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## **The Role of Foundations in German Higher Education**

A Case Study on the Influence of Foundations  
on Teaching at Universities

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## Executive Summary

The need for a change in the status and quality of teaching at German universities has been on the public agenda for several years now and actions have been taken to improve the situation by a number of stakeholders. This thesis examines the role which foundations have played in this process and links its empirical analysis to the existing theoretical framework about the roles which foundations can play in society (Anheier & Daly, 2007). The qualitative analysis is based on an examination of written material as well as twelve interviews conducted with foundation and university representatives as well as policy makers. Its main results are firstly a typology consisting of the three main categories of “Competitions”, “Networking” and “Think Tank” describing current foundation programs aimed at university teaching. Secondly, case studies analyzing the programs *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* and *Lehre*<sup>n</sup> indicate that they both originated from a failure of the state to set up programs regarded necessary for the improvement of university teaching. Thirdly, while foundation programs certainly contributed to putting the issue on the political agenda, a causal connection between the *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* in particular and the subsequent Federal-Länder program *Qualitätspakt Lehre* cannot be clearly established. Lastly, the analysis suggests the addition of a category of “networkers” to the conventional canon of roles which foundations play in society. The thesis concludes by providing policy recommendations aimed at foundation program managers and points out some risks such as a lack of sustainability and evaluation threatening the effectiveness of foundation programs.

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## 1. Introduction

*“Every young man, who feels a mission to be a scholar, needs to realize that the task ahead of him has a double face. He should be qualified not only as a scholar, but also: as a teacher. And both by no means coincide. Someone can be an outstanding scholar and a horribly bad teacher.”*

Max Weber (1995, p.9) <sup>1</sup>

Weber's statement still rings very true in the twentieth century and reflects current discussions about teaching in higher education. It is often lamented in the context of German higher education that good teaching is not as well-regarded and awarded as high-quality research (Hilgert, 2010; Diehn, 2010; Elkana & Klöpper, 2012). Several actors have set out to change this for the benefit of the students as well as the national economy. This thesis will analyze the role which foundations have played in increasing the status and quality of teaching at German universities. The focus on foundations has been chosen for several reasons: firstly, because “our understanding of the role of these institutions is still limited” (Anheier, 2005, p.12), secondly, because they are often regarded as drivers of innovation, and thirdly, because they have carried out a number of programs aimed at improving the status and quality of teaching, which have not been researched in a systematic way.

What is the problem of teaching at German universities? Many commentators criticize its quality and blame this not only on the capability of individual teachers but also on the incentive structure present at universities, making the investment of time and effort into research rather than teaching more attractive for advancing one's career as an academic. In addition, today's rapidly changing environment leading to a diversification of the student body, higher teacher-student ratios, and advances in technology make the development of new teaching methods necessary. Otherwise, low-quality teaching could lead to higher attrition rates and inferior learning outcomes, both of which are detrimental for Germany's status in today's “knowledge-based economy” (OECD, 2006).

In analyzing the role foundations play in this context, this thesis will answer the following research question: How *do* and how *should* foundations promote the status and quality of teaching at universities in Germany? A number of sub-questions will be investigated: How can present programs be categorized? What is the foundations' position within the higher education policy network? What attempts did

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<sup>1</sup> Own translation.

other actors make so far and how are they related to actions undertaken by foundations? And finally, how should foundations act in future projects?

It is important to note that it is by no means the aim of this paper to provide a proper impact evaluation of the programs but rather an exploratory analysis of their nature, scope and influence on other stakeholders. It will not offer any final answers, but rather a synthesis of the state of the art as well as recommendations based on the analysis of existing measures. As a consequence of the kinds of questions it wishes to explore, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach, including a number of interviews with experts working in foundations, university administration and policy-making. The thesis seeks to fruitfully apply approaches borrowed from sociology, higher education studies, economics, and communication studies.

In order to provide a sufficiently deep analysis, this paper will focus on the influence on universities only, rather than also dealing with the programs' impact on teaching at universities of applied sciences (*Fachhochschulen*). While these institutions also participate in the programs and struggle with the issue of good teaching, the problem presents itself in a different way as they are traditionally focusing much more heavily on teaching than universities do.

For the purpose of this study, a foundation will be defined in line with Anheier (2005) and others as a non-profit institution which can be mainly characterized as being "based on the transfer of property [endowment] from a donor to an independent institution whose obligation it is to use such property, and any proceeds derived from it, for a specified purpose or purposes over an often-undetermined period of time". This definition will be outlined in more detail in chapter 5. A university is defined as an ISCED-2011 level 8 institution, which has been awarded the right to grant doctoral degrees. Most aspects of the analysis will apply more to public than private institutions.

The structure of the thesis goes as follows: after providing an overview of the historical development and current situation of the German university system and outlining the key characteristics of the German university teaching profession, the thesis will go on to analyze the main personal, organizational and systemic obstacles to better university teaching. These introductory chapters are important to understand the institutional framework and the background conditions which need to be kept in mind. The thesis will then move on to an overview of the German foundation sector and its main characteristics and roles before turning to a discussion of the methodology used in this paper. Subsequently, the thesis will provide an overview of foundation activities in the field of university teaching before

conducting two case studies of the programs *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* and *Lehre*<sup>n</sup>. Subsequently, a typology of these activities is presented. The following section will then explore the role of foundations in the higher policy network and its influence on the emergence of the public program *Qualitätspakt Lehre* more specifically. Using this information, the thesis will discuss the applicability of theories aimed at describing the roles foundations play in society in the field of university teaching. Finally, policy recommendations for future foundation projects will be given, also outlining risks which have emerged from the foregoing analysis.

## **2. The German university system**

This section will provide an overview of the development, structure, and key characteristics of the German higher education sector. There exists an enormous number of studies on the development and current situation of the German system of higher education and its universities (e.g. Simon, 2010; Kehm 2008; Weingart & Taubert, 2006).

After a history dating back to the medieval and early modern foundations of universities, the origins of the modern German research university are usually traced back to the founding of the university of Berlin by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1810 (Meyer et al., 2008). Just as Humboldt intended, the principles this university were built on would be influential well beyond its walls and, as I will discuss in more detail in a later chapter, beyond its times (Ash, 1997; Vossler, 1967).

After financial difficulties during the Weimar Republic and ideological capture under the Nazi regime, the university system largely returned to its pre-War structure after World War II (Lengwiler, 2010, p.14f.; Ash, 1997, p.12). In West Germany, the new *Grundgesetz* ("Basic Law") (1949) guaranteed the control of education policy and the oversight of institutions of higher education to the *Länder*, with the federal state mainly holding competencies in questions of personnel or payment. In order to avoid a politicization of the higher education system, the *Grundgesetz* also guaranteed the freedom of the sciences and thereby strengthened the autonomy of universities.

Research policy was also decentralized at first. The *Max-Planck-Gesellschaft* (founded in 1946) and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (founded in 1954) started out by being financed only by the *Länder*, but over a long process the role of the federal government grew (Lengwiler, 2010; Grupp & Breitschopf, 2006). In 1955, the *Bundesministerium für Atomfragen*, the predecessor of today's

*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)*, was founded and was promoting particularly large scientific projects (Weingart & Tauber, 2006).

It was only in the late 1960s that real change took place. This was the time of the student revolts of the “68s”. The protesters mainly aimed at changing the inner structure of universities and improve their study conditions, decrying the failure to fully de-Nazify the teaching body after WWII. The wish for an increased competitiveness in comparison with other national research systems and the creation of the OECD in 1961 were also crucial drivers of the reforms marking the beginning of what is often called the “age of mass higher education” (Lengwiler 2010, pp. 17f.; Grupp & Breitschopf, 2006, p.178).

These reforms encompassed a substantial increase of federal expenses directed towards the provision of larger and more modern infrastructure at German universities. They were made possible by a change in the *Grundgesetz* in 1969 shifting some responsibility from the *Länder* to the federal level. The latter now had what was called the competency of *Hochschulrahmengesetzgebung*, meaning that it could issue general guidelines regulating the higher education system with the states still retaining large freedoms in acting on them (Weingart & Tauber, 2006, p.16; Stucke 2006). Between 1961 and 1971, the number of academic personnel employed at German universities tripled (Turner, 2013, p.28).

The expansion of higher education came to an abrupt halt after the oil crisis in 1973, forcing the federal government to keep its expenses on research and education stagnating till the end of the 1980s (Lengwiler, 2010, p.22; Turner, 2013, p.28).

After reunification, the East-German institutions had to adapt to their Western counterparts (Krull & Sommer, 2006, pp.200f.). From the late 1980s up to today, the German university system can be characterized by a new sense of crisis mainly due to the discrepancy between available financial resources and the existing pressure to educate more students than ever before (Ash, 1997, p.7). At the same time, universities were pushed to improve their research performance as they “were conceived as central elements of “national innovation systems”, providing the highly qualified manpower and the knowledge on which a science-based economy and society rest” (Enders, 2001, p.16).

Major reforms and government initiatives such as the European Bologna Reform, a reform of academic salary structures, the introduction of “junior professorships” (*Juniorprofessuren*) and the German “Initiative for Excellence” (*Exzellenzinitiative*) were brought on their ways (see Jansen, 2010; Turner, 2013; Burtscheidt, 2010). In

parallel, universities embraced new tools such as evaluation, benchmarking, marketing and new forms of management in order to be competitive in the national and international markets of higher education now being made seemingly more transparent by the increased use of rankings (Simon, Knie & Hornborstel, 2010, p.9). As will be shown, many of these changes had important ramifications for teaching at German universities.

Another recent change has been the increase in competencies of the *Länder* and the loss of influence by the federal government caused by the “federalism reform” of 2006 (Seckelmann, 2010). The German system of higher education has been marked by federalism over most of the past century (apart from under the rule of National Socialism and in the GDR) as education and research fell (and still largely fall) under the powers of the *Länder* (“Kulturhoheit”) (Lengwiler, 2010, p.14; Weingart & Tauber, 2006, p.15). The specific balance of power between the latter and the federal government has been shifting regularly, however, with their relationship being that of rivals in many cases (Lengwiler, 2010, p.14). Even if the *Länder* insist strongly on their prerogatives with respect to education and research, they grudgingly had to realize their need for financial support of the federal government. One of the results of this realization was the “Hochschulpakt” aimed at providing the financial resources necessary for educating a larger number of students (Burkhardt, König & Mordt, 2008, pp.66f.).

While this thesis will focus on universities, they do not represent the only institutions of higher education in Germany. They are complemented by *Fachhochschulen* (“universities of applied sciences”), which provide a more application-oriented training and are more widely accessible (Knie & Simon, 2010). Quantitatively, there are currently (2013/14) 212 *Fachhochschulen* and 106 universities in Germany, with around 850,000 students studying at the former and around 1.6 million at the latter (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014a). Student numbers have grown steadily during the last decades. The last years have seen a particularly dramatic growth due to political efforts to raise the proportion of graduates in line with OECD-standards as well as “double cohorts” due to changes in the number of school years and the abolition of the *Wehrpflicht* (compulsory military service).

Apart from its federalist principle, the German system of higher education is marked by a complex interplay of a large variety of actors being involved in policy networks (Speth, 2010; Knie & Simon, 2010; Stucke, 2010; Onestini, 2002).

On the public side, the 16 *Länder* ministries responsible for education are associated in the *Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK)*, serving to provide a minimum of policy

coordination and an exchange of ideas. The *BMBF* is the main federal institution responsible for the higher education system, with other federal ministries also providing resources for research centers linked to their respective portfolios. In the legislative branch, the federal and state parliaments have committees responsible for education and research policy. When agreeing on cooperative programs between the federal and the *Länder* level, representatives of both meet in the *Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskommission* (GWK).

