Massification and Diversity:  
Has the Expansion of Higher Education Led to a Changing Composition of the Student Body?  
European and German Experiences

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1 Introduction: Context and issues

One of the most important changes in higher education after the Second World War has been the massive expansion in social demand for and in participation in higher education – in Europe as well as on other continents (see section 2). Many countries show growing entry rates, sometimes more than half of the age cohort. Many debates in higher education research and policy focus on the structural and institutional consequences of this development, such as further differentiation or diversification in national higher education systems at different levels – e. g. in the provision of programs, courses and degrees or in the structure of the system, between or within institutions (Trow 1974; Guri-Rosenblit/Sebkova/Teichler 2007; Teichler 2008). The thesis is widespread that the expansion and massification of higher education have been (or will be) accompanied by a process of differentiation in different forms. Expansion and differentiation are often considered as complementary paths in the development of higher education (Windolf 1990). Or, as Peter Scott wrote: “growth is now conceived of in terms of ‘difference’” (Scott 2013).

There are several assumptions about the corresponding results of the expansion. A first assumption is that the rapid growth of higher education must have led to a more heterogeneous or diverse composition of the student body in terms of background, talents, motives and expectations and that differentiation of institutions, programs, courses, degrees or learning provisions might be an appropriate response to this development. A second basic assumption is that the process of growth in student participation is not only a process of increasing, but also of widening participation. That means that the structure of opportunities to obtain
access to higher education must have changed as a side effect of the expansion. More students, also as a proportion of the age cohort, are seen as an indicator for a wider range of student recruitment, resulting in a more diverse social composition of the student population, e. g. with respect to social origin or migration background.

The third assumption implies that this process of widening would be in accordance with key policy objectives such as the promotion of under-represented groups to achieve more equity or equality in the allocation and distribution of social opportunities. As a part of the Bologna process, for example, a larger diversity of the student body and social inclusion are central components of the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area. A fourth assumption asserts that there is a link between the diversity topic and the discourse about higher education and lifelong learning. Opening up academic institutions for lifelong learners has been or will be accompanied by a more diverse composition of the student population – e. g. more older and part-time students or more students with a vocational background.

In this context my paper will focus on the question of whether and to what extent and according to what characteristics the massification of higher education has actually led to a more heterogeneous composition of the student body. A special focus will be on the impact of the implementation of lifelong learning structures in higher education on the student composition. The database refers primarily to selected European countries and the particular case of Germany (for more details see section 3). ‘Diversity’ in this thematic context is limited only to the issue of the structure of the student body. Of course, the diversity or diversification discourse in higher education research and policy is embedded in a much wider frame of reference. Teichler (2008) for example distinguished with a focus on institutional configurations at least five different meanings of diversification: types of institutions, types of programs, level of programs, reputation and prestige and substantive profiles, and this enumeration is not complete.

2 The expansion of higher education: an overview

“The massive expansion of higher education across all continents has been one of the defining features of the late 20th and early 21st centuries” (Guri-Rosenblit/Sebkova/Teichler 2007, 374). Figure 1, based on John Meyer's research, shows that the expansion of higher education is a worldwide, nearly
global phenomenon not only linked to a particular country or region (Schofer/Meyer 2005 a, b). In some areas it has been a continuous process over the entire twentieth century, in other areas it did not start until the 1960s or later. However, there are many differences between the different countries or continents with respect to the starting point, the extent and the speed of expansion. The figure reveals considerable differences between the continents but, of course, there are also differences between countries within the same area. In the old industrial societies, growth started earlier and has continued up to now at a higher level. Since the beginning of the 1990s the East European countries have largely reduced the gap that emerged after 1960. In Latin America and Asia the trend is the same as the global one, but the backlog remains. Only in Sub-Saharan Africa does the development show a weaker dynamic than in other parts of the world.

