

---

Themenheft Nr. 31: «Digitale Bildung»

Medienbezogene Bildungskonzepte für die «nächste Gesellschaft».

Hrsg. v. Jasmin Bastian, Tobias Feldhoff, Marius Haring und Klaus Rummler.

## Considerations on Europeanisation at Universities:

### Establishing Low-threshold (Digital) Opportunities for Mobility between Social Inequalities and Changing University Structures

Jasmin Bastian and Estella Hebert

#### Abstract

*The following paper critically discusses the idea of a learning platform for teaching and learning at universities in an international context highlighting several social questions that arise in relation to questions of higher education and mobility. By using the example of the proposed platform, the paper touches on existing social inequalities in a complex system of international university landscapes and current educational and political changes by relating the discussed topics to the Four Freedoms of the European Union, namely the free movement of capital, goods, services and people. Based on the discussion of the ambivalence of benefits and limitations of current changes in higher education especially in relation to mobility, the paper discusses innovative ideas using new technical opportunities and critically asks whether these ideas are necessary and helpful in order to reduce limitations and inequalities or whether it might instead just shift these limitations and inequalities, thus pointing at wider structural and political problems within higher education and educational policies.*

#### Überlegungen zur Europäisierung an Hochschulen: Möglichkeiten für eine niedrigschwellige (digitale) Mobilität – zwischen sozialen Ungleichheiten und sich verändernden Hochschulstrukturen

#### Zusammenfassung

*Im folgenden Beitrag wird die Idee einer Lernplattform für das universitäre Lehren und Lernen an Hochschulen in einem internationalen Kontext kritisch diskutiert. In diesem Zusammenhang werden insbesondere Fragestellungen beleuchtet, die sich im Hinblick auf Hochschulbildung und (digitale) Mobilität ergeben. Am Beispiel der vorgeschlagenen Lernplattform weist der Beitrag auf bestehende soziale Ungleichheiten im komplexen System internationaler Hochschullandschaften und aktueller bildungspolitischer Veränderungen hin, indem er diese auf die vier Grund Säulen der Europäischen Union bezieht – die sogenannten «Four Freedoms»: den freien Verkehr von Kapital, Waren, Dienstleistungen und Personen. Ausgehend von der Diskussion um die Ambivalenz von Nutzen und Gren-*



*zen aktueller Veränderungen in der Hochschulbildung – insbesondere in Bezug auf die Mobilität –, werden im Beitrag innovative Ideen zur Nutzung neuer technologischer Möglichkeiten vorgestellt. Darüber hinaus wird die Frage gestellt, ob diese Ideen notwendig und hilfreich sind, um Einschränkungen und Ungleichheiten zu reduzieren oder ob es jene Einschränkungen und Ungleichheiten nicht vielmehr nur verschoben würden, was auf größere strukturelle und politische Probleme innerhalb der Hochschul- und Bildungspolitik hindeuten könnte.*

### **Introduction**

«Ruimte scheidt de Lichamen niet de Geesten.»<sup>1</sup> (Erasmus of Rotterdam)

At the central station in Rotterdam travellers are greeted with the above quote by Erasmus of Rotterdam saying that space could only separate bodies not minds. Academics like Erasmus of Rotterdam have proven a long time ago, that national borders and cultural differences do not necessarily have to function as limits to cultural and intellectual exchange. Nowadays it could be argued that because of political and technological advancements, the opportunities for international exchange both in a physical as well as in an intellectual sense have increased to a great extent. On a political level, especially in the European Union, this includes legal changes in relation to borders, work permissions, and international assimilation on a structural level through processes like the Bologna reform. On a technological level, this includes not only technical advancements in relation to vehicles that allow to travel great distances much faster, but also the advancement of media and communication technologies that allow for information and communication to «travel» much faster as well. These political and technological changes can also be seen to facilitate the Four Freedoms on which the European market and the Union are based on and shaped by, namely the free movement of people, capital, goods and services. The European Union made the free movement of the respective categories possible in the first place, while technological advancements further the possibilities for the free movement to happen in faster and also less costly ways.

While Erasmus of Rotterdam himself was a well-travelled man, he can also be related (by name) to one of the most popular programmes of the European Union in relation to international mobility and education. The Erasmus programme is a prime example for the way in which policies of the European Union in relation to the Four Freedoms facilitate the free movement of people in relation to the field of education. It could be argued that particularly for young Europeans who are still training and qualifying themselves academically, international exchange possibilities not only improve their employability, but also impact their personal and cultural learning

---

1 Translation: «Space separates the bodies not the minds.»

and development (Sweeney 2012). However, while without a doubt the possibilities developed by programmes such as the Erasmus programme offer great opportunities for many people, they are yet limited to a certain number of participants at the same time. Within these limitations, which can be based on a number of personal and structural reasons, an interesting ambivalence of the advantages brought about by programmes based on the Four Freedoms as well as the limitations involved within those structures arises. In the following paper, we would like to analyse this ambivalence by looking particularly at the Four Freedoms of the European Union, i.e. the movement of people, capital, goods and services, in relation to the current situation of Higher Education in the European Union.

Aside from the theoretical considerations of this analysis, we would also like to propose and discuss the possibility of a practical solution that might create a way of exchange based on communication technologies, thus allowing trans-European exchange despite spatial or temporal restriction with reference to the debate on digitalization processes. We argue that it is indeed necessary to think of new ways of intellectual exchange within higher education settings especially in the light of new technological advancements, still existing forms of social inequalities and changing university structures. It is exactly in the triad between these topics that we propose an online platform which enables academic staff as well as students to collaborate in relation to teaching and learning more easily. While we will give an outline of the ideas on the collaboration, we would at the same time highlight the structural and social problems and questions that have arisen in the process as they seem to be relatable to some of the current changes that can be seen in the field of higher education across Europe. Thus, the paper will look at questions in relation to Europeanisation, mobility and digitalization within contemporary structures and discourses in the Higher Education sector.