These *Länder* institutions are provided with policy advice by a number of intermediary actors both in the public and private realm. The *Wissenschaftsrat* (German Council of Science and Humanities) (*WR*) was founded in 1957 as a coordinating and advisory institution of higher education policy and has since been influential by preparing future policies and making recommendations (Knie & Simon, 2010, p.29). The *WR* comprises representatives of the federal and *Länder* level as well as representatives of higher education institutions and the economy. The *Deutsche Zentrum für Hochschul- und Wissenschaftsforschung* serves to provide politics with adequate data and studies on the state and future of the German system of higher education and is funded by the federal and the *Länder* governments.

Further actors of course include the universities themselves, the *FHs* and the extra-university research centers. The leaders of most institutions of higher education are assembled in the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (HRK). “Academic staff are represented by public sector trade unions” as well as the *Deutsche Hochschulverband* (DHV) but those do not play a very significant role (Enders, 2001, p.9; Schimank, 2001, p.118).

Apart from these institutions, there exists a range of private actors seeking to influence public policy in the field. Among these, foundations such as the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* and particularly its affiliated think tank, the *Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung* (CHE) as well as the *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft* do stand out in public discussions (see Speth, 2010).

As Knie and Simon (2010, p.29) argue, German higher education is “marked by a tight interplay and high level of interconnection between a range of actors of the state and society, in which single, steering subjects can hardly be singled out”. Moreover, it is characterized by a marked competition between the *Länder* and the federal level, with their respective competencies changing slightly but with the *Länder* always retaining the upper hand and control over higher education policy (see Schimank & Lange, 2006; Stucke, 2010). As a consequence of this potentially difficult set-up,

there exist a number of organizations such as the *WR* in which actors of the state and federal level can negotiate solutions (Edler & Kuhlmann, 2008).

### 3. Teaching at German universities

There is large and growing literature on teaching in universities (e.g. Forest, 1998, 2001; Enders, 2001; Schimank, 1995, 2001; Teichler & Höhle, 2013).

Two principles particularly characterize the work of a German university teacher: academic freedom and the unity of research and teaching. Academic freedom is guaranteed by article 5, paragraph 3 of the *GG* and is strengthened by the fact that once a candidate becomes a professor, he or she mostly attains the status of a civil servant. This means that a German professor has traditionally been very free in determining his topics of research and his division of time (Vossler, 1967; Schimank, 2001). This seems to change now slowly due to a diminishing role of the traditional “academic self-government” predominant in a context of a “strong academic oligarchy” (Enders, 2001, p.9) and a shift towards new structures of university governance for example involving *Ziel- und Leistungsvereinbarungen* (“Goal- and performance-agreements”) and *Hochschulräte* (“university councils”), acting similarly to boards of private companies (Enders, 2001, p.2). Equally, the teachers face more or less subtle pressures guiding their behavior and particularly the priority they ascribe to different tasks as I will discuss shortly.

The second guiding principle for a teacher at a German university is Humboldt’s “unity of research and teaching” (Ash, 1999; Teichler & Höhle, 2013). It describes a form of academic activity in which teachers and students work alongside each other and aim to undertake research in the free pursuit of *Bildung* rather than directly applicable training (Vossler, 1967, pp. 41f.). Today, many commentators argue that this traditional unity is being eroded, while others maintain that it had already ceased to be an accurate description of German university life by around 1900 (Ash, 1997, p.10). A reputed lack of “employability” of graduates is increasingly gaining in importance in criticisms of the current state of university teaching (Raber, 2012; Enders, 2001; Brennan, 2008). Furthermore, the traditional close cooperation between teachers and students is largely rendered impossible due to the growing number of students (Enders, 2001, p.16; Kreckel, 2008).

What tasks do German university teachers fulfill? Besides teaching an average eight hours of seminars or lectures per week, they are supposed to conduct research, write grant applications, possibly take on administrative tasks linked to research

projects they lead and participate in academic self-government by serving in administrative roles for a period of time (Burkhardt et al., 2008, p.69; Schimank, 2001, pp.118f.). As this list of duties already indicates, it is almost impossible to fulfill all of them without neglecting one or the other even if “German professors on average work 60 hours a week” (Schimank, 2001, p.131). In view of the incentives they face (see chapter 4), many of today’s professors seem to tend towards concentrating their energies on research rather than their role as teachers.

Partly as a consequence of this fact, criticism is growing and there has been a public discussion on the quality of university teaching for some years (e.g. Raber, 2012; Schimank, 1995). What further exacerbates the problem is the growing number of students with no proportionate growth in the number of teachers, resulting in high student-staff-ratio, which makes particularly interactive modes of teaching difficult to execute and leads to frustration among professors (Schimank, 2001, p.128). In its influential paper titled “Empfehlungen zur Qualitätsverbesserung in Lehre und Studium” the *WR* (2008) has demanded additional 1.104 billion € in basic financing provided by the government for institutions of higher education to improve the quality of teaching by measures such as an increase in the number of professors (Taffertshofer, 2008).

Furthermore, there have even been calls from influential trade associations for a better quality of teaching to improve the skill-set of graduates. During the 1990s, a number of *Länder* introduced programs aimed at improving teaching (Schimank, 1995, p.89). Other actors have also sought to improve the status and quality of university teaching. Perhaps the most prominent programs are the *Qualitätspakt Lehre* of the *BMBF* and around 50 awards for excellence in teaching granted mostly by foundations, *Länder* and universities themselves (Stifterverband, n.d.e). These measures will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

Further proposals include a “functional differentiation of roles” involving the introduction of new categories of personnel such as “Lecturers” existing in most other university systems whose concentration would lie on teaching rather than on research, which has been put forward by the *Länder* and the *Wissenschaftsrat* but has been criticized by other actors such as a number of scientific societies. The *HRK* proposed a doubling of all professorships, the creation of a new category of personnel focusing on teaching as well as a flexibilization of the personnel structure (WR, 2007; Kreckel, 2008; Burkhardt, König & Mordt 2008, pp.68f.; Heidel, 2008).

#### **4. Personal, organizational and systemic obstacles to better university teaching**

Before turning to an analysis of the role of foundations in German society with regard to the status and quality of teaching, I will point to some personal, organizational and systemic factors causing the perceived crisis of university teaching and representing obstacles to quick changes.

First of all, it is important to take a look at the personal factors influencing a professor's investment in and preference for teaching. The profession of a university teacher is generally described as marked by a high degree of intrinsic motivation, meaning that professors are not mainly motivated by extrinsic factors such as a high salary but rather like their job due to their passion for the advancement of research or the pleasure they take in teaching. Some argue that this motivation has started to erode due to increasing external pressures and the resulting loss of their traditional autonomy which professors face. Furthermore, the increase in administrative tasks arguably also leads to a diminishing motivation (Wilkesmann & Schmid, 2011).

Various studies have been conducted aimed at learning more about the relative preference university teachers ascribe to research and teaching (e.g. Enders, 2001; Teichler & Höhle, 2013). There are large differences in the relative amounts of time dedicated to research or teaching when looking at different countries. In their European study Kwiek and Antonowicz (2013, p.38) find that Swiss, Austrian and German academics spent "substantial amounts of time on research, when classes are in session", while their Portuguese, Dutch and Irish colleagues rather focus on teaching during these times. In the same study, 73 % of European academics stated that they preferred research over teaching or leaned more towards research. In Germany, 75 % shared this view (Höhle & Teichler, 2013, pp.89f.).

One of the factors influencing this preference is the fact that "research activities are carried out and evaluated within a "cosmopolitan" context that extends far beyond the particular university", whereas "teaching takes place in this "local" context" (Schimank, 2001, p.128; Fallon, 2012). This reputational aspect is also linked to an assumption which largely prevailed in recent decades. Namely, those putting much effort into their teaching have been suspected to be only second-class researchers (Raber, 2012, p.53).

Moreover, an increased engagement in teaching can lead to an increased work load and even less time for research as popular teachers tend to draw more students into their seminars and often receive more requests for thesis supervisions.

There are further psychological as well as sociological factors influencing the university teachers' readiness to adopt new methods in teaching. Raber (2012, pp. 55f.) explains the resistance against the adoption of innovative teaching methods firstly by the general human characteristic of being skeptical toward new approaches. Secondly, she points to the sociological transmission of a "teaching habitus" at universities. It denotes the -mostly unconscious- adoption of teaching styles one has encountered during one's own studies. Coupled with a lack of pedagogical training, this leads to a reproduction of teaching practices from one teachers' generation to the next. To counter these tendencies, training programs that stimulate thinking about teaching methods and present new approaches are important.

Mainly as a result of systemic and organizational factors which will be examined below, many teachers feel that putting more effort into teaching does not "pay off" as excellence in research is rewarded in a much larger degree in terms of both prestige and financial resources.

A consequential organizational factor is the lack of any specific teaching qualification required for taking up a professorship. It is just assumed that a good researcher who delivered an academically pleasing trial lecture will be able to teach his students without having undergone any training or testing. When making decisions about potential candidates for professorships, the university administration overwhelmingly considers the candidates' track-record in research and their ability to raise third-party funds without much attention being paid to any indication of their teaching abilities (Höhle & Teichler, 2013, p.92). This in turn again leads to the current state in which the incentives faced by candidates lead them to concentrate their energies much more on their research activities than on teaching. In recent year, the situation has started to change slightly and teaching quality features more prominently than in the past in recruitment processes, albeit still to a lesser degree than some observers would wish (Raber, 2012, p.53; Schimank, 2001, p.123).

A more systemic factor, which had a large influence on the decision-making by universities is the *Exzellenzinitiative* in conjunction with a general trend toward a reduction of direct public promotion of research in favor of a proportional growth of third party funds (Schimank, 1995, p. 147) as well as the increasing importance ascribed to rankings (Münch, 2007,2011; Enders, 2001; Hinze, 2010).

The *Exzellenzinitiative*, which began in 2005 and will run until 2017 elected "elite universities" (although this term had never been used in official documents) in a competitive process and granted them 2.7 billion € in three lines of funding aimed at

promoting the research of a specific topic, the training of PhD students and creation of institutional strategies, respectively (BMBF, n.d.b). The focus of these grants was clearly the quality of research rather than any consideration of the quality of teaching at the respective institutions. On the contrary, it is sometimes criticized that the best professors at these universities have in many cases subsequently been awarded the “privilege” to focus on their research activities and many of their teaching requirements have been fulfilled by replacement professors (Kreckel, 2008).

An important further consequence of the *Exzellenzinitiative* as well as other competitive research grants from public as well as third parties has been the increasing striving for “excellence” and an “elite” status among German universities (Kreckel, 2008; Turner, 2013, p.66). This in turn put further pressure on university professors to exhibit a good research record, publish widely and obtain research grants to further the status of their institution in terms of general reputation and their position in university rankings such as the CHE-Ranking or the Times Higher Education World Ranking (Enders, 2001, pp.18f.; Drennan et al., 2013).

In order to induce their teaching personnel to improve their teaching performance, some universities have introduced not only student evaluations of seminars or lectures but also include teaching as an aspect in determining the professors’ pay in the context of a new salary system which allows for a proportion of the salary to be performance-based. The way to evaluate their performance still remains quite opaque, however, with the process being much less routinized than it is the case in other countries such as the UK (Schimank, 2001, p.130; Becker, 2012).

The *Länder* governments aim to incentivize improvements in teaching quality by including it as an element in their *Ziel- und Leistungsvereinbarungen* with the universities in the context of governance reforms involving increased institutional autonomy (Enders, 2001, p.7). As Christensen (2010) has argued, these reforms can be characterized as ambiguous as they seem to enhance autonomy on the one hand, but diminish it on the other using elements of new public management (Bogumil et al., 2013).

