



Universität Hamburg

DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

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## **Draft Speech; Opening of the 2019 Global University Leaders' Council, 5 June 2019**

Dear Senator Fegebank,

Dear Professor Alt, dear Mr. Dittmer,

Dear Professor Loprieno,

Dear participants of the Global University Leaders Council 2019,

Dear guests,

I am delighted to welcome you to Universität Hamburg today, in the year of our university's one-hundredth anniversary. This permits us to include the topic of our conference—which brings together forty-five outstanding leaders of several world-class universities for the third time—in the discussion. Why? 1919, the year the University was founded, saw a longstanding debate come to an end in Imperial Germany about whether a university was of any use to the port and trading city of Hamburg. Before the German Revolution of 1918/19, the majority of the city's decision-makers had persistently rejected the idea. Yet on 28 March 1919, the time was ripe. A social democrat majority in the Hamburg parliament succeeded in founding the University with a sudden shift in their argument: It was no longer about the usefulness of a university for merchants and shipping companies but whether university education could dismantle class differences. This was precisely what the protagonists of the University's foundation had in mind: by opening a university for **all**, it would be possible to guarantee education and, as a consequence, socio-economic progress for all, which would ultimately end class differences. This small example shows us that the topic of tonight's opening ceremony—"How political must universities be?" based upon a study by Peter Maassen entitled "The place of universities in society"—was already relevant back then, although the answers were patently different from the ones that threaten us today.

Yes, **"threaten."** I frankly confess that the results of the study by Maassen and his colleagues horrified me somewhat. Yet they also reinforced me in my view, as expressed in my thesis from 2015, that we are facing an imperialistic, increasingly aggressive Atlantic understanding of the university, which is poised to destroy alternative, historically rooted concepts of the university. For if you read the results of this study closely, it becomes apparent that Germany is deemed lacking in its efforts to realize the "third mission" alongside research and teaching. For this reason, according to the authors: "The way forward is to re-balance the university's three missions and build on the achievements realized until now." (p. 13). And they continue: "This requires a more proactive university leadership, more managerial and academic capacity for the universities' third mission strategies and activities, more effective university personnel policies

and more diverse academic staff career possibilities, and more truly innovative new study programs and educational tracks.” (p. 13)

Support for an analysis such as this is only conceivable if one assumes that the Atlantic, that is, the Anglo-American understanding of the university, can be applied generally across the globe. Yet this is not the case. Rather, there is a sharp philosophical divide between countries with the Atlantic understanding of the university—that is, the USA, the UK, the Scandinavian countries, and the Netherlands—and the remaining continental European countries. Historically speaking, the continental European understanding of the university did not seek to make universities, science, and scholarship fungible commodities. This is the great historical achievement of the founding of the Berlin University in 1810: that the state, which established the university, resisted the temptation to assign it particular tasks. The Prussian state vested its trust in the university’s professors more or less in advance, under the assumption that they would know better than anyone else what scientific knowledge should be pursued and how this was to be done, and that professors should not be expected to deal with the question of whether their scientific findings are useful. Why? Knowledge emerges from and builds upon existing knowledge, not from possible needs. This was why the Berlin University was not founded as a private institution, but instead completely financed by the state. And thus the basis for a development that was to benefit Universität Hamburg in its founding hour was created: that a democratically elected government defines the purpose of a university in both the name and the interests of **all** the citizens it represents. This differs markedly to those countries in which higher education has degenerated into a business enterprise. We can readily correlate this with the fact that German universities, which are protected by relevant legislation, are today still in a position to act autonomously, even though we may not be able to depend upon sufficient basic funding from the individual states to cover all operations. To put it simply: An educational institution run in the name of the people using funds provided by the people (that is, tax revenue) must guarantee access to every person who fulfills the intellectual requirements. And it must carry out research that is, in principle, accessible for all and, at its best, helps individuals to realize their one good life. And this is why there is a duty to publish research results in Germany. Today’s “open access” is thus closely linked to this 200-year-old ideal, even though publishing houses charge—indeed must charge—money for publications containing the results of research. I repeat: In a democracy, a university that is a public institution has the function of being without function. It cannot be rendered fungible for particular purposes: the public university **belongs to** all and is there **for** all. This is why German universities do not charge tuition fees. And so that no one gets the idea of influencing research results or their distribution and communication for their own benefit, or putting pressure on professors to conduct research on a particular matter, the German Constitution guarantees science and scholarship—and with that university teachers—unlimited autonomy. Professors and lecturers decide what they want to research, how they want to research, with which means they want to research, and how they pass on their research results and knowledge to the next generation. They are not bound to follow orders. This is not the understanding of the university in many countries. The result is visible: High tuition fees at universities lead to social disparities, researchers have to seek pri-

