Papers of the UNESCO Chair in International Relations

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WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF UNESCO’S CHAIRS PROGRAMME?

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Prof. Dr. Klaus Hüfner has shown a long-standing, diverse and internationally renowned honorary commitment to UNESCO and the United Nations. He is Honorary Member and former President of the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK), member of the Board of Honorary Presidents and former Vice-President of the German United Nations Association (DGVN) as well as Honorary President and former Vice-President of the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA).

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WHAT IS THE SPIRIT OF UNESCO’S CHAIRS PROGRAMME?

Inspirational Speech given on the occasion of the meeting of German as well as selected Austrian, Polish and Swiss UNESCO Chairs from 28 to 29 October 2011 at the Technische Universität Dresden, Germany

First of all, I wish to express my sincere thanks for being invited to attend your networking meeting “Building Bridges”. I would like to congratulate the organizers of bridging German UNESCO Chairs with those from Austria, Poland and Switzerland. This is an important initiative under the umbrella of UNESCO.

Originally, you invited me for a dinner speech, more recently, you announced that I am giving an inspirational speech – hopefully, I can fulfil your new expectations.

I must confess that I have a special relationship to this topic. The former Director in charge of Higher Education at UNESCO Headquarters, Mr. Díaz, criticized Germany during the 1990s for being too reluctant in establishing UNESCO Chairs. Indeed, we did not want to imitate Spain where almost each university had established such a chair. Nevertheless, I took this criticism very seriously and started an initiative during my presidency which consisted of a more formalized procedure, thus replacing certain individual initiatives which had occurred previously. I am proud of having been directly involved in the establishment and inauguration of three UNESCO Chairs in Germany:

- The UNESCO Chair in Human Rights Education at the Otto von Guericke-Universität Magdeburg,
- The UNESCO Chair in Entrepreneurship and Intercultural Management, now at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, and
- The UNESCO Chair in International Relations here at the Technische Universität Dresden.

Moreover, I accepted invitations as guest lecturer at the Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus and the Technische Universität Dresden which resulted in some interesting academic ventures.

Dear Colleagues,

When the former Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, inaugurated a new UNESCO Chair at the National Open University of Nigeria he emphasized “that UNESCO is keen for all chairs and UNITWIN networks to become more integrated into the UNESCO family and more attuned to the strategic priorities of the Organization”. He expressed his vision of UNESCO to become increasingly a networking organization whose different parts make different contributions but in keeping with the same purposes and values. He described the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme as “antennas of UNESCO” which link up not only with intellectual communities, research institutes and universities at home and abroad but also with other parts of UNESCO and also with the wider UN system.
UNITWIN, the University Twinning and Networking Programme established in 1992 and celebrating its 20th anniversary next year, has been visibly growing over the two decades. Today, over 700 UNESCO chairs and 60 UNITWIN Networks in 70 fields are established within the Programme, involving about 800 institutions across 125 different countries in all world regions.

What are the goals and objectives, what is the spirit of UNESCO’s Chairs Programme? You have chosen the theme of “building bridges”. What do we mean by this? Obviously, not physical bridges which destroy landscapes of extraordinary beauty and historical value.

Do we seek in essence to “build bridges” among institutions, disciplines, and countries at the regional and world-wide level in order to promote the values enshrined in the Preamble to UNESCO’s Constitution, namely

- "that the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all states must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern*? And
- that the States Parties of the Constitution of UNESCO, “believing in full and equal opportunity for education for all, in the unrestricted pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and perfect knowledge of each other’s lives”?

In his book “UNESCO from within” Richard Hoggart once said: “In relation to its own Constitution, UNESCO is like a well-meaning but physically ill-coordinated man who has been required to skate on thin ice for a good cause. By brio alone he gets so far at great speed, and then falls flat. He tries again but now someone throws a brick on the ice and he falls through. He climbs out and tries again; and so on” (p.42).

And so on and so on – greetings from Sisyphus. Do we have to live with these tensions, these contradictions between lofty goals and reality? I think we must, and I also think we can do better. If UNESCO is a sick organization, then we have to identify the reasons and to find solutions to cure the situation. Is it because of the Member States, the international NGOs, the National Commissions, the organizational set-up of UNESCO in general or the Secretariat in specific? And what about our role as part of the world intellectual community? Since UNESCO is a great market for knowledge exchange, since it is an important centre for international dialogue among experts of all kinds, we as an integral part of this organization are challenged to do our best.

In order to identify the potential list of interrelationships let me just remind you that UNESCO is carrying out five established functions:

- laboratory of ideas,
- standard-setter,
- clearing house,
- capacity-builder in Member States, and
- catalyst for international cooperation.
If we combine these five core functions with the five main fields of UNESCO’s competence, we receive a matrix with 25 fields of potential interaction. This would require an interesting attempt of analysis. And I would, first of all, suggest that you undertake such an exercise for your own Chair, that you locate yourself, that you identify how close you are to UNESCO’s programmes and that you define your tasks according to the contract with the Organization. In the last case, I suggest that you clearly differentiate between the minimum and the maximum, between the must and your voluntary contributions, in order to reach a desirable optimum.

Originally, I thought of distinguishing between vertical and horizontal links. But I think that the term “bridges” clearly implies and demands that we better think and act in terms of being on equal footing. Perhaps, thinking in different concentric circles would be a better approach, whereby the inner circle would be the own university and the starting responsibilities of an UNESCO Chair within and vis-à-vis other faculties.