### Theoretical Background

«In itself however, the benefit emanating from the influence of a language manifests in two different ways, as enhanced ability of speech, and as a specific world view (*Weltansicht*). One learns to master the thought in a better and more certain way, pouring thought into new and inspiring forms, and making the chains less tangible, that the successively advancing, and always assorting and recombining speech puts on the rapidity and unity of pure thought. Insofar, however, as language through labelling, literally manages to grant the indeterminate thinking shape and form, the mind, supported by the impact of many, enters the essence of things themselves in new ways.»<sup>2</sup> (translated from Humboldt 1959, 82)

Wilhelm von Humboldt argues that by learning a language one does not merely benefit from a new set of linguistic skills, which might result in an «enhanced ability of speech». But what Humboldt also stresses is the way in which learning a new language can result in new views on the world (*Weltansicht*) and new ways of understanding the essence of things themselves. With reference to this idea and also to Humboldt's concept of *Bildung*, what becomes apparent is an assumption of learning that focuses on the educational value in relation to the realisation of the individual self without a predetermined objective. The newly learned language here functions not as a means to an end, doesn't even «function» at all, but rather allows for new ways of thinking in a more idealist and humanist sense.

Within a contemporary philosophical debate, but also within other academic disciplines, this ambivalence between on the one hand idealist/educational and on the other hand utilitarian/ functional perspectives on various different aspects of the human life can be found. The debate on «competence» as a functional set of skills that the individual can acquire through training is seen critically from many advocates of a more educational or *Bildungs*-theoretical perspective. This becomes apparent when looking at the example of language teaching and communicative competence as illustrated by Michael Byram (2010). Aside from the debate on communicative competence, a similar debate can be found in the German discourse on the differences between media education and media competence<sup>3</sup> (Iske 2015; Fromme and Jörissen 2010; Hugger 2005). It seems important to introduce these different positions, as

---

2 Original: «In sich selbst aber äußert sich der aus dem Einfluß der Sprache hervorgehende Gewinn auf eine zweifache Weise, als erhöhte Sprachfähigkeit, und als eigenthümliche Weltansicht. Man lernt sich des Gedankens besser und sicherer bemeistern, ihn in neue anregende Formen gießen, und die Fesseln minder fühlbar machen, welche die nach einander fortschreitende, und immer sondernde und wieder verbindbare Sprache der Schnelligkeit und Einheit des reinen Gedankens anlegt. Insofern aber die Sprache, indem sie bezeichnet, eigentlich schafft, dem unbestimmten Denken Gestalt und Gepräge verleiht, dringt der Geist, durch das Wirken mehrerer unterstützt, auch auf neuen Wegen in das Wesen der Dinge selbst ein.» (Humboldt 1959, 82).

3 In the English-speaking discourse, the term «media competence» is not commonly used. However, the discourse on media competence can be compared to the discourse on «media literacy» in the English-speaking discourse as seen in the works of David Buckingham and others (e.g. Buckingham, 2003).

they are closely related to both contemporary policies as well as implementations in the educational sector (Byram 2010) and therefore can also be related to questions of what higher education should look like, how political processes of higher education take place and or how students and teachers alike should be able to participate and reflect on these processes. Within the ambivalence of these debates also lies the current trend towards empirical educational research aiming at measuring productivity levels of various educational systems from Kindergarten through to schools, higher education or adult education. This can then easily result in educational policies which focus on productivity by quantifying outcomes of education (Klieme et al. 2008). While it can be helpful in order to compare and understand educational processes, it at the same time might highlight and privilege certain aspects which have been analysed as enhancing efficiency and discriminate against other aspects.

When relating the two perspectives with the question of mobility in higher education, the two differing opinions that might arise are the following ones (and it is obvious that they are slightly exaggerated at this point for the sake of better demonstration, however various different gradual opinions could be found easily): Firstly, mobility could be seen as a necessary tool for enhancing one's own career opportunities (as it is an important factor in the recruitment of employees (European Commission 2014) and as it might enhance language competences) thus focusing on the utilitarian benefits of a time spent abroad. Secondly, mobility could be regarded in a similar way to Humboldt's perspective highlighted previously namely in resulting in a new view of the world (Humboldt 1959), in allowing new and complex perspectives to develop (Teichler 2004) and in learning about new cultures without necessarily profiting from it in relation to later career paths. While each perspective might not preclude the other one completely and while utilitarian benefits as well as idealist self-development might indeed both happen at the same time, it seems that they value or highlight differing aspects in their respective ways and thus might also influence relating policies and structures in slightly different manners, thus also leading to different results.

Aside from the ambivalence of these two perspectives, another interesting ambivalence is apparent when looking at higher education contexts, as has already been argued in the introductory paragraph, namely that of the advantages and limitations related to mobility in higher education. While without a doubt, there are many advantages especially for those that can participate in a programme such as Erasmus+, and even those that are affected by it in more abstract ways, such as sitting in a class which might be enriched by a student from another country by offering a new perspective on the subject of the class, some of the limitations that programmes such as Erasmus+ face highlight social inequalities that are existent in contemporary societies and which are also of fundamental interest to the educational sciences both in research as well as in practice (Vester et al. 2001). It seems obvious that it is, among

many others, an objective of education to reduce the existing social inequalities as far as possible to make society as just and permeable as possible (Diehm et al. 2017). Thus, while access to universities and therefore also to programmes such as Erasmus+ might be theoretically open to anyone, studies show that students from higher social background benefit more often from these programmes than those of lower social backgrounds (Brennan et al., 2009), thus reinforcing pre-existing inequalities.

In this paper, using the example of the learning platform we are in the process of developing, we wish to critically discuss the benefits and limitations of opportunities for mobility at European universities and elaborate new (digitally-based) proposals and ideas within the current higher education landscape in Europe from an educational background. We locate our theoretical considerations within educational theory and try to analyse the respective benefits that might come along with a more educational perspective on questions of higher education and mobility. In order to do so, we have divided the following arguments into four thoughts relating them to the Four Freedoms of the European Union. Thus (slightly bending the meaning of the Four Freedoms to fit our argument) we will look at moving capital in relation to changing university landscapes, moving goods in relation to the movement of information and data through new media technologies, moving people in relation to considerations on mobility and moving services in relation to the proposal of a digital network for academic teaching and learning that we wish to present.