vate sources of funding, and in so doing, either fulfill the expectations of the contractor or forsake research entirely. If this is not understood, then it is also not understandable as to why there is a fundamental aversion to the idea of the “third mission” within German higher education, particularly in the so-called comprehensive universities (whose number does not include the technical universities and universities of applied sciences), against which the German Rectors’ Conference has also put up strong resistance. And this is why a third mission of any shape or form plays no role in the mission statements of German universities, although federal state governments sometimes expect one. Universities obediently formulate such mission statements, however, they are of absolutely no consequence. The reason is simple, and is the first thing that a student of philosophy learns: we cannot derive norms from norms, just as it is not possible to derive actions from norms.

Does this mean that German universities, or indeed Universität Hamburg, do or does not bother about the interests of society? Of course not. Absolutely not. In fact, the opposite is the case: “The place of universities in society,” however, is interpreted differently. In an exemplary manner, the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) has pointed out that transfer (that is, the “third mission”) does not take place primarily in applied research, but rather in the **communication** of research results, in **consultation** on the basis of what is known, and only thirdly in the realm of **application**. Here in Hamburg, this means that we work together intensively—in the sense of trans- not interdisciplinarity—with cultural institutions with the aim of enlightenment in the classical sense of the word: with theaters, museums, concert halls, operas, etc. It also means that we provide a free pool of experts able to provide advice or information on the basis of their knowledge for all manner of questions to members of the public and, in particular, the press so that this information can be disseminated widely. But that is not a “third mission”—these activities are an integral part of research and teaching. One could argue that research and teaching—indeed scientific knowledge—serve either all humans, or if they do not, then we are no longer dealing with scientific knowledge but instead with private, secret knowledge of the sort that has been preferred in the Vatican over the centuries.

Does this now mean that in Germany and in Hamburg there is no “third mission” at all? I would like to answer this question with a quote and with the inscription engraved over the top of a door:

During the debate over the foundation of Universität Hamburg on 28 March 1919, one of the members of parliament who supported the idea of a university for Hamburg stood up and said that the University “must not yield to receiving its problems first from the city’s merchants or industry and working on their behalf, but the other way round: What it [the University] develops of its free initiative, that is what practice must make use of.” That is both a clear statement and a legacy all at once. And so that no one forgets this, the architects of the building in which we find ourselves today engraved over the main entrance: “der Forschung, der Lehre, der Bildung”—which in English translates as “to research, to teach, to educate and form.” And there you have it—the “third mission:” **Bildung** is the third duty of the university. And “Bildung” means leading humans toward humanity through research and teaching, while, on the very long

journey they must take, creating a world in which it is worthwhile living. Could that not be an idea for a “university of the world,” everywhere on this globe?

I would now like to give the floor to tonight’s speaker and my esteemed colleague, Professor Antonio Loprieno, who is going to analyze the political role of universities in a keynote entitled: »How political should universities be? – Bridging autonomy and third mission in the age of simulation«

After his talk, there will be the opportunity of questions from the audience, moderated by Mrs. Anna-Lena Scholz.

We will then complete the evening with a panel discussion including the Senator for Science and Research and Second Mayor of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Katharina Fegebank, the President of the German Rectors’ Conference, Peter-André Alt, the Rector of the University of Campinas, Marcelo Knobel, and the President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Lynn Pasquerella.

Before we turn to Professor Loprieno, let me just add one last piece of information for the Council participants: Please stay in the auditorium after the panel discussion. You will be accompanied to the bus that takes you to the guesthouse of the Hamburg Senate.

Now, Professor Loprieno, the floor is yours.