The Neo-liberal Economisation of Austrian Universities: Conditions for Teaching Anthropology and Anthropological Research

As stated by the workshop convenors Annika Rabo and Susan Wright governments are pushing universities to become more business-like and competitive in a "global knowledge" economy. This paper examines some effects of this global transition for Austrian universities at the example of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. Using Michel Foucault's theoretical concept of governmentality I first elaborate on the use of audit as disciplining mechanism. Then I will explore some consequences of the neo-liberal economisation of universities for the academic work of anthropologists: the increasing division of teaching and research, a rising pressure to compete and perform along with precarious terms of employment.

The neo-liberal restructuring of Austrian universities: the University Law 2002

We can distinguish three phases of the development of higher education policy in the Second Republic (Burtscher, Pasqualoni & Scott 2005; Sandner 2006). The first is the so-called *Ordinarienuniversität* characterised by a relatively low number of students, a selective access to university and few democratic structures within universities. In this "republic of professors" (Pechar 2005: 321) the full professors ("Ordinarien") were relatively unrestricted ruling over their departments.

The 1970ies brought a democratisation of the internal structures of Austrian universities, a restriction of the power of full professors and a centralisation due to the influence of the newly founded Ministry of Science and Research (Sandner 2006: 279). During that period the "mass university" might have been acknowledged by the state – its costs however not (Fillitz 2000: 242).

From the 1990ies onwards Austrian universities were submitted to global neo-liberal processes of transformation, due to legal preconditions made by the state as well as decisions of their own administration/management. *New Public Management* has become the new credo of the university reform with its economic understanding of quality and the move from centralised bureaucratic structures to decentralised, management oriented systems. The University Law 2002 (UG 2002) granted universities an ambivalent kind of "autonomy" tied with a new mode of state regulation through strategic target-setting ("Globalziele"). Internal as well as external competition was increased through the use of market(-like) mechanisms. The university management was strengthened while the competences of students and all academ-

ics but the full professors ("Mittelbau") were drastically reduced. In addition new means of audit have been introduced (such as teaching audits or contracting). These developments can be analysed as following a neo-liberal governmentality aiming to construct new subjectivities of university members.

> By [neo-liberal governmentality] we refer to a wholesale shift in the role of government premised on using the norms of the free market as the organizing principles not only of economic life, but of the activities of the state itself and, even more profoundly, of the conduct of individuals. (Shore & Wright 2000: 61)

In a post-industrial society where (scientific) knowledge has become a central resource for economic growth old Fordistic disciplining mechanisms do not suffice to activate those intimate resources of the workers needed for succeeding on the global market. Thus most dimensions of the regulation of work are (tried to be) changed to self-regulation by having working subjects internalising the market logic (cf. Opitz 2004).

However, as opposed to a "scientification of production" in a "global knowledge industry" one may as well attest an "industrialisation of science" and scientific knowledge (Liessmann 2006: 39f.). Facets of this "industrialisation of science" are the standardisation of the "service/good" education (e.g. by means of the Bologna process), the privatisation of scientific knowledge (cf. Brenneis 2004; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004), the growing division of labour between teaching and research or the adoption of structures deriving from private business for the new management of universities (cf. Liessmann 2006: 39-41). For self-governance is not entirely replacing external control. Instead audit is introduced as a new mode of external regulation in sectors of society formerly differently supervised.

> [T]here is a visible regulatory style which seeks to internalize control at the bottom of a layered regulatory system, with oversight and ultimate sanction at the top. This is a style which compliments the demands of NPM and which also seeks to reconcile regulatory objectives with agendas for quality assurance. (Power 1997: 57)

This form of audit is trying to essentially measure the quality of human labour in quantifiable numbers – and by this establishes new standards of quality and performance. Presently those criteria for quality are set by the state and the economy (Fillitz 2000: 250). They are geared towards notions of economy and efficiency represented by the New Public Management approach. Considering the "massification" of higher education (at least in some disciplines like anthropology) as well as teaching and research audits focusing on statistics it seems more appropriate to talk about "quantity management" than of "quality management".