Source: Schofer/Meyer 2005 a, b

Figure 1: Tertiary Students Per Capita, Regional Averages, 1900 – 2000

Figure 2 shows the development in selected OECD countries during the last decade (OECD 2013). Within this country group there are also many differences with
respect to the starting level and the growth dynamic. Whereas in some countries (e. g. Australia, United States) a very strong increase in the entry rates took place, there was only a small increase (e. g. in Sweden or Spain) or moderate growth in other countries. The volume of growth was not influenced by the base of participation which had been reached before.

Figure 2: Trends in entry rates at tertiary A level in selected OECD-countries, 2000-2011

And finally a comment about the development in Germany (Wolter 2013, 2014). Germany has often been considered, in particular in the OECD context, as an example for a country in which expansion has been carried out in a rather delayed and tentative manner albeit in the same direction (Solga/Powell 2011). It is important to consider that Germany has a very well established sector of vocational training outside tertiary education which has been very attractive for young people. And many programs, which in other countries are part of higher education, are part of upper secondary or post-secondary education here.
Nevertheless, particularly in the last few years there has been massive growth in the proportion of first-year students related to the age cohort (Figure 3). This index has increased since the beginning of the 1950s, interrupted only periodically and, in the case of interruption, followed by an even larger rise in the next years. And an extremely steep rise can be observed since 2006 – due to certain conditions such as the reduction of the length of schooling up to the Abitur, the regular entrance examination to take up studies, from 13 to 12 years. But the main reason for the strong increase is the sustainable climb in educational participation, generated through the changing educational aspirations and decisions in families and transmitted through the school system. Special factors such as the shortening of school time or the suspension of compulsory military service reinforce the sustainable process of growth. Obviously, as a result of the strong increase the gap between Germany and the OECD average has become narrower, and there has been a clear process of alignment.
In Germany, this steep increase in the proportion of first-year students has provoked a critical debate about the accelerating academization of the labor market and employment system. There is a widespread concern about a fundamental change in the national qualification model (Bosch 2012). The traditional German qualification model was based, firstly, on a large sector of vocational training as something like the backbone of Germany’s economic and industrial strength and, secondly, on a considerably narrower corridor of higher education. It seems that this traditional model of allocation is in a process of dissolution, and higher education is on the way to becoming the favorite location of qualification in the younger generations. This development has provoked a lively but critical debate: On the one hand, there is the fear that there is or will be a profound lack of supply in the highly qualified workforce. On the other hand, the concern of a considerable lack of non-academically, vocationally trained workforce is widespread, in particular in the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises.

3 The concept of diversity and data-base

Often, the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘heterogeneity’ are used more or less interchangeably to characterize the process of differentiation in the student body. So, the first question is whether heterogeneity and diversity are both terms for the same thing or whether there is a difference and if so what. Sometimes, there are alternative concepts such as inclusion, non-discrimination, equal treatment or widening participation. There is a high degree of terminological confusion in this policy and research field. Furthermore, the differences between diversity and the older notions of equality (or equity) of opportunities become blurred. Historically, the concept of diversity can be traced back to two quite different discourse contexts (Schönborn/Stammen 2011): Firstly, to the human rights, minority and the social equality discourse and, secondly, to a human resource oriented management strategy. With regard to the former, it is not really clear what the added value is when substituting the equality concept by a diversity discourse. Sometimes it looks like a replacement of the social-political concept of equality and its political neutralization by the management stimulated concept of diversity.

Secondly, ‘diversity’ is a human resource concept or a management or organizational strategy of how to create a wide variety in the composition of staff in an organization and how to use this plurality as a resource for the further development of the organization or to improve its performance. According to the management concept diversity is a strategy to transform mono-cultural organizations
into multi-cultural organizations in order to benefit from this as a measure to extend the personnel resources (Kehr/Leicht-Scholten 2013, 35). Diversity management as a political objective, institutional mission or human resource strategy has become more and more important in many higher education systems and institutions – with respect to the student composition as well as to the structure of the academic staff. Many universities implement programs to foster diversity. In particular driven by the demographic decline in many countries, higher education institutions look for new target groups to compensate decreasing student demand.

