

CHALLENGES OF GERMAN STUDIES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

LES DÉFIS POUR LES ÉTUDES GERMANIQUES À L'ÉPOQUE DE LA GLOBALISATION

PROVOCĂRILE GERMANISTICII ÎN EPOCA GLOBALIZĂRII

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Abstract

Key words in the age of globalization are mobility, information technology, change, innovation, and competition. They are primarily related to the field of the economy, but nowadays they increasingly affect other spheres of human life, including higher education. The concept of the Bologna process was a reaction to these tendencies in society and culture on the global level. As a result of this initiative, universities have faced numerous challenges, in particular faculties of arts and humanities. These challenges refer to the subject, purpose and method of research and teaching, to the role of students and teachers, and to the response of these tradition-orientated institutions to demands of the modern society and culture, as well as of a modern student. The focus of this paper rests on German studies as a representative field of research in arts and humanities, based on the experience of research and teaching in higher education in Serbia.

Résumé

À l'époque de la globalisation, les notions clés sont mobilité, technologies d'information et de communication, changement, innovation, compétition. Ces phénomènes n'étaient tout d'abord associés qu'au domaine de l'économie, mais aujourd'hui ils influencent de plus en plus les autres sphères de la vie, l'éducation supérieure incluse. La conception du processus de Bologne représente une réaction à ces tendances présentes dans la société et la culture au niveau global. Conséquence de cette initiative, les universités ont dû affronter de nombreux défis, notamment les facultés des sciences humaines et sociales et celles des arts. Ces défis concernent l'objet, le but et la méthode de recherche et d'enseignement, le rôle des étudiants et des enseignants, la manière dont ces institutions attachées à la tradition répondent aux exigences de la société et de la culture contemporaines, ainsi qu'à celles des étudiants. Cet article se concentre sur les études germaniques en tant que champ représentatif des sciences humaines et sociales, et repose sur l'expérience acquise dans la recherche et dans l'enseignement supérieur en Serbie.

Rezumat

Cuvintele cheie în era globalizării sunt mobilitatea, tehnologia informației, schimbările, inovațiile, concurența. Inițial, aceste provocări s-au referit doar la domeniul economiei, însă ele în ultima vreme tot mai mult influențează și alte domenii ale vieții, inclusiv în învățământul superior. În concepția Procesului de la Bologna acest fapt reprezintă o reacție față de noile tendințe în societate și în cultură la nivel global. Ca urmare a acestei inițiative, universitățile se confruntă cu multe provocări, în special facultățile de științe umaniste și de arte. Aceste provocări se referă la

subiect, la scopul și metoda de cercetare și de predare, rolul studenților și al profesorilor în învățământ, modul în care această instituție este orientată spre tradiție îndeplinind cerințele societății moderne și ale culturii, precum și ale elevului modern. Lucrarea de față pune accentul pe germanistică, reprezentantul domeniului științelor umaniste, și se bazează pe experiența în cercetare și predare în învățământul superior din Serbia.

Key-words: *globalization, German studies, challenges, tradition, innovation.*

Mots clés: *globalisation, études germaniques, défis, tradition, innovation.*

Cuvinte cheie: *globalizare, germanistică, provocări, tradiție, inovație.*

1. Globalization and University

Globalization is the “worldwide movement toward economic, financial, trade and communications integration. Globalization implies the opening of local and nationalistic perspectives to a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world with free transfer of capital, goods, and services across national frontiers.” (LUTHRA, 2015). Globalization refers specifically to the economic, social and political changes which marked the last decades of the 20th century in the entire world, but particularly in Europe and countries of transition (ĐORĐEVIĆ, 2008, 827). The process of globalization implies the spread of liberal ideology, the establishment of free world market and more intensive exchanges and connections between local areas. The rapid development of information technologies has contributed to the creation of a world community which supports multiculturalism and tolerance among people (VULETIĆ, 2007, 163-164). Taking into account the rapidity and scope of all the changes, modern education has been obliged to adapt to new demands imposed by the process of globalization.