In any case audit functions as a technology of neo-liberal governance, combining technologies of the self and techniques of domination (cf. Shore & Wright 2000). It is supposed to enhance the governance mechanism of competition by simulating market conditions in academic work

(cf. Schimank 2000). Therefore the conclusion stands to reason that audit rather serves as disciplining mechanism asserting the smooth realisation of management objectives than to assure "quality" (cf. Shore & Wright 2001, online; Moldaschl & Schwarz 2005).

One indication for this is the upsurge of administrative work in the course of the managerialisation of universities despite its claim of rendering working processes more efficient. Audit forms a considerable part of this extra work. As one staff member of the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology in Vienna puts it:

> As there are more and more people doing controlling, more and more effort is being spent to count peas – which is and should not necessarily be leading to changes. To put it pointed: because of all the controlling and filling out evaluation forms we have less time for researching and teaching. Administration has dramatically increased, because the staff of the controlling department needs to justify their existence by producing one paper after the other that we need to fill in… (Translation by the author)

A circumstance leading Liessmann (2006: 99) to the conclusion that these conditions might well foster the organisational, bureaucratic and poetic expense for science – but not the quality of science. The numbers measuring science might become more and more beautiful, yet they have less and less to do with reality.

I now will turn my attention to the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna. My focus rests on the conditions of work for teaching anthropology and anthropological research. But let me first refer to the ongoing division of teaching and research (in order to render them more manageable?) as it explains why I deal with those two aspects of anthropological work separately.

The traditional Humboldtian unity of research and teaching is increasingly being undermined. On the administrative level the old department structure was replaced by a parallel structure of teaching and research with competences shifted from the department to the faculty level. While the department represented by its head is responsible for research issues, the in 2004 newly founded "Studienprogrammleitung" (SPL) is responsible for the operative business of teaching. This has direct consequences for the work of the department's personal, as their work is now regulated by two authorities running in separate lines of hierarchy within the university structure. On the level of the actual scientific practice of anthropologists working at the department this division is continued with an increasing division of labour between more research-oriented and more teaching-oriented staff.

Conditions for teaching anthropology

The only university in Austria offering a degree in social and cultural anthropology is the University of Vienna. One of the most significant aspects for teaching at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology is the disproportion between the teaching staff and the constantly rising numbers of students. An evaluation of 2001 specified the proportion between tenured teaching staff ("interne Lehrende") and students with 1:250, including the lecturers on short-term contracts ("externe Lehrende") with 1:150 (Burckhardt-Seebass, Baumann & Korff 2002, online: 7). In the spring term 2008 10 internal and 58 external lecturers were teaching 2900 students. Although the division between internal and external teaching staff was officially abolished through the UG 2002, it is still used at the department. As in fact conditions of employment and work are fundamental different for those two groups I will stick with this differentiation.

Concerning the tenured teaching staff a growing tension between the traditionally equally divided duties of teaching, researching and administrative work can be noticed due to expanding student numbers, a rising pressure to perform in research and an upsurging administrative work load.[1] A circumstance an interviewed professor describes with the words:

> The more empathy you show [for the needs of students], the more time is lost, the higher the price you pay in favour of those you give your energy. We are facing many situations of dilemma. Everything is not possible. You can only choose one or the other, according to your disposition or preferences. Everything together kills you. (Translation by the author)

As performance in research is generally higher valued than in teaching (not to talk of administration) there is the danger of the scientific personal carrying the large part of the teaching and administrative load becoming frustrated – which is certainly not going to contribute to the quality of teaching. This tension is intensified by the fact that due to the division of teaching and research on the administrative level, the performances in these two areas are separately evaluated. Consequently a relatively low performance in one area cannot be justified by achievements in the other.

At present approximately two thirds of the teaching load are carried by external lecturers facing precarious working conditions, a "'flexible' reserve army of academic labor" (DiGiacomo 2003, online). As growing numbers of qualified graduates are merely offered few possibilities for scientific work outside of university, they are/need to be ready to accept insecure employment (Német 2003: 111). This development suits the neo-liberal strategy of

[1] This is not to imply that in the past the de facto work done by some anthropologists employed at the department was equally divided between these three fields (as it officially should have been). According to one of my interview partners the administrative work could for example already in the 1980ies amount up to 90% of the entire academic work.