### **Moving Capital: Changing University Landscapes**

When talking about the landscapes of universities in Europe it seems inevitable to take a look back at the origins of the first universities as such. Particularly in the light of the topics discussed here, the origins of the European universities are in many ways closely related to the topics that will be touched upon in this paper. The first recorded university was the University of Bologna, founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, being by name related to the process of various European countries that reformed the European university system in order to establish a «European Higher Education Area», by adopting a «system of easily readable and comparable degrees», introducing the ECTS system and promoting mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff first started in 1999 (Council of Europe 2014).

Aside from the relation of the University of Bologna to the Bologna process, which started more than 900 years after the founding of the latter, the University of Bologna also adopted a charter which is said to be the base of the principle of academic freedom, called the *Constitutio Habita* (Watson 2005), which allowed scholars the freedom to travel in the interests of education without being hindered on the way, hinting already at the principle of academic freedom. Here of course the notion of freedom and the principle of the free movement of an academic in order to provide

the service of teaching can be closely related to the freedoms of the European Union that are also object to this paper. As has already been shown in the introduction using the example of Erasmus of Rotterdam the internationalisation of universities is something, which is indeed not new to this age, but can be found even as early as the appearance of the first universities.

This proves that some changes of the university system might indeed not be as new as they might seem at first glance. Stichweh (2009) has argued that even the distinction between students as «customers» to universities in contrast to students as being a part of the academic community can be found in discussions of whether students should be included in the academic community or not, thus starting an ambiguity on the role of the students which lasts until today. This again highlights two interesting points: First of all, it points at the origin of the word university, which can be traced back to the Latin meaning of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* (the whole/ community/ world of teachers and scholars) (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911, 748-749) thus leaving the ambiguity of whether to include students or not fairly open. Secondly, Stichweh argues that in recent structural developments it could be argued that students take on the client role much more than that of belonging to the academic community since the start of the mass universities of the 20th and 21st centuries (Stichweh 2009).

This structural change already hints at the point we are trying to make by connecting the changing university landscapes to the first freedom, namely that of moving capital. Watson and Temple have argued that the changing university landscapes especially in relation with tuition fees, might lead to a new relationship between students and universities, where students are seen as customers and where on the other hand students see universities as offering a service they pay for expecting certain benefits in return (Watson and Temple 2009). It is in this sense that many academics argue universities would be functioning more and more like businesses. Thus, while research and teaching might be analysed as the two main objectives of universities, their organisational structure tends to shift towards an economical perspective on optimization and focusing on the demands of society, students and businesses from an economic point of view (Endruweit 2015). Endruweit argues that since the Bologna process the European Higher Education Area functions on a more economic basis and universities could almost be described as production sites for academics focusing mainly on vocational training (Endruweit 2015). De Wit and Verhoeven on the other hand argue, that while a university might be compared to a production site, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) might be referred to rather as a «quasi-market» (De Wit and Verhoeven 2009, 275) since the common principles of a free market of buying and selling would not apply in the same way. The authors argue that due to this nature the term of «network universities» (ebd., 274) could be used, thus highlighting the fact that universities function more like enterprises and

yet are historically based on more bureaucratic forms of organisation. Because of this ambivalence between the historic structures of universities and the to a certain extent public mandate for education in contrast to the contemporary changes towards more economically based structures of funding and managing universities, De Wit and Verhoeven argue that new management forms are needed.

What becomes apparent when looking at the just presented arguments is that while we might not focus on the free movement of capital as guaranteed by the European Union as such in our argumentation, it can be seen that the movement of capital in Higher Education is shifting. Thus, the shift that can be analysed is taking place on different levels. It seems that because of the necessity for the procurement of research projects as well as the need for publications for academics' careers, there is a shift between the balance of the two, already mentioned, objectives of teaching and research that universities follow. Furthermore, not only is a shift taking place which might advantage research over teaching, but the change of structures also results in what could be seen as less academic freedom (Brennan et al. 2009). If universities and academic staff are reliant on procuring research projects from third parties, they of course are in some ways dependent on the requirements these parties set along with their funding. Thus, it could be argued that new inequalities might arise based on the third parties' decisions of which topics will be funded and which ones won't be. The worry that because of this some socially yet maybe not economically important topics might be marginalised would thus be understandable. While a notion of competition might indeed be seen as enhancing motivation among researchers (Kadushin, 2012), these shifts of university capital should still be seen from a critical, not necessarily negative, point of view.

While we have highlighted some aspects of change within higher educational structures that might be seen from a critical point of view, it needs to be added that there are also changes in relation to the internationalisation of the higher education sector as well as in relation to technological advancements (Watson and Temple 2009), which will be taken up in the following parts of the paper. Before focusing on the technological and international changes however, we would like to summarise what we have tried to highlight here, namely the ambivalence between the university's historic role in relation to its students and staff and in relation especially to how it has been capitalised. While one may see these changes positively, negatively or fairly neutral, it seems to be important that the resulting conditions for research and teaching, as well as the university's role for society should be critically reflected upon, as Watson and Temple have summarised to the point:

«The European university's historic role as a guardian – and critic – of cultural heritage must not be forgotten as universities develop new entrepreneurial functions and global vision. These roles are likely to remain dependent on public, or possibly philanthropic, funding, and must be carefully defined and supported.» (Watson and Temple 2009, 177)



### **Moving Goods: Information and Data as Important Goods**

Historically it can be seen that the advancement of new technologies or forms of media have on the one hand often led to very critical and fearful assumptions on the effects that the new technologies and media might have especially on children and young adults. So, for example when the novel became popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was feared that it was a «trashy piece of fiction» for young women, who were found to enjoy reading novels, on the basis that it might corrupt their moral values (Eagleton 2005). In hindsight, it might be easy to assert that none of these worries were particularly justified. At the same time, if the new technologies and media weren't welcomed with feelings of fear and worry, they on the other hand were sometimes received with overly celebratory sentiments and visions about how the media would transform education completely. While youth has neither been corrupted by new forms of media, nor education has been transformed in altogether new ways, it seems that the advancement of new technologies results in educational and cultural changes and transformations which are complex and diverse. While this might be quite obvious, it thus highlights the necessity to analyse the effects that new media have on education in consideration of the wider social, political and economic structures that these new advancements take place in, which also applies to the higher education sector as will be outlined in the following.