In contrast ‘heterogeneity’ is rather an empirical term to describe the composition of a population. In other words: ‘Diversity’ represents a mission statement or a political concept whereas ‘heterogeneity’ is more a scholarly term. Often, several programs or measures are subsumed under the term ‘diversity’ to manage the increasing heterogeneity of a population or group or to widen the composition of a group (Berthold et al. 2013; Knauf 2013).

The second question refers to the criteria or indicators for diversity (or heterogeneity). Diversity has to be understood as a broad concept which includes a variety of characteristics and groups (Berthold/Leichsenring 2013; Middendorff 2013) such as

- gender and age (at the time of enrollment)
- the educational attainment of parents and the socio-economic background of students
- the migration status or international mobility of students
- the educational biography, e.g. if students have only a school or additionally a vocational background
- students with children
- studying with disabilities
- the proficiencies and competencies students prove at the beginning of their study
- individual objectives, expectations and ambitions to achieve by studying and many more. This plurality of different dimensions altogether subsumed under the umbrella term ‘diversity’ raises the question whether it makes sense to
deal with such different groups and dimensions under the same label. For example, the issue of students with disabilities in higher education is completely different from the issue of non-traditional or international students. The reasons for under-representation, the specific living conditions, objectives and also the programs to promote these sub-groups vary from group to group so that actually each of these demands a particular view.

Often there is a differentiation between surface level diversity and deep level diversity (Middendorff 2013).

- Surface level includes such demographic characteristics as age, gender, origin, education and so on, even if not all of these are really visible.
- Deep level means weaker characteristics such as targets, motivations, normative orientations, experience and so on.

A very important, but also very difficult part turns out to be the competencies students have developed before starting to study or during their studies. Currently, we are at best on the way to developing procedures of competence measurement that will enable us to assess the diversity and broad range of student competencies. Most of the presently available studies are based on self-evaluation of competencies not on direct competence measurement. The OECD carried out a feasibility study about the learning outcomes of students in order to assess student performance and competencies in an internationally comparative frame of reference (Braun/Donk/Bülow-Schramm 2013). In Germany, the National Educational Panel Study comprising also a student panel started four years ago with a particular focus on competence development and learning outcomes in different institutional settings including higher education institutions (Blossfeld/Rossbach/v. Maurice 2011). But as yet we do not have any meaningful or valid data about the possible heterogenization of student competencies as a result of massification.

**Data base**

The paper will concentrate only on a few selected, particular characteristics for which there are some data from European surveys – the most important is the Eurostudent project (Eurostudent 2012; Orr/Gwosc/Netz 2011) –, other international databases or national studies from Germany and which are of special relevance for the lifelong learning or the equality/equity of opportunity discourse. One difficulty is that we do not have time series for all variables that allow the
reconstruction of changes and developments over time. Often we only have cross-sectional data. So it is very important to consider that often our data are only proxies.

As a part of the Bologna process a European-wide monitoring system has been implemented to provide some empirical information about the state of realization of the idea of a social dimension – the so-called Eurostudent project. The Eurostudent study is centrally coordinated by the previous HIS Higher Education Information System in Hanover, Germany – now the German Center for Higher Education and Science Research (DZHW). The Eurostudent project collects and reports comparable data particularly on

- the socio-economic background
- access to and participation in higher education
- the living and study conditions
- and international mobility of students throughout Europe.

In the last sequence, in 2011, 23 countries participated in the Eurostudent project, which means that the study is one of the broadest internationally comparative studies in higher education or student affairs. The Eurostudent project has a decentral structure which considers the country participants as members of a monitoring network. All this information is a byproduct of national surveys or national administrative data based on several conventions and agreements about the standards, the form and processing of data provision. The implementation of the national surveys lies within the responsibility of each participating country. However, participating in the Eurostudent project is dependent on the adoption of the Eurostudent core questions and central data conventions. Once the data are received by HIS, they have to be evaluated, and only after cross-checking to assure quality, the data are used for analysis.