Austrian university managers to make employment relationships more flexible and increase internal competition. It is difficult for external lecturers to unite and take common measures against worsening employment relationships, as they constitute a very heterogenic group comprising different interests: the spectrum ranges from people with a full-time employment outside of university to otherwise unemployed who are financially dependant on their teaching contract. Furthermore they often hardly know each other personally and all of their engagement except for their lectures is unpaid. Who can afford investing time in extra work when one is struggling to pay the bills?

Conditions for anthropological research

These precarious working conditions find their continuation in anthropological research. As regular employment is only available at the University of Vienna, the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna and the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Ackermann & Pantucek 2003: 93), most anthropologists doing research are dependant on applying for project funds (cf. Nöbauer & Zuckerhut 2002: 49). Apart from the unpaid work of applying for funding and the risk of being unemployed after the end of the project many face the problem of not being able to make a living out of this work. The need to earn money out of non-anthropological work reduces the time available for research. This in return makes it more difficult to gain funding – which again increases the need to earn money out of non-anthropological work. A vicious circle (cf. Nöbauer & Zuckerhut 2003: 63f.). The situation (especially) of (female) freelance anthropologists is characterised by short-term working contracts, little payment, psychic pressure and high demands concerning their work (Nöbauer & Zuckerhut 2002: 48f.). One interviewed scientist states:

> If you keep on doing research without employment, you have to apply for projects. Then there is always the phase of the project preparation, which is not paid. This means an extreme insecurity. […] And of course it is a question of gender. If you get lost as a woman in this freelance story – I don't know how one can have time for a child or family. It actually is a nightmare. (Translation by the author)

However, not only the work of freelance anthropologists is defined by project work. The tenured staff is as well urged by the university management to acquire third-party funding (cf. University of Vienna 2007, online: 5f.). Moreover the junior staff can only be employed through third-party funding, making them dependant on the will of the established tenured staff to obtain these funds. Hence the responsibility for financing research and young scientists is delegated from the university management to the scientific staff. The resulting insecurity might be intended to boost performance and intimidate opposition against the employer. Shore & Wright (2000: 77) for example notice that "[e]gendering insecurity in the

workplace appears to be consistent with new managerialism throughout the public and private sectors". But will it actually create the "excellence" that is constantly mentioned in the discussion about the restructuring of universities? And how wise is it to employ young scientists for a few years without an option to continue their work when they are well trained?
Another relevant aspect of third-party funding is a certain accountability being inherent in it. The discussion about an audit culture forcing its way into academic work has been going on for a few years in anthropology now. As far as third-party funding is concerned it is likely to produce some form of market behaviour among researchers: I assume the demand at the "third-party funding market", which in Austria is so far mainly in the hands of the state and the EU[2], to influence the application for and granting of those funds. Whether the competition for funding is actually going to improve the quality (what kind of quality?) of research, as is often more or less explicitly claimed, is arguable. Performance in any case is less and less measured primarily by the efforts taken or the results achieved in a certain period. In accordance with post-fordistic processes of production performance becomes what is remunerated by the market (cf. Wagner 2006: 142).

Conclusion

Neo-liberalism can be analysed as a technology of governance reconfiguring the social space by re-defining the relationship between politics and economy respectively the public and the private (cf. Lemke, Krasmann & Bröckling 2000). From this point of view it is not surprising that global neo-liberal processes are as well transforming the Austrian university system – and consequently the professional and personal identities of anthropologists. For governance works best when its norms are (unconsciously) internalised by the subjects of its rule.
In academia characteristics of this development are the increase in competition created by audit and for third-party funding and a decrease in job security. Furthermore the academic work of anthropologists is more and more broken up into teaching and research and standardised at the same time.[3] Understanding how these mechanisms of governance function and how we are positioned respectively actively position us towards them allows us to develop strategies of resistance for consequences we consider destructive. However, as Amit (2000: 233) already asserted nearly a decade ago, investigating those processes is not enough.

> Our challenge will be to combine ethnographic insight with political courage, […] the courage to insist that the true measure of the intellectual project must be the curiosity of a critical and independent mind.

[2] In a neo-liberal state this does not imply that it is not influenced by economic interests.
[3] Standardised for example by means of audit, third-party funding, the Bologna process or eLearning.

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