Therefore, we would firstly like to look at the way in which data has become a central asset of economic interest (Zuboff 2015). Looking at the debate on what is termed «surveillance capitalism» (ebd.), it could be argued that there has been a shift of capitalism, where power does not necessarily lie in means of production anymore, but more so in means of access to data and information. Following this assumption, it becomes possible to think of data as an important good for securing revenue and capital. That data through technological advancements can be shared in fast ways across great distances, thus allows to a great extent to move these goods fairly freely between various locations. While this might be easily compared to one of the Four Freedoms underwritten by the European Union, namely that of the free movement of goods, it at the same time highlights one of the problems that legislation, as of the European Union for example, is facing in relation to a global network such as the internet, where data, as means of economic capital, are produced and shared outside of national international political contexts. New media allow for freedoms and can be seen as a driving force of globalization (Wulf 2006), by furthering the process of economic, political and cultural transformation in relation to the local, regional, national and global, through the movement of goods, services, capital and people.

While Wulf sees the powering force of media, he also ascribes a certain level of ambivalence to the advancements media bring along by highlighting that despite new freedoms, new borders and limits can also be discovered in relation to media technological advancements at the same time. Some of these limits might indeed be

found in questions of social inequality. Hölscher and Suchanek (2011) have analysed the access to knowledge as a key factor for inclusion and exclusion processes in contemporary societies based on information technologies. Their assumption does not only refer to questions of inequality that are of relevance to educational research but also might serve as a nexus to demonstrate why in the light of higher education the capitalistic prominence of access to data plays an important role.

Thus, when looking at the discourse in relation to questions of big data and big data analytics, it becomes obvious that questions of access to big data sets also relate to questions of research that is done based on questions of big data. Chris Anderson has prominently diagnosed the «end of theory», as big data now allows to gain «empirical» insight into social practices which, as he would argue, render academic research somewhat redundant (Anderson 2008). Boyd and Crawford (2012) along other social scientists have explained however, why it might be critical to approve of Anderson's point of view, thus relating the argument back to questions of social inequality, but also to ethical questions. They argue that it is important for academics «who are invested in the production on knowledge» to question the «assumptions, values, and biases of this new wave of research» (boyd and Crawford 2012, 675).

Because academics and universities, as part of their mandate on research and teaching, are working in the field of the «production of knowledge», the question of how this knowledge is collected, researched and thus presented is an essential one. While new media offer great possibility for the exchange of information, it is at the same time obvious that universities might be easily put at a disadvantage in relation to access and power over both data as well as the placing of publications within the current economic and media structures. While it is crucial for universities to stay abreast of the technological advancements (Debray 2003), Schwalbe and Meyer argue that higher education institutions are both producers and users of information technology and thus should try to actively shape media structures that enable those educational processes which universities both teach and shape while also being shaped by them in return (Schwalbe and Meyer 2010). Mai (2011) argues that the current scientific community is dependent on the media much more than the other way round. He says that universities have to follow media logic in order to justify funding, as only research covered by the media will actually be perceived and thus regarded as relevant. On top of this he argues that economy only values those research findings which can be used further for economic profit (Mai 2011). The inequalities and imbalances that might come along with such practices, seem more than obvious and can also be related to what was previously argued about the measurement of educational value, where only those research results, which produce quantifiable data, which can either be used further for economic purposes or for justifying political decisions is valued. While this might not be a problem as such, it yet puts other important research at the danger of being ignored or cancelled. Mai proposes that it is

essential therefore to have a system in which economy, science and media are independent and says that this is crucial for the success of a well-functioning democracy (Mai 2011). That universities, as well as certain societal groups, seem to be falling behind the rapid change of both economic strategies as well as technological advancements is a point several authors have made (Välilmaa 2009; Marmolejo et al. 2008).

To summarise it seems necessary, that universities, try to regain a level of agency in relation to this process and actively shape the educational processes that are transforming in the light of current advancements of the information and computation technologies, so that the modes of knowledge transfer are based on social and academic research rather than economic interests. Teichler (2004) has defined four modes of knowledge transfer in the higher education sector, whereby he defines media only as one category, including books, films, letter, e-mail messages, etc., while he defines physical mobility of scholars and students, collaborative research plus joint teaching and learning projects and finally transnational education. This analysis highlights the importance of international exchange and collaboration, as well as mobility of students and teachers, which will be touched upon in the following paragraph.

### **Moving People: Mobility as an Important Asset**

As the example of the life of Erasmus of Rotterdam as well as the introduction of the *Constitutio Habita* have already demonstrated, the movement of academics across different universities in Europe is not a new phenomenon. Because of the history of European academics in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Teichler even argues that we should talk about «reinternationalisation» rather than internationalisation when talking about contemporary processes, highlighting that the focus on mobility of academics is not as new as might be imagined (Teichler 2004). That mobility seems to, even historically, have been particularly popular among academics could be explained by the fact that people who are trained academically often also can deal with uncertainties and surprises, as they know how to understand these uncertainties and acquire new knowledge and insight, thus leading to the fact they often enjoy new experiences (Teichler 2004). Thus, it could be said, that they are able to benefit from the experiences that mobility brings along in various ways.

