Research Design and Preliminary Results of the Scientific Study of the Funding Programme “Strategic Partnerships and Thematic Networks“

DAAD Conference „Going Forward – Strategic Partnerships as a Driver for Internationalisation“

Berlin, 18 April 2016

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The International Centre for Higher Education Research Kassel (INCHER–Kassel) at the University of Kassel

- **Strong Interdisciplinary Orientation**: Broad Focus on Higher Education: Research, Teaching, Third Mission, Governance and Organization
- Currently **35 Researchers** (including Ph.D. Students, High Level of Third Party Funding)
- **Strong International Orientation**: International Projects, Conferences, Guest Researchers, Publications, Networking
- **Academic Focus**: Ph.D. and Postdoc Training, Relevance of a Variety of Theoretical and Methodological Approaches, Long-term Oriented Research, Peer Reviewed Journal Publications
- **Transfer and Collaboration** with Practitioners in the Field, e.g., Conference „University Governance: Impeding or Facilitating Creativity?“, Hannover–Herrenhausen, September 29\(^{th}\) and 30\(^{th}\), 2016
Scientific Study of the Funding Programme “Strategic Partnerships and Thematic Networks“

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DAAD Focus on Institutionalisation and Sustainability of the Programme at University Level (Long–term Effects)

Three Successive Project Goals:

The Analysis of

1) Initial Phase of Generation of Ideas and Project Planning

2) Realisation in Projects

3) Sustainability of Projects
Conceptually: Social Innovation Perspective (Rogers 1962; Baldridge/Burnham 1975; West et al. 2004; Howaldt/Schwarz 2010)

- Here: Individual Projects as Social Innovations
- Focus on Generation of New Concept, Realisation, Institutionalisation and Diffusion within Organisation
- Focus on Social Innovations, not Technological Innovations
- Increasing Importance of Studying Social Innovations
- No Clear-cut Model on Emergence and Diffusion of Social Innovations
Recent Emphasis on Universities as Strategic Actors (Clear-cut Goals and Missions, Strong Leadership, Accountability etc.)

In Comparative Organisational Research, however, Universities as:

- Loosely Coupled Systems (Departments, Administration/Scientific Staff)
- Organized Anarchies (Unclear and Open Decision-making Structures)
- Governed by Academic Profession (Strong Role of Scientific Staff, in Particular Professoriate, and Bottom-up Initiatives)

Tensions between “New” and “Old” Models of University Governance

Implications for Generation and Diffusion of New Ideas
Conceptually: Evaluation Research (Bergmann et al. 2005; Stockmann 2007)

4 Success Factors:

- Properties of Actors
- Institutional Support
- Planning and Realisation of Project
- Communication
Variety of Research Methods and their Combination ("Triangulation")

- All Data Remain Anonymous, No Disclosure of Participating Projects and Individuals!
- Document Analysis (Grant Applications, University Strategies, Reports to DAAD etc.)
- Online Questionnaires (Different Target Groups)
- Focus Groups (Different Target Groups)
- Individual Face-to-Face Interviews
- Individual Telephone Interviews
Success Factors: General Findings and Concrete Examples
Properties of Actors (Success Factor I)

- Generation of Ideas as **Collective** Process (vs. Theoretical Expectation)
- High **Intrinsic** Motivation
- High Degree of **Previous International Experiences** (Study and Work Experiences Abroad, International Projects)
- **Pre-existing** Network Contacts
- High Importance of **Coordinators**

± **Low** Personnel Turnover in Projects
± **High** Involvement of Project Leaders (Not Just Symbolic / Representative)
Institutional Support (Success Factor II)

In General:

± Active Involvement of University Leadership in SP
± Interest of University Leadership in TN
✓ Support by University Administration
± Financial Support by University

Diffusion of Social Innovations in Universities:

○ Challenge for SP: From Central Units (Administration, Leadership) to Decentral Units (Departments)

○ Challenge for TN: From Decentral Units (Department, Institutes, Working Groups) to Larger and more Central Entities
Institutional Support (Success Factor II)

High Involvement of University Leadership in SP if
- “Flagship Project” or “Prestige Project” due to Regions, Countries, and Universities Involved
- Embedded in Internationalisation Strategy
- Previous Investments in Partnership

High Interest of University Leadership in TN if
- Personal Ties to Project Leader
- Particular Relevance of Research Area for University
- Project Embedded in Internationalisation Strategy
Planning and Realisation of Project (Success Factor III)

✓ Huge Variety of Activities (TN, SP)
✓ Exchange and Mobility [(Doctoral) Students, Scientific and Administrative Staff]
✓ Conferences and Workshops
✓ Networking Activities

± Structural Innovations (e.g., Common Teaching Programmes):
  • Financial Constraints
  • Time and Commitment
  • Administrative Obstacles /Compatibility of Higher Education Systems
Planning and Realisation of Project (Success Factor III)

Examples of Good Practice:

✓ Establishment of Web-based Support System that Provide Information on the Project
✓ Broad Inclusion of Junior Researchers and Students
✓ Constitution of Long-term Summer Schools with own Structures and Financing
✓ Expansion of the Network, Inclusion of New Members
✓ Applications for New Common Research Projects
Planning and Realisation of Project (Success Factor III)

- Existence of Steering Committees (Positive Role)

- Continuous Self-evaluation and Necessary Modifications

- Different Network Models: SP with Focal Organisation, Multilateral and Heterogeneous Networks Structures in TN
Communication (Success Factor IV)

± Critical: Decision-making Structures, Modifications of Time-table not always Clear

✓ Positive and Trustworthy Communication Climate (Longstanding Relations and Knowledge of Involved Persons and Institutions)

✓ Informal and Flexible Modes of Communicating

✓ Mix of Face-to-Face and Technically Mediated Communication

✓ Role of Online Platforms and other Forms of New Media: Changes over Time
Thank you!