

Welcome Address
"Hochschulstudium in Australien"
29-30 April 1996

When, a few months ago, I was informed of the Australian Trade Commission's intention to plan this information seminar highlighting on the academic opportunities and the terms of trade implied in studying in Australia, I immediately agreed that Tübingen would be an appropriate meeting-point. Tübingen is, above all, a friendly place: you'll get Australian wine in at least three different shops, and there has been a considerable tradition of teaching Australian topics at this university. One might indeed proudly point to the various historical links and astounding proximities between this small town and that remote continent. So there seems to be some sense in counterbalancing the information activities at the newly-established Australia Centre in Potsdam by choosing a complementary place in the deep German South-West.

I have been asked to give a short outline of the general framework for academic exchange between Australia and Germany. At a conference staged by Manfred Jurgensen in Brisbane in September 1994, I have done so in greater detail.¹ My story included a fairy-tale past, a difficult and somewhat sombre present, and it anticipated a brighter future for salvation. The story is still largely the same. Although things have been changing rapidly, due to the tremendous growth of the tourist and economic interests that Germans have discovered in Australia, and due to the energetic and efficient marketing of Australian images and products in Germany (everything from Koalas, Kangaroos, Crocs and Coal to the most enjoyable movies and sophisticated catamaran ferryboats), the days of millennial glory - as they were in the beginning - have not yet returned: not in educational affairs, in any case. Allow me to elaborate on this in a drama of five acts:

Act I. In the good old days - say in the seventies, not very far back in terms of European history - students could move freely and enjoy liberal hospitality

¹ "German-Australian Academic Relations Since 1945: Achievements and Desiderata from a European Perspective", *German-Australian Cultural Relations Since 1945: Proceedings of the Conference held at the University of Queensland, Brisbane, from September 20-23, 1994* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), 154-176.

between the universities of both countries. Whatever fees they had to pay were nominal, usually covering some health insurance and the odd glassware broken in laboratories or books torn or crumpled in postgraduate libraries. The main impediments to a larger flow of students to and from Australia were the considerable travel expenses and - to Germans at that stage - the comparatively high costs of living in the "Lucky Country".

Act II. Asian students, who were gradually able to afford not only the tickets for their relatively short trip to, but also for their costs of living in Australia, came to study "down under" in increasing numbers. It was publicly felt that they created an imbalance by using educational commodities without paying for them. In 1979, The Australian Commonwealth (significantly it was the "Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs") passed an "Overseas student charge act" wisely coupled with an "Overseas student charge collection act", both devised to approach the unsatisfactory situation, with the aim of mending or minting it. The legislators, however, provided for a loophole, in small print, envisaging "exemptions" from these acts, in the shape of "reciprocal exchange agreements" that might be established between universities and similar tertiary educational institutions.² Since this loophole was hard to find, however, the number of students from Europe, who were accustomed to their liberal, non-fee-paying systems dropped drastically while at the same time students from fee-paying educational backgrounds in Asia continued to come, paying their "study fees", in the form of "visa charges", to Canberra.

Act III. Deregulation and the decentralization of university budgetting in the late eighties helped the now self-financing Australian universities to draw the overseas student charges directly from their overseas students and revise the rates according to the "laws of the market". In the early eighties, university administrators had still been willing to *widen* the loopholes for European students, for moral or nostalgic reasons, applying to Canberra for student charge waivers. As a rule, they had been granted such waivers, under a reciprocal exchange agreement. In the late eighties, matters became harsher. Universities, in their very own interest, tended to insist on levying student charges and narrowed the existing loopholes by lowering the student numbers their exchange agreements and by jealously watching the exchange balances. Meanwhile, the imbalance of student numbers actually exchanged grew to be

² Cf. Australian Commonwealth, Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, "Overseas Students Charge Act" No. 119 of 1979) and "Overseas Students Charge Collecting Act" (No 120 of 1979), *Temporary Entry Handbook*, Pt. II, 8ff., 90ff.

more and more unfavourable for the ⁻¹⁰¹⁻German side. Various factors were involved in this:

1) The monetary exchange rate between the Australian Dollar and the Deutschmark declined from 2.5/1 (in 1983) and arrived soon (by 1988) at a fairly low ebb of close to 1/1. In terms of buying value, this seems a little unfair to Australians, and it consequently created considerable difficulties for Australian students in coping with the cost of living in Germany.

