

*Academic Values & Student Identity
in the Marketized Higher Education Sector*

*Student Perceptions of Transforming Universities in
Germany and Denmark*



Veronika Maria Schmidt

*Academic Values & Student Identity
in the Marketized Higher Education Sector*

*Student Perceptions of Transforming Universities in
Germany and Denmark*

Master's Thesis

in

Culture, Communication and Globalisation

Aalborg University Denmark

Veronika Maria Schmidt

Supervisor: Malene Gram

May 2013

Number of standard pages: 80

Abstract

The competition among higher education institutions is rising on a national and international level. As knowledge represents the main driving force for economic growth in today's globalized world, universities have not only taken up internationalization efforts, but they are also actively marketing themselves around the globe. While some scholars see the benefits of the marketing approach for the higher education sector, others perceive the adoption of business practices as highly problematic: a growing fear of dwindling ethical academic standards along with a decrease of *true* student-knowledge engagement can be noted.

Given this context, this thesis aims to explore how German master students at Aalborg University Denmark (AAU) perceive their personal and academic development within a transforming higher education landscape. Further, and from the perspective of AAU's international recruitment team, it tries to find out how AAU could market itself successfully to potential German students. This is of interest since higher education marketing is fairly new in Germany and it is not clear how German students respond to a university conducting promotional activities. By shedding light on the students' study experiences in Germany in comparison to Denmark, insight for addressing the sketched issues is provided. The classical way of teaching in Germany opposed to the Problem Based Learning (PBL) method (based on group and project work) practiced at AAU also constitutes an integral part of this thesis.

The scope stretches over relevant secondary literature about higher education transformation, identity and consumption theories. Empirical data is generated by conducting qualitative in-depth interviews with nine German AAU students. Within the interpretivist paradigm, the data is analyzed by employing the concept of the hermeneutic circle.

The findings show that learning and teaching conditions have worsened in Germany as there seems to be a move away from critical thinking towards non-reflective "bulimia-learning". The few German universities following a marketing strategy are characterized by competitive student behavior and a counterproductive atmosphere. The learning environment at AAU on the other hand is described as collegiate, friendly and service-oriented. The close corporation with the teaching staff and the PBL model can enrich and inspire the critical learning process. Although PBL is regarded as a more fruitful way of gaining knowledge, most of the students struggle with its execution. The loose structure, the lack of control mechanisms and unequal work forces within the groups are some of the reasons. When it comes to university marketing, the students only express criticism towards German higher education marketing for being too obtrusive and revenue-centered. AAU's marketing efforts are

perceived as mainly positive and informative. However, “the German eye” is not used to higher education in the advertisement world.

All in all, the findings suggest that at least some German universities have experienced a shift in academic values which is hollowing out the “Idea of a University”. Old structures combined with the attempt of conforming to new European standards are harming the learning environment. AAU’s PBL model seems to be much more adequate for developing a “healthy” academic identity if the right circumstances are given. The findings also show that university marketing does not have to “spoil” the learning environment if it is not exploited for mere financial gain by the institution. In regards to the more global issue, the students are highly reflective about internal and external demands and the new “passive student body” as described by some critics does not apply to them. Personal values and aspirations are tightly interwoven with the respective field of study and modified to society’s demands. It seems as if both the university and the student are in conflict between pursuing idealistic goals and serving the industry at the same time.

Although AAU’s marketing efforts are welcomed by the students, their receptiveness for “higher education ads” is very limited. Therefore, other marketing tools like education fairs, promotional visits, personal online and offline reviews about studying at AAU and developing a solid German alumni network should be considered. In regard to the interviewee’s problems with PBL, AAU has to find better ways to communicate its expectations to the students. The lack of a firm structure and academic contribution by some of their peers cause frustration among the German students and “taint” their otherwise positive impression of PBL and AAU.

Contents

1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 German Students at Aalborg University.....	2
1.2 Formulating the Problem: The AAU Marketing Dilemma in a Global Context	3
2 Background Information	5
2.1 Transformations of the Modern University	5
2.2 The World Wars and the Myth of the German Professor.....	6
2.3 Recent Reforms.....	8
2.4 Higher Education in the Marketplace	8
2.5 The German University System and Student Mobility.....	10
2.6 Aalborg University: Problem Based Learning and Internationalization.....	11
3 The Theoretical Framework	13
3.1 A Question of Ethics	14
3.2 The Commodification of Education and the Corrosion of Learning.....	16
3.3 The Customer Perspective as an Alternative Future for Higher Education	17
3.4 Academic Identity and Three Different Voices	18
3.5 Motivations to Study.....	19
3.6 Identity Formation through Consumption.....	20
3.7 Consumer Ambivalence in the Higher Education Sector	22
3.8 Theories tied together	22
4 Methodological Considerations	23
4.1 Paradigm and Research Approach	23
4.2 Research Design and Methods.....	25
4.3 Collecting Data through the Semi-structured Interview.....	27
4.4 Sampling.....	29
4.5 Data Analysis	30
4.6 Research Criteria	32

4.7 Limitations, Feasibility and Ethical Considerations	34
5 Data Analysis	35
5.1 Studying in Germany	36
5.1.1 German Professors and their Students.....	37
5.1.2 The Student Community	38
5.2 Studying at AAU	39
5.2.1 Getting used to PBL.....	39
5.2.2 Coping with Disappointment	41
5.2.3 Preparing for the Future	42
5.2.4 The Teaching Staff and Atmosphere at AAU	43
5.3 An Academic Career	44
5.3.1 Picking the Path	44
5.3.2 The Student Identity	46
5.3.3 Expectations from a University	48
5.4 University Marketing.....	51
5.4.1 Higher Education Marketing in Germany	51
5.4.2 AAU: The Positive Effects of Marketing	52
6 Discussion.....	55
7 Conclusion	60
7.1 Recommendations	62
List of References	65
Appendix A: Interview Guide	70
Appendix B: CD-ROM	73

1 Introduction

This thesis explores the values that German graduate students at Aalborg University (AAU) ascribe to their academic development within a transforming higher education (HE) landscape. Inspired by the question of how AAU can recruit more German students, it illuminates the differences between the students' bachelor education in Germany and their current experiences at AAU while addressing their perception of HE commodification and marketing.

Over the past few decades, universities worldwide have been undergoing a remarkable transformation as they have been facing and adapting to socio-economic and cultural changes. Most of all, the forces of an on-going globalization and the demands of a pervasive "knowledge economy" have led to the diversification, expansion and massification of HE (Gibbs, 2008; Gidley, 2012; Marr & Forsyth, 2011). As a consequence of globalization and marketization trends, universities are receiving an ever-growing number of overseas and international students (Marr & Forsyth, 2011). The number of students who are leaving their country of citizenship in order to enroll at a foreign university has overcome the 4 million mark in 2010, meaning that the percentage of international students worldwide has increased by 99% since the millennium (OECD, 2012). The desire to move across borders for academic purposes has always been present in the scholarly world; however, global mobility, new modalities in the transportation and information sector as well as internationalization efforts on the tertiary level are enabling today's students to broaden horizons while upgrading their curriculums (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). Celebrating the increasing amount of students entering foreign territories, scholars declare that the pursuit of knowledge has successfully overcome all physical and virtual boundaries (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Gidley, 2012).

But although knowledge, as being the main economic driving force in a globalized world, has accelerated the shift from a closed academic "elite" system to a diverse, accessible mass-system – on a national as well as international level – it has also conjured up a clash of values. The fear of a decrease in academic standards through the *marketization* of HE has risen when the latter came up as a trade category in the WTO registry around the year 2000. Along with the industry, governments have responded to this trend with incentive policies encouraging their home universities to compete for students on the international HE market (Miklavič, 2012). Putting price tags on educational programs and thus the commodification of education in Europe has incited critical voices to herald the erosion of ethical values within the HE landscape (Gibbs, 2008 and 2011; Naidoo & Jamieson, 2007; Schwartz, 2006). Whereas one less vocal camp is fearing the hollowing out of sacred intellectual values (and the dwindling of social and cultural ones), another one is embracing a new academic diversity, international exchanges, cross-cultural partnerships and the rising comparability

in HE standards and quality (Gidley, 2012). Although the (inter)national competition and the marketing of HE programs are said to be leading to improvement of academic quality and content, the student-as-consumer approach could also come with a certain risk (Natale & Doran, 2011). According to the “marketing naysayers” within the sector, the acquisition of knowledge at a university should not be reduced to simply obtaining a degree that is used to saturate the demands of the industry. Instead of preparing students for lucrative future job opportunities with “pre-packaged take-away” degrees, university scholars should encourage and support critical thinking, self-reflection, personal growth and the development of “good” human values, untainted by economic aspirations (Scott, 2004, p.442). Natale and Doran (2011) write the following:

A new model of higher education appears to be developing in which the pursuit of knowledge related to the “practical” rather than the pursuit related to what is “true” or “good” has become the dominant goal. The knowledge society is interested only in certain kinds of knowledge and values only certain kinds of learning. Therefore, students are torn between self-development and the need to have marketable skills (p.188).

Even if the situation is not as severe as the authors describe it above, we can still assume that the globalization and marketing trends have had and still have an influence on intellectual and scholarly values that universities jointly with society pass on to young academics.

1.1 German Students at Aalborg University

The shift from the classic university that is based on traditional values and practices, to a more modern, marketing-oriented and applied system, becomes apparent to those that have experienced both: international students who have already obtained a degree in their home country and are now continuing their studies at a more future- and industry-oriented learning institution such as Aalborg University (AAU) in Denmark. Founded in 1974, the university is characterized by its unique teaching and learning model “Problem Based Learning” (PBL). Driven by their own area of interest and curiosity, students are encouraged to solve real-life problems in small groups and thus, become better team players who are well-equipped when entering the working world after graduation. Next to this applied learning approach and the emphasis on working directly with the business community, 10% of AAU’s 19.000 students are internationals pursuing undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate degrees. The unique PBL model and a strong commitment to internationalization and innovation also translate themselves in AAU’s on- and offline brand communication (“About Aalborg University”, 2013). Hence, both the applied and modern learning approach and the marketing efforts can be seen as a move away from the traditional European concept of HE that international students who enroll at AAU might be used to from their home countries.

Coming from Germany and previously having studied there before enrolling at AAU, I could experience the contrast between the “old” and the “new” institution myself. Germany is a country where the branding and marketing of HE is quite novel and still met with half-hearted approaches or ignorance (GATE Germany, 2010). On these grounds, I have been surprised and somewhat puzzled by the branding and marketing efforts of AAU. Personally, I had never observed public owned universities running extensive marketing campaigns or using witty advertising slogans and brand logos. It appeared to me that a public university as an institution standing for a public value like education would be at odds with the mere concept of advertising and marketing. Hence, perceived through my “cultural filter” it could not mean anything “good” to see a university eagerly reaching out for students.

The interest in this matter grew with my employment as a student worker in the communications department of AAU, specializing in international student recruitment within the German market. Being a member of the international recruitment team allowed me to experience the outlined conflict from the opposite side turning it into a dilemmatic practical problem: How would AAU be able to advertise in Germany and recruit more German students if such efforts would go against an engrained ethical sentiment? I also asked myself how the PBL model and a more job-oriented way of learning was perceived by other German students and also whether AAU could maybe “get away” with modern advertising as the institution is – opposed to many German institutions –relatively young and not “old-fashioned” to begin with. In order to answer these questions, I decided to engage with German students within the scope of in-depths interviews.

1.2 Formulating the Problem: The AAU Marketing Dilemma in a Global Context

The group of interest for my thesis consisted of German graduate students at AAU who have had their first university experience at an undergraduate level in their home country. Since they have not been exposed to extensive HE marketing or university branding in Germany (so was the assumption), I aim to find out how they perceive AAU’s modern brand image and its efforts in regards to student recruitment. From the AAU marketer perspective, which I am taking on in this research, it was also important to know how the students would define their education and which values they attach to it. Furthermore, since the PBL model must differ from their previous study experiences, it is also part of this research to explore the students’ attitude towards this untraditional way of learning and how it can be connected to AAU’s marketing efforts. I also want to explore how operating with “real-life problems” and the emphasis on teamwork – opposed to traditional university teaching and assessing – influence the academic identity of the student. This is especially relevant when looking at PBL as directly preparing students for jobs (which could be considered as a short-term goal). On this note

and in terms of consumer behavior, the way German students cope with mixed emotions concerning their old and new study environment is also analyzed.