4 Results: empirical findings

4.1 Gender

Of course, one of the most important indicators for the social composition of students is the student gender profile (Orr et. al. 2011, 68). As far as participation in higher education is concerned, women have meanwhile overtaken the men in most European countries. In nearly all countries the women's share has continuously increased over the last years and climbed to above half or more. The
share of female students in 2011 varies between a maximum of 65 % (in Romania) and a minimum of 49 % in Germany. In most countries participating in Eurostudent (and also in other countries) there is a clear trend of feminization in higher education despite the fact that their share varies considerably between subjects and also between the sequences of studies (Bachelor, Master). In some countries the share of female students transferring to Master programs is lower than at Bachelor level, but in other countries the proportion is the reverse. Together with the general growth in social demand for studies, the "feminization" of the student body seems to be the most important change in the participation patterns in European higher education. The issue of gender equity has shifted more and more from higher education to the labor market and employment system. However, concerning the gender profile it is difficult to state which proportion of female or male students is a clear indicator for diversity. Is a female majority among students an indication for diversity or an unbalanced proportion?

4.2 Age

The share of students entering higher education between 25 and 39 years may be a good, but only a particular indicator for the process of opening up institutions for lifelong learners. Often lifelong learners or non-traditional students are identified by the criterion of being older than 25 years at the time of enrollment. The data does not suggest a clear trend across or within countries.

In all countries included in a cross-sectional overview (Figure 4) the students in Bachelor courses are on average younger than 25 years, at least 60 % (Orr et al. 2011, 62). The proportion of students older than 25 on average varies between a minimum of 5 % (Turkey) and a maximum of more than 35 % in Portugal, Sweden, Denmark and Austria. Of course, the average is much higher in Master courses. Here, more than two thirds are on average older than 25, in England more than half already older than 30 years. Several conditions can influence the age average as well as the age at enrollment: e. g. time of schooling, military service, duration of studies, openness of access and admission for non-traditional students.
**Figure 4: Bachelor students by age, 2011**

**Figure 5: Share of students between 25 and 39 years entering tertiary education**
The share of older students entering higher education is very different not only across countries but also over time (Figure 5). According to this figure (based on the HEAD-study, see Dollhausen et al. 2013, 20), which also includes some non-European countries the highest share of older students (at the time of enrollment) with more or around 20 % can be found in the Scandinavian countries, Iceland, New Zealand, Portugal and Switzerland. In some countries the proportion of older students has increased (e. g. in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Spain, Turkey), not always very steeply, but in others it has decreased (e. g. Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, UK) whereas in some the trend varies. So to sum up, with respect to the age composition there is no clear development towards more diversity in the surveyed countries.

4.3 Part-time

We can find a similar pattern with regard to the proportion of part-time students. The flexibilization of programs or courses is often seen as an instrument for opening up higher education to new target groups, particularly for older (adult or mature) students. Often, the most important obstacles for the participation of older or non-traditional students are not primarily located at the level of access but at the level of predominant study formats not allowing any adaptation to the special needs of older students. Together with institutional obstacles time and place have often been identified as the most important barriers (Cross 1981). So, beside the provision of distance or online-based learning the time-budget of studies has proved again and again to be a prerequisite for widening participation and the implementation of lifelong learning structures in higher education.

Studying part-time can be defined in two different ways, formally and informally: Formal means to be enrolled in organized part-time courses, informal refers to the actual time budget and means studying de-facto in a part-time mode. In many countries the proportion of de-facto part-time students is much higher than that formally enrolled in part-time courses. In the next figure (Figure 6) a student is considered to be part-time if he or she is enrolled in a program that requires less than 75 % of the full-time load. This definition focuses on the program, not on informal study patterns (Dollhausen et al. 2013, 22).

