

## Panel Discussion: Are universities allowed and capable to plan their research?

### Prof. Dr. Barbara Sporn

#### The University as Enterprise

Universities in the German-speaking area have seen many, often fundamental changes. Budget cuts, organization reform and student protest are some of the more prominent examples. Overall, a trend towards more accountability, management, and planning can be observed. Universities are described as enterprises which need to plan their resources, innovate their services and understand their internal as well as external stakeholder expectations.

At the same time, competition and market pressure have increased for the best talent and the scarce resources. Institutions with a strong reputation in research and a clear profile are often more successful in this environment. They are pushed to analyze their core areas of competence and need to invest in certain fields. Funding agencies at the national and international level require universities to develop these fields of expertise.

#### Research Planning

Freedom of research and teaching has been a high value in higher education for a long time. Science has to be free from political, economic or social pressures in order to move a field forward. Many innovations are based on this basic research. Universities need to guarantee a structure which allows the development of talent independent of any market trends or funding requirements. New fields have to be able to evolve.

Apart from an “open space for research” most universities define research objectives. They want to develop, reward, and promote young researchers, or they want to offer an attractive infrastructure for senior researchers and their projects. In this sense, a certain commitment to planning a research environment is necessary.

#### In Need of a Profile?

The landscape for research funding has changed. Universities need to set up mechanisms to develop areas of expertise and to create groups which form clusters of research. They will then form a specific profile for students and faculty to recognize the character of an institution. Often funding agencies – under the heading “strengthening strengths” - want to be sure that their money is spent for strong competent teams.

It is not easy to plan research. Universities need to make choices about which areas to build. It requires leadership and a certain amount of top-down process with bottom-up participation in order to be successful. Ideally, universities combine faculty expertise with societal needs as a basis to develop a profile. Society at large looks for institutions of higher education which can provide rigor and relevance in their research.