However, the purpose of this research is not only to analyze the German students' perception and values when it comes to studying at AAU. It is also to find a connection between the decrease of academic values through marketing HE and the outlined "small-scale" marketing dilemma. This enables me to integrate the analyzed problem into a broader context, giving it more of a global relevance. After all, the philosophical dimension has the potential of providing explanations to the posed question and can draw a sharper customer profile of AAU's target group within the PBL concept and a new knowledge society.

In a nutshell, next to the question of how a paradigm shift in academic values reveals itself within the consumer segment of German graduate students at AAU and how these students perceive their academic identity given the outlined scenario, I am asking myself how AAU can market itself successfully to German students. Conclusively, and in light of my considerations above, I have developed the following problem formulation:

How do German graduate students perceive studying at Aalborg University as compared to studying in Germany and which values do they ascribe to their education within a marketized higher education landscape?

And furthermore the sub-question:

How do marketing efforts by universities affect the students' perception of higher education and how can Aalborg University successfully market itself to the German student?

With these questions, I aim to gain a deeper insight and a better understanding of the matter that puzzles me on a philosophical and professional marketing level. I find it necessary and interesting enough – especially for those practicing HE marketing at AAU – to explore this particular student segment with its perceptions and values when it comes to the consumption of a study program at AAU. Hence, the "German marketing dilemma" is put into context of the ethical discussion in order to bring about not only insight, but recommendations for the international recruitment team at AAU.

In the following section, background knowledge concerning the German university system, Aalborg University, its PBL model and an overview dealing with the most significant developments of the European university landscape are provided. Subsequently, the main theoretical section introduces theories that paint a pessimistic picture for the future university, its students and professional staff, predicting a moral decline with the rise of marketing HE. However, in order to construct a balanced framework, another approach offers a more positive outlook pointing out the benefits of HE

marketing for universities operating in a modern knowledge society. It is vital to see if any of these projections, trends or sentiments can be rediscovered within the analyzed consumer segment. To get a better hold of the students' elaborations, a concept of how academic identity is formed and how it can change through the course of HE is employed. This only makes sense as values (that play an important part in this research) can make up identities, are displayed through identity or are at least tightly interwoven with it. Especially in order to answer the question of how the students' academic identity is affected by an on-going HE transformation, these theories are indispensable. Moreover, since this research is handling commodification and the marketability of HE, consumer-theory and a theory of how identities are being "extended" through possessions and commodities are introduced. The act of consuming, especially when it is spread over a longer period of time, also requires a theoretical backup handling consumer ambivalence as pursuing a degree is usually accompanied by various mixed feelings and experiences.

Altogether, the presented theories establish a framework that is used to analyze the students' stance on their own education. The theoretical section is followed by the methodological considerations leading this research. Subsequently, in the analysis, the empirical findings of the student interviews are placed into the context of marketing HE and the formation of academic identity. Within the section "Discussion", I reflect on the meaning of the analyzed "pieces" by putting them together in relation to the introduced theories. Not only these theories, but also the used methods are "re-visited" and recommendations for future research are provided. In the final part, the "Conclusion", the main findings are summarized which finally leads me to answering the research question. Specific recommendations for AAU and its international recruitment team are listed in the last sub-section "Recommendations".

2 Background Information

2.1 Transformations of the Modern University

When thinking about the concepts behind our modern university today, Wilhelm Humboldt and Cardinal John Henry Newman could be the first names that come to mind. The Humboldtian concept is based on the notion that research and scholarship have an interdependent relationship and that only the interplay between the two can result in personal growth and knowledge expansion. Both the student and the teacher are advised to learn together in an environment of academic freedom (Marr & Forsyth, 2011). Although Newman had similar views in many aspects, his focus was directed towards the diffusion of knowledge and not the advancement as in Humboldt's case (Newman, 1854). The Humboldtian idea of a university from 1810 (when the University of Berlin was founded)

became the dominant model in Europe and then the blueprint for research-oriented universities in the United States. Since Germany had been the breeding ground of this concept, it received strong international recognition in the HE sector which can still be felt today. Although they still enjoy a high reputation, Anderson (2010) points out that the Humboldtian universities had a very “restricted social mission” as they mainly recruited upper class students who were then trained in areas like medicine, law and religion in order to fill in elite positions that came with high social responsibility (Anderson 2010, chap. 5). It also needs to be mentioned that even though Humboldt had stressed the importance of conducting research, it was seen as more of a by-product of the learning process. Only later in the twentieth century, specialized research as an independent activity started to play a major role within the industrial, military and social arenas (Anderson, 2010). This was also when the elite system started to transform itself into a more open system. More and more occupations became professionalized and vocational or technical subjects integrated themselves into the traditional university portfolio.

While the universities of the nineteenth and twentieth century were exposed to strong national influences, they were still marked by the “cosmopolitanism of learning and science” (Anderson, 2010, chap. 6). In line with Humboldt’s vision that universities should not bend under external pressures, the idea of academic freedom emerged. It did not only include the commitment to the free pursuit of truth and teaching, but also the notion that scholars and scientists represented an independent and accredited intellectual and cultural force in society. Also in terms of governance and administration, universities were operating highly autonomous despite the laissez-faire capitalism of the nineteenth century (Anderson, 2010). Anderson (2010) writes:

(...) no-one then suggested that universities should be run as commercial organizations. It was seen as a virtue that, like the professions, they stood outside the system of market relations and cultivated values of a higher and permanent kind. This sort of autonomy was an aspect of classic liberalism, which saw the best protection of liberty and diversity in a pluralist civil society of self-governing institutions. Neoliberalism, which seeks to dismantle all barriers against the operation of pure market forces, has proved rather different (chap. 6).

The last sentence hints at the issues that are directly related to the corrosion of academic values as mentioned in the introduction. These aspects represent a central part of this thesis and are treated in further detail within throughout the research.

2.2 The World Wars and the Myth of the German Professor

According to Rüegg (2010), wars throughout history had a tremendous impact on HE institutions in Europe. During the First World War, growing nationalism resulted in an increased isolation and a decrease of international cooperation for many universities. Especially German intellectuals were

excluded from scientific committees and bonds (“Wissenschaft und Forschung”, n.d.). However, after recovering from the repercussions of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany’s contributions to the fields of natural sciences impacted the world of knowledge on a global scale. Coping with war guilt after the First World War, academic scholars separated themselves ideologically from the “Weimarer Republic”, referring to the freedom of research and teaching that was granted by the “Weimarer Constitution”. This attitude surely changed with Hitler’s takeover in 1933 and the “adjustment” of scholastic values to the ideology of the Third Reich.

The Second World War represents the biggest turning point in European university history. HE institutions served as the ideal platform to spread the ideological values anchored in the political systems to young academics and were correspondingly under strict control. Nevertheless, the end of war also heralded a moral re-orientation – not only in Germany – that was pushed forward by the occupying powers through “denazification” and a democratization of the educational systems. By 1947, the rehabilitation of a democratic German HE system was “handed back” to German authorities. Not only in Germany, but also in the majority of Western European countries, the local value and focus on HE rose significantly. The recent war and the awareness of the university as being the centre of humanitarianism standing for social responsibility created the foundation of the university system that is taken for granted today (Rüegg 2010).

Even through the most troubled time in history, professors in Germany have always enjoyed a high status and have been intellectually “separated” from the rest of society. Especially before 1914, they were regarded as the bearers of wisdom and the spiritual and intellectual mentors of the public. As the intellectual elite, the professors of Prussia became the paragon of Europe and were treated like bishops (Gruneberg, 2011). Gruneberg (2011) writes that even with the age of industrialization that brought about structural changes also within the HE landscape, the intellectual elite shun its eyes from reality and stayed seated on its “elevated thrones” (Gruneberg, 2011, p.3). The extreme freedom that German professors enjoyed in their profession lead them to conduct primarily self-motivated research. At times, this resulted in the neglecting of actual teaching. The rise of National Socialism in Germany and the following years of war represent the darkest and most uncomfortable chapter in the history of the German professor. The majority of scholars welcomed the new ideology and the German university bowed down without much resistance. After Gruneberg (2011), the academic teaching elite – still ashamed and battered by the war – tried to reestablish the old pecking order around the 1950s. Gruneberg (2011) writes: „When the professor entered the institution only his word counted, no ifs and buts: *I am your Lord, your God. You shall not go after other Gods.*” (...) If somebody wanted to hear a second opinion, they had to switch universities” (pp.3-4). However, this attempt was met with a growing resistance on the part of the students who were longing to break the shameful silence after the Second World War. Subsequently, the 1960s, an era of student

movements, brought about drastic changes tearing the teaching elite from its high throne. Although a loss of authority and the religious-like respect were the outcome, the German professor is still living his or her outmoded legacy today, standing out with a particular personality that reformers would refer to as “a tough nut” (Gruneberg, 2011, p.4).

2.3 Recent Reforms

The first reform worth mentioning is the “Magna Charta Universitatum” that was signed by 388 rectors worldwide in 1988 (“Observatory of the Magna Charta”, n.d.). It reinforced the Humboldtian principles of the universities’ autonomy and independency from political or economic authorities (Anderson, 2010). Moreover, it affirmed their dedication to free teaching and their strong commitment to the transmission of culture and science (“Magna Charta Universitatum”, 1988). Expanding networks, international cooperation and the growing globalization led to the Bologna Declaration eleven years later: 29 European countries signed an agreement in order to reconcile the differences among the European HE systems. The goal and the outcome were a uniform evaluation system to facilitate credit transferability (ECTS), standardized degrees (Bachelor-Master system) by 2010 and the promise to increase international competitiveness in a joint effort (OECD, 2004, p.94). In the same spirit, the Lisbon Summit in 2000 and the Barcelona European Council Meeting in 2002 developed their strategies for HE within the EU with the incentive of turning Europe into “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” (European Council as cited in OECD, 2004, p.96). The latest “update” on Bologna is the Lisbon declaration of 2007 in which the intentions from the Bologna meeting in 1988 are restated. However, Anderson (2010) claims that those represent a “watered down” version of the original in order to comply to the “managerial and economic priorities of governments” and that universities experience a crisis of the Humboldtian university system (chap. 7-8).

2.4 Higher Education in the Marketplace

Prompted by the World Trade Organization for the first time in 1995, GATS (General agreement on trades and services) can be regarded as a concrete effort of drawing HE into the global marketplace. Including HE as a trade category and thus liberalizing the market, has spurred European countries to adopt internationalization strategies for their universities in order to keep up with a globalized knowledge society (OECD, 2004).

When claiming that the *internationalization* of universities and *globalization* play a major part in the transformation of HE, the two have to be differentiated first. Knight (1999) says that “internationalisation and globalisation are seen as different but dynamically linked concepts” and that “globalisation can be thought of as the catalyst while internationalisation is the response (...) in a

proactive way” (p.14). On these grounds, internationalization is not only the reaction to on-going globalization forces but rather a form of preparation or anticipation. An internationalized university landscape does not only bring about cross-national cooperation, but also competitiveness. As opposed to the “cosmopolitanism of learning and science” in the Humboldtian sense (Anderson, 2010, chap. 6), the “co-operation paradigm” is increasingly paralleled by a “competition paradigm” and European countries are reacting in different ways (OECD, 2004, p.100). While the United Kingdom or the Netherlands were the first ones to embrace the new economic rationale in Europe, other countries, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, have been worrying about the marketability of their institutions and the international recognition of their degrees (OECD, 2004, p.96). Further, those countries whose systems tend to be (over)saturated would accordingly not feel the immediate need to push internationalization or marketing strategies as much as other countries (ibid.). In countries where universities are not allowed to charge tuition fees and where the trade-view of HE has not replaced the political value-based one, the motivation to make university programs more attractive in the marketplace is rather weak or even absent (ibid., p.103). In Denmark, on the other hand, the “government supports the ambition of making the universities attractive for foreign students and offered universities the possibility of charging tuition fees for non-EU students” (ibid., p.100). In this case, universities experience a clear incentive to adopt HE marketing practices. In recent years, also the German ministry for education and research has been trying to encourage German universities to market themselves more effectively on the international market through becoming a paying member in “GATE Germany”, a single service provider and expert in HE marketing (“GATE Germany”, 2010). While there is public awareness that most German universities are not keeping up with the internalization efforts of other European countries, the restructuring of especially more traditional systems by introducing modern corporate marketing strategies is only slowly progressing (ibid.). Whereas Denmark’s eight universities are all employing a developed internationalization strategy (Hansen & Schmidt, 2006), only 38% of the 387 universities in Germany have adopted a similar approach, as shown in the figure below:

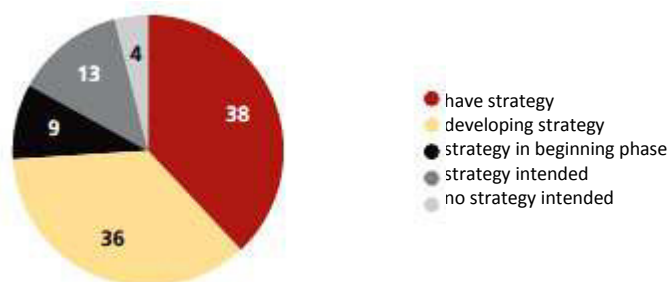


Figure 1: *Internationalization Strategy at German Universities in percent* (ad. from “GATE Germany”, 2010, p.23)

2.5 The German University System and Student Mobility

Among the 387 universities in Germany, 110 are traditional and 221 are universities of applied sciences. The traditional institutions hold a theoretical and research-based orientation, while universities of applied sciences – that mainly emerged in the seventies – focus on application and practical orientation offering programs within the fields of engineering, business and social work. The programs are usually tailored to certain professions that one third of Germany's student population aspire to take on after graduation. A popular form of pursuing business and engineering-related degrees is the enrollment in so-called "dual-programs". The student is attending regular lectures at university while working at a company for a salary in his or her lecture-free time. Advocates of this system point out the combination of theoretical and vocational training which would be highly valued by the industry ("Duales Studium", n.d.).