2) The linguistic hurdles are felt to be higher for an Australian student studying in Germany than for a German student studying in Australia. In spite of the official support in multicultural Australia for learning and studying languages other than English (LOTE), the readiness of Australian students to learn German (and French) has gone down in favour of Japanese and other Asian languages.³

3) Germany, after unification, has certainly gained some additional attraction for the Australian economy and for Australian students. The foundation of the Potsdam "Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Australia" can be seen against this backdrop. It is difficult, however, to register a corresponding increase in the numbers of Australian students studying in Germany. Foreign students, in our liberal system, come and go where they like. They are not dependent on our exchange programmes. It is therefore difficult to keep track of them and credit them, even numerically, to our exchange balance.

4) There is another point which cannot escape attention in the long run, although it does not seem to be a major obstacle to developing exchange partnerships at the moment: Due to the different size of the population (including the academic population) in our two countries, there will naturally be a larger number of Germans willing to go to Australia for an exchange than vice versa. Moreover, since the number of tertiary academic institutions in Germany amounts to at least three times that in Australia, every Australian institution, on an average, may sooner or later be faced with three quite demanding German partners. We can only imagine what may come out of this in a free play of supply and demand.

Considering all this, our Australian partners, even when a "swing" (i.e., in international trade relations, a tempoary imbalance of exchange) has been tolerated, tend towards reducing the volume of a liberal student exchange, rather than encouraging and enlarging it.

³ Cf. Gisela Triesch, "Die Sprachenpolitik Australiens", *Australien zwischen Europa und Asien*, ed. Gerhard Stütz und Rudolf Bader (Bern: Peter Lang, 1993), 87-96.

Act IV. The AVCC/HRK agreement on academic co-operation⁴ of March 1993 seemed to bring good news to academic exchange between Australia and Germany. It provides for the waiving of fees in bilateral partnership agreements among signatory institutions. Although it may still be debatable that one should need an institutional partnership agreement at all in order to enjoy a fair balance in matters of exchange, the agreement can be taken as a well-intentioned compromise. It not only (1) regulates study fees but also (2) placement and credit formalities that used to be somewhat arbitrary in the past. Beyond that, the new agreement is intended to promote cooperation (3) in "the fostering and implementing of research projects", (4) "in the exchange of junior and senior staff and research assistants ...", (5) "in establishing contacts in research and teaching, and in exchanging research information via publications, teaching materials, and electronic networks." The agreement will be valid for at least five years, and I would like to wish that it will raise German-Australian academic relations to a new and stable level, to "facilitate broad national academic contact and exchange programs with varying patterns of voluntary involvement of signatory institutions in the two countries."

However, in spite of its good intentions and basically fair and sound principles, it seems to be doubtful whether this agreement can really help much in removing the abovementioned stumbling-blocks. For one, it does not and cannot go beyond the recommendation to establish bilateral partnerships and bilateral contacts. It offers the good offices of allied bodies such as the German Academic Exchange Service or the Humboldt Foundation on the German side and the Australian Research Council and the International Development Programme of Australian Universities on the Australian side, but it can, of course, not offer any budget to take care of the study fees that Australian universities are dependent on. Moreover, while all the German universities feel obliged to comply with the recommendations of HRK and, in fact, take them as binding decrees, the AVCC has a much weaker standing, since their agreements are barely regarded as optional recommendations submitted to the signatory institutions. Since competition among Australian universities, however, is as severe and grinding as it can be at the moment, administrators will only sign what they regard as profitable and feasible in fiscal terms.