The share of part-time students as well as the development over the last decade fluctuates between countries and also over time. There is neither a common pattern nor a clear trend. In some countries this ratio is more than 30 %, e. g. in
Sweden, Finland, Poland, in the US and UK, Hungary or New Zealand. In other countries the ratio is very low, i.e. in Austria, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands or Spain. In these countries the traditional model of full-time studies still seems to be predominant, part-time rather an informal pattern than a formal provision if at all. In several countries the proportion of part-time students has risen, whereas in others a reverse trend can be observed. In Belgium, Iceland, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland and Sweden the share has increased; in Germany too, but at a very low level.

The Eurostudent data, only cross-sectional, show that on average 86 % of students in the participating countries study formally full-time, but there are large differences between the countries. In some countries including Germany the share of part-time students is marginal, in others it is higher than 25 % (England, Poland). Eurostudent data refer also to de-facto part-time students (Orr et al. 2011, 92). For Bachelor students they show a wide variety from approximately 40 hours (e. g. Portugal, Italy, Turkey) to a minimum with less than 30 hours a week (as in Slovakia and Austria) together for taught studies and personal study time. However, the time students spend on study related activities varies

Source: HEAD 2013

**Figure 6: Share of students studying part-time**

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This is a bar chart that shows the percentage of students studying part-time in different countries. The chart includes data for the years 2000, 2005, and 2010. The countries are listed along the x-axis, and the percentage of part-time students is shown on the y-axis. The data is sourced from HEAD 2013.
considerably between subjects. On average it is higher in the sciences and lower in the humanities and arts. A very popular argument claims that the time students have to invest in paid work beside their studies is an indication for the increasing heterogeneity of the student body. This is partly true in a European comparison (Orr et al. 2011, 114). The share of selfEarned income as a part of the total monthly income of students varies between more than 40 % (in Portugal, Estonia, Slovakia and Czech Republic) and less than 20 % (in France, Sweden, Turkey and Hungary). And the time necessary for paid jobs also varies between more than 10 hours a week (in Portugal, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia) and less than 6 hours (in Malta, Turkey, Finland, Romania and France).

4.4 Non-traditional routes

The paths that prospective students took to obtain their higher education entrance qualification differed to varying degrees between countries. Two general models can be distinguished. In some countries selection is concentrated at the level of admission as the most important instance for access. In other countries admission is linked with formal school credentials and certificates so that selection occurs primarily during the school career. Furthermore, there are differences with respect to the permeability of access and admission to higher education for applicants with a vocational qualification instead of a general school entitlement. Besides the classical access routes to higher education via upper secondary schools, additional access opportunities, sometimes called "non-traditional routes", are now being offered in many countries (Slowey/Schuetze 2012).

As a strategy to widen participation such alternative routes to higher education have received more attention. Alternative routes have been or are being increasingly established in order to provide a second chance for studying or to enhance the permeability between vocational training and higher education. Which path to higher education is defined as "non-traditional" depends, however, on the national education system and differs from one country to another. So, the definition of non-traditional students can be based on different reference points (Wolter 2012): (1) age (often older than 25); (2) participation focusing on under-represented groups; (3) life-course referring to mostly winding biographical paths to higher education; (4) access and admission embracing alternative routes to higher education (e.g. via recognition of prior learning); and (5) lastly modes of study such as distance learning or part-time.
Sometimes, the concept of non-traditional students includes more than one of these categories, in some cases even all groups, sometimes only one of these. Referring to varying definitions the share of non-traditional students related to all students can differ considerably not only between countries but also between different statistical sources, in particular in an international comparison. That is exactly the reason why the Eurostudent study developed a schematic framework for the different forms and procedures subsumed under the label “alternative routes”. It embraces three different procedures which the study describes as follows (Orr et al. 2011, 29):

- **Post-secondary non-tertiary education:** that means obtaining the study entitlement via courses outside the regular secondary school system, e. g. in adult education institutions.