In total, 279 HE institutions are state-funded and enjoy reasonable autonomy within their federal states. As the amount of students has doubled since 1995, the demands for state funding are growing steadily. However, even the rise in governmental funds cannot meet the demands for modernization and rejuvenation of the HE system. Thus, the overall situation "can be described as unsatisfactory" and the dependency on third-party funds is constantly rising ("Higher Education System", 2011; "Higher Education Finance", 2011, para.1). In 2006, the federal state allowed universities to charge general tuition fees. Half of the federal states welcomed the change in legislation and introduced semester fees of around 500 Euro per semester ("Die Historie der Studiengebühren in Deutschland", 2010). However, due to great public upheaval and a referendum, tuition fees were abolished by February 2013 ("Ende der Studiengebühren beschlossen", 2013). Recently, German universities have been pointing at foreign universities who turned the acceptance of foreign students into an economic factor. Although the idea of charging non-EU students has found many advocates, universities still have too many qualms about the introduction of a selective tuition system (Burchard, 2013).

Another reason for public concern was brought about with the Bologna Reform in 1999. The transition to a uniform degree system that was completed in 2010 has been met with great resistance ever since. Students, professors and the industry have been complaining about a devaluation of the traditional German degree system. Next to offering the obligatory new system, some states reintroduced the traditional degree "Diplomstudium" in order to preserve the former prestige (Fries, 2010). Not only the decrease in quality, but also the increase of "bulimia-learning" (learning and reproducing in bulk) due to the restructuring measures have caused deep satisfaction in the student community. A three-year undergraduate degree required the compression of knowledge which used to be scattered over a period of five years. Thus, the (superficial) coverage of

the complete content fostered excessive studying and increased the amount of exams which in the outcome lowered the traditional university standards (Haerder, 2012).

In terms of mobility, German students' willingness to study abroad is constantly rising. Reasons are not only related to gaining an international portfolio, but it is reported that more and more students try to escape from overcrowded auditoriums and strict admission restrictions at German universities. Whereas 52.000 students went abroad in 2000, 127.000 students were moving across borders in 2010 (including exchange and full time students). Over half of the students abroad study in Austria, the Netherlands and Great Britain ("Auslandsstudium: Das Fernweh deutscher Studenten wächst", 2012). In consequence, the tendency to study in neighboring countries holds great potential for Danish universities in attracting more German students.

2.6 Aalborg University: Problem Based Learning and Internationalization

Broadly speaking, Danish universities are highly recognized all over the world when it comes to innovation and overall teaching quality. According to 2012/13 QS World University Ranking, five of Denmark's universities belong to the top 400 worldwide ("Study in Denmark", n.d.). Spurred by several reforms, also Danish universities have undergone significant changes over the past ten years. The government recognized the economic potential of knowledge and research and has been trying to equip its universities for global competition. Danish universities are increasingly encouraged to adapt their knowledge transfer to the needs of society and recent reforms have affected especially their management, educational and financial sectors. In terms of administering their affairs, universities have been granted more freedom and the management has been professionalized. In order to shorten the amount of students' study period, the government has introduced extra rewards for universities that produce their graduates in a certain time frame (Oddershede, 2009). As a result of the political decision to "go from research to invoice", more and more applied programs targeted at specific job profiles have been emerging (ibid., 2009, p.3). Oddershede (2009) writes: "From a political perspective it is very important to see this [supplying knowledge to society] as a chain of supply of knowledge – as far as possible directly – into new products" (p.3). Governmental incentives like encouraging universities to charge tuition fees from non-EU members and a focus on global competition have significantly driven marketing activities of Danish universities (ibid., 2009). Aalborg University, founded in 1974, is located in the North of Denmark and with almost 19.000 enrolled students the country's fifth largest university ("Informationer om den samlede studiebestand", 2010). Mainly located in Aalborg, the university includes faculties in engineering, natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities and has additional campuses in Esbjerg and Copenhagen. In 2011, 72% of the university's income was made up by government grants. Just to

illustrate the contrast, in the same year the average university in Germany received 72% of their income through third-party funds ("Facts 2011 – Aalborg University", 2011; "Ausgaben und Drittmitteleinnahmen der Hochschulen im Land steigen", 2013). According to AAU itself, it is "is the country's leading university with regard to knowledge transfer between the university and the business world" ("Facts 2011 – Aalborg University", 2011, p.10). The university offers a program called "Matchmaking" and has a Careers Center which facilitating exchanges between students and companies (ibid.).

One trait setting AAU apart from most other HE institutions is its unique Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach. Students are working in small groups solving a "real-life problem" that has grown out of their own "wondering" (Barge, 2010, p.5). After identifying the problem, it is being analyzed within the frame of a group project that is supervised by a professor and teacher of the respective faculty. According to Barge (2010), the model does not only have high pedagogical value as students are actively engaged in the learning process and teamwork, but PBL also represents an organized and traceable way of educating students. Complementary to the project work, AAU also uses more traditional teaching models like lectures and seminars. These are centered on PBL and transmit knowledge that can be applied in the projects ("Why study at Aalborg University", n.d.). The PBL model is internationally recognized: the university is in possession of the UNESCO chair in PBL and has received a very positive assessment by the OECD (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (ibid.).

AAU's internationalization strategies and multilateral networking are not only reflected in the relatively high number of international students (10%) but also in the continuous development of international programs ("Aalborg University of Denmark", 2010). Thus, marketing efforts and the branding of AAU are not only concentrated on Denmark but are practiced on a global scale (Hansen & Schmidt, 2006). According to its promotion material and overall tone of its campaigns, AAU presents itself as a modern and down-to-earth university that is highly valuing teamwork and informal student-teacher relationships ("Why study at Aalborg University", n.d.). The "AAU Brain" as shown on the next page has been used in national and international campaigns and commercials. It has become one of the university's trademarks since it does not only emphasize the "usage" of the brain but also the academic and personal value of collaborative work.

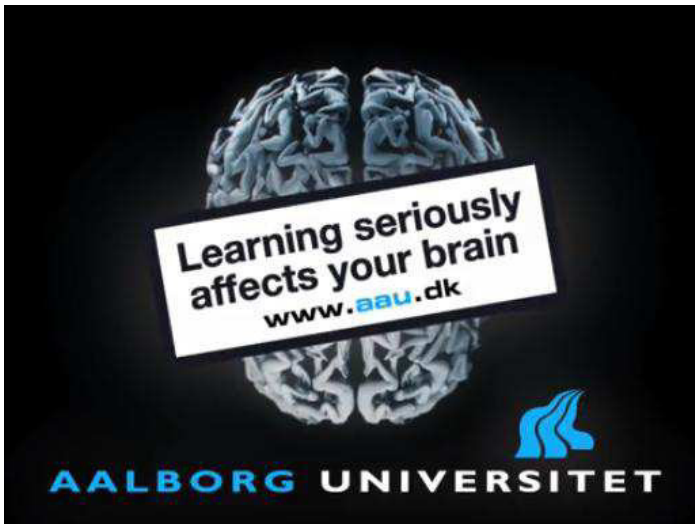


Figure 2: "AAU Brain" composed of human bodies ("AAU film og TV", 2010)

In terms of foreign student recruitment, AAU has mainly been focusing on attracting students from Europe (Jacobsen as in Hansen & Schmidt, 2006). In the last five years, there have been sporadic efforts in recruiting especially German students. The marketing communication included a German landing page on the AAU website, education fairs, advertisements in free study books and Google AdWords. The direct outcome, however, was difficult to measure (Pedersen, 2013). A more concentrated approach on the German market with native cultural insight and more targeted promotions was introduced in autumn 2012, when I took on the job at AAU Communications. Since then, I have helped organizing AAU's presentation at three different educational fairs in Germany, the translation of Germany-targeted GoogleAds and the organization of several promotional university visits in Germany.

3 The Theoretical Framework

The complexity of the research problem requires a theoretical construct that can hold the main components of the conceptual formulation. Hence, the theoretical framework incorporates a set of different approaches and theories that address the following key elements: transformations in HE (pessimistic and optimistic outlooks on the ethical standards of HE), student identity, HE in the context of consumerism and consumer ambivalence. Clearly, all these elements assume a role in the research problem and are subject to strong interplay. However, by giving each of these parts a theoretical backup, they are easier to be extracted from their context when analyzing the empirical data.

3.1 A Question of Ethics

Although the commodification of HE is a topic that has come up fairly recently in Europe, the attempt to define the purpose of universities from a philosophical point of view is not new. With the introduction of degree subjects such as engineering or chemistry and a stronger commitment to catering industrial needs, universities already experienced a shift from wisdom to producing utility. The question whether HE institutions should and can produce both at the same time, lies at the heart of the old “crisis of the university” and is now being intensified by the adoption of marketing practices that once were exclusive to the business world (Gibbs, 2008, p.3). Due to the privilege of state funding, a majority of the more traditional European universities were able to circumvent a mission statement that would redefine their role and function in a post-modern society. Thus, they did not have to acknowledge or respond to a philosophical contradiction (Gibbs, 2008). Yet, with the rising competition between universities on a global scale leading to visible marketing efforts and commoditized educational programs, critics are asking universities to reconsider their values and to “articulate a vision of what they are trying to achieve for society, and then live up to it” (Schwartz, 2006, p.4). But when speaking of ethics in HE and traditional academic values that need to be preserved or revived, what are we in fact referring to? According to Gould (2004), the university’s social mission does not involve the teaching of ethical behavior and the instilling of a fixed set of good values since “goodness” – as in being good and making good decisions – are very context-sensitive (a notion established by Aristotle). But it is rather about how well-informed these decisions are – may they concern the professional or private life of the social actor – and how students argue in favor of their good actions. Thus, HE should help students to “form values, shape valid argument, and to develop a base of knowledge allowing for informed decisions” (ibid., p.452). In Gould’s (2004) eyes, HE should enable individuals to empathize with others and to develop social values, to live a responsible life serving the public good as opposed to only wanting to satisfy personal monetary interests. Yet, he argues that the European university is facing major moral challenges and that the described tasks are difficult to live up to given the setting of an economy-driven knowledge society (ibid., pp.451-453). According to him, especially universities that find themselves “flirting” too much with market-driven values run risk of creating an unhealthy atmosphere of market opportunism and “bad metaphysics” (ibid., p.454). Following this pessimistic outlook, it is inevitable that the favored values and objectives embraced by the institutions will in one way or another be projected onto the students.

Whether the concerns about a negative shift in academic values hold truth is to be discussed but getting nostalgic and looking back at the antique university in its pristine moral robe might be naïve and counterproductive to the dialogue as the surroundings of the modern university have drastically changed. Scott (2004) addresses the atrophy of ethical issues in HE that has been brought up by

scholars like Gould (2004). Scott (2004) points out that the historical “elite university” that is often (unduly) romanticized, existed more or less outside of society and could therefore develop its own set of values maintaining a critical distance at all times (p.442). Today, mass HE systems are fully integrated in a knowledge society and are thus experiencing an “erosion of the boundaries between once discrete domains such as politics and the market, science and culture” (ibid., p.443). The changes of time and the integration of the open mass university system into a post-modern world might therefore ask for a redefinition of academic values, especially in the context of competing on HE markets. To Miklavič (2012), the definition of such will help in constructing the meaning of HE in order to protect it from the construction of other, rather undesirable meanings. In 1988, the authors of the “Magna Charta Universitatum” tried to define some of the university’s moral purposes that already seem to hover between retaining traditional, moral values and caving in to growing economic demands. Among the fundamental principles it is mentioned that a university as a “trustee of the European humanist tradition” must exercise its research and teaching “morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power”. However, it is also not “to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society, and advances in scientific knowledge” (Magna Charta Universitatum 1988). This example demonstrates the balancing act universities have to perform in keeping up with external demands and retaining internal ethical standards.