In sum, the incentive structure present at universities as well as the wider university system as a whole leads to a widespread tendency among university teachers to favor research over teaching and thus represents a major obstacle to an improvement in the quality of teaching. Additionally, the existence of sometimes very high student-staff ratios renders individualized learning impractical (Münch, 2011, p.49). In contrast to the majority of commentators, Schimank (1995, p. 16) argues, however, that research activities rather than teaching are crowded out due to the

increase in student numbers and the still hallowed unity of teaching and research discussed above.

## **5. Situation, development and role of the foundation sector in Germany**

Having gained an overview of the parameters and problems of university teaching in Germany, the paper will turn to the role foundations can play in improving the status and quality of teaching. First of all, the situation and development of the German foundation sector in general will be outlined in this chapter. Importantly, this section will also discuss the literature on the roles foundations can fulfill in relation to the state. This theoretical framework will then later be applied to the specific foundation programs.

The German Civil Code (§§80-88) defines foundations as non-member-based “legal entities based on endowment”. Albeit foundations can take various legal forms, the majority of German foundations are civil law foundations (Anheier & Seibel, 2001, p.129). For the purpose of this paper, it makes sense to adopt the structural-operational definition of non-profit organizations (to which foundations belong) by Salamon & Anheier (1997). According to them, nonprofit organizations are non-membership-based, private, self-governing, nonprofit-distributing entities which serve a public purpose.

Importantly, while a foundation is generally defined as an organization “based on the transfer of property [endowment] from a donor to an independent institution whose obligation it is to use such property, and any proceeds derived from it, for a specified purpose or purposes over an often-undetermined period of time” (Anheier, 2005). I will follow Anheier and Leat (2006, p.16) and Strachwitz (1999) by also including organizations without a “permanent endowment” but rather “deriv[ing] their income from a regular covenant”, “shares in business firms” or even from annually raised donations. Nevertheless, these organizations “behave in many important respects much like endowed foundations” (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.16) and are “generally regarded as parts of the foundation community” (Strachwitz, 1999, p.221). Legally, such institutions can take a number of forms apart from that of a foundation in law. They could for example be incorporated as associations or limited companies for the public benefit (gGmbH) (Strachwitz, 1999).

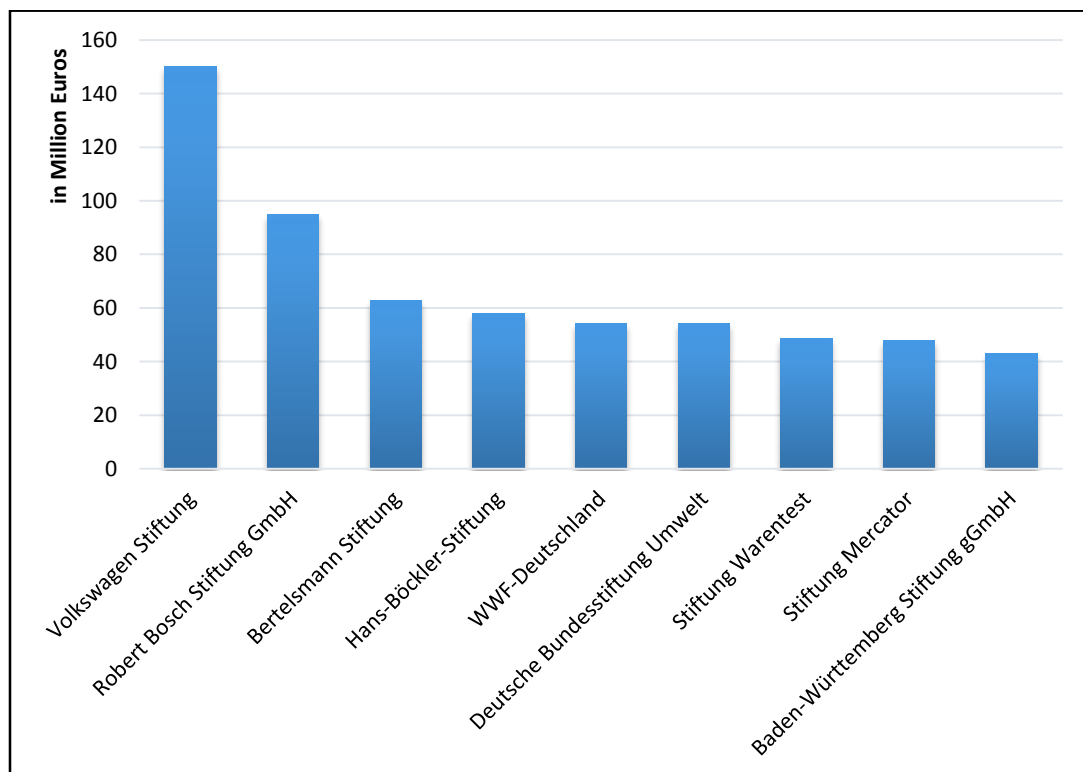
Operationally, the distinction between grant-making (financing projects of third parties) and operating (carrying out own projects) foundations can be made, with

many foundations combining both elements in a hybrid form (Timmer, 2005, p.104; Anheier & Seibel, 2001, pp.16,129).

Historically, many foundations were church-related and provided charity to the poor. Factors such as “secularization” as well as the “development of a state-centred welfare system” and “two periods of hyperinflation (1923 and the late 1940s)” led to the destruction of many older German foundations. As a consequence, “the great majority of foundations existing today were created after the Second World War” (Anheier & Seibel, 2001, p.15).

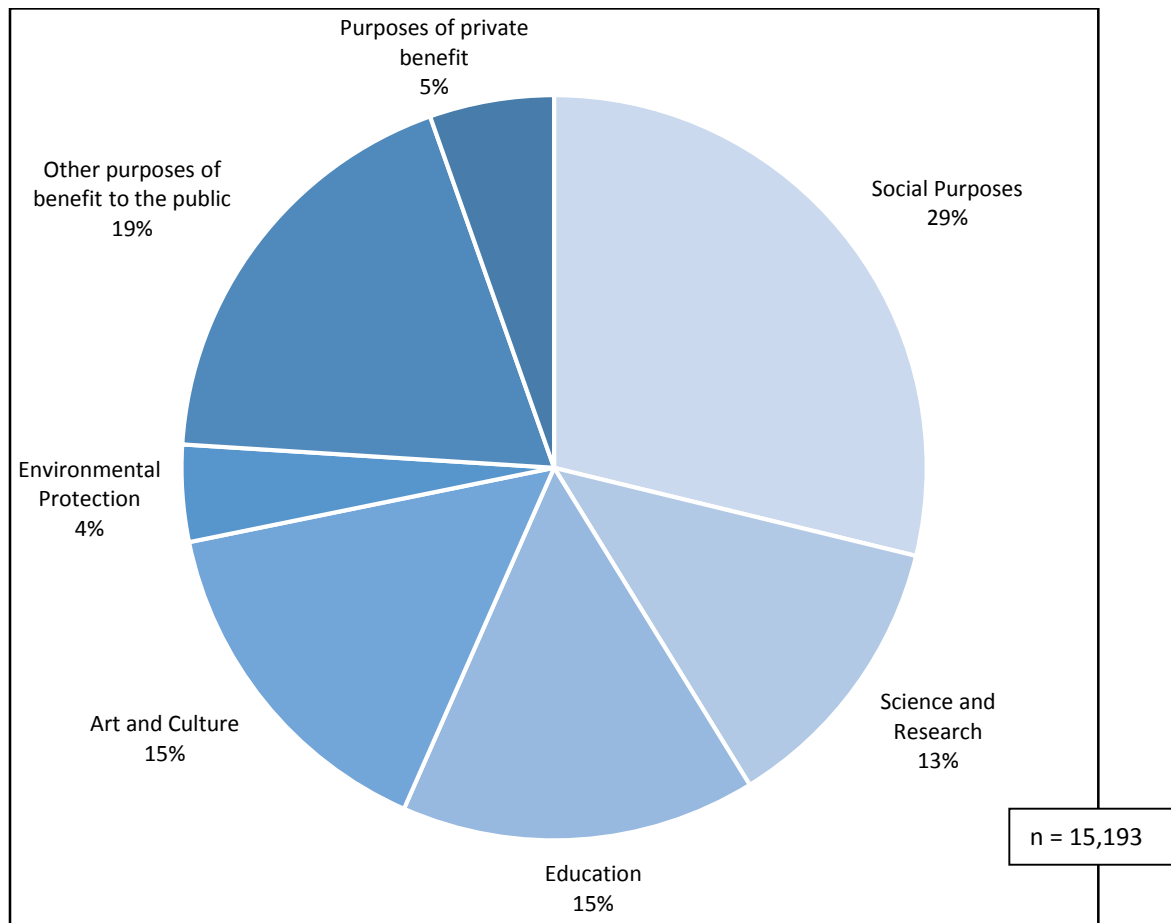
In 2013 there were around 20,100 foundations in Germany according to the *Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen* (2013). Anheier (2005, p. 315) classifies Germany as a country with a medium to large foundation sector in international comparison. In general, the foundations’ “financial weight” is “highly concentrated” on “a relatively small number of foundations” (Anheier & Seibel, 2001, p.131). Approximately 12 per cent of foundations were involved in matters of science and research (see Fig.2).

**Figure 1: The biggest foundations under private law according to annual expenditure (in 2011)**



Source: Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, own graph.

**Figure 2: Distribution of main fields of purpose of foundations  
(as of February 2014)**



Source: Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, own graph.

German foundations have recently gained in prominence in public discussions and have drawn an increasing interest in the academic field (e.g. Anheier & Seibel, 2001; Strachwitz, 2010; Adloff, 2010; Anheier & Toepler, 1999; Anheier & Leat 2006, 2013). This can largely be ascribed to the impressive development the number of foundations has taken since the early 1980s, which has been called a “renaissance” (Anheier & Seibel, 2001; Timmer, 2005, pp.18f.). While in 1990, 181 foundations have been founded, 638 have been founded in 2013 (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen, 2013). The reasons for this development include “prolonged economic prosperity” and “more favorable legislation” (Anheier, 2005, p.50). While foundations have figured prominently in matters of social change and the promotion of culture in the U.S. context, German foundations arguably play a smaller role in German society (Anheier & Toepler, 1999). Recent development indicate, however, that this might change in the future (Anheier and Seibel, 2001; Meffert, 2005).

Foundations are said to fulfill a number of specific roles in society as actors of civil society being positioned between the state and the market, somehow having “a foot in all” sectors (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.10). As nonprofit organizations more generally, they are often “seen as private institutions with a common, public purpose” (Anheier & Seibel, 2001, p.9). They can be regarded as fulfilling the following set of roles or functions according to Anheier & Daly (2007), Prewitt (1999) and Anheier and Leat (2006):

- **Innovation:** As a consequence of their independence from electoral demands, financial interests or any external stakeholders, foundations find themselves in a unique position to be “risk-taking funders” of innovative projects as they are free to test new ideas and fail (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.3).
- **Promoting Change:** Due to their independence they are in a good position to take up issues which are avoided by other actors and promote social, policy or practice change. This may for example involve “shaping public opinion” (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.34) or “fostering recognition of new needs” (Anheier, 2005, p.319). Both with respect to this role and the role of innovation, foundations can demonstrate to other actors “the feasibility of new ways of working” (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.33).
- **Complementarity:** According to the theory of nonprofit organizations by Weisbrod (1988) and Douglas (1987), foundations sometimes “step in to compensate for governmental undersupply” of public goods “in fields where demand preferences are heterogeneous” and the public budget is constrained (Anheier, 2005, pp.283,318). According to this view, foundations work in complementarity with government (Salamon, 1995).
- **Substitution:** Albeit this arguably should not be their role, some foundations might run the risk of substituting services “otherwise or previously supplied by the state” and “become providers of public and quasi-public goods” (Anheier, 2005, p.319). In most cases, this is no viable option as foundations lack the resources to fulfill these needs and should stick to doing what they can do better than both government and private business.
- **Redistribution:** moving resources from wealthier segments of the population to those less well-off.