- **Vocational training, work experience and accreditation of prior learning:** This approach embraces procedures of recognizing the equivalence between vocational qualifications and the regular secondary school certificates or procedures of measuring the actual competencies of persons. In some countries age (23 or 25) is a criteria.

- **Special aptitude or entrance examinations:** In some countries such entrance exams are obligatory for applicants without the traditional credentials, sometimes in certain fields, sometimes for all.

Based on this framework it can be stated that in 19 of 23 countries included in the Eurostudent study more than 80 % of all students have entered higher education with a regular school entitlement (Orr et al. 2011, 31 f.). The exceptions are Finland, Ireland, England and Sweden – in these countries between 70 and 80 % arrive via the regular route. In eight of the countries included in the study special alternative, non-traditional entry routes do not exist at all (Figure 7). In these countries there are not any indications for diversity with respect to the criterion of non-traditional students. In other countries their share varies between 2 and more than 20 % - which is the case in the countries mentioned.

In many cases the national higher education systems provide a mix of the three options for alternative routes. The most widespread route is that via continuing education opportunities. In Germany the share of non-traditional students (in a wide understanding) amounts to 4 %, most of them on the so called second educational route – that means grammar schools for adults with a vocational training
background leading to the regular ("traditional") study entitlement, the Abitur. In contrast, the share of non-traditional students in a stricter meaning (Wolter 2012) – students without Abitur but vocational qualification – is very small. In almost all countries which provide alternative routes for vocationally qualified persons, especially students with a low social or educational family background benefit from these, in particular in Finland, Sweden and Ireland (Orr et al. 2011, 31).

Source: Eurostudent IV

**Figure 7: Students entering higher education through an alternative route, 2011**

### 4.5 Educational and social family background

One of the main issues in higher education research and policy over the last decades has been the social composition of students, the relation between family background and the opportunity to gain access to higher education. This is also one of the central concerns of the social dimension of the Bologna process. The social dimension of the European higher education area had not really been a core element of the Bologna process, until the Prague communiqué (2001) and the Berlin meeting (2003). Originally, the Bologna declaration (1999) did not
mention the social dimension. Since then each following Bologna conference has
stressed the relevance of the social dimension of the EHEA. Recapitulating the
development it might be possible to state that a more precise and operational
understanding of the term "social dimension" has subsequently been created
and that the concept of the social dimension has been established in the Europe-
an discourse on future higher education – despite the impression that it some-
times looks a little bit as if this concept has become more and more an all-
embracing catchphrase.

As previously in the general diversity discourse there are two different frames of
reference in the debate about this topic. On the one hand, there is the social jus-
tice discourse including objectives such as the equality of opportunities or a more
socially cohesive society. On the other hand, there is the human capital discourse
focusing on the demand for a highly qualified workforce and new talents from all
social groups. However, our understanding of this concept has been widened and
differentiated so that is now possible to consider ‘social dimension’ as a multi-
dimensional concept and to identify its most important elements, which can be
summarized as follows: “the societal aspiration that the student body entering,
participating in and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of
the population (in the countries joining the Bologna process)” and, furthermore,
“to take action to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportuni-
ty” (London Communiqué 2007).

In the Eurostudent study three educational levels are differentiated with respect
to students’ parents (Orr et al. 2011, 46):

- low level education: including parents who did not attain an educational
  level higher than lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2)
- non-tertiary education: because the group ‘low education’ is very small in
  some countries, a category ‘non-tertiary’ has been added to include all
  parents who attained any educational level (ISCED 0-4) under higher edu-
  cation (ISCED 5 and 6)
- high level education: that means that the parents attained higher educa-
  tion (ISCED 5 and 6).
A relatively simple measure of social inequality is based on the highest attainment of at least one parent – comparing students from families who have an academic background with those who do not. In each of the Eurostudent countries the share of students from one of these three groups differs. That indicates larger distinctions between the countries included with respect to the social openness of higher education institutions. Three types of countries can be identified based on the indicator (Figure 8) (Orr et al. 2011, 46 ff.):