Since the concept and interpretation of ethical values as they could be applied within HE might differ from reader to reader, one possible definition should be offered. In his essay “Values and Globalisation”, Marginson (2006) focuses on the impact of globalization forces on the ethical values within HE sectors. He establishes values and ethical regimes that in his eyes constitute the “Idea of a University” (ibid., p.2). This research paper draws on these values and ethics that he divides into two domains:

- ***The domain of communicative association.*** *This embodies liberal human conduct, including the right to speak, and the conduct of dialogue on the basis of honesty and of mutual respect; and intra-institutional and inter-institutional relationships grounded in justice, solidarity, compassion, cosmopolitan tolerance and empathy for the other;*
- ***The domain of secular intellectual practices.*** *This includes support for, and freedom for and of, the practices integral to productive intellectual activity, including curiosity, inquiry, observation, reasoning, explanation, criticising and imagining (ibid., p.2).*

These values or ethical requirements are being played out on the level of the individual, as well as on the levels of the local and global intellectual community. Marginson (2006) also points out that it is within the second sphere where innovation takes place and new knowledge is being formed (p.2).

3.2 The Commodification of Education and the Corrosion of Learning

When reading about the corrosive effects of applying consumerist frameworks within the sphere of academia, marketing and education expert Rajani Naidoo is frequently mentioned in contemporary relevant literature. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) argue that the presence of consumerism in HE is globally changing and harming “academic identity, teaching and the curriculum” and “student identities” (p.267). The scholars base their suppositions on the theoretical model of French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who divides society in different spheres that contain value and capital (Bourdieu, 1986). According to him, HE occupies its own field in society operating with a value system that is independent from economic and political fields. This means that the “academic capital” is laden with “intellectual or cultural, rather than economic or political assets” (Naidoo & Jamieson. 2005, p.270). Following this thought, it is assumed that practices in the acquirement of capital within the academic field must differ from those used within the economic or political fields as they all operate according to their own unique rules and values (ibid., p.270). Given the outlined division, an exchange or shift in values in at least one field is incalculable once it is interwoven with the other fields. In this particular case, the authors are speaking of “the erosion of academic capital and the valorization of economic capital” (ibid., p.271). If the academic field is adopting practices of the economic field by marketing and branding universities, the intrinsic “use-value” of the educational process will (and already has?) become an “exchange-value” (ibid., p.271). This turns students into consumers and teachers into the producers of commodities; an alarming development that hollows out the basic idea of studying at a university (ibid.). Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) go further and claim that students who regard learning “as a commercial transaction” adopt an external relationship to the institutions as consumers draw clear lines between their own identity and the one of the organization. This fosters not only a passive consumer attitude and a sense of entitlement concerning the acquisition of a degree, but also an alienation from universities that are losing their characteristic of being interactive knowledge engagement centers (ibid., p.272). According to these elaborations, it is highly unlikely, that this type of student is interested in personal growth and the co-creation of academic value when engaging in the learning process as he or she is focused on the short-term goal of obtaining a degree that holds the exchange-value of economic revenue. Other undesirable outcomes of the commodification of HE are the quality of teaching: the authors assume that the fear of students’ complaints and the pressure of retaining and attracting more students lead the professional teaching staff to give milder feedback and to artificially lower the rate of failure. This could harm important teaching qualities that lie on a deeper emotional level like the “enthusiasm for the subject” or the passion for the “pedagogic process” of each individual student (ibid., p.274). Furthermore, the authors see a decrease of trust and risk-taking when it comes to academic research which could distort the basic idea of a university. Correspondingly, risky

academic endeavors that do not necessarily hold promising outcomes (but might turn out as very successful in the end) can only be undertaken when learners trust their teachers as guides throughout the process accepting the possibility of failure (ibid., p.275).

Natale and Doran (2011) paint a similar picture and sum up Naidoo's and Jamieson's (2005) concerns in one sentence: "The student as a consumer perspective causes harm. It has the propensity to lower quality and promote a passive, disengaged student body" (Natale & Doran 2011, p.194). Referring to marketing within education as an "epidemic", the authors claim that degrees nowadays are too narrowly defined and too tailored for a particular job to allow abstraction and critical thinking (ibid., p.187). They also accuse knowledge society of strong biases and favoritism when it comes to kinds of knowledge; a trend that is corrupting the personal development of the individual student and undermining subjects within the humanities.

3.3 The Customer Perspective as an Alternative Future for Higher Education

In his book "Marketing Higher Education: Theory and Practice", Gibbs (2008) is offering a different outlook on the commodification of HE and argues that universities could actually benefit from the student-as-consumer perspective. According to him, having forfeited the status as the most influential organization in society, the university could in fact learn from the business world, especially when it comes to understanding the point of view of the customer, the student. Thus, the attention can be directly focused on the learner who represents the most important subject in the relationship. Practicing HE marketing would force a university to find out who its customers are and make them recognize their needs, expectations and aspirations. Gibbs (2008) stresses that it is not about "pampering" each individual student but rather about managing his or her expectations and desires to learn. What is more, the university's interest for receiving feedback from its students through conducting interviews or surveys would give additional insight into the receptiveness of teaching practices and academic content. In face of the massification of HE this might be a vital step into the right direction, even if it is partly initiated by economic aspirations (ibid.). In contrast to Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) and Natale and Doran (2011), Gibbs (2008) is not afraid of students becoming short-sighted and profit-orientated: "When students talk about their experience at university, rarely do they say (...) 'I got the job that I wanted'. They talk (...) about the total experience of having attended their study institution" (p.39). This study experience would contain emotional values and include the process and mode of learning, personal development and interaction with peers and teachers. The author cautions against the common first reaction to associate HE marketing with deception and unethical business practices. This would lead to overseeing its potential to inform students, get informed by students and thus, deepening the understanding for the customer whose learning experience could be drastically improved.

3.4 Academic Identity and Three Different Voices

The question of how academic identity and alongside intellectual and personal values are shaped by current globalization and marketing trends raises other more philosophical questions about the nature of identity itself. The term identity is a very slippery one to begin with and the question of what it exactly *is* leads to a multitude of definitions strongly depending on different schools of thought (Lawler, 2007). In this manner, dealing with identity demands a common understanding of what it means within this research. Hall (2004) sheds light on major methodologies of selfhood and identity possibilities throughout history with a special focus on how these theories can be applied within social and cultural criticism. He offers a compact definition of identity that can serve as a cornerstone for this section: “one's identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being” (ibid., p.3). As this definition suggests, dealing with identity and more, trying to account for its composition is not a light (if not never-ending) task because it involves taking all areas of a person's personal and professional life into consideration. The more narrow focus on academic identity does not produce a more concrete image either: “At best one can describe academic identity as a constantly shifting target, which differs for each individual academic” (Quigley, 2011, p.21). The same author suggests that an academic identity involves “academic ontology (how academics come to be)” and how academics “form epistemologies (how academic[s] come to know)” (ibid., p.21). Evidently, both processes also involve the presence of cultural and social identities. Taylor (2008) stresses that academic identity is not an entity that once acquired will not change but finds itself under constant construction charged by the need for personal meaning. There might also be a great discrepancy to whatever identity is constructed and “exercised” privately and which (aspired) identity is displayed in public and shared with those around us. What constitutes identity precisely and whether there is a true core or an aspired identity in the first place is a profound discussion that would exceed the scope of this research by far.

Since the matter of identity formation holds deep complexities – particularly when approached from the psychological, philosophical and cultural standpoint – it is advisable to employ a concept that deals with the different layers and implications of student identity. Batchelor (2008) introduces the concept of the “student voice” that incorporates the capacity of “progressive self-formation and self-construction, shaping one's own individual identity and not accepting ready-made paradigms of studenthood” (pp.41-42). The latter point suggests that when students are uncritically adopting definitions about themselves, omitting the process of self-realization or self-understanding, this voice of self-formation is neglected or even muted. Without this voice, identity cannot be properly shaped and subsequently, the desire for self-transformation through HE cannot be fulfilled. Batchelor (2008) argues that today's students find themselves in a paradox situation that has been created by

consumerism and commodification: on the one hand, they are asked to evaluate the quality of programs and courses, but on the other hand, commercial language and a prefabricated student-image is restricting their vocabulary and in fact silencing their real voice. Therefore, the praised shift towards the learner ushered by global marketing practices as described by Gibbs (2008) would essentially be a fallacy, according to Batchelor (2008). It is not the totality of the student voice that is falling silent, however, but rather “voice modes” that disappear while others are being overemphasized. To understand this notion, Batchelor’s (2008) concept of the three different student voices requires a closer look:

The concept of student voice may be anatomized into three constituent elements: an epistemological voice, or a voice for knowing; a practical voice, or a voice for doing; and an ontological voice, or a voice for being and becoming (p.45).

The author surmises that the third voice, the ontological voice, is the most delicate and vulnerable one of the three and also the most important one when it comes to identity formation. According to her, today’s academic world does not validate this vulnerable voice sufficiently and privileges the notions of knowing and doing. This is quite a predicament as using the voice of being and becoming is necessary to understand the other two. Ironically, the ontological voice of self-realization is primarily used in HE marketing promising future students that they could become, whoever they aspire to be (ibid.). There is a risk that the terms self-reliance, self-realization, self-creation, self-awareness and self-empowerment are becoming empty shells that have nothing to do with progressive life-long learning (ibid.). Batchelor (2008) fears that the real content could be “diminished by being restricted to the status of quickly achievable orientations directed towards successful activity in the world” (p.46). An imbalance between the three voices caused by short-termism, the longing for success and an emphasis on being productive and already matured could therefore lead to “a corrosion of character” (ibid., p.54). First and foremost, and here the author leans on Bourdieu’s philosophies, the voices of knowing and being should stand in the foreground as they withhold the potential of “an academic identity that is authentic self-expression” (ibid., pp.48-40). This description fits well into Quigley’s (2011) understanding of an academic, as discussed earlier, that is defined by the processes of coming to be and coming to know.

3.5 Motivations to Study

The theory above assumes that ideally, every student enrolled at a university has more or less the same (“noble”) motives for choosing an academic path which are self-realization and developing all three voices in equal proportions. According to Batchelor (2008), reasons that diverge from the ideal balanced model are being nurtured by today’s society. Thus, there can be a variety of different reasons why a young adult would pursue an academic career in the first place. Next to the more

philosophical theoretical approaches about academic identity, it is helpful to work with a more “simplified” framework that can help through the beginning stages of the analysis. Hence, Bogler’s and Somech’s (2002) typology comes in handy as it tries to find the most common reasons for enrollments at HE institutions. The authors identify the following three subcultures:

- **instrumental:** *students who attend institutions of higher learning to acquire degrees that pave the way to social occupational mobility*
- **scholastic:** *students driven by intellectual stimulation and purely academic reasons*
- **collegiate:** *corresponding to students’ aspirations for their social life on campus (ibid., p.234)*

According to the previous more negative theories, the current academic environment cultivates students that are more instrumentally oriented and underemphasizes the importance of scholastic and collegiate motives. The more positive outlook by Gibbs (2008) however suggests that whether education is commoditized or not, students see their education as a full experience that involves all of the listed areas.

3.6 Identity Formation through Consumption

After exploring different theories that cover academic ethics, academic identity and the implications of students being knowledge consumers, it is useful to shed light on theories that treat the formation of identity through the act of consumption. After all, if the notion of study programs as products holds any truth, acquiring knowledge could be paralleled with acquiring other goods that affect and extend the student’s self in similar ways. And if this was the new way of constructing academic identity, we can ask ourselves how this new identity would comply with the three student voices outlined in Batchelor’s (2008) theory or in the definition of academic identity by Quigley (2011).

Our western culture is based on the notion of the independent self and is highly engaged in the formation of a personal rather than a collective identity. The pursuit of happiness and a good life are more connected to personal goals and achievements than interpersonal ones (Ruvio & Belk, 2012). Individuals are highly driven and pressured by the need of constructing their own identity in order to attain personal meaning and value. Yet, in this context, it is vital to keep in mind that Hall (2004) also referred to identity as a mode of a *social* being, meaning that identity formation only happens when interacting with others and ones culture. This entails that cultural and thus collective aspects exert a great influence on identity construction and subsequently consumer behavior. In connection to Ruvio and Belk (2012), the creation of personal meaning and value cannot be performed solitarily, but strongly depends on interaction and collective values.