- **Pluralism:** “Foundations promote diversity and differentiation in thought, approaches and practice [...] looking for causes and solutions to a variety of problems and issues” (Anheier, 2005, p.175).
- **Preservation of Traditions and Cultures:** in contrast to some of the other roles, foundations can sometimes function as conservative actors who “oppose change, preserving past lessons and achievements that are likely to be swamped by larger social, cultural, and economic forces” (Anheier, 2005, p.319).

It will be one of the topics of analysis in the second part of this thesis to examine how we can classify the actions foundations undertake with regard to university teaching in terms of the roles outlined above.

## **6. Foundations and their role in society: The case of programs aimed at the improvement of university teaching**

### **6.1 Methodological approach**

This thesis adopts a qualitative research design in firstly providing an overview of current foundation programs before moving on to two more in-depth case studies of specific programs. The major character of the study will be exploratory as it seeks to learn more about the extent, characteristics and dynamics of foundation activities in the area under study but it will also seek to examine in how far the roles generally ascribed to foundations apply to the programs conducted by them in the context of university teaching. The decision of employing a qualitative approach has been made on the basis of the nature of the topic under study. It enables the author to “integrate multiple perspectives, describe processes, understand events and develop detailed descriptions” (Cascione, 2003, p.133; see Yin, 2014).

I first gained an overview of foundation programs related to university teaching before deciding on the most suitable cases for more detailed analyses. The cases were chosen according to several criteria: (I) They should be diverse in their approaches, (II) at the same time, they should be typical for a category of programs promoting better teaching at universities, (III) they should have run long enough to draw some first conclusions about their effects and (IV) enough material and interview partners should be accessible to study them (see Gerring, 2012). As a

consequence of these considerations, I decided to focus on the *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* and *Lehre*".

These case studies do not and cannot claim to be completely representative of the population as a whole. In contrast to random sampling, there is a risk of sampling bias and "no statistical estimation procedures are of assistance in making a case for the representativeness and generalizability" of the findings (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.52). Nevertheless, the presented programs provide a good picture of the programs related to teaching as a whole as I was able to secure interviews with representatives of seven out of eight major foundations active in this field.

The analysis is based upon twelve expert interviews which have been conducted with foundation employees, members of university management and policy makers (federal and *Länder*), an analysis of relevant material published by foundations and government, press articles as well as some unpublished background material kindly provided by the Stifterverband. The interviews took place in February and March 2014, were mostly conducted face-to-face and lasted between 20 and 120 minutes, with most of them lasting around one hour. They have been recorded and subsequently transcribed and coded using a coding software in order to facilitate analysis. This analysis aimed to explore patterns and ideas that were emerging in a number of interviews. As some interviewees have wished to remain anonymous, their names will not be mentioned in the text. These persons will be called "foundation representative 1" etc. depending on their professional role.

The interviews were of the semi-structured kind due to the exploratory nature of the study. Thus, there existed a framework of similar open-ended questions for all interviewees of one institutional category which was adapted spontaneously during the interviews when new interesting aspects arose. Thanks to the length of most of the interviews, there was ample space to explore issues beyond simple factual details. The questions were further refined after the initial interviews had been conducted.

Of course, there are a number of limitations of the applied method besides the potentially limited representativeness of the findings already mentioned. As with all qualitative research, there is a risk of the researcher "imposing [her] own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meanings they attach to their words and actions" (Maxwell, 1996, pp.89f.). Thus, it is crucial to remain as open as possible towards discrepant data and alternative ways to interpret the information at hand. A second risk is reactivity, denoting "the influence of the researcher on the setting", which cannot be eliminated (Cascione, 2003,

p.144). It can be mitigated to an extent, however, by being aware of the problem and trying to ask questions in the least guided way possible. Lastly, the sample of interview partners is non-random as they are mainly actors which are particularly engaged in the field of university teaching. When conducting more extensive research, it might be useful to specifically target some actors not interested in this topic to better understand their reasons and perhaps be able to come up with ways in which they might be addressed more effectively by foundation programs.

## **6.2 Literature review**

The existing literature on my particular topic area is relatively thin. Speth (2010) offers a good, albeit quite brief, overview of the general roles which foundations and think tanks play in the context of German higher education. He presents the main foundations active in this field and argues that it is their main aim to promote the further development of the German institutions of higher education as well as the research sector more generally. More specifically, he points to the crucial function of foundations as agenda-setters with the CHE and the Stifterverband as main examples. The concept of agenda-setting denotes the ability of an organization to influence the salience of certain topics on someone's agenda (Maurer, 2010; Dearing, 1996). In the context of this study, it denotes the foundations' ability to place on the agenda the awareness for topics such as "good teaching" or new methods of teaching in universities in public discussions, with policy makers and the universities themselves. Speth argues that foundations increasingly move into the think tank business either by supporting one or forming one themselves. While he provides a useful analytical starting point for my analysis, he does not go in much detail and does not mention the topic of teaching at universities.

Similarly, a recent publication by the Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen (2013) treats the cooperation between foundations and higher education but equally does not go into much detail when it comes to teaching specifically. The publication is rather meant as a handbook for practitioners at universities than as an analytical work.

There exist some works on teaching awards in general, which also touch upon the role foundations have played in this context. A volume edited by Tremp (2010) assembles a number of articles which analyze teaching awards, their mechanism and their consequences, followed by a number of country case studies. Jorzik (2010) examines the situation in Germany, focusing on providing an overview of existing awards and their modalities. She concludes that "whilst the prizes have served to

raise the importance attached to teaching, their role in providing greater impetus for a stronger commitment to teaching and its further development has, however, been rather limited” (ibid., p.117).

There seems to be no academic work devoted solely to the foundations’ influence on teaching in particular. If there are any works touching on this subject, they are mostly written by the foundations themselves. Some of these cannot be neutral in their judgment, others mainly analyze the specific characteristics of their programs rather than looking at the “bigger picture” (e.g. Mansbrügge & Wildt, 2010; Krull, Lorentz & Schlüter, 2010). An exception is an article by Jorzik (2011), which includes a chronology of events linked to teaching since the early 1990s. In this context, she also examines the program *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre*, its origins and the reactions it received. Similarly, Mansbrügge (2012) describes the position which *Lehre*<sup>n</sup>, which she manages, takes up in the wider landscape of foundation programs aimed at university teaching.

This thesis represents a valuable extension of the existing works in that it provides a comprehensive picture of foundation activities related to the improvement of the status and quality of university teaching in Germany. Furthermore, it also seeks to place these activities in a broader context both empirically with regard to actions undertaken by the government and theoretically by relating it to existing theories about the roles of foundations in society presented above.

### **6.3. Major foundation programs related to teaching at universities**

The number of foundation activities which are directly aimed at the improvement of the status and quality of teaching at German universities is rather limited. The five major programs are summarized in table 1. Additionally, there are some small-scale projects as well as some foundation programs with a wider focus but also touching on teaching. Most notable among the latter are perhaps the university ratings compiled by the CHE. These can be regarded as influencing the quality of teaching insofar as they seek to find measurements for it and make the results transparent, allowing for some comparison between different universities and faculties.

**Table 1: Overview of major German foundation programs directly targeting teaching**

Program Name	Actors	Duration	Award Size (in €)
Ars Legendi-Preis für exzellente Hochschullehre	Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft and Kultusministerkonferenz	2006-?	50,000
Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre	Stifterverband and Kultusministerkonferenz	2008-2012	up to 1 Mio. (330,000 p.a.)
Bologna - Zukunft der Lehre	Volkswagen Stiftung, Stiftung Mercator	2009-2015	ca. 1 Mio.
Lehre <sup>n</sup>	Stifterverband, Joachim Herz Stiftung, Nordmetall-Stiftung, Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, Volkswagen Stiftung	2010-?	Non-monetary support, depending on program part (1000-10.000)
Fellowship für Innovationen in Hochschullehre	Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, Joachim Herz Stiftung and Stifterverband	2011-?	up to 50,000

Note: question marks denote that the program end date has not yet been finally set

In the following section, the programs will be briefly presented in chronological order, not only outlining their characteristics but also characterizing the foundations organizing them as “every foundation is as unique as its founder” (Timmer, 2005, p.11). In the subsequent chapter, two of them - namely the *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* and *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* - will be analyzed in more depth in case studies.

### **6.3.1 Ars Legendi-Preis für exzellente Hochschullehre (“Ars Legendi-Award for excellent teaching in higher education”)**

**Organizers:** Stifterverband and KMK

#### **Foundation Profile:**

- *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft:*

While the Stifterverband cannot formally be called a foundation as it is organized as an incorporated association (e.V.) and does not have an endowment at its disposal, it can still be classified as a foundation for the

purpose of this thesis according to our definition outlined above. The Stifterverband consists of 3000 members from companies, trade associations, foundations, as well as private persons, who finance it through donations. It is commonly regarded as a “quasi-foundation” and “acts very much like a foundation” as Bettina Jorzik, Program Manager at the Stifterverband notes. It was founded in 1920 after World War I to “avert the danger of a complete collapse of the German scientific research”. Today its mission is to promote projects in (higher) education institutions or research institutes as well as individual talents, act as an operative organization, and also as a think tank analyzing the system of higher education and deriving recommendations. Furthermore, it is a service partner for foundations, managing almost 600 of them. It seeks to critically observe developments and give impulses to the higher education system. In doing so, it particularly aims to “identify the innovators in the system, support them in their reform efforts and help to disseminate their ideas” (Schlüter, 2013, p.34). The Stifterverband is based in Essen and acts on a national scale (Stifterverband, 2014a).

The *Ars Legendi-Preis* is awarded annually to one or two outstanding higher education teachers since 2006 in a public-private partnership. It has a different subject focus every year. The winners receive a personal award of 50,000 €. The motivation behind the award was that there existed some small prizes for good teaching at a number of universities or on a *Land*-level but no national award. The *Ars Legendi-Preis* sought to close this gap by representing a nation-wide award connected with a considerable prize money. Jorzik, described the goal of the award as follows: “We want to elect the stars of teaching and make them known nationally”. Furthermore, the overdue discussion about the reputation and quality of teaching should be advanced. As a longer-term goal, the award seeks to be an equivalent to prestigious awards in research such as the *Leibniz-Preis* and should play a role in appointment decisions (Lisberg-Haag, 2008, p.3).

### 6.3.2 Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre (“Competition Excellent Teaching”)

**Organizers:** Stifterverband and KMK

#### **Foundation Profiles:**

- *Stifterverband:* see above

The public-private partnership *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre* promoted institutional strategies aimed at the appreciation and upgrading of academic teaching by awarding ten grants of up to 1 million € per cohort, which adds up to around 330,000 € per year as the support period spans three years. It ran from 2008 to 2012 (including the application phase) (Stifterverband, n.d.b). More details will follow in the case study below.

### 6.3.3 Bologna – Zukunft der Lehre (“Bologna – the future of teaching”)

**Organizers:** Volkswagen Stiftung and Stiftung Mercator

#### **Foundation Profiles:**

- *Volkswagen Stiftung:*

The Volkswagen Stiftung is the “largest private science funder and one of the major foundations in Germany with a funding volume of up to 100 million € p.a.”. It is based in Hannover and is formally a non-profit foundation under private law. Its endowment currently amounts to about 2.7 billion €. The foundation mainly awards grants to research projects in all fields of research and promotes young talented researchers. Furthermore, it seeks to help “improve training and research structures in Germany”. The foundation “owes its existence to a treaty between the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony, which settled a controversy over the ownership of the Volkswagen factories after the War” and was set up in 1961 (Volkswagen Stiftung, 2014a).

