

Old socks – new shoes?

TU Cottbus – a school of architecture searching for a profile

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The Technische Universität of Cottbus does not feature a long academic tradition. The university, which was founded on 15 July 1991 during the administration of founding president Professor Dr. Ing. Günter Spur, has the chance to compensate this alleged deficit with the unique opportunity to develop theory and research freely and in accordance with the requirements of modern society in times of profound structural transformation.

The sole Technische Universität of the federal state of Brandenburg offers an interesting combination of various disciplines of technical sciences and **social sciences**, which provide a unique and leading profile for the scientific structure of the university. The "Cottbus model" is applied to 12 courses with an emphasis on efforts around key interfaces in academic education of engineering.

Next to the "classic" faculties of mathematics, natural science and computer technology, the faculty of architecture and civil engineering and next to the faculty of mechanical engineering and electro-technology, it is the faculty for environmental science and the faculty for philosophy and social sciences, which are to guarantee a high level of training for professional qualification.

Minister of Science Hinrich Enderlein said: "We do not intend to found a Technische Universität Cottbus as scientific Wolkenkuckucksheim, but to provide practical solutions to the problems encountered in the federal State of Brandenburg."

This also refers to existing deficits in training of architects in this state. Special attention should be given to the rich and valuable heritage of architectural monuments, cultural landscapes and historic parks of national importance as well as the redevelopment and refurbishment of historic buildings of various types.

The science committee will deliver its vote on this issue in the next few days. It is generally expected that the technical university is granted admission to the register of universities.

The faculty of architecture and civil engineering has its predecessor in the former college of building technology. The combination of the two disciplines in a single faculty may be considered as further experiment of the „Cottbus Model“. In Cottbus, existing models should not be adapted un-reflected, because of the very different conditions.

The future will show whether "zusammenwächst, was zusammengehört". Joint projects provide promising opportunities to students to become familiar with topics of other disciplines while still at university.

Non-university based research co-operations are to take a broad space. Due to its geographical location Cottbus seems to be pre-destined for orientation towards Eastern Europe. Further development of existing contacts might be a valuable resource for the management of a demanding future and an effective way to promote the European idea.

The foundation deanery under the direction of Professor Dr. Ingo. Klaus Dierks works jointly with the faculty on a re-orientation of academic teaching.

The first evident output of this process is the new curriculum for the course in architecture. The design modules form the core of the course. The remaining subjects are assigned an integrated and serving role as part of the project based studies. The link to historical, social, economic and jurisprudential disciplines is indispensable. The relevant modules are provided by the neighbouring faculties.

Among our colleagues the goal is clearly and unanimously defined with respect to the aforementioned aspects. An unusually open atmosphere provided the setting to discuss detail questions during the course of the development process. This so-called "profile discussion" is currently debated and will hopefully not come to an early conclusion.

Based on the past papers of all colleagues a provisional summary was produced, intended not as a conclusive document, but as the basis for the further discussion.

Some quotes read as follows: " The role of the architect in the building and planning process is a core concern in the course and it's organization. Architects have to take on the role of co-ordinator more often, as a pre-requisite in the process of transforming own ideas to detailed design stage and the execution of a building project. The qualification spectrum of a young architect therefore must be put on a broad base. Architectural education must provide thorough knowledge in the areas of function, construction and organization, technical building equipment, building physics and building economics and ecology as well as in planning management. In addition he should be prepared to take on the role of lead consultant in the conditions of a changing society and politico-economic structures. "

"Imagination is the basis of creativity. The meaning of a building is derived from an imaginative understanding of the solution to a problem. The act of building takes raw matter as a starting point to create light and shade, the qualities of a space, the sense of architecture. The teaching of architecture therefore requires an holistic approach. Students have their own pre-occupations. They are to be nourished and not levelled out. Architectural work is rooted in the past. Recognizing the conditions, thoughts, ideas and methods is the goal. Conclusions are the result of logic thought. Order is logic. Form is logic. Condition for this is analysis and understanding of the problem in a responsible way. Solutions are recognized problems. Bad architectures are solutions without problems. Art is not teachable, understanding is teachable. Building is the meaningful ordering of recognized parts into one being."

Joachim Fest describes in its book "The destroyed dream, from the end of the utopian age" in 1991: "In a world of infinite interdependences there are no striking solutions. Their processes permit only gradual progress. They force detours and interruptions as well as the many toilsome compromises, which appear always impure and promise the less perfect condition." We could hence

conclude: "The bearing of the less perfect condition, of the less perfect architecture and the understanding of this open form of architecture as a chance is the actual process, which this is all about. "

It may be considered as characteristic to the course in architecture that the discussion on training concepts is carried out without the wide-spread fighting common in the board rooms of other schools. University teachers of "old" and "new" approaches have met on acceptable levels certainly not without some difficult compromising. It should not remain unmentioned that new staff form the majority on the panel.

Nearly all of the 156 students in architecture are provided with university accommodation and studio space. The faculty is determined to maintain this attractive and nearly unique offer. On the basis of the refusal to become a centralized mass university – the number of students is planned to be limited to 8000 maximum – there exist best chances for this goal to be achieved. In addition the ratio of staff to student numbers is to be maintained to a certain limit. This recognises the importance of personal contact between staff and students as basis for meaningful teaching. The proportion of students originating in the old federal states to those from the new federal states of the republic is fortunately equal in relative numbers.

Despite the existing structure of an extensive campus compound, lack of teaching space will surely become a central topic in the near future. The university is improving on the development of the structural/ spatial situation with high pressure. A nation-wide competition shall deliver a master plan for the university campus.

However, it became generally accepted that the next years are not to be managed without interim solutions. Whether this will result in the famous "container solution" or the occupation of available empty space in buildings nearby is without doubt a question of the financial resources available, the fantasy and the ability to manage this situation at the faculties of architecture and civil engineering.

With the Ministry for Science, Research and Culture we have a partner who is aware of the complexity of the problems and presses on the progress in development, in particular Minister Hinrich Enderlein.

During the next years a due measure of flexibility and the employment of unorthodox measures will necessary in addition to the high levels in competence.

The continuous provision of substantial financial means, which are indispensable for the founding of a university, will be the test for the provision of adequate efforts in science at the technical University of Cottbus, in particular in the light of diminishing budgets of the public sector.

Leaving the forecasts aside I shall now return to the state of affairs. Meanwhile the everyday life on the campus is shaped by pioneering work. People of formerly different political systems are moving closer in the pursuit of a common vision. We counteract the still wide-spread mentality of narrow thinking by means of co-operation. A difficult yet extremely exciting process.