and practical change by creating an awareness of the differences, by taking it up in discourse and by mediation.

Due to its positioning between labour and science, cooperation centres play an intermediary role. They are engaged in both social fields without taking over one or the other way of doing things. They work at the interface in order to overcome it. Through their work they create a new frame, which transgresses the traditional limits. They allow for conscious reflection upon the differences, and for their mediation in the process of cooperation.

In the last 20 years, cooperation centres have developed into agencies, which take the initiative themselves and which define and implement their service anew again and again in cooperation with potential partners. The strength of cooperation centres lies in the fact that they detect potentials on the local level, that they mobilise actors and initiate processes. This way, academia is referred to a local context and the practice of labour is connected to general knowledge more easily. In the process of cooperation - organised and moderated by the cooperation centre – applicable, academic knowledge develops, which can cause practical change and at the same time be taken up in academic discourse.

The wide spectrum of activities of the cooperation centre, the variety regarding the content and the different approaches are due to the local reference of the cooperative work. Depending on the circumstances on the spot, cooperation centres define the fields of work and their focus after consultation with local partner institutions. The skills of the individual employer are demanded here to get acquainted with local conditions, to integrate into the respective milieu and to work for a respectable reputation. In this difficult intermediary position, cooperation centres depend on their employees to emphasise the chances of the cooperation between academics and labour, to develop implementation suggestions and organise processes of cooperation. At many places stable networks have developed due to the work of the cooperation centre, in which new projects always develop.

Examples of good practice

Examples of good practice of the Kooperationsstellen can be found in Klaus Kock’s paper, for example on:

- page 8 from the office of cooperation between the Ruhr Universität Bochum and IG Metall.
- page 9 between the cooperation centre Dortmund and the Trade Unions.
- page 10, one in cooperation with the Free University of Berlin and Trade Unions and another one between the centre in Osnabrück.
- page 11, examples of work of the Centre in Saarbrücken.
- Page 13, examples of the University of Braunschweig and Hannover.
- Page 14, projects of the University of Hamburg
- page 15, an example of the centre of the University Frankfurt, Oder.

Effectiveness of this activity and issues for future development

Discursive work approaches are characteristic of cooperation centres as intermediary agencies, ranging from discussion events, conferences and future workshops to cooperative research projects and seminars. It is always about bringing together different actors from academia and labour and about facilitating an active dialogue. Through its initiating, organising and moderating activity, the cooperation centre allows for a discourse of “two worlds”, which rarely communicate directly in every-day life. Based on this, a form of cooperation in projects is stimulated and organised, which ideally develops into a network.

Furthermore, cooperation centres also conduct projects themselves or offer seminars and other continuing education events. This happens most notably if a particular topic could be approached in a new way. Cooperation centres raise third-party funds for projects on questions from labour, which might not be taken up otherwise. The spectrum ranges from detailed research, regional measures on employment promotion and operational innovations to applied research. These projects have in common that they are designed cooperatively, e.g. organising a discourse between academia and labour, integrating actors from labour into scientific work and integrating actors from science into practical change. Projects are embedded in a long-term process of cooperation.

Today it has often become a pure necessity due to lack of resources that cooperation centres raise funds for projects. But convincing donors of the value of cooperative projects is still very difficult. Topics from labour are often not “marketable”. The work of the local dialogue, which is divided into small sections, can hardly be presented as differentiated projects. Moreover, continuity can scarcely be secured if one is forced to work on different projects due to resource requirements. If employees leave the institution after a project has been finished, the cooperative knowledge that has been gained is lost. A minimum of secure existence of the institution and its employees is necessary to conduct the business of raising third-party funds on a continuing basis.

Trade unions and the Hans-Böckler-Foundation have initiated cooperation centres at many places and have made their foundation possible by means of some start-up financing. The basic idea from the 1980s is still valid today: The founding and maintaining of cooperation centres is a public responsibility. Cooperation centres are an instrument for the strengthening of the social responsibility of academia. It is their task to counterbalance the partial exertion of influence by economically powerful groups by creating the prerequisites for the engagement of the broader public in the production of knowledge.

For this reason, the cooperation centre and its local partners strive towards acceptance and funding as a public institution. At places where this has been achieved, one notices that the potential that has been described so far unfolds much better. On the other hand, in the public sector the pressure to justify one's own work has increased tremendously in recent years. Cooperation centres are on the right track to cope with these demands to describe and evaluate their work. The purpose of this study would be met if it could make a contribution to giving the public a better understanding of the characteristics of cooperation centres, their tasks, functioning, success and its conditions. “

Transferability of practice

The focus in our report is on the special situation of having established institutions at universities which have the task of cooperating with Trade Unions. In our opinion, this is the best way to establish sustainable links and common working conditions between universities and Trade Unions. The transferability of our examples depends on this kind of institutional organisational form. Other projects or activities between universities and Trade Unions are mainly short term orientated for example as long as there is money or a personal interest. Kooperationsstellen make sure that the work is sustainable.

Reference: Klaus Kock “Between Chairs and Work Benches” 2007, p 41-42, see Tulip website