- *Stiftung Mercator:*

The Stiftung Mercator is one of the largest private foundations in Germany. Formally, it is a “GmbH” and is based in Essen. It was founded in 1996 after the Schmidt family, who is a major shareholder of the Metro Group, donated a substantial amount of their assets to the foundation. Its assets amounted

to around 110 million € at the end of 2012 and it “has invested approximately 282 million € in over 800 projects” up to the same date. In comparison to other foundations, the foundation sets itself apart by a strong emphasis on political communication and a clear strategic focus (Stiftung Mercator, 2012). Its three main thematic clusters are “integration”, “climate change” and “arts education”. These are advanced within the centers of “international affairs”, “education” and “science and humanities”. It is within the latter that the foundation promotes the “improvement of the quality of teaching and degree courses at universities” as well as providing “support for the institutional development of universities and the higher education system”. As an operative foundation, it implements own projects but it also provides funding for external projects.” (Stiftung Mercator, n.d.).

*Bologna – Zukunft der Lehre* is a German-wide initiative which promotes exemplary curricula for Bachelor’s degrees, expert groups or centers and events in three funding lines. Nine grants of around 1 million € have been awarded so far with the program running since 2009 and till 2015. The cost of the program has been divided equally between the Volkswagen Stiftung and the Stiftung Mercator.

The first funding line aims to “provide an incentive that encourages universities to develop model bachelor degree courses by restructuring course content”. This funding line has been created mainly in response to the changing conditions at universities as a consequence of the Bologna process.

The second funding line addresses “teams of university teaching experts or competence centres” and seeks to “facilitate the use of existing and future knowledge and experience to improve teaching quality and to pool it in expert centres, specific disciplines or subject groups” run by one or several universities.

The third funding line “provides funding for international conferences, workshops and symposiums”. Additionally, the organizing foundations held four regional conferences in different parts of Germany in May, June and July 2009. These were meant to provide “forums for debate on the improvement of teaching quality and sources of inspiration for future initiatives” (Stiftung Mercator, n.d.b).

#### 6.3.4 Lehre<sup>n</sup> („Teaching<sup>n</sup>“)

**Organizers:** Stifterverband, Joachim Herz Stiftung, Nordmetall-Stiftung, Alfred Toepfer Stiftung and Volkswagen Stiftung

##### **Foundation Profiles:**

- *Stifterverband:* see above
- *Joachim Herz Stiftung:*

The Joachim Herz Stiftung has been founded in 2008 as a non-profit foundation under civil law and is based on a donation of 1.3 billion € by Joachim Herz, a son of the founder of the major coffee company *Tchibo*. In 2012, the foundation spent 6 million € on projects and seeks to raise its annual spending to 10 million € in the future. Its main focus is the promotion of education, science and research in economics and natural sciences with children and young adults as its main target groups. Its operative projects are situated in the three program areas of “personal development”, “natural sciences”, and “economics” and make up the core of its activities. External projects are funded to only a very limited extent. The foundation is based in Hamburg and operates in regional, national and international contexts. (Joachim Herz Stiftung, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c).
- *Nordmetall-Stiftung:*

The Nordmetall-Stiftung has been founded in 2004 by the employers' association NORDMETALL, which is an organization consisting of 250 companies operating in the metal and electrical industries in northern Germany. It is located in Hamburg. The foundation takes the form of a non-profit foundation under civil law and it is endowed with 80 million €. Its operative and grant-making activities are focused on northern Germany. It “encourages work in the fields of education, study, research, culture and social issues”, which it regards as “key areas for securing the future of the industry in Northern Germany (Nordmetall-Stiftung, 2013).
- *Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S. (Toepfer Stiftung):*

The Toepfer Stiftung has been founded in 1931 as „Stiftung F.V.S. zu Hamburg“ by the merchant Alfred Toepfer. It is still based in Hamburg but its aims and profile have changed markedly since its beginnings. Today, its

activities are characterized by the three “guiding principles” of “accompanying biographies”, “risking changes”, and “providing space”. Their overarching principle is that the foundation “should devote its efforts to modern and promising tasks in as pioneering and concentrated a manner as possible”. More concretely, the foundation acts in the whole of Europe in the fields of culture, science, education, environmental protection, and European understanding. It mostly functions as an operative foundation and only provides external grants in exceptional cases. In its program area “risking changes”, the foundation seeks to stimulate and promote innovations in society through different projects and programs. *Lehre*<sup>n</sup> is situated in this section (Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, n.d.c). The Toepfer Stiftung is constituted as a non-profit foundation under civil law and is endowed with around 88 million €. Its annual spending lies at around 2 million € (Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, n.d.a).

- *Volkswagen Stiftung*: see above

*Lehre*<sup>n</sup> is a program organized by a particularly large group of five foundations, which assembled in a *Bündnis für die Lehre* (“alliance for teaching”) for the purpose of the program.

It is the main goal of the program to form a “community of practice”, which it seeks to reach in four program areas:

- the *Jahresprogramm* (“Yearly Program”) for around 32 members of academic management and university teachers comprising five workshops per year to exchange ideas and discuss projects
- the *Kolleg* (“college”) for around 19 university teachers and members of academic management meeting three times per year for 2,5 days to discuss reform programs in the teaching of a particular subject area
- the *Lecturer für Internationale Impulse* (“Lecturer for international impulses”) inviting around eight international university teachers to present their ideas concerning university teaching as well as providing travel stipends to visit other universities
- the *Sommerakademien für neu berufene Professorinnen und Professoren* (“Summer academies for recently tenured professors”) which takes place twice yearly and is a three day academy for 15-20 recently appointed professors.

In contrast to other programs, *Lehre*<sup>n</sup> mainly rests on non-monetary benefits and seeks to include a variety of actors in discussions about the improvement of university teaching (Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, n.d.c). More details on the program will follow in a case study below.

### **6.3.5 Fellowship für Innovationen in der Hochschullehre ("Fellowship for innovations in higher education teaching")**

**Organizers:** Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, Joachim Herz Stiftung and Stifterverband

#### **Foundation Profiles:**

- *Baden-Württemberg Stiftung:*

The Baden-Württemberg Stiftung has been founded in 2000 as a foundation of the *Land* Baden-Württemberg and is located in Stuttgart. Legally, it takes the form of a non-profit GmbH. Its endowment amounts to 2.4 billion €, of which it spend around 50 million € per year on programs and projects. Its main fields of activities include "research", "education", and "society and culture". In terms of its organizational structure, it can be compared to the Volkswagen Stiftung as its board also consists of representatives of the *Länder* parliament and the government of the *Land*. The foundation seeks to stimulate the innovativeness and sense of community of Baden-Württemberg." (Baden-Württemberg Stiftung, 2012).

- *Joachim Herz Stiftung:* see above

- *Stifterverband:* see above

The program *Fellowship für Innovationen in der Hochschullehre* awards 14 to 16 individual grants of up to 50,000 € for developing a project aimed at the innovative development of teaching. It also includes bi-annual Fellow-Meetings as well as a yearly conference.<sup>2</sup> It has started in 2011 and while the first round is ending soon, a second round is in planning (Stifterverband, n.d.c).

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<sup>2</sup> The most recent of which I had the chance to attend on 3 March 2014 in Berlin.

## 6.4 Case Studies

In the following section, the *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre (WEL)* and *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* will be analyzed in more depth as exemplary case studies of foundation activities directly targeting the improvement of the quality of teaching at universities. Special attention will be paid to their origins and goals, their contents, their strengths and weaknesses and the interconnections between different foundations and policy makers. In conjunction, these aspects will inform the later analysis of the role foundations play in relation to the state and society with reference to the generally proposed roles of foundations as well as the policy recommendations made in chapter 7.

### 6.4.1 Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre

As has been outlined above, the *WEL* is a program which was organized in a public-private-partnership between the Stifterverband and the *KMK* with each institution contributing 5 million € to the prize money. Its goal was raising the status of teaching and stressing its importance for Germany as a scientific location by triggering a developmental dynamic in teaching (Sekretariat der KMK, 2008). It aimed to reach this goal by promoting institutional strategies aimed at the appreciation and upgrading of teaching. Universities should devise strategies for the future of teaching and studying at their institution with regard to increasing their attractiveness to prospective students (Stifterverband, 2008).

The *WEL* had an interesting genesis as it emerged out of the idea of an “excellence initiative for teaching”.<sup>3</sup> The Stifterverband first started thinking about setting up a new program concerned with university teaching in 2006 when it also talked about the next “big topic” to tackle on the level of the program department following its focus on “deregulated universities”. In the same year, Edelgard Bulmahn, the Minister of Education and Research of the time, propagated a new competitive program targeting excellent universities which would eventually result in the *Exzellenzinitiative* after long and difficult negotiations. The Stifterverband welcomed this program very much, but was very critical of the fact that the initiative exclusively addressed the aspect of excellent research without considering the aspect of a good teaching quality. In contrast, the Stifterverband, as other actors in the realm of higher education, was of the opinion that an elite university should be marked by excellence in research *and* teaching, taking elite universities in the U.S. as examples.

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<sup>3</sup> The following analysis is strongly based on information provided by Bettina Jorzik.

In 2007 a public appeal with the title “Nehmt die Lehre endlich Ernst!” (“Take teaching seriously!”) was published in *ZEIT Campus* (2007) and signed by prominent members of the higher education community such as Christian Bode, the secretary general of the DAAD and a number of university presidents. The signatories demanded more money for the universities from government, an excellence initiative for teaching and a change in the ethos at universities when it comes to teaching. The newly elected president of the *KMK*, Jürgen Zöllner picked up on the topic and made the need for an “excellence initiative for teaching” one of his major topics (Heidel, 2008, p.19). This suited the *Länder* as they had already expressed the wish to set up such a program should teaching not be included in the *Exzellenzinitiative*. In its plenary session on 14 June 2007 it agreed that a common “Qualitätsoffensive exzellente Lehre” should be prepared (*KMK*, 2007). The *KMK* set up a working group devoted to the improvement of teaching at institutions of higher education and contacted the Stifterverband in the course of its discussions, as the latter had previously offered them to talk about a potential program related to teaching.

The final result of these talks then became the *WEL*. Initially, the Stifterverband had planned to take a number of foundations on board and create a comprehensive Excellence Initiative for Teaching, which did not work out (Stifterverband, 2008). However, the *WEL* took place in close conceptual coordination with *Bologna-Zukunft der Lehre* by the Stiftung Mercator and Volkswagen Foundation. While the latter program has been modelled after the “centers of competency” of the second program line of the *Exzellenzinitiative*, the *WEL* has been modelled after the third program line of university-wide strategies.

The competition was published at the end of 2008 and the winners of the program were selected by two juries of 12 persons each (judging universities and FHs respectively). In the end, four FHs and six universities were chosen as winners of the competition after public presentations at the end of 2009. They received each up to 1 million €. The program was terminated with a final conference with around 300 participants in October 2012 (Stifterverband, 2012; Sekretariat der *KMK*, 2008; Keller, 2009).

After the program ended, the finalists of the *WEL* created the *Charta Guter Lehre* in cooperation with the Fellows of *Fellowships für Innovationen in der Hochschullehre* and members of the juries involved in the two programs (Jorzik, 2013; Diehn, 2010). In this document, they outlined key aspects of “Good Teaching” such as quality management or curriculum design in order to advance public discussions on the topic and provide a framework for universities interested in improving their teaching.

The program seemed to have struck a nerve, which is also illustrated by the fact that 61 % of German public universities applied. In general, the universities clearly welcomed the initiative (Schlüter, 2010; Stifterverband, 2012). Jorzik and others argue that it has been successful in drawing attention to the topic of good teaching as well as making it more acceptable to work on the subject. Before, academics who invested time in improving their teaching were often smiled at and they were said to be those bad at research. Today, a significantly larger number of people occupy themselves with the question of better teaching as several interviewees agreed upon. This impact has also been reached due to the cooperation with the *KMK*, heightening the public attention paid to it. The program came at the right time when other important actors such as the *WR* also worked on the issue. As a consequence, the media echo was also quite large (Bernau, 2012).