Education represents one of main factors of economic and social development and improvement of social and economic relations in Europe (KOSTADINOVIĆ, 2007, 601). In order to meet the demands of the globalization process in education, European countries drew up the Bologna Declaration and initiated the process of the higher education reform. This reform was supposed to contribute to the European integration, to spread the awareness of common values and sense of belonging to the same social and cultural area, to facilitate the mobility of citizens and students, their employability and the completion of higher education institutions at the international level (ĐORĐEVIĆ, 2008, 834). The reform should also support prerequisites and opportunities for quality development of human resources in the modern age and in education. The education in the age of globalization should offer cognitive and theoretical knowledge as the basis for the acquisition of skills which become ever more sophisticated under the influence of technological changes in the workplace. It should also develop a broad array of competences required for a successful engagement in various jobs in the global society. A competent education should also support self-employment and strengthen productivity of employees (KOSTADINOVIĆ, 2007, 601). Although the focus of education mostly rests on young people who shall find an employment in the near future, education is nowadays a process of lifelong learning and not a thing of free choice any more, but a necessity. In order to meet the demands of a changing society and process of work, everyone should regard education as a priority.

In the process of globalization universities are supposed to play a crucial role as institutions at the highest level of education, but they should also take the leading role as research institutions. This is not always the case. Particularly the faculties of arts and humanities and social sciences have difficulties not only to lead, but also to follow up in the process of globalization. They face many challenges in that process as they cling to the tradition of their own institution.

2. University Tradition

The first university was founded in Bologna in 1088 and even the oldest universities in the German speaking area are more than 600 years old (Prague 1348, Heidelberg 1386). The university originally consisted of four faculties: law, medicine, theology and *septem artes liberales*. “Seven free arts” were divided into *trivium* (grammar, logic, rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) (DINZELBACHER, 1992, 55, 236, 858). The focus of the university studies was primarily on human beings, on their spirit, body and mind, on regulations of life in communities, on words and numbers as reflection of order in the surrounding world.

In the history of universities the reform of the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) had the furthest reaching consequences. The university in Berlin, founded in 1809, became the lighthouse of the modern education system, because professors were supposed to connect teaching and research (“Lehre und Forschung”) and to teach subjects they do their research on. German studies were founded in the 19th century as an independent university discipline, although their roots lie in the 1st century, with Tacitus’ *Germania*. However, the beginnings of German philology were orientated to history and that was and has remained one of the main reasons for criticism.

During the protests in the sixties in Germany, students demanded the reform of education and the transparent “Unter Talaren Muff von 1000 Jahren” (“Under the academic gowns the mildew of thousand years”) designed in Hamburg 1967 became the motto of their revolt: students expected not only the confrontation with the Nazi past (“Das Tausendjährige Reich”), but the modernization of education as well. Twenty years later, the Bologna process started.

3. The Bologna Process

Nine hundred years after the foundation of the first university, on September 18, 1988, in Bologna, Italy, *Magna Charta Universitatum* was signed by rectors of European universities. They took into consideration that the future of mankind depends on cultural, scientific and technical development built up in the centres of culture, knowledge and research as represented by true universities. The task of universities is to spread knowledge among the younger generations, which implies that they must also serve the society as a whole and that the cultural, social and economic future of society requires a considerable investment in continuing education. Universities must give future generations the education and training that will teach them and others through them, to respect the great harmonies of their natural environment and of life itself. They proclaimed the fundamental principles listing firstly the autonomy of university, the demand for teaching and research to be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind the changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge. Freedom in research and training is also a fundamental principle of the university life, as well as rejecting intolerance and always being open to dialogue. As such, the university is supposed to be an ideal meeting-ground for teachers capable of imparting their knowledge and well equipped to develop it by research and innovation and students entitled, able and willing to enrich their minds with that knowledge. Finally, a university is the trustee of the European humanist tradition and its constant care is to attain universal knowledge, to fulfil its vocation and to transcend geographical and political frontiers, and to affirm the vital need for different cultures to know and influence each other (*Magna Charta Universitatis*, 1988, 2-3).

The purpose of the reform was obviously to adapt the educational system to the changing demands of society and to the process of globalization, to homogenize the educational system in Europe as much as possible, in order to facilitate the mobility and employability of young people and support the establishment of the world community. That is the reforming moment in this process – the switch from tradition to modernity.

