



INSTITUT FÜR HÖHERE STUDIEN  
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES  
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## Research Seminar:

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# Governing Disciplines

## Reform and Placation in the Austrian University System

Datum: Monday, 17. November 2008

Uhrzeit: 16:00-18:00

Ort: Institute for Advanced Studies, Department of Sociology

Based on a paper of the same title by Claudia Meister-Scheytt and Alan Scott to appear in Jeroen Huisman (ed.) *International Perspectives on the Governance of Higher Education*. London: Routledge, forthcoming 2008/09.

This paper seeks to provide a conceptual frame for analysing issues of governance and change in a university context. We use Louis Dumont's distinction between *homo hierarchicus* and *homo aequalis* to argue that change within higher education systems takes the form of a sedimentation, rather than replacement, of one organizational type upon another. In this context there is room for continuing struggles around basic values and the conduct of vocational life (*Lebensführung*). The paper uses the Austrian case in order to periodize reform waves and trace the ways these roll out in practice. This latter part of the analysis draws upon Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory of institutions and its elaboration by Christopher Hood. Interview material from a research project based in the Innsbruck School of Management on university boards is used to illustrate the dilemmas key actors face in realizing the intentions of legislation and of state reform aims.

Rather than assume that university systems are the passive victims of 'neo-liberalization', we argue that the scope for placation and for subversion of reform intent remains considerable within HE systems. This residual, but not insignificant, autonomy we explain in terms of the self-reproducing logic of disciplinarity; a logic that, in some areas more than others, remains resistant to external pressures for 'relevance', however defined. The weakness of the most recent reform wave is partly intellectual: its over reliance on rational actor models of agency and its ahistoricism.