Nevertheless, the program was not altogether successful in reaching its goals. While it had been one of the wishes of the organizers of the program that universities would apply with strategic plans on how to change the general “branding” of their universities in terms of teaching, there was barely a university who fulfilled this expectation. Rather than forming a coherent approach to teaching, they created projects aimed at single faculties or university-wide projects with a less clear strategic focus (Stifterverband, 2012). As with other foundation programs, it might further be argued that such endeavors can always only achieve punctual change in restricted areas. For them to have a larger impact, a larger number of actors needs to be motivated to act. This has partly been achieved by the *WEL* by putting the topic on the general agenda among practitioners and politicians.

There has also been some criticism of the program itself (GEW, 2008). It was voiced for example by student representatives such as Imke Buß, member of the board of the Freie Zusammenschluss von StudentInnenschaften. Generally, she welcomed that the topic of teaching was discussed more intensely again thanks to the proposal of an *Excellence Initiative for Teaching*. Nevertheless, she viewed the program itself very critically as such a competition would exacerbate existing differences in teaching quality. Rather than setting up such initiatives, universities in general should receive money for better teaching (Lisberg-Haag, 2008, p.7). The working group for teaching of the *Junge Akademie*, an organization of 50 young academics, also looked at the program with mixed feelings. It published a position paper in April 2008 to contribute to the general debate on teaching at universities in which it pointed to the erosion of the unity of research and teaching, the lack in the reputation of

teaching, and chronic underfinancing of the universities as reasons for existing problems (Landfester, 2008).

Even if planned initially, no proper evaluation of the *WEL* has taken place, which could have aimed at estimating the impact of the program at the winning universities or the higher education system more generally (Stifterverband, 2012).

In summary, the *WEL* seemed to have been very successful in raising public awareness for the topic of university teaching and has led to a mobilization of many universities. It seems to be an example of an exemplary public-private-partnership but the limitations of foundation activities in their reach has also been demonstrated. Equally, the program did not succeed in prompting the universities to think more strategically about the branding of their universities in relation to new approaches to teaching.

#### **6.4.2 Lehre<sup>n</sup>**

The program *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* is a more recent and still ongoing program, which makes an assessment of its effects more difficult. Currently, the third cohort will begin with the “Jahresprogramm”. Nevertheless, it is a valuable topic for a case study as it represents the first trial to focus on the networking aspect of improving university teaching. Furthermore, it is unique in the number of foundations organizing the program in cooperation.

As has been outlined in a previous section, *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* is organized by five foundations and is divided into four program lines with different focal points. They all share an emphasis on exchanging experiences and learning more about different perspectives on the topic of teaching, including not only German university teachers, but also members of academic management, didactics specialists and invited academics from abroad. In comparison to *WEL* and other programs, *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* is not based on any incentivization through prize money but rather through the non-material benefit of offering a forum for discussion for its participants. The latter need to pay for their travel costs, but lodging and program costs are paid for by the foundations.

It is the goal of the program to strengthen engaged actors, collect excellent projects at universities related to teaching, and build a “community of practice” involving a range of different actors. Recent and former participants are all part of the *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* network and continue to exchange ideas even after their formal participating time has ended. The program also integrates further actors by organizing public conferences to stimulate a national debate and consider possibilities of transferring

project ideas from one institution to an other. In choosing its participants, the organizers aim to target particularly engaged actors who are already acting as diffusors within their communities to maximize the impact of the program.

Issues discussed in the framework of the program include ways to promote innovation at universities, the further development of degree programs or the role of university management in reform processes (Lehre<sup>n</sup>, 2014).

Interestingly, its creation is similar to the origins of *WEL* in that it is also linked to a failure of politics to act on proposals with regard to university teaching.<sup>4</sup> In this case, it was the failure of government to create an “academy for teaching” which sparked the creation of the program in its current scale. The summer academies for recently tenured professors, which now represent the fourth program line of Lehre<sup>n</sup>, have been organized by the Toepfer Stiftung since 2006. Initially, *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* only included the *Jahresprogramm* and had been developed by the Toepfer Stiftung in cooperation with the University of Hamburg and the Nordmetall Stiftung. It has been supported in the framework of *Bologna-Zukunft der Lehre*. Mansbrügge created the concept for the project in 2009 when she discovered that existing programs overwhelmingly addressed only professors. She finalized the program after many discussions with relevant stakeholders. During the same time, there had been a public discussion involving all the major actors of higher education policy around the question of an *Akademie für die Lehre* (“Academy for Teaching”) or *Deutsche Lehrgemeinschaft* (“German Teaching Community”), which was propagated mainly by the Stifterverband and the HRK and had been discussed at the federal and Länder level (see e.g. Heidel, 2008; Stifterverband, 2008; Burchard, 2011). Such an institution would be an equivalent of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* and would represent a permanent “voice” of teaching in the German higher education landscape (Jorzik-Interview). The academy would support innovative teaching projects and research on higher education didactics as well as promoting a systematic exchange of experiences among universities (Stifterverband, 2010). However, all discussions failed and the project was largely dismissed from political discussions. At this point, the Toepfer Stiftung decided to expand *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* in response to this failure in cooperation with its *Bündnis für Hochschullehre* consisting of the five foundations organizing *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* since 2012 (Mansbrügge, 2013:111).

So far, the feedback from participants seems very positive (Mansbrügge & Wildt, 2010, p.246). They appreciated the possibility to exchange views and meet many

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<sup>4</sup> The following outline is based on an interview with Antje Mansbrügge, Program Manager of Lehre<sup>n</sup>.

persons from a range of different subject areas. Prof. Sigrid Harendza, first winner of the *Ars Legendi-Preis* and *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* participant, jury member and lecturer, particularly emphasized that the program format helped to improve the communication among different actors within a university by enhancing the understanding of different perspectives. Nevertheless, University Representative 1's feedback on the program was rather mixed. On the one hand, he was not sure whether the large expenditure of time involved was worth the results but on the other hand he found it very interesting to learn about the problems which different operational entities at other institutions encountered. These insights subsequently helped him in his work in university management.

An important positive aspect of *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* is the strength of its "brand". As Mansbrügge points out, the name is widely known in relevant communities, which she ascribes in part to the large number of participating foundations, increasing the potential for creating publicity for the program (see Etscheit, 2012). The foundations were able to create a thoughtful marketing strategy, involving online and offline material and including an image film, which was, however, produced when the Toepfer Stiftung still conducted the program in cooperation with the University of Hamburg and the Nordmetall Stiftung (Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, n.d.b).

When asked about any difficulties in coordinating among such a comparatively large number of foundations, Mansbrügge states to be content with the cooperation as every foundation has a slightly different subject focus, thus complementing each other in the program work. She admits that there are naturally differences in cultures and foundation purposes to be navigated, but the partners aim not to focus on these differences but create positive synergies instead and communicate regularly.

*Lehre<sup>n</sup>* is planned to continue in the framework of the *Bündnis für die Hochschullehre* till 2016 for the time being. Experiences made during the program could then be used for potential follow-up programs. In order to learn more about the effects of the program, the foundations have commissioned researchers at the University St. Gallen to conduct accompanying research, which is financed by the Volkswagen Stiftung. It is, however, no impact evaluation in the strict sense. Even if Mansbrügge is aware of the prominence of the issue of impact evaluation in current debates of the foundation community (Pauly, 2005; Kurz & Kubek, 2013), she is very reluctant to undertake it. She doubts the possibility of proving any causality without spending excessive amounts of time and money.

In sum, *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* certainly "recognized a missing element in the support landscape" and is the program which emphasizes the networking aspect of the promotion of

good teaching at universities most consistently. As with other programs, the question of sustainability remains, however, and the small scale of the program means that it cannot change teaching on a larger scale.

## 6.5 Proposal for a Typology

After having thus outlined the five major programs aiming to improve the status and quality of teaching at German universities, it is time to attempt to devise a typology of existing activities.

**Figure 3: Typology of foundation activities intended to raise the status and quality of teaching**

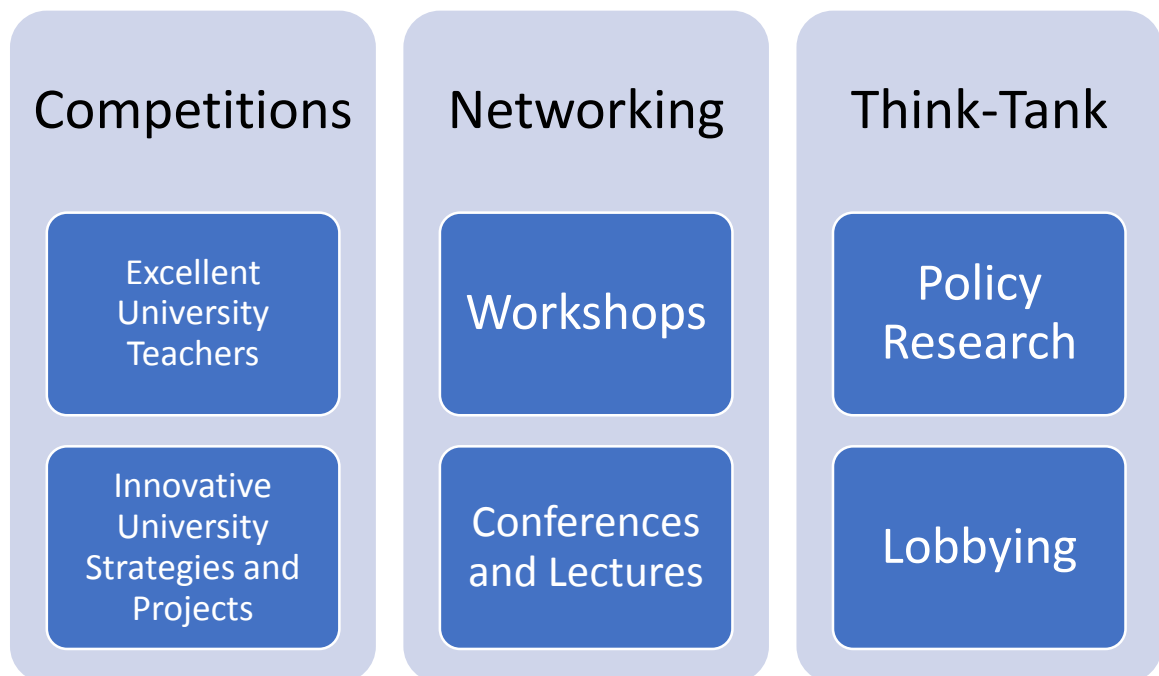


Figure 3 illustrates the typology proposed as a consequence of the analysis of the programs as well as information gathered in expert interviews. It is important to note that one foundation program can consist of elements fitting into different “boxes” of the typology. Each section will now be briefly discussed in turn, linking it to the program activities outlined above.

### 6.5.1 Competitions

Activities under the category “competitions” seek to incentivize a better teaching quality and make outstanding teaching activities more visible by awarding competitive awards or grants to individual teachers (e.g. *Ars Legendi-Preis*) (Schiefner & Eugster, 2010). Depending on the specificities of the program, the

emphasis can lie on rewarding past achievements in good teaching or incentivizing future efforts to improve teaching. Even if most awards include a monetary element, the reputational reward linked with winning in such a competition seems to be the most important motivational factor (Wilkesmann & Schmid, 2010). Many commentators do question, however, whether such awards do not merely reward those who would be active in improving teaching anyway. According to them it seems more than questionable whether hitherto disinterested teachers would regard such prizes as enough of an incentive to try to improve their teaching. Independent of such effects on individual teachers, it seems to be evident, however, that competitions have raised the general awareness about university teachers among a variety of actors both inside and outside of universities by increasing its visibility and putting it on the agenda. When it comes to competitions awarding universities or faculties rather than individual teachers (e.g. *Bologna-Zukunft der Lehre*), the mechanisms are very similar, with the reputational element mainly accruing to the university as a whole and possibly making it more attractive to prospective students. The effect of the financial element is more debatable as a grant can certainly help to kick-start a project aimed at increasing the quality of teaching at the university but often universities also need to free additional resources for the project and most importantly, need to think about future ways of financing it if it proves successful as University Representative 1 noted. Nevertheless, the respective vice-president found participation in such programs worthwhile as winning meant “excellent marketing” for his university.