- firstly those countries in which over one third of students have parents with an educational background classified as low – that is Ireland, Turkey and Portugal; so these are countries with a high degree of upward social mobility via higher education;
- secondly those countries in which 10 to 25 % of students have parents with a low educational background – among others Finland, France, The Netherlands, Italy and Spain;
- and lastly those countries with the highest degree of academic self-reproduction among students – that includes Denmark, Germany and Norway. In these countries two thirds or more of students have at least one parent (father or mother or both) with a higher education degree.
The methodological limitation of this indicator is the ‘absolute’ measurement of the social composition of the student body, not including any reference point or group to determine the extent of over- or underrepresentation. Therefore, a more complex measure is based on the statistical relationship between both student groups – those with and without an academic family background – and the share of the group with this status in the general population in a country (Orr et al. 2011, 50 f.). This is a more adequate indicator for social (in)equality or equity in the social participation in higher education even though this is also a proxy.

Source: Eurostudent IV

**Figure 9: Typology of social inclusiveness of higher education systems**

This procedure results in a four-field matrix presenting a typology of more socially inclusive and more socially exclusive countries (Figure 9).

- Ireland, The Netherlands and Switzerland can be identified as socially more inclusive on both measures: they display a minimal under-representation of students with low education background and a minimal over-representation of the high education group.
- The Slovak Republic, Romania, Germany, Latvia, Turkey and France can be identified as socially exclusive on both measures.
- The remaining countries can be identified as transition systems.
With regard to this indicator it can be stated that the social composition of the student body varies considerably between European countries and that in the majority of the countries included in the Eurostudent study the social mix is far away from diversity. Unfortunately these data are only cross-sectional.

5 Some results for Germany

For Germany there is very little evidence verifying a greater heterogenization of the student body – despite the fact of massive expansion. The results are based on data partly up to 2010, partly up to 2011 (sources: Autorenguppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2012; Middendorff 2013; Middendorff et al. 2013). It is important to distinguish the absolute numbers and the share of the different groups related to all students (or first-year students): the absolute number can grow but the share can stagnate or even decrease.

**Gender:** The share of female first-year students grew continuously from 37 % (in 1975) to 51 % in 2002 and has hovered since then around 50 %. It is one of the lowest proportions among European countries.

**Age:** The average age at the time of enrollment has decreased from 22.5 (1995) to 21.7 years (2011). The proportion of very young first students (19 and younger) has increased, whereas the proportion of new students older than 25 has stagnated.

**International mobility:** The proportion of first-year students coming from abroad (incoming mobility) increased from 5 % (1980) to 16 % in 2002 and has stagnated since then around 15 %. During the phase of massive expansion since 2006 the proportion of international students has not increased further.

**Migration:** The share of students with a migration background but with residence in Germany (without international students) is difficult to determine exactly because of different statistical definitions and forms of assessment (Engel/Neusel/Weichert 2014). So, there are divergent data. According to different sources their proportion has remained at a low level, compared with their share in the young population. Halfway reliable and valid data are available only for a special sub-group – the so-called Bildungsinländer including only those students who have a foreign nationality but permanent residence in Germany where they achieved their study entitlement. During the last two decades the proportion of students with a migration background according to this narrow definition has
stagnated between 2 and 4 % (Middendorff 2013, 12) – compared with about 10 – 12 % in the younger population.

**Educational family origin:** The share of students with an academic family status has continuously increased from 36 % (1985) to 51 % in 2006, in the sector of universities even to almost 60 %, and has leveled off since then. The proportion of students with low educational family status has decreased enormously (from 42 to 27 %). So, the social composition of students has become more exclusive despite the massive growth.