Act V. Therefore, all those students who would like to study in Australia, as long as they cannot secure a fee-waiver on the basis of a reciprocal exchange

⁴ "Deutsch-australische Vereinbarung über akademische Zusammenarbeit", distributed by the HRK president in Rundschreiben 1190 of 11 June 1993, rpt. Gesellschaft für Australienstudien, *Newsletter* 7 (1993), 13-28.

agreement, will still have to pay fees, and it may be that some students, or parents, don't mind. They are the target group and the clientèle of education marketing and will certainly be the most welcome visitors and temporary residents in Australia. Below this open stage of the free market, there are, however, the various instruments of stipends and scholarships that have helped students during the past and at present to defray the costs that they will be burdened with and cannot afford to pay:

1) The foremost relief system for German students to be named in this context is BAföG whose special office for handling Australian and New Zealand matters is lodged in Bremen. Under BAföG, once the merits of a proposed term or year of studies in Australia are recognized, not only is additional support for the costs of living abroad granted, but the required ticket and the study fees are also paid. It is advisable, even in cases where regular support is denied by a small but critical margin, that BAföG should be consulted, since their calculations may turn out to be more favourable during a term of studies abroad than they would be at home.

2) DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) unfortunately does not offer a regular support programme for German undergraduates (i.e. students up to M.A., M.Sc., Diplom or Staatsexamen) wishing to study in Australia during their most impressionable first five years of studies. The DAAD's support programme for students of English ("Anglistenprogramm") provides assistance to students to be sent to England, the U.S. and Canada, but not to Australia or New Zealand. An earlier recommendation of the Anglistentag in 1988 to include Australia and New Zealand in this programme was turned down by DAAD, certainly in view of the rigorous handling of overseas student charges on the Australian side. At the same time, however, the President of the DAAD suggested that Integrated Courses of Study Abroad ("Integrierte Auslandsstudiengänge") might be established between German and Australian universities, a type of programme devised with preference for the natural sciences and courses in engineering, law and economics,⁵ but expressly excluding (letter from Isolde Wienhard of 13 Juli 1994) "philologies". This gap might now be closed, in view of the AVCC/HRK agreement.

3) Certainly DAAD would have had less cause for debarring Australia from "Anglistenprogramme" if the total amount of stipends and scholarships offered by host to guest between Australia and Germany had been more balanced. It appears that not much has changed since the late eighties, and it is to be hoped

⁵ Seven such IAS programmes have been working since 1992 through 1994 between German and Australian universities, supporting some twenty students per year, with a slight tendency of growth.

that renewed efforts in Australia and in Europe will revise the Australian Research Committee's notion of "Australia's Asian context" as its "priority area" (*Program Budget*, 1989-92). The German Embassy in Canberra, in its report on cultural relations 1989,⁶ pointed out this one-sidedness, for instance in the limited number of scholarships granted by Australia in exchange for the 37 stipends offered in 1988 by the DAAD and the 17 fellowships awarded by Humboldt, but the ambassador insisted on carrying on, even with the imbalance, for the long-term political effect that the stipends produce. Walter Veit, in his 1989 paper "Multikulturalismus und Interkulturalität als Fundamente der Kulturpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Australien"⁷ acknowledges 77 stipends per year offered to Australians by the Goethe Institute: 12 for university students, 12 for teacher candidates, 15 + 5 for teachers, and another 16 for students of German, while the DAAD is credited with 44 scholarships for Australian students annually. Undoubtedly the 3 annual scholarships and the 1 fellowship offered from the Australian side figure rather low in comparison. Adding to these the short-term teaching programmes offered to German scholars by the DAAD and used by an annual average of 6 scholars during the years 1991-1994, Walter Veit did not seem to be asking too much from the Australian side to exempt an equal number of German students in Australia from study fees.⁸

While I should hope that meetings such as the present one will seek to promote academic exchange between Australia and Germany on all levels and by all means, I would personally like to give preference and special encouragement to those options which are based on and continue along the bottom-line of a balanced, mutually fee-saving, and thereby reciprocal relationship, ideally endorsed by a liberal, state-supported exchange system. Wherever this cannot be achieved, studies in Australia for German students, and studies in Germany for Australian students, should be firmly footed on mutual, fee-waiving agreements between universities. I hope that this seminar may, among other things, turn out to be a productive step in this direction.

Gerhard Stilz

⁶ Botschaftsrat Dr. Schmitz, 3 May 1989, Ku 600.51/7 - Nr. 299/89.

⁷ Typescript, 22 pp., Department of German, Monash University, Melbourne-Clayton, Vic.3168, Australia.

⁸ Cf. Gerhard Stilz (1994), 167-168.