### 6.5.2 Networking

Activities under the category of “networking” seek to intensify the exchange of experiences and ideas among university practitioners and ultimately build “communities of practice”. They bring together either those individuals or institutions which have been awarded grants or prizes in competitive programs or aim to form new communities consisting of university teachers, members of university administration and didactical specialists. The latter is the main strategy of the program *Lehre*<sup>n</sup>. The activities in this category mostly work with non-monetary incentives such as the possibility to learn about new methods to be applied at one’s own institution. Apart from building connections between actors who are already engaged in the subject of “good teaching”, more large-scale networking activities such as annual conferences, which are for example a part of *Fellowship für Innovationen in der Hochschullehre*, could also aim at addressing actors just starting to play with the idea of investing more time in better teaching. Additionally, such

events can also serve to facilitate networking with other actors such as policy makers.

### **6.5.3 Think Tank**

Activities in the category “think tank” seek to improve the quality of teaching as well as the visibility of the topic on the public agenda by providing more or less academic information in the form of publications or events to spread their ideas (see Speth, 2010; Schlüter, 2013). In doing so, they seek to influence relevant stakeholders and policy makers in particular. Perhaps the most prominent example is the *Charta Guter Lehre* (“Charter of Good Teaching”). In a less transparent way, foundations sometimes also seem to engage in limited forms of what is generally called “lobbying”, addressing policy makers directly and aiming to influence their decisions on topics of higher education policy regarded as relevant. The extent of such activities, as other activities under the “think tank” umbrella, seems quite limited when compared with activities in other categories.

In summary, the activities undertaken by foundations seek to improve the quality and status of university teaching by rewarding outstanding individual and university-level efforts to improve teaching, by aiming to form communities of engaged actors who exchange experiences and serve as diffusors, and lastly by providing information about the characteristics of “good teaching” to inform university members and policy makers alike (Stifterverband, 2010).

## **6.6 Foundations influencing policy? The case of the *Qualitätspakt Lehre***

The following section will return to the question of whether and in how far foundation activities influence policy, taking the case of the *Qualitätspakt Lehre* (QPL) as the most striking candidate for our discussion. There do exist mixed views on the extent in which the program is a direct consequence of previous foundation activities. Examining this question allows us to learn more about the specific role foundations play with regard to the state and can thus enrich our subsequent analysis of the roles foundations play in society with regard to the question of university teaching.

The QPL is a competitive federal-*Länder*-program set up by the BMBF to promote the quality of teaching and improve study conditions more generally at a large number of institutions. So far, 186 institutions have received funding to realize specific projects related to increasing the quality of their teaching. On the whole, the program aims to distribute 2 billion € in grants between 2011 and 2020. This large

sum demonstrates the willingness of politicians to take teaching seriously and makes the implementation of changes on a larger scale possible. (BMBF, n.d.a).

Foundation representatives mostly hold the view that foundations did contribute significantly to putting the topic of better university teaching on the agenda and providing model programs, thus influencing the willingness of policy makers to act. They are, however, skeptical about attributing the *QPL* to their previous activities. It remains unclear whether they do so out of caution or true conviction. Nevertheless, Jorzik does think that it were the “foundations who have made the most recent wake-up call” at the end of 2007 and have given a “decisive impulse” for the *QPL*. Higher education journalist Wiarda (2010) went as far as to say that the *QPL* was a reaction of politics to the *WEL* and *Bologna-Zukunft der Lehre*. Simply looking at the chronology of events, it is obvious that all the activities undertaken by both foundations and the state cluster around the same years. Before the 2000s, there have been relatively few activities aimed at improving teaching with most being focused on individual universities or *Länder*. 2006, when the *Ars Legendi-Preis* has been created, might be regarded as a turning point. From then on, the number of teaching awards increased strongly, the foundation programs presented above were set up and in 2011 the *QPL* started. This does not imply that there must be a causal relationship but it indicates that foundations have contributed to the general discussion about the topic in a significant way and might have increased the pressure on politics to act. Besides foundations and the government, actors such as the media, university representatives, students or institutions such as the *WR* or the *KMK* have been involved in this public debate.

An interviewed policy maker responsible for designing the program in the *BMBF* attributes the creation of the program less to foundations specifically and more to the general public debate, emphasizing the role that the student protests in 2009 (Becker, 2012, p.40) and the recommendations of the *WR* have played for putting pressure on politics to act. Ultimately, the plan to set up a generously financed program to improve the teaching quality at German universities has been included in the coalition agreement of 2009, paving the way for what would become the *QPL*. Subsequently, the *BMBF* entered into negotiations with the *Länder* to decide on a program as it is required according to Art. 91 b (2) of the *Grundgesetz*.

Besides the more fundamental question on the impulse to set up the *QPL*, there have been other connections between foundations and the policymakers designing the *QPL*. Representatives of the *Stifterverband* did discuss practical issues such as the composition of juries, selection criteria, and other procedural questions with

representatives of the *BMBF*, providing advice to policy makers as both parties confirmed.

How do foundations and policy makers see their relationship more generally? The *BMBF* representative described foundations as a bit of a “thorn in the flesh of politics” because they can act much more quickly and can pick up topic much more flexibly. To them, foundations also serve as “test laboratories”. If ideas seem to work out, policy makers can consider implementing them on a larger scale and institutionalize them. In this context, the policy maker admits that the *WEL* might have been “a little bit of a role model” for the *QPL* as it also not only awarded prizes to single individuals but to concepts of faculties or universities as a whole. In sum, the policy maker describes the “division of labor” between foundations and politics as “very constructive”. A minister responsible for research in a *Land* regarded foundations as “important stimulators” who “make it possible to try out new things”. Furthermore, foundations sometimes fill the role of bringing up painful subjects, e.g. when policy makers have failed to act on an important issue, as Ralph Müller-Eiselt of the Bertelsmann Stiftung pointed out.

## 6.7 Revisiting the Roles of Foundation in Society

The following chapter will revisit Anheier et al.’s list of roles that can be played by foundations in society and will apply it to the cases at hand.

**Figure 4: Roles of Foundations in Society**



When thinking about the roles foundations have played with regard to their activities related to teaching, some of the listed roles are more salient than others. We can exclude the roles of redistribution, pluralism and preservation of traditions and cultures from our following analysis as they do not reflect the main function foundations have played in this context.

Let us now consider the remaining roles in turn, coming back to their operational definitions presented before.

The **role of innovation** might be the most pronounced in the context of promoting good teaching at universities. Anheier & Leat (2006, p. 39) define “innovation” as a “change process that rests on some idea, either new or perceived as new, that is applied to existing ways and means of doing things”. The foundations were certainly able to profit from their independence from electoral demands or time-consuming political negotiations and could be taking risks in designing programs. A number of interviewees have expressed their feeling that foundations benefit strongly from their freedom to test new approaches to societal problems and fail in doing so without any major consequences (Krull, 2013; Speth, 2010). It is their great strength to “try things out, give ideas a chance” and “break up time-honoured structures and show the state the way in many aspects” (Schlüter, 2013, p.33; see Stiftung Mercator, n.d.). Furthermore, they can generally act much more swiftly than the public sector (Hinze 2010).

The **role of promoting change** is strongly linked to innovation. Again, the foundations’ position as relative “outsiders” to complicated political or administrative processes within universities, puts them in an advantaged position to try to change the status of teaching. With their programs, they explicitly aimed to spark a shift among both university members and policy makers to recognize the significance of teaching and take it as seriously as research by putting the issue on the public agenda. As the previous section has shown, they might well have been successful in achieving policy and practice change with regard to teaching at universities. As Anheier and Leat (2006, p.34) maintained, the role of the change-maker did actually involve a “shaping [of] public opinion”, which was mainly reflected in the number of newspaper articles being published on the topic. Equally, the foundations have certainly used their programs to demonstrate to politics “the feasibility of new ways of working” (*ibid.* p.33).

When it comes to **complementarity**, it is certainly true that foundations work to some extent as partners of the state and react to a governmental undersupply of public goods, namely high quality university teaching (Küstermann, 2013). However, it

seems at least questionable whether the field in question is one of heterogeneous demand preferences as it might be argued that every student (and theoretically every university) should principally wish for an increase in teaching quality. It does not seem to be the case that there is a large proportion of people who think that there is no need for any measures. Thus, it is difficult to tell whether foundations actually fulfill the function of complementarity according to the definition in the strict sense.

At the same time, it does not seem plausible to describe their role as one of **substitution**. The preceding analysis has shown that it probably is the case that foundations provide services which would “otherwise [be] supplied by the state” and have “become providers of public and quasi-public goods” (Anheier, 2005, p.319). They (at least initially) have set up programs in response of the lack of action on the side of the state and in anticipation of future actions from the governmental side. Consequently, they clearly regard it as the role of government to act with regard to the status and quality of teaching at universities. It is important to keep in mind, however, that foundations were neither willing nor able to substitute state services entirely due to their mission and their lack of resources. They have only been able to act on a much smaller scale (Krull, 2013). Jorzik, Mansbrügge and Müller-Eiselt specifically mentioned that they see foundations as acting “in complementarity to political actions” and that foundations would generally oppose doing something that would normally be the job of the state.

The preceding considerations have on the one hand demonstrated how closely the role descriptions fit to actual activities of foundations in the case of their role of innovating and promoting change, on the other hand they have demonstrated a number of difficulties in clearly operationalizing the concepts of complementarity and substitution. The activities under analysis seem to be located somehow in-between these two boxes and there seems to be at least some discrepancy between *de facto* tendencies to move towards substitution while holding a self-view of acting in a complementary manner.

Furthermore, the analysis of the way in which foundations and state actors perceive their relationship has pointed to another potential functional category of foundations. It might make sense to include their role as **networkers** or conveners of a range of different actors involved in policy networks. Foundation Representative 6 particularly emphasized this aspect. For him, foundations should also take on the role of being conveners and “honest brokers”, who are trusted by all sides and thus able to facilitate discussions between actors who might otherwise be hesitant to come together to talk. Similarly, Jorzik describes the Stifterverband as a “networker

between the economy, science and politics". This also fits Anheier and Leat's (2006, p.40) analysis, as they argue that foundations are in a good position to "span[...] boundaries, link[...] actors and conven[e] constituencies that would otherwise be unconnected" (see Adloff, 2010, pp.396f.).

## **7. Policy Recommendations**

The following policy recommendations aimed at foundation program managers have been deduced from the foregoing analyses as well as points raised during interviews and in the literature. At the end of the section, some risks that should be considered when designing new programs will be reflected upon.

As Henrike Hartmann, program manager at the Volkswagen Stiftung, has rightly pointed out, it may be time to stop and think about existing programs and their actual impact before designing any new programs.

Based on Anheier and Leat's (2006, p.5) more general statement we might ask ourselves not: "do foundations do good things for improving the quality of university teaching?" but rather: "do foundations do the best they possibly could in the current environment to improve university teaching?". In asking this question, emphasis is placed on the specific advantages foundations have and should make use of in comparison to other actors. Among them are their "independence from government and market accountability" (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.39). The impact that foundations can achieve is not necessarily proportional to their financial resources. On the contrary, they "can have an unlimited impact with their limited resources" (Schlüter, 2013, p.33).