This implies that bridges between institutions are to be built not only between universities in Europe and world-wide, but also between the academic community and the National Commissions for UNESCO, and the Ministries in charge of UNESCO, and the Secretariat of UNESCO in Paris. UNESCO Chairs are serving as a sort of intermediary; the relationships should not be one-sided but imply give and take, supply and demand.

UNESCO Chairs should also build bridges between disciplines. Although all Directors-General of UNESCO I met claimed in their speeches and programmes interdisciplinary work, I must confess that that the interdisciplinary work of the Secretariat remained extremely weak over the last decades. Unfortunately, a good example is the attempt of delivering, instead of world reports for each sector, only one UNESCO World Report of interdisciplinary nature on a bi-annual basis. During the Matsuura era we received instead of five reports only two, one on the information society – after, not before the Information Summit – and the other World Report on Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue just before he left. Instead, we are increasingly bombarded with a huge number of discipline-oriented reports such as the World Science Report, the World Social Science Report, the annual Education for All Reports, etc. Here, the UNESCO Chairs are challenged to interact not only with other Chairs dealing with the same topic but with Chairs covering other disciplines or topics.

UNESCO Chairs represent the Organization. This is a mandate, and it implies duties. This is again not a one-way interaction. UNESCO needs a regular and frank exchange of constructive criticism. For the time being, UNESCO does not get enough of that. This is a major weakness of the Organization. And this is primarily due to the changes in the governance structure of UNESCO in 1991/1993.

Until 1992, the Members of the Executive Board were primarily elected as persons in their personal capacity, as “representatives of the intellect” in one or more fields of UNESCO’s competencies. They were elected for four years on the basis of a proportional geographical key. Immediate re-election was not possible.
In 1991, UNESCO's Constitution was amended upon an initiative put forward by Japan "in order to increase UNESCO's efficiency". Since 1993, the Executive Board consists no longer of individuals, but of Member States which are eligible for immediate re-election. Of course, the Member States shall endeavour to appoint persons "qualified in one or more fields of competence of UNESCO and with the necessary experience and capacity to fulfil the administrative and executive duties of the Board".

As a result, a decrease of the specific qualifications in demand could be observed. Experts were replaced by traditional routine diplomats, often exchanged even within election periods. This kind of "creeping socialism", as I dared to say, led not only to a peu-à-peu disappearance of a high-level intellectual exchange, but also to an increased politicisation of the Board.

Some of you will most probably remember that France and Germany intended to balance the move of Japan twenty years ago. They suggested the setting up of an "ad hoc forum of reflection" by the Executive Board to be composed of a selected number of men and women in UNESCO's areas of competence from all the world’s regions. This ad hoc forum "would be responsible for identifying and defining a number of vital issues representing new challenges coming within the Organization's mandate". However, only one ad hoc forum took place. It has never been called together again.

One option could be the waking up of our "sleeping beauty", the ad hoc forum; another option would be an amendment of the amendment of 1991, because UNESCO’s responsibility for intellectual and ethical matters in an open society demands the best and most experienced personalities to be engaged, not primarily career diplomats.

The first question is, of course, whether we should and can engage ourselves as UNESCO Chairs? I would say yes, because we have to identify ourselves with the destiny of UNESCO and to give a broad interpretation of our mandate.

Without going into further details, let me give you another example of unfinished business which challenges our roles. This relates to the Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel adopted by the General Conference at its 29th session on 11 November 1997. Paragraph 75 reads as follows: "The Director-General will prepare a comprehensive report on the world situation with regard to academic freedom and to respect for the human rights of higher-education teaching personnel on the basis of the information supplied by Member States and of any other information supported by reliable evidence which he/she may have gathered by such methods as he/she may deem appropriate". About ten years later the Executive Board received a report consisting of no more than four pages. It had to be withdrawn. The promised final report is still in preparation. However, after three ADGs for Education and two ad interim ones over the last ten years I ask you how to best remind the Organization of fulfilling its duties.

Of course, I could continue with other issues concerning the work of UNESCO, but I will stop here.
To cut the story short, let me summarize what I have in mind. Two years ago, a top UN official called for a new culture of “intellectual social responsibility” to take education beyond the classroom or campus, to leave its ivory tower and to search for real solutions to real problems. In principle, I agree with this position. However, this cannot and should not be undertaken in a technocratic manner, as a one-way activity from above. It demands a concept of mutual communication and cooperation whereby the UNESCO Chairs should be at the forefront.

Dear Colleagues,

Putting it in a nutshell, let me summarize as follows:

- UNESCO is an organization for peace serving the United Nations in its fields of competence;
- the United Nations have four main aims:
  a) securing peace,
  b) promoting social and economic development,
  c) implementing human rights and
  d) saving the environment;
- UNESCO should primarily serve as a think tank and as a critical-constructive observer of what is going on in the UN system and in the world;
- given the small amount of its regular budget, UNESCO is not a development agency as often proclaimed;
- UNESCO should do less (programme/projects) with more (money) and not the other way around as always proclaimed by the Directors-General;
- "upstream" and "downstream" can be the main lines of UNESCO’s concrete action, but the main way of thinking must be "against the stream";
- there are three UNESCOs, the Member States, the Secretariat and the academic NGO world to be kept in mind;
- UNESCO Chairs are well placed to exercise intellectual social responsibility in close interaction with those three UNESCOs; and, therefore,
- they are challenged to contribute in such a way that UNESCO can make the world a better place.