First of all, taking a rather utilitarian perspective, one could argue that through exchange programmes and time spent in other countries, individuals acquire new necessary skills that provide them with a certain level of assurance of their own capabilities and improve their employment chances (Sweeney 2012). At the same time, they can also benefit in relation to language skills. As some authors have argued the role that prior language proficiency plays as a factor for mobility has not been given enough attention in research (Gimenez and Morgan 2017). Insufficient language skills

are amongst the most relevant obstacles as stated by students that prohibit a participation in mobility programmes (Hauschildt et al. 2015). The other obstacles that the authors mention are separation from family and friends, problems with credit recognition, additional financial burdens and a lack of given information by the home institutions. The various personal, structural and social reasons for obstacles hint at existing inequalities. While inequalities in access and participation might indeed be reducing overall (Clancy and Goastellec 2007), it also has been shown that students from already advantaged social backgrounds benefit more often from mobility on an international level (Brennan et al. 2009). This indicates that student mobility might indeed comprise a certain ambivalence of social inequalities, whereby already advantaged students may enjoy a wide range of options and potentials for individuals to gain new skills and perspectives, thus to a certain extent even increasing levels of inequality. Researching and learning at a university setting in another country, may allow an individual to experience a new culture and thereby develop new perspectives (or *Weltansichten*) in a creative manner by confronting the individual, whether teacher or student, with new theories and methodologies that can help to reflect one's on practices and frameworks by highlighting the individual limitations of one's own concepts and ideas (Teichler 2004).

With these advantages in mind, student mobility became a central issue in higher education policy shortly after the second World War, to strengthen mutual understanding and international collaboration, and working against sentiments of hatred and mistrust (Teichler 2004). In 1987 the European Higher Education Area started a programme entitled European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (in short: *Erasmus*). In the 30 years of its existence, the Erasmus programme has accommodated a total of 9 million people (European Commission, 2017), including young people, students, adult learners, teachers, trainers, volunteers and youth workers since several programmes were merged together under the Erasmus+ programme in 2014. While there are different mobility rates between different countries, (for example ranging between 10% in countries such as Romania and Slovakia and 30% in countries like Denmark and Finland), differences of mobility rates can also vary depending on the subject, indicating that the subject of education is related to rather low mobility rates (Hauschildt et al. 2015). According to the EHEA the objective is that by 2020 more than 20% of students will be able to benefit from the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2016). At the same time, while student mobility rates prove to be quite successful, academic mobility rates do not seem as successful, this might be also because of the different personal commitments and life situations that people working in academia are in, in comparison to students. Hauschildt et al. (2015) argue that mobility for all students or staff would not be feasible, thus proposing supporting mechanisms for internationalisation at home as an alternative means. The necessity for programmes furthering

internationalisation processes at home might become obvious when looking at the current situation of staff mobility and considering the personal, structural and social limitations on mobility that are apparent. Debray has illustrated two positions of how to attribute the responsibility for furthering internationalisation and mobility as on the one hand referring to the individual and his or her self-responsibility and on the other hand referring to the need for institutional mediators that facilitate these processes (Debray 2003). In relation to this, we would like to present the idea of an online network that takes into account the above mentioned considerations on questions of mobility and cultural exchange but also on questions of media technology and changing university structures.

### **Moving Services: Idea of an Online Network**

We have covered the previous topics on the changing nature of educational research, changing university landscapes, changing media technology and the importance of mobility in fairly great detail, because it seemed relevant in the light of the proposal that we wish to come up with. It seems that thinking about and designing a platform which might strengthen possibilities of academic exchange can only be done in consideration of the wider political, structural and social contexts apparent in European higher education. While we have highlighted some of the benefits higher education enjoys because of the European's Four Freedoms, it seems that at the same time other limitations, problems and social inequalities persist and arise. It is particularly this ambivalence of benefits and limitations that we wanted to reflect upon in order to help us understand possible gaps for opportunities of mobility and academic exchange in the European higher education system within the contemporary structures, before designing a platform which can thus try to bridge at least some of the uncovered gaps. Thus, within the triad of the changes taking place structurally in higher education, and questions of media and mobility in relation to higher education, we have discovered a necessity for low-threshold opportunities for academic exchange which relate to the arguments brought forward in relation to the three respective topics, as they can all be related to each other in a reciprocal manner.

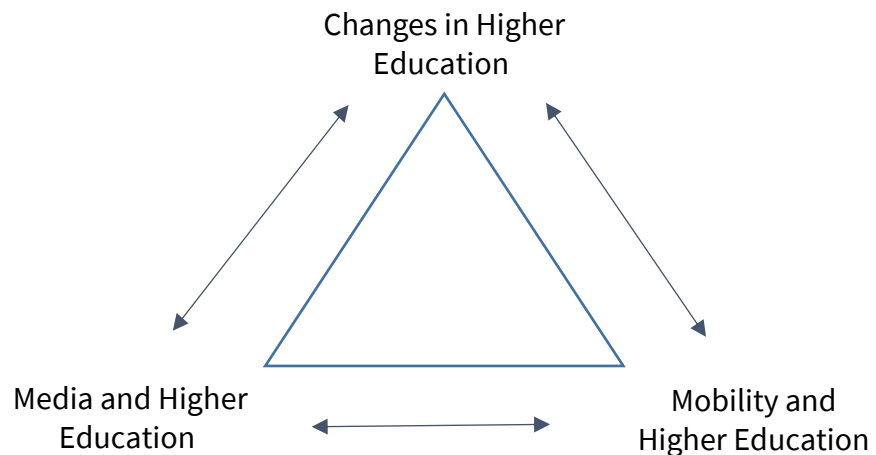


Fig. 1.: The Higher Education Mobility and Media Triangle.