Batchelor (2008) has outlined how an academic identity can evolve through the constant process of learning, self-awareness and self-realization. However, the common notion is that in our consumer culture, this difficult process can be circumvented through purchasing “finished” identity-pieces (Dittmar, 2007). This is concordant with Batchelor’s (2008) fear of students blindly and uncritically adopting student identities.

When it comes to the construction of identity through consumption, Belk (1988) is one of the best-known researchers who established a framework that has been reused in consumer research ever since. After Belk’s (1988) theory, the accumulation and consumption of tangible and intangible matters have always been used to extend the self or one’s identity. Or to be more precise and simplistic: human beings define who they are in terms of what they *have*. Hence, it is act of consumption through which identity and the self are being developed and established. The acquired possessions do not necessarily take the form of an external object but they might as well be another person, groups and experiences. Belk (1988) argues that as long as we can exercise control over the object (or the object over us), we regard it as an integral part of ourselves. As mentioned before, the extended self does not only include the ownership over material objects but also non-brand images like being a horse enthusiast, stamp collector or university student. Other categories are “internal processes, ideas, and experiences, and those persons, places, and things to which one feels attached” (Belk, 1988, p.141). The author draws on philosopher Sartre when he speaks about the notion of integrating something into our self-concept by exercising control over it. In a more figurative sense, it could be the mastering of a skill, the creation of ideas or simply knowing things, people or places. This evokes the idea that from a more philosophical perspective, the pursuit of an academic career has always been an act of consumption and an attempt of *having* rather than being. In this light, students have always been consumers and the attaining of knowledge and self-realization has always been the attaining of another possession (skill) to extend the self. Therefore, the perceived shift in academic values through marketization might lie in the way of consuming and not in the consumption itself. Thus, Quigley’s (2011) academic still comes to be and comes to know, although the process might have changed and adapted to different circumstances. In what ways this academic identity is “authentic” is a very difficult question to answer (Batchelor 2008).

In a nutshell, Belk (1988) stresses that consumption is the central way of creating one’s identity and that the phrase “we are what we have” has been gaining more and more validity these days (p.160). For this research his approach of “the extended self” through consumption is regarded as useful when analyzing how the selected students perceive their academic careers.

3.7 Consumer Ambivalence in the Higher Education Sector

When referring to students in a consumption context, it needs to be kept in mind that they are also the co-creators of an intangible product (apart from receiving a certificate) which can display itself in manifold versions (Eagle & Brennan, 2007). Gibbs (2008) has pointed out that pursuing a degree is rather an experience than a simple transfer of time (money) and knowledge since it is composed of emotional values, interactions with fellow academics, the university staff and student life in general. The amount of different variables that are present during the consumption of a degree (students, teachers, subjects, equipment, relationships, student life, etc.) implies that this particular consumer experience is predestined to hold contradictory or ambivalent emotions. In their research paper exploring consumer behavior of individuals planning weddings, Otnes et. al (1997) come up with the following definition for consumer ambivalence:

[It] is the simultaneous or sequential experience of multiple emotional states, as a result of the interaction between internal factors and external objects, people, institutions, and/or cultural phenomena in market-oriented contexts, that have direct and/or indirect ramifications on prepurchase attitudes and behavior (ibid., pp.82-83).

It is of interest to find out how students cope with these emotions, in what way the coping strategies become apparent and how these influence their academic identity. This applies to their previous study experience in Germany and also to their current enrollment at Aalborg University. In their research, Otnes et al. (1997) identify three coping strategies: resignation, modification and defiant non-purchase (p.91). Needless to say, there is a big difference between the experience of a wedding day (and the preparation of it) and the experience of pursuing a university degree. However, the coping with negative feelings such as disappointment and frustration prior or during consuming the product might bear similarities. For this research, the strategies are adjusted to the consumer segment and the product:

- “resignation” conforms to accepting the circumstances and neglecting internal values
- “modification” means the adaption of internal values to external ones
- “defiant non-purchase” equals to “dropping out” or “quitting”.

3.8 Theories tied together

The introduced theories are written by various scholars from different backgrounds shedding light on selected components of the problem. Apparently, these all play part in the shared perception that the face of HE has been and is changing on a global scale. In order to tackle the research question, these theories need to be tied together to form a solid framework.

The definition of ethics in HE has been discussed and also how ethical values could have changed due to commodification and marketing trends. This change is assumed to have an influence on

student/academic identity including students' attitudes towards learning and their motives for pursuing a degree. Therefore, next to outlining different scenarios that deal with the transformation of HE, a definition of academic identity was necessary. The student as a consumer perspective – evoked by the described commodification and marketing trends within HE – asked for the employment of consumption theories. These theories deal with both student identity as consumption is very closely related to identity (Belk, 1988) and consumer ambivalence. The latter is employed since the pursuit of a degree is a longitudinal consumption process characterized by negative and positive experiences that need to be coped with.

The theoretical framework helps in investigating the students' self-perception, their expression of academic identity and their view on HE institutions in the context of the outlined phenomena. Their insights towards their current enrollment at Aalborg University compared to their previous study experience in Germany does not only reveal preferences and coping strategies concerning their consumer behavior but also cultural influences that could indicate how AAU can achieve recruiting a higher number of German students.

4 Methodological Considerations

4.1 Paradigm and Research Approach

This section provides the methodological background that is necessary to define the context in which the findings of this research were generated and into which context they are placed. First of all, it needs to be established what the “basic set of beliefs” are as the observations and results should not stand alone without meaning and context (Guba, 1990, p.17). This set of beliefs that led my decisions and actions through this investigation constitutes my *paradigm* (Saunders et al., 2009) which is identified at the beginning of this section. My research paradigm and my research philosophy are directly tied to the research questions and reflect and justify my approach on how I intend to answer them in this research. As I aimed to get a deeper understanding of how German graduate students at AAU perceive their academic life and how these attitudes and mindsets relate to the sketched dilemmas, I chose to interact with them taking a closer look at what they say. Thus, several, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted in which the addressed issues were thoroughly worked through in conversation. The created content depended on the individuals involved in the interview: their perception of reality, their self-concepts and their concepts of their surroundings. The meaning of what is being expressed in an interview is attached to these individuals, their different backgrounds and unique stories and was therefore treated as such. This means that interpretations and conclusions that derive from the interviews are understood cohesively and are

not isolated from their context. This contemplation already suggests that within the frame of this thesis, there must be more than one single and universal worldview (Denzin, 2001; Bryman, 2008). On that account, I adopted *interpretivism* as my research philosophy as I tried “to enter the social world” of my “research subjects and understand their world from their point of view” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.116). In this philosophy, the interviewees and the researcher are regarded as social actors that interpret their everyday social roles according to the meaning that they attach to them. This also applies to how they interpret the roles of others (ibid., 2009). Before anything else, it was crucial to understand the life worlds of the interviewees with special respect to them being individuals, not speaking for the majority of German graduate students. Nonetheless, given that the individuals share a cultural and social background provided the possibility of detecting common patterns that could be linked back to the background information and the theoretical framework. While looking for trends and clues in the students’ elaborations that could help me in answering my research question, I remained open to unexpected findings and the emerging of new categories that were not listed in the theoretical framework. This was possible since the objective was not to test the theories (a practice often associated with quantitative methods and a positivist paradigm (Bryman, 2011)) but to inspire the collection of empirical data and to help organizing and analyzing it thereafter. Nevertheless, there are always temptations of *explaining* human behavior with the presented theories, so it was kept in mind that the “chief ingredient” of the interpretive approach within social sciences is not the explaining but primarily the “empathetic understanding of human action” (Bryman, 2008, p.15). The goal of explaining certain phenomena is commonly associated with quantitative research methods and an objectivist concept of reality (ibid., 2008) which is not compatible with the design of and the philosophy behind this research. The degree and capability of understanding the subjects might have been even greater in this project since I happen to be a German master student at AAU as well and did not have to artificially “put myself into their shoes”.

From an ontological perspective, it was assumed that every individual is constructing his or her own reality and subjective meanings resulting in an infinite amount of different versions of reality. According to Bryman (2008), *social constructivists* agree that “phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (p.19). This entails that social reality can only be constructed through social interplay and that there can never be a definite version of a social reality. Thus, the researcher is only able to present snapshots of a specific constructed reality at a particular time as a result from interacting with the analyzed subjects (ibid., p.19). To take this even further, this reality only exists in the first place because it is put into context of a mental framework and actually thought about (Guba, 1990). Of course, the researcher should also be aware that his or her reality lens is just as uniquely colored as those of his or her informants. Consequently, content first

passes through the sender's lens before it passes through the recipient's lens forming a collaboratively constructed reality. In a third step, we could even consider the reader's lens that the processed knowledge passes through when being confronted with the findings.

In line with the contemplations above, the epistemological approach in this research postulates that generated knowledge is made up by "subjective meanings and social phenomena" by taking into account the details of the situation (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119). This seems sensible as a social phenomenon was explored by investigating the attitudes and feelings that the students transmitted through their narratives.

4.2 Research Design and Methods

After having identified the research paradigm, questions about the research design and research method need to be treated in a more detailed manner. The research design as "the framework for the collection and analysis of data" reflects my "decisions about the priority given to a range of dimensions of the research process", meaning that the way data was collected determined the *kind* of data in the outcome (Bryman, 2008, p.31). In this research, the interpretation of a particular group's behavior stood in the foreground. Although quantitative researchers are also interested in exploring groups in society, it is often the meanings behind the behavior they are interested in and not so much the interpretation of the behavior in a certain context. Oftentimes, quantitative methods like social survey research "have been shown to relate poorly to people's actual behavior" (Bryman, 2011, p.620). Therefore, many researchers feel strongly about employing qualitative research methods when exploring human beings within their social world and want to distance themselves from a quantitative approach and a positivist research philosophy (Bryman, 2008). Given these contemplations, I opted for a qualitative research design of an in-depth *interview study*.

Before conducting the interviews, background knowledge was collected and I constructed a theoretical framework that assisted me in building an interview guide as well as in analyzing the empirical data. For the AAU background information, I drew on an email from Jens Pedersen (2013), Head of AAU Communications (see enclosed CD-ROM, Appendix B) that informed me about AAU's marketing efforts within the German market before my employment as a student assistant. For the assessment of the current situation, I relied on my own experiences and the shared knowledge among me and my team members.

The theoretical framework consists of a variety of peer-reviewed literature about ethics and transformation trends in HE, identity and consumption theories. Within the framework, different and sometimes opposing viewpoints create a balanced out construct that did not only serve as a guiding hand through the investigation but also facilitated the emerging of categories during the analysis of the empirical data. Although the theories represent a vital part of this research, the main focus lies

on the primary data generated through the interviews as it constitutes the center piece of my problem formulation. Thus, the emerging of new categories and not only the rediscovery of those from the theories was intended from the start.

In accord with my research philosophy, I was trying to see the different worlds explored through the eyes of my interviewees in order to get better equipped for answering the research question. Conducting relatively long in-depth interviews (60-80 min, with one exception of 25 min) with several (and in the end nine) students represented a suitable way of achieving this goal. According to Howe (2004), engaging people in a dialogue is one of the most fruitful ways of coming to a better understanding because “deeper and more genuine expressions of beliefs and values” can emerge through it while painting a more accurate picture of the held views (Howe, 2004, p.54). This means that the desired data was preferably gathered through the means of interviews since this research focuses on the understanding of human behavior and not, for example, on the causality of two phenomena or the generalization of certain findings. Kvale (1996) argues that interviews can help to gather knowledge about “one specific person or institution” or even “illustrate more general phenomena” that are embedded in a larger context (p.98). The interviewing of nine students in total did not only offer more volume and content but it also allowed for comparison among the participants and the discovery of tendencies and patterns. Why the final number of informants turned out to be nine is addressed in the section “Sampling”.