The structure of higher education in Europe was about to change and the three-cycle studies (BA-MA-PhD) have been widely accepted throughout Europe. In order to make the mobility easier, the universities introduced the ECTS (European Transfer Credit System), so that national grades

can be transferred to the ECTS-grades and then again to the national grade system of other country. For example, the grading system in Germany corresponds to ECTS-grades as following:

German Mark („Note“)	German Mark in words	ECTS-Grade	ECTS-Definition
1,0 – 1,5	Hervorragend	A	Excellent
1,6 – 2,0	Sehr gut	B	Very good
2,1 – 3,0	Gut	C	Good
3,1 – 3,5	Befriedigend	D	Satisfactory
3,6 – 4,0	Ausreichend	E	Sufficient
4,1 – 5,0	Nicht bestanden	FX / F	Fail

Table 1: German Grades vs. ECTS-Grades (European Credit Transfer System, 2015)

In the Bulgarian national system the scale is reversed, because the grade 6 (excellent) corresponds to German 1 and the ECTS-grade A.

National grading system		Grade distribution guidance	ECTS Grade	
Excellent	5.50 – 6.00	5.75 – 6.00	A (10 %)	95 % – 100 %
		5.00 – 5.50	B (25 %)	80 % – 94 %
Very good	4.50 – 5.49	4.25 – 4.75	C (30 %)	61 % – 79 %
		3.50 – 4.00	D (25 %)	46 % – 60 %
Satisfactory	3.00 – 3.49	3.00 – 3.25	E (10 %)	40 % – 45 %
		2.50 – 2.75	Fx	–
Fail	2.00	2.00 – 2.25	F	

Table 2: Bulgarian Grades vs. ECTS Grades (ECTS Guide, 2013)

However, grading in Serbia differs as well, as the lowest grade at the university is 5 and the highest one 10. Therefore, the recognition of the Serbian grades would be as following:

National Grading System	Distribution (points)	ECTS-GRADES
10 (9,50-10,00)	95-100	A
9 (8,50-9,49)	85-94	B
8 (7,50-8,49)	75-84	C
7 (6,50-7,49)	65-74	D
6 (5,50-6,49)	55-64	E
5 (5,00-5,49)	0-54	F

Table 3: Serbian Grades vs. ECTS Grades

In the ECTS grading system a student needs at least 40% of points for grade E (satisfactory), whereby it does not correspond to the Serbian grade system in which 55% of points is required for the for grade 6 (satisfactory). The absolute equivalence can obviously not be achieved but it does appear sensible to introduce ECTS in order to facilitate the recognition because of its impact on student mobility.

4. Mobility

Information technologies and mobility contribute to the process of globalization and give opportunities to students to encounter different cultures, to learn foreign languages, to connect with people from all around the world and to gain a sense of belonging to a larger community than the one they have known before. For students of German studies mobility is also an excellent opportunity to improve their knowledge of the German language and culture.

Although the ECTS should facilitate the mobility of students, it sometimes appears to be an impediment. In fact, the ECTS points do fulfil their purpose and make the grade recognition easier, but, for example, students in Serbia need to acquire a certain number of points per year (48 ECTS points) in order to be financed by the government (“budget students”). If they earn at least 37 ECTS credits, they can enrol in the next year of study, but in the status of “self-financed students”.

For many students in Serbia the financial aspect is of highest relevance and therefore they want to be positive that they will be guaranteed free education. For that reason they sometimes decline a scholarship and a chance to study in Germany for a semester. They miss the opportunity to encounter a different culture, to improve their language skills, to develop their intercultural competences and to profit from that experience in many ways. Therefore it is highly important to create study programmes which have similar courses as partner universities, to facilitate the recognition of grades and to encourage the mobility both of outgoing and incoming students.

The other side of mobility is, in accordance with the proverb “If the mountain won't come to Muhammad (then Muhammad must go to the mountain)”, to bring the institution closer to students through online, distance or e-learning. Nowadays universities offer various courses and entire programmes online, so that students who work or live abroad can attend courses when it suits them. They only have to pay the fee and they gain full access to teaching material and the opportunity to pass tests and exams. Naturally, the faculties of arts, humanities and social sciences are slow in acceptance this tendency, since it is against the true nature of those sciences to bring people apart and to destroy the traditional social interaction. However, this is not an issue for new generations of students. They are entirely mobile and live fully in the age of modern information technology. In this aspect the generation gap between the teaching staff and students is large, with the tendency to increase constantly.