**Vocationally qualified students:** The share of students with a vocational training degree has declined greatly from 38 % (1993) to 22 % (2011) – completely contrary to the political target of opening up higher education for vocationally qualified people. This development is primarily due to students with the regular study entitlement, the *Abitur* or other school credentials, and an additional vocational degree. However, the proportion of non-traditional students in a strict definition – entering higher education without the *Abitur* but a vocational qualification – has risen slightly from 1 to 3 % among first year students (Wolter 2012).

**Students working besides studying:** Between 2003 and 2012, a period of massive growth, the proportion of students working in parallel to their studies has decreased a little bit from 66 to 61 %. On average they work 13 hours a week.

**Part-time:** Whereas the share of de-facto part-time students – with time spent on their studies less than 25 hours a week – increased from 1991 until 2003, after which it has decreased to presently 22 %. Only 4 % of all students are formally enrolled in part-time courses.

All in all these indicators for Germany do not really show a clear trend towards more diversity or heterogeneity in the student body. Rather the data reveal sometimes a mixed picture, sometimes even a trend to more homogeneity.

### 6 Conclusions

Diversity and heterogenization of the student body are two current themes linked very closely with the continuous expansion of higher education in many countries including Germany. The assumption that massification and heterogeneity are parallel or complementary trends is widespread in international higher education research and policy – in Germany too. Often, it is not really clear whether both terms mean the same thing or if there is a difference. The paper argues for a
terminological distinction albeit a smooth one according to which diversity repre-
sents an institutional or organizational target or strategy to widen personnel re-
sources and capacities whereas heterogenization means primarily an empirical
concept to describe the structure of a population.

The hope is widespread that the massification of higher education has led to a
more heterogeneous composition of students in terms of gender, social back-
ground, migration status, age and so on. Contrary to this expectation, the actual
structure of the student body is far away from the diversity objective in many
countries. However, there are not only many differences from country to country,
but also with respect to the indicators considered. In some aspects more diversi-
ty has been realized, in other aspects it has not. All in all, according to the avail-
able data there is only a weak correlation between the expansion of higher edu-
cation and the heterogenization of the student composition.

The notions of diversity and heterogeneity are of special relevance for the ambi-
tious undertaking of implementing lifelong learning structures in higher educa-
tion. And there are some particular indicators for this such as the number or
share of older, part-time or non-traditional students. Evidence shows that there
are some countries in which strong growth or a large rate of first year students
has been connected with a larger proportion of older, part-time or non-traditional
students. This is true e.g. for Sweden, Finland, UK and Portugal. But on the other
hand, there are also some countries where there has not been any relation be-
tween massification and diversity with respect to these criteria. This is true
among others for The Netherlands, Germany, Turkey and Austria.

The expansion of higher education was partly a politically or economically intend-
ed, partly a non-planned process of its own momentum. Nevertheless, the ex-
pansion was accompanied by the expectation that historically evolved social dis-
parities in the participation in higher education could be eliminated or at least
reduced. However, the social structure of the student body has proved to be a
most stable pattern. In almost all countries growth in participation has not been
accompanied by a process of social inclusion or only by a very modest process of
social opening. There are only three countries with a larger degree of social in-
clusion, one with a high participation level – The Netherlands – and two with a
low or average participation level, Switzerland and Ireland.
In Germany the cliché of growing heterogeneity is an indelible part of the political rhetoric in higher education. However, Germany shows a very low degree of heterogenization in the European comparison. The student body has changed a little bit during the growth periods in the 1980s and 1990s, but during the last 10 to 15 years there have been only a very few indications of more diversity. With a particular focus on Germany heterogenization is more myth than reality. To sum up it can be stated that there is no automatism between massification and diversity – neither in Germany nor in other European countries. Obviously, because of the self-reinforcement features of the expansion, targeted political programs and measures are necessary to promote particularly those groups that are underrepresented in higher education in order to combine growth with more diversity.

References