Given that the theoretical framework was to play an inherent role – also while gathering the empirical data – a semi-structured interview form was chosen. Thus, topics that had emerged from secondary literature could be integrated into the interviews without exerting too great of a restriction. This chosen interview form required the design of an interview guide. The process from the general research area to generating an interview guide which covered all relevant topics in need for discussion can be followed in Figure 3:

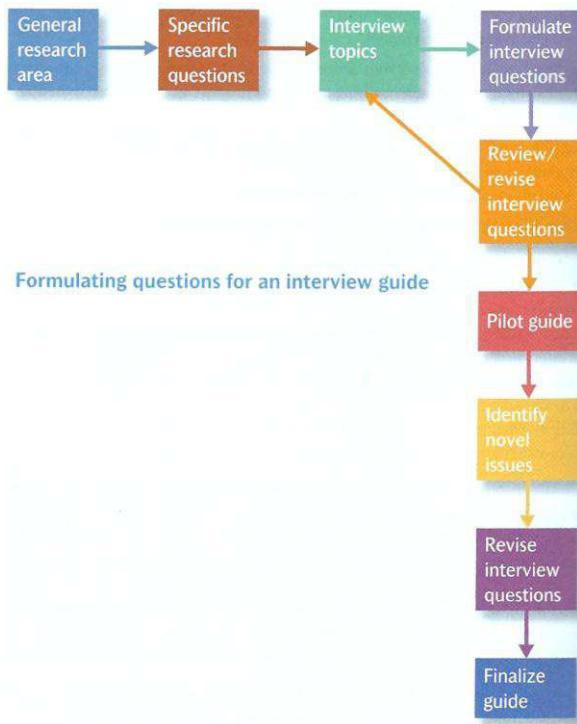


Figure 3 (Bryman, 2011, p. 476)

The background literature composed of different theories offered a pool of ideas from which several interview topics were condensed. The formulation of the interview questions required a constant adjustment as new possible topics came up while revising more literature. A pilot guide then came into practice while conducting a pilot interview that gave a first impression about the reception of the questions and the length of the interview (80 min). This first trial enabled me to identify new relevant topics for the following interviews that were then added to the final guide. The questions within this final guide (see Appendix A) include descriptive, general, (in)direct as well as very specific questions. The benefits and implications of this particular interview-structure are elaborated in detail in the section “Data Collection”.

4.3 Collecting Data through the Semi-structured Interview

In this section, the structure of the in-depth interview is treated in greater detail. The semi-structured approach was chosen as on the one hand, it allows interviewees to elaborate freely and even go off topic if it serves the greater purpose of creating more valuable and genuine data. On the other hand, there was a catalogue of questions that had to be answered in order to tackle the research question. An interview guide that included these questions was able to lead me and the informants through the conversation. According to Bryman (2008), a semi-structured interview offers great advantages if the researcher starts the inquiry with a rather clear idea and wants to address specific themes that cannot be answered in a simple question-answer-manner but require the

interviewee to unfold his authentic self in a comfortable setting. The structure, even though it might appear as somewhat loose, ensures a level of comparability if more than one person is being interviewed. In choosing a semi-structured form, the interviews were quite flexible but still specific enough to cover the range of topics I was interested in.

In order to “get a feel” for the appropriate length and the best approach in executing the interviews, I conducted a pilot interview before moving on with my methodological considerations. As many of the questions revolve around personal attitudes and deeply anchored values that would most likely be shared after a “warm-up-phase”, it appeared as absolutely necessary to allow for a longer duration. As more interviews followed, time management issues resulted in an exceptionally short interview of only 25 minutes. However, the personal acquaintance that had already been established before the interview was able to compensate for this drawback.

Next to allowing for a long duration of 60-80 minutes, it also became clear that it was necessary to be very patient and wait for an answer to unfold after a complex question. It often turned out to be helpful to touch upon the same question towards the end of the conversation. In most cases, new view-points and conclusions emerged in the process of speaking which at some point, led me as the interviewer to withdraw in order to not interrupt the informant’s “stream of consciousness”. However, the presence of the interviewer was more required in other cases depending on the student’s personality.

From the social constructivist viewpoint, the content generated in interviews is quite context-sensitive and depends on the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee (Kvale, 1992). The participant does not represent a full container that can be emptied but is a “real person who may not have quick and ready answers (“narrative complexity”), who may shift responses depending on the perspective taken (“multivocality” and “contextual shifts”), and who may even make new discoveries (“horizons of meaning”) as the result of participating in the research project” (Holstein & Gubrium quoted in: Hiller & DiLuzio 2003, p.3). These important points clearly manifested themselves in the pilot interview, in the interviews that followed and were also taken to heart in the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Regarding the intensity and length of the conversation combined with the limited time frame for this project, I settled on the amount of nine interviews in total. Since the pilot interview already offered valuable material for addressing the problem formulation and since there were no major adjustments necessary, it represented an equally important part in the body of primary data. The question of whether the total amount of interviews was enough to answer the research question and other concerns about the generalizability, reliability or transferability of this research is addressed in the section “Research Criteria”.

All interviews were not only recorded but also conducted and transcribed in German (see enclosed CD-ROM for audio and text files, Appendix B). However, all the material used in the analytic part of this project was translated into English as precisely and nuanced as possible. The reason behind this choice was that speaking in the students' mother tongue would contribute to a better conversation flow and descriptions and elaborations would be more authentic and articulated in a more nuanced way. Thus, I regarded it as an advantage to have conducted the interviews in the language the participants felt most comfortable. After all, they did not have to disengage themselves from the conversation in order to search for proper vocabulary and wording.

4.4 Sampling

After the decision of conducting qualitative interviews had been made, the question of how and where to find eligible candidates arose. As the amount of German graduate students at AAU is of a rather manageable size, I relied on my personal network in order to retrieve relevant candidates. I reached out to the informants either by asking them in person or by sending them an email (after being referred to them through mutual acquaintances). In order to achieve a wide range of possible scenarios, I selected students from different disciplines as staying in the sphere of one academic field could have resulted in an unnecessarily homogenous content. In more scientific terms, the selection of interviewees happened through a mixture of *purposive* and *convenience sampling*. Naturally for this research, only people who were "relevant to the research question" were interviewed in order "to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling" (Bryman, 2008, p.458). In other words, only German graduate students at AAU with previous university experiences in Germany were contacted. The availability and personal disposition of these students determined their participation in this project. Using convenience sampling would not only turn out to be practical but it would also offer an additional advantage: being acquainted with at least half of the research sample provided a head start in the interviews because a basic level of trust was already present. Thus, the "warm-up-phase" was shortened considerably.

At this point, the question whether and when the actual amount of interviews would be enough (irrespective of the given time frame) troubled me as it has many qualitative researchers before. Kvale (1996) has treated this topic in great detail. He argues that there is no rule of thumb for qualitative research that would indicate when an appropriate amount of people have been interviewed. As every research problem is different, the question of the right amount of participants is context sensitive and generally, a researcher should conduct as many interviews as he or she needs to reach the desired amount of data (ibid.). Bryman (2011) speaks of theoretical saturation: "successive interviews/observations have both formed the basis for the creation of a category and confirmed its importance" and "there is no need to continue with data collection" (p.420). Kvale

(1996) goes even further and claims that many qualitative research projects would benefit from reducing the number of interviews so that more time could be invested in a thorough preparation and analysis: “Qualitatively, the focus on single cases made it possible to investigate in detail the relationship of a specific behavior to its context, to work out the logic of the relationship between the individual and the situation” (p.103). These considerations and of course, the limited time frame resulted in the chosen number of participants.

4.5 Data Analysis

After the data had been identified and collected it had to be broken down and analyzed. In this section, the analytic approach is looked into and explained in detail.

The hermeneutical circle belongs to the interpretative research family and was chosen as an appropriate way of analyzing the empirical data. Although there are many different hermeneutic theories, all underline the center role of understanding through the universal medium of language: Through language “experience is filtered, encoded, and communicated in dialogue. It [language] bridges past and present, interpreter and text; it conveys and propels tradition” (Arnold & Fischer, 1994, p.58). Hermeneutics traditionally refer to the study of interpretation of texts but can also be an appropriate scientific approach when analyzing interviews (Kvale, 1996). After all, the concept of what a text actually *is* has been extended to human action and oral discourses that even serve as a prerequisite when subsequently analyzing written texts (Kvale, 1996). In this research, conversations about human life that are turned into texts are the subject of analysis. According to Kvale (1996), the benefits of the hermeneutic approach for the interview lie in the twofoldedness of the discourse analysis: first, the dialogue producing the interview text is illuminated and then the interview text itself is interpreted as a form of another dialogue. Arnold and Fischer (1994) have also pointed out the relevance of the hermeneutic approach within consumer research: “Of particular relevance are the concepts of [pre]understanding, the hermeneutic circle, the fusion of horizons, self-understanding and the ideal of the dialogic community” (p.55). In this research, the [pre]understanding occurred through the gathering of relevant theories, through the examination of my own situation as a German student at AAU and the conducted pilot interview. However, the “understanding” did not end there but developed over the course of the whole project. This process is already the main characteristic of the hermeneutic circle in which knowledge is generated through the investigation of a topic which then is reinvestigated with the newly acquired understanding (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). According to Kvale (1996), the meaning of separate parts of the text is largely determined by the anticipated global meaning of the text. The close investigation of the separate parts, however, lead to a change in the global meaning, which then again can lead to a change in meaning of the separate parts (ibid., p.47). Moving around in this circle – that is often

referred to as an iterative spiral (Arnold & Fischer, 1994) – can feel like a trap as theoretically, the researcher will not arrive at a natural ending point but keeps on going back and forth within the circle. Debesay et al. (2008) call it a vicious circle with the difference that the researcher is gaining more knowledge every time he or she is revisiting an old point. This circle can only be broken when the researcher comes to a plausible end point out of pure necessity. For Kvale (1996), the attainment of a sensible meaning signifies the end point which was also the goal in this research. On a critical note, the lack of a precise procedure or theory when taking the hermeneutic approach is defined as one of its weaknesses (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). Nonetheless, I regarded this “weakness” as an important methodological freedom that would enable me to operate more context-sensitively within the circle.

The constant comparison between old and new data until a state of saturation was reached (Bryman, 2011) already began during the collection of the primary data: the narrative content was broken down, coded and categorized. This process did not only provide a starting point for designing and conducting the interviews, but it also avoided the crisis of the 1000-Page Question that Kvale (1996) cautions against. He advises that the process of analyzing should already begin while the data is being collected during the interviews and not after the content has been gathered and transcribed. This led me to already analyze the content by asking the informants follow-up questions that would clarify their statements. Furthermore, the actual interpretation of the content did not just happen on the paper transcript but during the dialogue. The semi-structured interview form enabled me to employ questions that I found context-appropriate and conducive to the interpretation. According to Kvale (1996), the face-to-face interaction is just as important as the reading between the lines and creating meaning during the interview and the analysis of the written words. Especially in regards to my research philosophy of a social constructivist, regarding the content created during the interview as “coauthored” as Kvale (1996) points it out, was highly relevant (p.183). The singularity of each social situation in which statements are jointly created had to be kept in mind while forming categories by extracting meaning from the conversation later on. It has to be stressed, however, that being able to follow and to agree with every single interpretation completely is a claim that this research cannot live up to. For it is very unlikely that a social situation constructed by two individuals will be interpreted in the exact same way by neither of them, not to mention by a third party that was not present during the interview. On these grounds, it was vital to take a step back from what was actually being said and draw from the background knowledge that the theoretical framework provided. After all, the more the researcher achieves to recontextualize, the more comprehensible appear his decisions (Kvale, 1996).

Breaking down the narration into different themes happened through the condensation or reconstruction of the interview. By doing so, a whole new story is being created and the researcher

can transform from the “narrative-finder” to the “narrative-creator” (Kvale, 1992, p.201). This allowed me to cluster information, establish coherence in concepts and theories which then made me recognize patterns and contrasts.

4.6 Research Criteria

In terms of research criteria, the first thought that comes to mind might be the question of how credible the findings in this research are. And how, if the interviews are liable to subjective scrutiny, can the researcher guarantee the reliability and validity of the outcome? Although these are legitimate points, it needs to be stressed that it would not be sensible to adopt the same research criteria that positivists would use in their investigations. As many qualitative researchers have noted before, a clear line needs to be drawn between qualitative and quantitative research and the respective evaluation techniques (Morgan, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hirschman, 1986). The nature of positivist and interpretive research differs greatly in goals and design and therefore, it would be a logical error to judge interpretive research with the same criteria that one would use for a positivist inquiry. In his work “Beyond Methods: Strategies for Social Research.”, Morgan (1983) writes:

Research strategies that abandon the positivist standpoint of the detached, neutral observer cannot be fairly judged in terms of the evaluative criteria normally applied to positivist research, for they seek a different kind of insight, adopt different methodologies, and favor different criteria for judging their knowledge claims” (ibid., p. 396).

Dealing with a qualitative research, criteria especially developed for the evaluation of such have to be employed. For this research, these interpretative criteria are *credibility, transferability, dependability* and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hirschman, 1986; Bryman, 2008).