They can achieve this impact if they focus on their "value-added function", which is innovation (Anheier, 2005, p.322). In "Creative Philanthropy" Anheier and Leat (2006) have outlined a new approach to promoting change that foundations should adopt to make the most of their unique capabilities. Foundations should take care not to substitute government functions but rather "provide new ideas and perspectives [...] to stimulate creative, constructive conversations and programmes". They should use "knowledge, networks, influence and an independent non-partisan voice" as their "key resources". Such an approach entails that foundations "place significant emphasis on making a sustainable difference with an impact beyond their immediate grantees" (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.205f.), which is something that foundations have only partly considered in programs related to teaching. In contrast to older approaches, foundations should not stop at "grant-making for new ideas and

ways of doing things” but instead Anheier and Leat (2006, pp.47f.) argue that “creative projects have to be deliberately, slowly, strategically and opportunistically –often painfully- embedded in wider structures and processes”. The last aspect seems to be particularly applicable when it comes to teaching and here again, foundations have not found a way to make this final step so far.

Bearing these aspects in mind, the following proposals for future foundation programs related to teaching are made:

- **Focus on their added value:**

As the outline of “creative philanthropy” has indicated, foundations should make the most of their special position in society by continuing to be a laboratory of new ideas and promoting innovation and social change. In the future, they might think more strategically when it comes to designing programs and should ask themselves perhaps more critically about whether they do not actually substitute activities by the government.

- **International exchange:**

*Lehre*<sup>7</sup> includes a program line in which academics teaching abroad can be invited as guest lecturers to tell the program participants about the way in which teaching is addressed in their country. At the same time, the program participants can apply for grants to travel to foreign universities to learn more about the way in which teaching is organized there. Such elements of international exchange seem promising and should be strengthened in future programs. This is particularly the case as countries such as the U.S. or the Netherlands seem to be more advanced when it comes to taking university teaching seriously (Diehn, 2010). In addition to existing teaching awards and the subject centres, the UK government has invested large sums in a “Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund” and the installation of a network of “Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning” all around the country in recent years (Schors, 2008). In 2004, the Higher Education Academy has been founded with the goal to “develop and promote best practice in teaching” (Clarke, 2003). This institution deserves close examination when considering to establish a German equivalent.

**Cooperation between foundations:**

Equally, the strength of the brand of *Lehre*<sup>7</sup> and the positive experiences made within this cooperative program of five foundations, suggest that it might be advantageous for future programs to be set up in such foundation consortia whenever possible. Several foundations working together have more resources

at their disposal, can make use of synergies, can maximize the publicity of their programs and can thus create more powerful programs with a potentially larger impact than would be possible alone. Such programs are particularly advantageous for young foundations who need to build up their reputation and could profit from cooperating with older, more well-known institutions.

- **Incentivize Transfer:**

There already is a rich array of innovative and successful approaches to university teaching. While grant-making programs have made an important contribution to enabling the implementation of such ideas, they have been less successful in facilitating a transfer of successful measures to other locations. Even actors in the field have no clear overview of existing projects. Foundations should think about programs which incentivize transfer, which existing programs already partly try to do, more decisively (Mansbrügge, 2012). As Anheier & Leat (2006, p.32) put it, otherwise, “money [spent] on innovation is sometimes just an expensive candle snuffed out too quickly”. The Stifterverband has decided to act in this field and will aim to set up appropriate programs in the future. It would be good if other foundations were to follow. In the context of such programs, it would again be crucial to think about how universities themselves can best be integrated in the process as projects backed by the university administration can have much more sustainable effects than projects conducted by individuals in relative isolation as Andreas Weber of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung highlighted.

- **Increase number of think tank activities:**

As Speth (2010) argues, there can be discerned a general tendency among foundations active in the university sector to move towards the methods of a think tank (Merai et al., 2011; Welzel, 2006). The most prominent example might be the CHE of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, which was able to exert considerable influence on the development of the German higher education sector for example when it comes to the introduction of tuition fees or university boards. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the CHE is not directly active in the field of university teaching apart from the inclusion of the topic in its regular university ratings.

It might make sense to think about ways in which similar activities could enhance the chances of reform when it comes to university teaching. A possible activity could for example include the attempt to promote research on reliable measures

of good university teaching. Currently, it is one of the big basic problems that we do not even really know how to assess teaching properly as Ralph Müller-Eiselt, amongst others, has pointed out. Furthermore, such a program or institution could undertake political and/or university consulting.

- **Lobbying politics:**

An approach which has been avoided by many foundations and embraced more or less openly by others is to put effort into directly trying to influence policy-makers in their decision-making by what is commonly called lobbying. As it seems clear that the basis for a wide-range change in university teaching can only be provided with a greater involvement of politics, especially since the option of financing teaching improvements by tuition fees seems politically dead, foundations might try to influence policy makers more decisively. In part, they certainly do so but a more strategic approach might be needed. One element of such a strategy might be the use of “think tank activities” outlined above.

Foundations have largely been on the right track so far. After the topic of university teaching has been set on the agenda, they have to think strategically about how to advance it further, making use of their particular strengths. In the end, it seems clear – and foundations are aware of this – that the universities themselves and the state need to become active to change the status and quality of teaching on a larger scale and implement new incentive structures within the university system. Until then, the sustainability of current program results seems to be at risk.

## **7.1 Risks**

When analyzing current programs related to teaching and considering feedback from university representatives, the following potential risks involved in past activities emerge. They are probably more salient for some foundations than for others, but all should at least keep them in mind when thinking about future programs.

- **Sustainability**

While university representatives greatly welcomed the foundations’ initiative to offer programs which provide funding for advancing good teaching, they have often pointed to the fact that the supported innovative projects are subsequently difficult to finance on a longer-term basis. Thus, a “thousand flowers bloom- and die” potentially (Anheier & Leat, 2006, p.23). Foundations have partly tried to deal with this problem (Keller, 2009, p.37).

#### ■ **Topic Switch and Restriction of Project Ideas**

Another aspect which has been mentioned in a number of interviews is the general tendency of foundations to move on to a new topic or a new program relatively quickly. Anheier and Leat (2006, p.12) have described this phenomenon in conjunction with their concerns about a lack of sustainability with the picture of a “relay race”. As they say, “many foundations give short-term grants and then expect the baton to be picked up by others”. In contrast, they are sometimes “poor marathon runners”. The authors argue that foundations should actually become marathon runners. The problem is that firstly, some institutions simply cannot keep up with such quick changes and are unable to hand in projects proposals of the required quality in sometimes relatively short time-frames. Secondly, some universities seem driven from one topic to the next while they feel as if the grant money could be put to more effective use in already existing projects or project ideas which do not perfectly fit the announcements in question. Ultimately, the latter problem could probably be best solved by a permanent institution such as the proposed Academy for Teaching, which could offer more flexible grants to implement project ideas.

#### ■ **Lack of Evaluation:**

Something which was striking in the analysis of existing programs was the fact that none of them seemed to have conducted a true impact evaluation. Some programs have not been evaluated at all and others have only been evaluated partly in accompanying evaluations. While the foundations are aware of the current trend of impact evaluation among nonprofit organizations which is particularly pronounced in the U.S. (Anheier, 2005, p.318; Gertler et al.2011), they share a great skepticism about the possibility of measuring impacts correctly. It is certainly true that it is difficult to measure outcome variables such as the status of teaching at a university, let alone attribute any causal impact of foundation programs on any detected changes. Furthermore, the costs of an elaborate impact evaluation would amount to a significant proportion of the program costs. Nevertheless, foundations should strive to do their best in evaluating their programs to maximize the effectiveness of future programs.

## ■ Questioned Legitimacy

Time and again, critical views on the legitimacy and transparency of foundations are voiced (Speth, 2010). Without being democratically legitimized, they can and often exert substantial influence on politics and society (Anheier, 2005, p.323). Thus, foundations need to be as transparent as possible in their procedures and finances. Due to their tax-exemption, they have a special responsibility towards society and should do their best to demonstrate that they put their resources to good use for the public benefit. In the context of activities related to teaching, foundations also have placed significant emphasis on legitimacy and transparent decision-making on grants by making final presentation of project proposals public and by letting a jury decide on the winners.

More generally, it will be interesting to see whether and how foundations will continue to work on the issue of university teaching beyond current programs. Of the interviewed foundations none has announced any new programs directly related to the topic.

## 8. Conclusion

So how do and how should foundations promote the status and quality of teaching at German universities? After outlining the major historical, political and institutional background of the German university system, university teaching and foundations, this thesis has provided a qualitative analysis of the five major existing foundation programs directly related to university teaching. The programs *Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre (WEL)* and *Lehre<sup>n</sup>* have been examined in more in-depth case-studies, focusing on their origins, contents, strengths, and weaknesses. A typology of three main categories (Competitions, Networking and Think Tank) in which the existing programs can be categorized has been proposed and analyzed. Subsequently, the relationship between the *Qualitätspakt Lehre* set up by the *BMBF* to advance teaching and the *WEL* in particular has been examined. Following these analyses, the thesis returned to the theoretical framework suggesting roles played by foundations in society more generally. It argues that the roles of innovation and promoting change have been most salient in the context of university teaching. Additionally, it proposes to add the role of a networker to the existing framework. Finally, six policy recommendations are put forward. At the same time, important risks such as a lack in sustainability and evaluation have been presented. In sum and coming back to our initial hypotheses, this thesis has found firstly that foundations have indeed sought to influence the status and quality of university

teaching in Germany by setting the agenda and facilitating the exchange of experiences and ideas between relevant actors. In addition, they have conducted think tank activities and lobbying to a certain extent. Secondly, foundations have been found to be an important part of the higher education policy network when it comes to teaching. Thirdly, it cannot be decided with certainty how large the influence of foundation programs on policy measures such as the *Qualitätspakt Lehre* has actually been. Evidence suggests, however, that they had a major impact in mobilizing the higher education community and putting pressure on the government to act. Other actors such as the *Wissenschaftsrat* or students have also played a crucial role.

Beyond providing policy recommendations for foundations, this thesis has implicitly also made an appeal to other actors such as universities, policy makers and university teachers themselves. They all need to contribute to make a lasting improvement of university teaching possible. Even if foundations have made a good contribution to advancing the public discussion and awareness of the topic, they were only to a very limited extent able to affect university teaching in Germany as a whole.

The results of this thesis might have implications beyond its direct subject field. The case studies have enriched the existing theoretical framework about the roles foundations can play in society with empirical examples. Furthermore, they have pointed to the “shifts in the relationship between public and private responsibilities” taking place (Anheier & Romo, 1999, p.80). As particularly the discussion about a possible substitution function of foundation activities has indicated, the state seems to increasingly expect the private or third sector to act before it makes a move itself.

In view of the lack in existing literature on the topic, this thesis has set a good basis for further research. Potential topics might include the role which endowed chairs set up by foundations could play for the improvement of teaching. Another aspect which had to be omitted in this analysis is the question of the contribution which e-learning can make to improve the quality of teaching in the age of mass higher education (Bischof & Stuckrad, 2013).

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## List of Abbreviations

BMBF	Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung
CHE	Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung
DAAD	Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
DHV	Deutscher Hochschulverband
e.V.	eingetragener Verein
FH	Fachhochschule
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GG	Grundgesetz
gGmbH	Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung
GWK	Gemeinsame Wissenschaftskonferenz
HRK	Hochschulrektorenkonferenz
ISCED-2011	International Standard Classification of Education agreed upon in the 2011 UNESCO General Assembly
KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz
MOOCS	Massive Open Online Courses
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QPL	Qualitätspakt Lehre
Stifterverband	Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft
Toepfer Stiftung	Alfred Toepfer Stiftung F.V.S.
WEL	Wettbewerb Exzellente Lehre
WR	Wissenschaftsrat

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