

Expanding the University System (September 3, 1966)

Abstract

The overcrowding of existing universities, the desire to create new types of institutions for higher learning, and the effort to improve regional education led to the expansion of the university system in the 1960s and 1970s. The founding of the University of Bielefeld is a prime example of that process.

Source

Where Cows Are Still Grazing . . .

The Contours of Bielefeld's Alma Mater are Slowly Emerging

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

But the state government in Düsseldorf—the sponsor and financial backer of the newest alma mater—is still on summer break. And even when the state capital goes back to work in a couple of weeks, political squabbles 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 probably continue to force Bielefelders to be patient.

Yet Westphalians have been waiting for their new university for years—all in order to restore parity between their part of the state and the Rhineland. Ever since the 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, this was due not least to the fact that Rhinelanders had their universities in Bonn and Cologne, while Westphalians only had a single one in Münster. University founder and Minister of Culture Paul Mikat finally created universities in [the Westphalian cities of] Bochum and Dortmund, but shortly thereafter he also gave the Medical Academy in Düsseldorf the rank of a university. Since the renaming of the Technical College of Aachen and the founding of East Westphalian University, however, the score between the Rhineland and Westphalia has been four to four.

Above all, the area of East Westphalia, in the northeastern reaches of the state, had been somewhat neglected up to this point, which is why Bielefelders are working with particular zeal to level the terrain 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 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 to start classes in 1968 as planned.

Only Three Departments

The university is intended to grow outward gradually from 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 have only 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' intentions, 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 to be balanced by a "Center for Interdisciplinary Research," where joint research projects will 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 hybrid 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.

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