The observations made while collecting and analyzing the primary data should be reflected adequately, meaning that the researcher tries to stay as close and true to the content as possible while moving away from it as much as it seems necessary. Since there are many different versions of reality (see research paradigm), it is the task of the researcher to ensure that “research is carried out according to the canons of good practice *and* submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation” (Bryman, 2008, p.377). In this research, this confirmation was achieved during the interviewing process by asking the participants to clarify their statements or to comment on conclusions that I drew from what was being said during the conversation. To add more complexity to the criterion credibility we can ask ourselves how much the informants were showing their “authentic” self in the moment of the conversation and whether they were presenting an image that corresponds to how they would like to be seen by the researcher. Pondering over this question is dangerous and might not lead the person asking anywhere. The

researcher and his or her peers have to merely accept that “identities are continuously under construction” and that informants “share their sense of who they are and what their current experiences mean to them” in “collaborative acts of identity formation” involving both themselves and the researcher (Taylor, 2008, p.30). Next to being aware of these considerations, I relied on my analytical abilities and assumed that my interviewees were largely “as they appear[ed] to be” (Hirschman, 1986, p.244).

Whether the findings of this research are transferable can only be decided through successive similar investigations. The minimum that this research can offer in terms of transferability is a detailed description of its context from which the interpretations are generated (ibid., p.245). Thereby, other researchers have a fair chance in comparing the specifics of the new context in which they are investigating. For this research, transparency about the settings and the situations for the interviews was regarded as a pre-condition.

The question of how the criterion dependability could be fulfilled can be answered through Kvale’s (1992) explanations about reliability in qualitative interviews (the term dependability can be paralleled to Kvale’s (1996) concept of reliability as both deal with the consistency of the research findings). A way of increasing interviewer reliability is the “explication of procedures”: if the researcher uses examples of the material and walks through the steps of his or her interpretation process, the readers can decide whether they agree or not (ibid., p.209). Furthermore, not only the interviewer’s consistent approach during the interview is important, but also the consistency in transcribing the content. In order to transcribe as accurately and efficient as possible, a transcription software was used (f4) that facilitated the typing process by slowing down voices. Therewith, a more accurate transcription could be achieved.

The last criterion conformity deals with the fact that to some degree, findings are influenced by the values of the investigator. Thus, I had to be aware of the predefined values that I brought into this research and justify my interpretations and findings in a comprehensible manner, meaning that the reader should be able to follow my thoughts as if he or she followed a travel route on a road map.

Lastly, when it comes to how generalizable the findings are, it needs to be clear that the generalization of the results were not the objective of this research. Whereas transferability is understood as offering the reader the possibility to transfer the results to another context – which is facilitated by detailed descriptions and transparency – generalizability would make too much of a broad claim about large groups in society (“Generalizability and transferability”, n.d.). Although answering the research question through finding tendencies and patterns among the responses stood in the foreground, the situation I was analyzing is quite unique and can only speak for itself. However, not only telling “what is” but “what could be” was a large part of my task and could therefore offer hints and trends for somebody interested in conducting further research in the field.

After all, the used methods served as tools that helped me to discover what I was looking for. The utility of these methods and the integrity of their employment should render the knowledge created through this research reliable and valid (Kvale, 1996).

4.7 Limitations, Feasibility and Ethical Considerations

As in any research, I was facing obstacles and limitations that were difficult to circumvent and therefore need to be acknowledged at the least. Some of them have already been discussed and others are addressed in this section.

The size of the research sample and whether nine in-depth interviews are “enough” to answer the research questions was discussed in “Sampling”. It is important to remember, however, that the interviewed students’ points of views are not only influenced by their cultural and social background but also by the type of discipline they dedicate themselves to. Those disciplines, depending on their subject-specific tradition already embrace certain sets of values as part of the body of knowledge that they analyze. Hence, students who have been enrolled in a program like Social Work or International Development probably have a predisposed interest when it comes to social values and experience this to be an integral part of their studies. Therefore, when speaking of a general humanistic oriented teaching tradition, it needs to be remembered that there are study programs that find themselves within the humanities already. When thinking of ways to approach the potential German student through advertising, it is also vital to keep in mind that the interviewed segment consists of German students that have already made the decision of moving countries and joining AAU. As part of their personalities they might be more driven, open and interested in the new culture and country anyways without any external marketing related influence needed.

I have already mentioned the aspect of me being a German graduate student at AAU. On the one hand, this is essential to the research question because the fact that I find myself in this position has sparked my interest in investigating this problem in the first place. Being able to speak the language and being able to relate directly to the subjects can be of great advantage. However, I am aware of the confirmability criterion, meaning that although I hold my own construct of reality, I am advised to not let my personal values intrude this investigation to an unnecessary high degree (Bryman, 2008, p.34). The commonalities between the German students and me help to understand them on a deeper level; however, they could also be responsible for my overseeing aspects due to home blindness. I deal with this problem through simple awareness and by taking a step back as the interviewer and the researcher during the analysis of the empirical data.

Using a semi-structured interview bears the risk that some questions that have been asked during some conversations will remain unanswered in others. This is an aspect that I chose to accept as the

wholeness and genuineness of each interrogation contributes to a deeper insight and more interesting findings in the long run. Furthermore, the recreation of the exact same interview setting in qualitative interviews is viewed as not possible and thus, does not pose a problem at this point.

Lastly, when it comes to ethical considerations, before the interviews were conducted, all participants were informed about the topic, that they were being recorded and that their true identities would not be revealed. This is particularly important since the participants were sharing very personal stories and values. Further, their exact study programs at AAU remained largely unrevealed as in some cases, they could be easily identified. The interviewees were also aware of the fact that they could terminate the interview at any given moment.

5 Data Analysis

In this section the nine interviews are analyzed with the help of the background information and the theoretical framework. At the time of the interview, the informants were all between 23-27 years old and grew up and studied in different regions in Germany. The table below shows their gender, in which discipline they received their bachelor's degree and in which field and semester they are pursuing their master's degree at AAU. It also indicates which form of HE institution they attended in Germany as this has an impact on their views and descriptions. In order to protect the students' identity, their names have been replaced by the abbreviations S1-9 (S stands for student).

Informant	Gender	Institution Germany	Bachelor	Master at AAU	Semester
S1/Pilot	f	state university	Linguistics	Humanities	8
S2	f	state university + dual degree	Business Economics	Humanities	8
S3	f	state university + university of applied sciences	Social Work	Humanities	10
S4	f	state university	Linguistics	Humanities	8
S5	m	university of applied sciences	Engineering	Engineering	8
S6	f	university of applied sciences + dual degree	Business Logistics	Humanities	8
S7	m	university of applied sciences + dual degree	Engineering	Engineering	8
S8	f	state university	Cultural Studies	Natural Sciences	10
S9	m	university of applied sciences	Political Sciences	Social Sciences (Economics)	8

Figure 4: The interviewees

5.1 Studying in Germany

As the table indicates, six of the interviewed students pursued their bachelor's degree at a university of applied sciences and/or did a dual degree. In the section "Background Information" it was mentioned that universities of applied sciences offer a more practical approach than regular universities and that dual programs are a combination of theoretical and vocational training in which students work at a company for a salary. Five of those six students explain that in choosing a more practical program, they were hoping to have better chances on the job market later on. They also stress the fact that they were looking for a learning environment that would differ from what they knew (from high school) and that they preferred *doing* something instead of sitting in lectures. The three students who pursued a dual degree point out that earning their own money was the key factor in joining the program. On this note, not having to pay tuition fees was also an incentive for most of the interviewees to pursue their studies at AAU. S7 explains why he chose his dual program in Germany:

I didn't want to take money from my parents because I was self-sufficient before and I had my own money, my own status, my own apartment and so on. Therefore, the only solution was the [dual] studies. Otherwise I could have not been able to finance myself (S7, p.130).

Although the "promise" of Germany's universities of applied sciences lies in teaching students through more practical exercises and active involvement, the five students who were enrolled experienced only half-hearted modernized approaches and mainly ex-cathedra teaching (traditional lecturing). S9 calls this "false labeling" and reveals that he was deeply disappointed by his institution's teaching approach (S9, p.186). Classic auditorium teaching in front of 100 - 250 students seems to be the trademark of Germany's traditional university system as three of the four students who were enrolled speak of crowded, theory-laden lectures and intense examination phases in which memorized knowledge had to be reproduced and was subsequently forgotten. S1 says:

So much stress working towards one single day and even if the topic interests you, you have to choke it down and then spit it out and then forget it immediately. And for the most part, you are not forced to really reflect on it (S1, p.5).

What S1 is describing could be a direct result from restructuring the German university system according to the Bologna Declaration. The form of teaching and assessing has been there before, however, since the bachelor is regarded as a full training qualification, more knowledge – that used to be scattered over five years – has been compressed and integrated into three years of education. Eight of the informants agree that they were not able to retain knowledge from these lectures and exams, but rather from the few written paper assignments that allowed them to reflect on what they were learning. Especially students within the humanities/social sciences who had no vocational training alongside their studies did not have the impression of possessing particular skills when they

graduated. Thus, they did not feel ready to take on a job – also since the program did not prepare them for a particular one – and applied for a master’s degree instead. Students who describe their bachelor education as varied (seminars, group work, excursions) speak more confidently about their abilities: “I really have the feeling that I learned a lot, in all areas. Not only technical knowledge but also social skills, I was lucky enough to do excursions (...) and play theatre” (S8, p.151).

All students who worked at a company or at the faculty alongside their studies – which is the case for those in the areas of engineering and business economics – felt confident enough to enter the job market, but they also felt overqualified or bored in their jobs and developed the urge to expand their horizons through another degree. The presence of Batchelor’s (2008) three voices can be detected in different intensities when the informants refer to their education in Germany. Naturally, the voice of doing is stronger within the group who pursued a degree with vocational features. But the strong tendency towards “bulimia learning”, even at the universities for applied sciences, seems to have repressed all of them: the epistemological voice of knowing (since the knowledge has been forgotten), the practical voice of doing (due to ex-cathedra teaching) and the ontological voice of becoming and being (as students were not actively reflecting on the material). S2 confirms that there was not much time for reflection, but that the university’s anonymity and indifference towards students taught her to become more self-reliant and organized: “I learned how to organize my things. It is not a bad thing to see the reality because in real life nobody cares about you either and it was a good experience somehow to be thrown into the deep end” (S2, p.31). According to the responses, especially traditional universities pay less attention to the individual student. This is of course, also due to the high number of students. S2 reports that her class of economics comprised 1200 members and that some lectures were broadcasted into an additional room (S2, p.27).

5.1.1 German Professors and their Students

All of the nine interviewees describe the relationships to professors and teaching assistants as extremely hierarchic and anonymous. S4 says: “I didn’t have a relationship to 90% of the professors. I mean, it was the typical German student-professor relationship. Where you just don’t see each other” (S4, p.76). Some students also refer to the professor’s status and that the intellectual gap between a student and a professor – paired with a large amount of students – created an unbridgeable distance. This could be a cultural remnant from the “God-like” image that German professors exerted especially before the World Wars. While all the others perceive this as a major drawback, S3 is the only informant who justifies the non-existent interaction:

You don’t have contact to professors and that is pretty normal. And you don’t just approach them, you just don’t do that. You have to be extremely good or [you] really want to know something. Which is okay I think, because you are not on the same [intellectual] level and cannot communicate with them as if you were (S3, p.51).

Although S3 seems to have internalized the role of the humble student according to Humboldt (Anderson, 2010), her passiveness stands in contradiction with his ideas about a learning cooperation between teacher and learner.

5.1.2 The Student Community

Four students report a much closer and collegiate atmosphere with fellow students. Having studied within the field of humanities and engineering, they experienced a strong sense of community since they all had to suffer under the same pressures. The other five describe a more competitive atmosphere. S4 reports that after the Gaussian grading system which was used at her university, students are graded in relation to the overall performance of the class which produced a taut atmosphere. This system was also responsible for “lone worrier” symptoms among the students:

This really fuelled the competition among students which I really didn't like. On the other hand, if everyone did badly you still got a good grade if you performed mediocre. You noticed that there was some tension (S4, p.76).

She experienced this tension only in her economics classes whereas her linguistic courses were quite the opposite which was due to a weaker sentiment of competition. S8 also reports that being competitive was strongly connected to the discipline. While she enjoyed a collegiate atmosphere during her cultural studies, law and business students had to put up with not only competition, but also with blatant malevolence:

In cultural studies (...) we were very social, but I heard that pages are ripped out of books in libraries because one student wants to avoid that another student will get the same knowledge and there is heavy competition among the students (S8, p.155).