5. Students' Motivation and Employability

Another issue between teaching staff and students is their motivation. Professors cannot always comprehend that students of new generations do not study for the same reason as they once did. Modern students are mostly practical and they want to secure their financial future, to be assured that they will find employment after graduation. In the widely recognized Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety and security belong to basic needs (MASLOW, 1943).

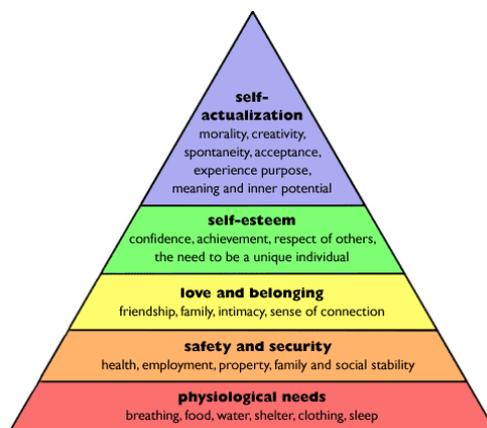


Diagram 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (MASLOW, 1943, 370)

In the world of insecurities in which we live, in a society which has undergone shattering changes, nowadays it is not certain if students will find employment after graduation at all. If they do find employment, the chances that it will be the one they really have wanted are even smaller. It seems quite unrealistic to expect students to strive to attain their self-actualization, as most teachers as matter of fact do, since young people are mostly concerned with the fulfilment of their basic needs. This is particularly an issue for the students of arts and humanities, as well as of social sciences.

Students of German studies mostly work as teachers in primary, secondary or private language schools or at universities. A certain number of graduates find employment as translators. Although translation and interpreting are attractive jobs, not many students can make a living from it. Sometimes they start as translators in the fields of economy, politics and culture, and find a position in a government institution, a German embassy, a German foundation or a firm. Afterwards they acquire new, practical knowledge, develop new skills and German studies are only a springboard for the new profession which has only a few points of contacts with the German language and culture.

Now, the crucial question here is: how can German studies, which traditionally focus on the German language and literature, offer students the knowledge, skills and competences which they do or do not need in the age of globalization? How can the knowledge they gain in linguistics, literary theory, history of the German language and history of German literature be of any importance for them in the age of rapid changes and instability in all spheres of life? How can university teachers who see themselves as keepers of traditional values which have been provided for decades and hundreds of years, adapt themselves to the needs of the modern society and yet not betray their own beliefs and lose their role identity? How can students and teachers free themselves from their prejudices and find a new, common perspective?

6. Innovation and Change

Modern German studies respond to needs of the global world and, consequently, new fields of study and research have arisen recently. As a reaction to the issues of multiculturalism and migration, new disciplines step into the spotlight, like “intercultural German studies” (“Interkulturelle Germanistik”) with its key words “cultural”, “intracultural”, “intercultural” “differences”, “hybrid identity”, “strangeness”, “alterity”, “postcolonialism” (HOFMANN, 2006, 9-60). In this field authors do research on confrontation of German culture not only with other cultures, but with its own culture as well.

“Memory research” offers another perspective on one’s own identity in search of the traces of past in the presence and in research on how memory is formed and preserved. The key words in this field of study are “memory”, “remembrance”, “forgetting”, “collective memory”, “cultural memory”, “social memory” and “memory culture” (ERLL, 2005). The diachronic perspective on tradition, on media and carriers of memory also exposes the relativity of memory and identity as constructions which are not always based on the truth and reality. This encourages tolerance and understanding among cultures.

These innovations do not automatically exclude the traditional subjects and the traditional way of teaching and researching. On the contrary, traditional subjects have to be retained, but the approach should change. Students should perceive the benefit of studying the history of language in gaining insight into language development which brought Germanic languages apart and which produces the basis for their comparison due to the common origin. Learning the history of language can contribute to better understanding of the process of language change and therefore to easier learning of other languages as well.

The history of German literature can help students realize that certain topics are universal and everlasting for Germans and humans in general, but that the perception and expression of those topics has varied with the change of the context. Love, for instance, is a major subject in the Middle Ages (“Minnesang”), in the Rococo and in the Romanticism, and despite certain “topoi” (*locus*

amoenus) it has been expressed in different ways. Students can largely benefit from the change of perspective and the insight in the interdependence of art, culture and society. In that way they could develop tolerance and basics of global thinking.