Starting off, our initial goals of initiating ideas for an exchange online platform were based in what has already been analysed as the advantages of mobility as is apparent in the Erasmus programme, namely enriching knowledge and (cultural) insight. At the same time, we are aware of possible restrictions on the access to mobility programmes, and therefore would like to stress the importance of creating opportunities for academic exchange in less complex ways especially for those that due to personal and structural reasons might not be as (physically) mobile per se. We think that academic exchange on an international level, as has been stressed before, is important because it can confront academics with new theories and methodologies (Teichler 2004), as well as cultural practices which might disclose the individual limitations of their past conceptual frameworks and thus lead to valuable educational processes which enrich new perspectives, as in the *Bildungs*-concept of Humboldt (1559). Because of the assumption that cultural exchange might indeed broaden academic perspectives, we also wish to stress that this again has interesting implications for the educational sciences by offering opportunities to develop didactical models between various university systems that function in different languages, cultures and structures. While we want to highlight the advantages of our proposal in relation to existing restrictions and limitations which might result in social inequalities, we wish to emphasise that we are aware of the social inequalities that are persistent at universities as such, thus leading to the fact that it is difficult to prevent certain social inequalities at a university level, where entry requirements already often exclude certain groups of individuals per se. So, in order to summarise, we have proposed the following goals as being leading principles for the benefits that we would wish to strengthen:

- *(Intellectual) Mobility*: To find an easy way to collaborate for students and teachers on an European level (thus reacting to the fact that mobility due to personal and structural reasons may not be accessible to everyone, yet international exchange still can be achieved through less expensive and time-consuming ways)
- *Internationality*: Students and teachers learn how to work in an international setting from and with each other (exchanging various forms of content, thus being confronted with new methodologies and theories that may broaden both students' and teachers' conceptual frameworks and enable them to develop more diverse perspectives)
- *University Structures*: To foster closer cooperation among universities (thus strengthening the structural implementation of internationalisation at various universities)
- *Competences and Learning*: To achieve other benefits on many different levels such as the improvement of language skills, the engagement with other university systems thus getting to know new ways of learning as well as theories and topics prominent in other cultures
- *Online Media*: To bring students and teachers together through online media and let them compare lessons and exchange ideas on how European education should look like, what didactical concepts of education they might come up with and exchange ideas on their respective fields of study

In order to achieve the five principles mentioned above, it becomes obvious that there are a number of prerequisites necessary. These can be summarised as being of conceptual nature, of technical nature, of structural nature and in relation to questions of implementation. While we are still in the process of development, a number of critical aspects and problems have been found along the way. At this point in the paper, we do not wish to go into too much detail on the concept of the platform as such, but rather wish to use the example and experiences we have made to illustrate a number of important points and relate them back to the discourse on higher education and mobility in relation to the Four Freedoms of the European Union. Structural problems, such as diverging term or semester timetables, as well as the financing of such a project illustrate the changes taking place within higher education, namely of international adaption as well as changing university funding. In the light of this article as well as the project, it seems to also be extremely difficult to find a suitable online platform. As has already been illustrated the question of technical implementations is of fundamental importance in relation to data ownership. Thus, it demands a great level of technological competence to develop an infrastructure that is both user friendly, serving educational purposes and complying with data protection laws, being free, accessible and public. Creating such services, if completed, can on the other hand create collaborations among various students and teachers and

increase the mobility of ideas (Gimenez and Morgan 2017). This is necessary to develop «a pedagogy that both enhances and expands the existing resources of academics and professionals who come to interact in new and more complex linguistic spaces» (Gimenez and Morgan 2017, 88). Within the complexities of a globalized and digitalized world, it seems that pedagogy needs to equip students with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate across different situations and architectures. Constant adaptation and flexibility are seen to be a necessity for the short-term demands of an economy based on rapid change (Ribolits 2006). Ribolits takes a very critical position on the subject of flexibility and analyses the demand for flexibility as a tool of post-industrial economies, which denies the individual to act freely and implies a constant bending of the individual to the situation. While his opinion might be disregarded as overly critical, it nonetheless conveys an interesting assumption. Disguised as a promise of «greater human freedom», flexibility, according to Ribolits, has now turned into its opposite. If we take this assumption to be true for one moment and relate it to the context of this paper, then it could be assumed that the freedom to move one's services across Europe opens up many possibilities (and we do not wish to deny that it certainly does), however these possibilities are not all as free as they might seem. Especially when looking at the case of higher education in relation to the educational sciences, we can see comparatively low numbers in student mobility in relation to other subjects (Hauschildt et al. 2015). Adding to this, it is often difficult for teachers already working to teach in another country. Hauschildt et al. argue that future teachers should indeed also be prepared to work in international settings and culturally diverse classrooms, so that in their role as educators they can influence their pupils' attitudes towards international experiences and diversity (Hauschildt et al. 2015). Therefore, a platform, as the one we are trying to design, would help teacher students to engage with other students on an international level and thus increase the possibilities of educators for international exchange. It would not only help to engage with other students but also to practice their foreign language skills, as the ability to speak English can be seen as a central competence for the participation in a great number of international settings (Gimenez and Morgan 2017).



### Conclusion

The entry for *free* in the etymological dictionary goes as follows:

«FREE, at liberty. (E.) M.E. fre, Chaucer, C.T. 5631. -A.S. fred; Grein, i. 344. + Du. vrij. + Icel./H. + Swed. and Dan./ri. + Goth./rm (base/rya-). + G.frei. p. The orig. sense is having free choice, acting at pleasure, rejoicing, and the word is closely connected with Skt. priya, beloved, dear, agreeable. ^ PRI, to love, rejoice. See Friend. Dei. free, vb., free-ly, free-ness; free-dom = A. S. fred-dom ; free-hooter (see Booty) ; free-hold, free-hold-er ; free-man = A. S. freoman ; free-mason, free-mason-ry ,, free-stone (a stone that can be freely cut) ; free-think-er, free-will.» (Skeat 1888, 219)

The words *free* and *freedom* entail in their etymological meaning a reference to a sense of choice and self-determination (Skeat, 1888). Historically, as might not be surprising, it can be found especially in medieval times in relation to notions of political and civil freedom contrasting to forms of slavery or peonage. While in the European Union notions of slavery and peonage as they existed in the Middle Ages, might seem like a historic fact long overcome, the meanings once adhered to the term of freedom yet shine light on both how far Europe has progressed and at the same time where new borders have been uncovered. Additionally, looking at the etymology, one can see the term being based in a number of different linguistic origins of countries that are now members of the European Union, such as Denmark, Sweden or Iceland. This way the etymology of the term *free(dom)* also highlights the way in which ideas, words and languages have for a long time travelled across borders and various European cultures have influenced each other thus creating new forms of common heritage. These two points, on the one hand freedom as implying a sense of self-determination and on the other hand freedom as a term based on the mobility of language and a sign of cultural influence, are relevant also in relation to the argument made in this paper. While the European Union's Four Freedoms enable the free movement of people, goods, services and capital in various sectors of the public and private life, it may not be ignored that certain fundamental resources are necessary in order to really benefit from these freedoms. Especially when looking at the higher education sector it becomes apparent that the successful participation in the Four Freedoms is not granted to everyone and thus certain limitations in relation to the Four Freedoms can be detected. While not denying the advantages and possibilities that might be brought about through being able to freely move people, goods, services and capital across European Union borders, the limitations that result or persist need to also be seen and critically discussed, especially when looked at from a neoliberal-critical point of view.