The teaching and research process should be modernized. In the didactics of the German language, literature and culture, new approaches have been introduced in accordance with the student-centred concept, with the activation of both cognitive and affective sides of the personality, with an emphasis on problem solving, with an orientation on students' action and production. For scientific purpose new software can be implemented and used to facilitate the research process. However, new media and information technology are not only instruments in research and teaching; they also become objects of research and teaching. In linguistic, literary and cultural research the global tendencies should be retraced and analyzed. Linguistic, literary and cultural approaches to visual art, to audio and audiovisual texts and to the internet respond to modern tendencies in the society and culture.

Projects play a crucial role in the process of innovation and change in the age of globalization. According to the Bologna declaration, universities – particularly in Europe – should regard the mutual exchange of information and documentation, as well as frequent joint projects for the advancement of learning, as essential to the steady progress of knowledge (*Magna Charta Universitatum*, 1988, 3). Projects offer opportunities to exchange knowledge and ideas, to learn and teach outside one's own institution, to compare the results, to follow and create new tendencies in teaching and research, to create a common basis for equivalence and recognition of study programmes and courses. Briefly, projects can give impulse to the overall improvement and development.

7. Competition

Universities cannot afford to remain the same because the competition in the world market affects them as well. Nowadays universities are not as scarce as they used to be. Private and state universities compete for students while the number of students decreases from year to year. For example, young people in Serbia can study German in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Novi Pazar. If they speak Hungarian or Romanian, they can study German in the EU. Students from Bosnia and Herzegovina or from Croatia come to study German in Novi Sad. Frontiers are not barriers any more, students are mobile and they have a choice.

In order to attract the attention of students-to-be, universities have to take care of their public image. A modern university is forced to think of marketing, public relations and its presence in the media. That does not imply only the media like television, radio or papers (in print or online), but social media as well. Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIN are media which students visit frequently and universities can reach a great number of future students online. Nowadays, it almost appears that if a university is not visible on Facebook, it does not exist at all. A good side of social media is the option of gaining feedback ("Like" button), although it can also lead astray in certain situations (cf. PALMQUIST, 2015). The benefits of social media should be exploited, but with measure.

A good image is not enough to attract and keep students. Quality is. In order to enhance the quality of teaching and research, a head of the department or a dean has to be a good manager as well. Beside managing finances and projects, the person in charge has to manage human resources, to select and hire employees who are highly motivated and stress-resilient, who can manage time and conflicts. The manager also has to observe and manage unproductive behaviour like absenteeism or mobbing (cf. SAJFERT, 2006, DESSLER, 2007, VUJIĆ, 2008, MARINKOVIĆ, 2009, BOGIĆEVIĆ MILKIĆ, 2014). In order to accelerate innovation, to increase chances at the market and to improve organization efficiency, the person in charge should also manage knowledge (ĐORĐEVIĆ-BOLJANOVIĆ, 2009, 25). However, not everyone reacts to innovation in the same way. Among employees only a few really support the change, while most of the others struggle against it (SAJFERT, 2008, 29-30). There are many challenges to be faced in that process. Yet, the final goal is to achieve a high quality of products and services, specifically, of teaching and

research. This is the purpose of the process of accreditation, of quality committees, of external and internal evaluations. Taking into account rapid changes, quality assurance is a process of permanent improvement against the inert principle of *status quo*.

8. Conclusion

Universities have to change. Universities have to innovate. If they do not adapt to the needs and demands of the modern society, they will become outdated and marginalized or will disappear from the market. Although universities have to innovate in their content, structure and form, to change the research and teaching approaches and methods, it does not mean that they have to reject their tradition. Several universities have already abandoned the Bologna process (e.g. in Zagreb), so it is not certain if this reform will last. If universities follow only the modern tendencies, they could fall apart after those tendencies lose their current importance.

In order to survive every reform of higher education, universities should preserve their core identity despite innovation and changes they implement. Thus German studies remain focused on the German language and literature, although the (inter)cultural aspect may be modern at the moment. German culture might become a part of the core of German studies or it may lose its current importance. New interests may appear and some of them even remain, but it is crucial that German studies remain open to these new influences and that they do not abandon the old ones immediately. Only time will prove the value of all the tendencies. Meanwhile, universities should compromise between tradition and innovation in order to find the right measure of them both and this is the greatest challenge of all them.

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