As many academics, both from within the educational sciences as well as other disciplines, criticise the profit-driven, competition-based ideal of neoliberal policies (Naidoo 2017), the distinction mentioned at the start of the paper in relation to *Bildung* versus competence becomes relevant again. Davies (2014) argues that competition is often used in order to legitimate inequalities, thus using the argument that those who are not as well off are self-responsible for their misfortune, while everyone would have the chance to compete equally. That existing inequalities, however, should not be denied and need to be analysed, seems obvious from an educational point of view. It is thus, that we have not only tried to highlight some of the ambivalences in relation to the higher education sector, but also find new proposals of decreasing some of the limitations that we have detected. This being said, the notion of academic autonomy that was introduced at the start of this paper, is something which might serve as an objective which should be held up high. Looking at some current trends we should critically ask whether or not the expansion of freedoms in a neoliberal sense, does not actually impede other forms of freedom or autonomy, especially for those who cannot afford to move themselves, or any means of capital, goods or services.

As Naidoo (2014; 2017) has argued there seems to be an uneven development in higher education. This uneven development does not only exist in relation to certain theoretical positions and topics, but also in relation to certain subjects, as well as in relation to intra-national and international university competition. While these developments can be found even between departments, academics and universities, who are yet to a great extent set within the public system of higher education, the question of what might happen once the educational sector is more and more opened to other actors is an interesting one. As educational scientists, we might not only need to consider and analyse, but maybe develop more concepts of how to act both with and against the current trends within the educational sectors, so that we will not fall short behind quickly moving developments within the context of free economy and media (Debray 2003; Välimaa 2009; Marmolejo et al. 2008). While we have slightly bent the meaning of the Four Freedoms to fit the scope of our argument in the subtitles of this paper, the question of what freedom actually implies, is an important aspect to consider and should be redefined time and again thus informing pedagogical practices where they might be most needed. In order to do this in the best possible way, it seems indispensable to try and understand the movement not only of the Four Freedoms, being people, capital, goods and services, but also the ways in which knowledge, information and ideas travel.

## References

- Anderson, Chris. 2008. «The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete». *Wired*, 23 June 2008. <https://www.wired.com/2008/06/pb-theory/>.
- boyd, danah, and Kate Crawford. 2012. «CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR BIG DATA: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon». *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (5): 662–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878>.
- Brennan, John, Rajani Naidoo, and Kavita Patel. 2009. «Quality, Equity and the Social Dimension: The Shift from National to European Level». In *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*, edited by Barbara M. Kehm, Jeroen Huisman, and Bjørn Stensaker, 141–62. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Buckingham, David. 2003. *Media Education: Literacy, Learning, and Contemporary Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Byram, Michael. 2010. «Linguistic and Cultural Education for “Bildung” and Citizenship». *The Modern Language Journal* 94 (2): 317–21. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40856134>.
- Clancy, Patrick, and Gaële Goastellec. 2007. «Exploring Access and Equity in Higher Education: Policy and Performance in a Comparative Perspective». *Higher Education Quarterly* 61 (2): 136–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2007.00343.x>.
- Council of Europe. 2014. «Bologna for Pedestrians». 2014. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/EHEA2010/BolognaPedestrians_en.asp).
- Davies, William, and Aditya Chakraborty. 2017. *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*. Revised edition. Theory, Culture & Society. Los Angeles ; London: SAGE.
- De Wit, Kurt, and Jef C. Verhoeven. 2009. «Features and Future of the Network Society: The Demographic, Technological and Social Context of Higher Education». In *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*, edited by Barbara M. Kehm, Jeroen Huisman, and Bjørn Stensaker, 263–80. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Debray, Régis. 2003. *Einführung in die Mediologie*. Vol. 3. Facetten der Medienkultur. Bern: Paul Haupt.
- Diehm, Isabell, Melanie Kuhn, and Claudia Machold, eds. 2017. *Differenz - Ungleichheit - Erziehungswissenschaft*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-10516-7>.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2005. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica, and Hugh Chisholm. 1911. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*. 11th ed. Vol. 27. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press. <http://archive.org/details/encyclopaediabri27chisrich>.
- Endruweit, Günter. 2011. «Mögliche Funktionen von Wirtschaft und Medien für die Universität». In *Wissenschaft und Hochschulbildung im Kontext von Wirtschaft und Medien*, edited by Barbara Hölscher and Justine Suchanek, 15–32. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92648-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92648-3_2).

- European Commission. 2014. *The Erasmus Impact Study Effects of Mobility on the Skills and Employability of Students and the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions*. Edited by Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf).
- European Commission. 2016. «A New Skills Agenda: Working Together to Strengthen Human Capital, Employability and Competitiveness». European Commission. <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2016/EN/1-2016-381-EN-F1-1.PDF>.
- European Commission. 2017. «Erasmus+ Programme Guide». European Commission. [http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/2017-erasmus-plus-programme-guide-v2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/2017-erasmus-plus-programme-guide-v2_en.pdf).
- Gimenez, Julio, and W. John Morgan. 2017. «Academics across Borders: Narratives of Linguistic Capital, Language Competence and Communication Strategies». *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15 (1): 68–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2014.937402>.
- Hauschildt, Kristina, Christoph Gwosc, Nicolai Netz, and Shweta Mishra. 2015. *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe: Synopsis of Indicators. Eurostudent V 2012-2015*. Edited by DZHW. Bielefeld: W. Bertelsmann.
- Hölscher, Barbara, and Justine Suchanek, eds. 2011. *Wissenschaft und Hochschulbildung im Kontext von Wirtschaft und Medien*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92648-3>.
- Hugger, Kai-Uwe. 2006. «Medienkompetenz versus Medienbildung? Anmerkungen zur Zielwertdiskussion in der Medienpädagogik». In *Dieter-Baacke-Preis. Handbuch. 1. Methoden und Konzepte medienpädagogischer Projekte*, edited by Jürgen Lauffer and Renate Röllcke, 1. Aufl, 29–36. Bielefeld: Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von. 1959. *Bildung Und Sprache – Eine Auswahl Aus Seinen Schriften*. Edited by Clemens Menze. Schöninghs Sammlung Pädagogischer Schriften. Quellen Zur Historischen, Empirischen Und Vergleichenden Erziehungswissenschaft, 163 S. Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh.
- Iske, Stefan. 2015. «Medienbildung». In *Medienpädagogik - ein Überblick*, edited by Friederike von Gross, Dorothee M. Meister, and Uwe Sander, 247–73. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.
- Jörissen, Benjamin, and Johannes Fromme. 2010. «Medienbildung Und Medienkompetenz: Berührungspunkte Und Differenzen Zweier Nicht Ineinander Überführbarer Konzepte». *Merz | Medien + Erziehung* 54 (5): 46–54.
- Kadushin, Charles. 2012. *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Klieme, Eckhard, Johannes Hartig, and Dominique Rauch. 2008. «The Concept of Competence in Educational Contexts». In *Assessment of Competencies in Educational Contexts*, edited by Eckhard Klieme, Detlev Leutner, and Johannes Hartig, 3–22. Toronto: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.

- Mai, Manfred. 2011. «Legitimationsprobleme der Wissenschaft in der modernen Gesellschaft – Die Erwartungen von Wirtschaft und Medien». In *Wissenschaft und Hochschulbildung im Kontext von Wirtschaft und Medien*, edited by Barbara Hölscher and Justine Suchanek, 33–42. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92648-3\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-92648-3_3).
- Marmolejo, Francisco, Sean Manley-Casimir, and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin. 2008. «Immigration and Access to Tertiary Education - Integration or Marginalisation». In *Higher Education to 2030*, edited by Centre for Educational Research and Innovation and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1:Chapter 9, 241-264. Educational Research and Innovation. Paris: Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD.
- Naidoo, Rajani. 2014. «Transnational Higher Education: Global Wellbeing or New Imperialism». Keynote Presentation presented at the United Kingdom Forum for International Education, UCL Institute of Education, October 24.
- Naidoo, Rajani. 2017. «The Competition Fetish as an Imperative of Change: Animators, Mediators and Consequence». Keynote Presentation presented at the ECER Conference 2017, UCC Copenhagen, August 23.
- Ribolits, Erich. 2006. «Flexibilität». In *Pädagogisches Glossar der Gegenwart: von Autonomie bis Wissensmanagement*, edited by Agnieszka Czejkowska and Alfred Schirlbauer, 120–27. Wien: Löcker.
- Schwalbe, Christina, and Torsten Meyer. 2010. «Umbauten im und am Bildungsraum. Zum medieninduzierten Wandel der Kommunikationsstrukturen in der Hochschulbildung». In *Neue digitale Kultur- und Bildungsräume*, edited by Petra Grell, Winfried Marotzki, and Heidi Schelhowe, 27–50. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91917-1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91917-1_3).
- Skeat, Walter William. 1888. *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. <http://archive.org/details/etymologicaldict00skeauoft>.
- Stichweh, Rudolf. 2009. «Autonomie Der Universitäten in Europa Und Nordamerika: Historische Und Systematische Überlegungen». In *Die Illusion Der Exzellenz: Lebenslügen Der Wissenschaftspolitik*, edited by Jürgen Kaube, 38–49. Politik Bei Wagenbach 604. Berlin: Wagenbach. [https://www.fiw.uni-bonn.de/demokratieforschung/personen/stichweh/pdfs/71\\_autonomie-der-universitaeten.pdf](https://www.fiw.uni-bonn.de/demokratieforschung/personen/stichweh/pdfs/71_autonomie-der-universitaeten.pdf).
- Sweeney, Simon. 2012. «Going Mobile. Internationalisation, Mobility and the European Higher Education Area». York: The Higher Education Academy. [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/going\\_mobile.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/going_mobile.pdf).
- Teichler, Ulrich. 2004. «The Changing Debate on Internationalisation of Higher Education». *Higher Education* 48 (1): 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000033771.69078.41>.
- Välilmaa, Jussi. 2009. «The Relevance of Higher Education to Knowledge Society and Knowledge-Driven Economy: Education, Research and Innovation». In *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*, edited by Barbara M. Kehm, Jeroen Huisman, and Bjørn Stensaker, 23–41. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

- Vester, Michael, Peter von Oertzen, Heiko Geiling, Thomas Hermann, and Dagmar Müller. 2001. *Soziale Milieus Im Gesellschaftlichen Strukturwandel. Zwischen Integration Und Ausgrenzung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Watson, David, and Paul Temple. 2009. «The University Community in a European Community: Investigating the Notion of an Engaged University». In *The European Higher Education Area: Perspectives on a Moving Target*, edited by Barbara M. Kehm, Jeroen Huisman, and Bjørn Stensaker, 163–80. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Watson, Peter. 2006. *Ideas: A History of Thought and Invention, from Fire to Freud*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Wulf, Christoph. 2006. *Anthropologie Kultureller Vielfalt: Interkulturelle Bildung in Zeiten Der Globalisierung*. Global Studies. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Zuboff, Shoshana. 2015. «Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization». *Journal of Information Technology* 30 (1): 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2015.5>.