This alarming behavior could be the logical consequence for those being assessed through the Gaussian method: if the other students fail, the results of the individual who has performed well will be graded higher. All the students' answers combined leave the impression that regardless of a collegiate or competitive atmosphere, the main goal was to achieve a high mark in order to get through the system: “I thought everyone was pretty much on their own because that is what the system does. Everyone tries to get away with the best mark. Because they tell you that if you aren't very good you don't stand a chance” (S1, p.6). It seems as if Naidoo's and Jamieson's (2005) projection of students becoming rather passive education consumers has come true in this case. The student has developed an external relationship to the institution trying to reach the short-term goals of passing the exams. However, the reason for this kind of relationship lies more in the form of teaching and assessing and not in the students' personal. In Germany, the students who underwent great examination pressure were simply afraid of falling through system and of not being good enough in the eyes of society. And although most of them paid a tuition fee around 500 Euro per semester, no sense of entitlement to a degree (due to the financial transaction) can be found. It

could be argued however, that the Bologna Declaration facilitated the commodification of HE and thus indirectly introduced a “fast food” learning mentality to German universities. This would train the students to not invest too much effort in reflecting but rather in passing the exams. But for all that, the interviewees were not just passive knowledge consumers as described by Naidoo and Jamieson (2005). They felt more trapped in the system and would have appreciated the opportunity for reflection. S2 claims that by the time of her graduation she had turned into “a nervous wreck” because she felt stuck in a “vicious circle” (S2, p.30). Yet, not all students suffered “in silence”: S8 reports that shortly after her university had restructured the system according to the Bologna Declaration, students organized massive protests and revolted against the changes (S8, p.147). Actions like these show that the commodification/marketization of HE does not have to result in an indifferent, disengaged student body as suggested by Natale and Doran (2011). On the contrary, the interviewees see their undergraduate education with critical eyes and express great concern about the German HE system in general. This would also dissent from Batchelor’s (2008) assumption that today’s prefabricated student-image restricts the student’s own voice and vocabulary.

The phenomenon of extreme competitiveness in business-related subjects (or economics) is described by S8, S2 and S4 who were enrolled at universities which did not only undergo a restructuring in degree systems, but also “polished up” their old image in order to become global players in the HE market. Thus, there could be a connection between universities encouraging competitiveness among students while trying to raise their own market value.

Working against each other instead of collaborating clearly attacks Marginson’s (2006) domain of communicative association that is part of his idea of a university. It seems as if academic relationships that are “grounded in justice, solidarity, compassion, cosmopolitan tolerance and empathy for each other” (ibid., p.2) cannot be cultivated in a highly competitive environment. On the other hand, it would also be premature to doom the German HE system as anti-social as some interviewees also report the feeling of community and solidarity among their peers. These positive traits are more prominent within the field of the humanities and in more open study programs which lack a certain job profile.

5.2 Studying at AAU

5.2.1 Getting used to PBL

For the largest part, the interviewees are content with their decision of having moved to Denmark in order to study at AAU. However, adapting to new circumstances – like a different university environment and the PBL method – has also brought about some difficulties. The biggest difference which all of the informants experienced once enrolled at AAU was the form of learning. Eight of them

report that they had informed themselves about PBL but did not have a concrete idea before coming to AAU. Their decision was mainly guided by the title and content of the respective study program. S9 says that PBL was a nice “bonus present” that he had not expected (S9, p.181). Eight of the informants also chose to apply as they were looking for a major change in academic direction which the more rigid German system would not have allowed. S1 describes that she was specifically looking for a different form of learning: “You can’t find anything like this in Germany where it is so outdated really, and the programs are not very flexible. They sound very traditional and very rigid” (S1, p.9). When it comes to accepting PBL, the students experience mixed emotions. Although the overall tone about conducting group projects is rather positive (with one exception), all the students within the humanities miss a firmer structure or a stronger guidance in their program. Six students mention that the openness of the program and the lack of academic guidelines make them feel uneasy. S2 says:

I was missing the scientific or academic demand somehow (...), I felt left alone, in the sense of what you are writing here is complete bullshit. Well, not bullshit but like what am I scientifically contributing or where are your skills or your knowledge assessed right now? But, well, it was exactly that what I actually didn't want anymore. But it was difficult because I am used to structure (S2, p.35).

It is interesting how in the same interview S2 describes herself as “a nervous wreck” when she graduated from her German university but on the other hand, she feels uncomfortable with not being assessed in the way that she is used to. She goes on that she feels embarrassed to tell her German friends that she has only very few exams to pass. Further, she describes this achievement-oriented attitude as typical for Germans and that she is trying to free herself from it (S2, p.35). A quite similar notion can be perceived in S6. She describes her study experiences in Germany as follows: “My whole private life, I did not put it on hold, it was non-existent. And that was so sad that I decided to make a change” (S6, p. 113). However, the same student is puzzled by the free time she has at AAU and says: “I wish we had more lectures because I think people have enough time to do a project at the side, so I think it is too much time that we have” (S6, p.116). It seems that even though these students admit that they could not retain the knowledge from their bachelor studies due to excessive examinations and lectures, it still gave them the feeling of knowing something; at least for a short while. At AAU, they might perceive the voice of doing as over-pronounced and cannot find the connection between the doing and knowing (and eventually becoming). Apparently, some of them do not trust in their own abilities to develop valuable knowledge and the focus on the learning process rather than the results gives them the feeling of being lazy or not studying hard enough. Another problem arises in the group work itself and the distribution of grades. Eight of the students claim that up until now they felt that the main responsibility in the group was put on their shoulders, mainly because they were dissatisfied with their group members’ work approach concerning structure, content and linguistic thoroughness. S6 says:

[The Germans] push, structure, from what I've heard. (...) Really, we approach it, make a plan and say, okay, what are we doing and what is up next. [We make sure] that people don't fall behind. [Because] we are so disciplined. This prejudice that is there is confirming itself during project work and I think then you really realize how German you actually are (S6, p.117).

The quote suggests that cultural aspects that were not perceived in their home country manifest themselves intensely when working with an international group. Moreover, the strong focus on grades in Germany puts most of the informants at unease once confronted with the grading system at AAU. On the one hand, they claim that receiving a high mark is completely subjective as it would depend on the strictness of the supervisor, on the other hand they feel a sense of injustice when “lazy” or weaker group members benefit from their work. However, most of them are aware that their “obsession” with the highest grade is not beneficial to the learning process and that a grade per se does not define what they have actually learned and what they have become academically. S8 says:

Problem-based is suitable because it is about the process and not the result. In Germany, we are taught in a way, the result is the most important thing (...) and not the way that you walk in order to get there. But even after two years I still haven't quite understood that it is about the process. Because for me, it is the master thesis and not the walk towards it (S8, pp.158-61).

Despite the frustrations with other group members, the general consensus among the informants is that through PBL the learning satisfaction is much higher and that students are actually prompted to reflect on their work. This would happen not only through the working process but also when doing the oral defense. However, they also point out that reflection is optional and that the system allows for “dragging people along” (S1, p.13). The informants agree that PBL contributes to an environment of growth and reflection, but they still seem to have problems with “giving up control” and leaving their trained habits behind. Here, Naidoo's and Jamieson's (2005) observations can be drawn on. Accordingly, the decrease of trust and risk-taking in research – which for them is a part of the basic idea of a university – is a side effect of the commodification process of HE. To them, the acknowledgement and acceptance of the possibility of failure is vital in the academic self-realization process (ibid., p.275). Moreover, if those students with a fear of failure would try to let go of the short-term goal, they would experience Batchelor's (2008) voice of becoming, the ontological voice which she is pointing out as the most important one.

5.2.2 Coping with Disappointment

In spite of the outlined difficulties, the informants who claim to have struggled display a high degree of awareness and assimilation. The initial frustration with unequal work forces, more unpredictable

grade outcomes, unfair grade distributions and looser structures has been compensated by focusing on positive aspects. In terms of consumer behavior, some of the students' expectations were not met but by modifying them and subsequently their view on their study experience at AAU, consumer satisfaction could be established. When S9 realized that his group members were not as ambitious as he was and that the outcome of the projects did not satisfy his knowledge needs, he started to collaborate more with the teaching staff (S9, p.180).

S8 experienced a strong sense of injustice when she noticed that one of her group members did not contribute to the project in the same way as she did. However, she sees the benefit for herself in doing more work and also got around to acknowledge that everyone has different skills:

It was a process for me that I learned maybe to accept that not everyone has the same skills. In the beginning I was really angry. You think she has to do the exact same amount as we do (...), but I reached a point when I understood that it [formatting] is very time intensive (...) and that we are actually happy that one person takes care of that (S8, p.159).

These examples show how the students coped with their frustrations. But the second example also exemplifies how group work supports the development of social values like tolerance, solidarity and empathy which are all in Marginson's (2006) catalogue for university ethics and also comply with the Humboldtian idea of collaboration in research.

5.2.3 Preparing for the Future

When it comes to the real life application of the PBL model, the students' responses are also mixed. All informants within the area of engineering report strong satisfaction with the perceived applicability of the PBL approach. S8 says: "When I work in a planning office then there is a traffic planner, a traffic psychologist and politicians (...) so it [the work approach] is quite suitable" (S8, p.161). Interviewees who study within the humanities, however, are not sure whether PBL can be seen as a preparation for their future work environment. This seems to have something to do with the rather "blurry" job profiles that come along with studying something less technical. S2 says that her topics are "still very abstract" and theoretical (S2, pp.37). S3 sarcastically remarks that the meta-theories she has to apply in her projects have never helped her to solve any real problems (S3, pp.55-56). Here, there is a contradiction between the demands that some of the students seem to have. One example is S8, who claims that she would like to be prepared for a job, but on the other hand she says: "if I wanted to get prepared for the working world I would do an apprenticeship and not go to university" (S8, p.163). All in all, it appears that the more "job-tailored" a study program is, the higher the satisfaction with PBL. Its acceptance also strongly depends on the experiences the students have made so far. S9 and S3 are extremely disappointed when it comes to the engagement of their team members. S3 reports that she is usually doing all the work by herself, mainly because

she has lost the trust in others and the teams cannot cope with the difference in work approaches: “It [the atmosphere] gets worse because at some point people hate each other. When you have to rewrite your whole project because you fail because someone cheated [plagiarized]” (S3, p.61). S6 sees this as a perfect reflection of the working world where she “takes the initiative” while others don’t apply themselves: “Of course, I get annoyed but I know that’s how it is in the working world as well” (S6, p.116). These examples show that group work also creates hostility and can be perceived as counterproductive by the individual. Nevertheless, all informants agree that the collaboration with different personalities – even though challenging – helps them in developing better soft skills and the understanding of other people’s opinions and that most of the times, results in a better end product. From this perspective, Gould’s (2004) demand that HE should train the individual to become more empathetic and to develop social values is clearly met.

5.2.4 The Teaching Staff and Atmosphere at AAU

Overall, the students appreciate a collegiate and non-competitive atmosphere at AAU as opposed to their learning environment in Germany. This satisfaction is also connected to the relationship with the teaching and administrative staff at AAU. All students describe the contact to professors and teaching assistants as very informal, laid-back and refreshing. To them, this has not so much to do with the PBL style as it has with Danish culture. Most of them cannot see this kind of student-teacher relationship in Germany because of the difference in basic attitudes and an overall formal and humble contact with authority figures. S6 says that AAU professors are very interested in her learning advancement and that they are always willing to engage in a dialogue with her (S6, p.119). In contrast, she describes the relationship to her professors in Germany as follows: “They wanted to thrust their knowledge on us but whether you understood it or not did not matter to them. They get paid either way” (S6, p.119). According to S6’s descriptions, the friendly relationship to her supervisors at AAU enhance her learning process and development. Furthermore, she feels much more respected and her opinions are more valued than in Germany. Regardless whether this is due to a certain teaching style or due to cultural features (anyhow, they are probably connected), the student-teacher relationships at AAU conform to the Humboldtian ideal: the teacher and the learner share the common interest of advancing knowledge in collaboration based on mutual respect. The German teaching style as S6 describes it can be compared to Cardinal Newman’s objective of simply diffusing knowledge instead of advancing it. However, S1, S8, and S9 also point out the downsides of a personal relationship. They fear that their supervisors are not harsh enough when judging their work as they would not like to criticize too much. Once again, they ascribe this “friendliness” and “modesty” to Danish cultural values (S1, S8 and S9, p.16, p.154 and p.178). At this point, it almost

seems as if students that are used to not being entitled to their own “academic opinion” do not trust in the quality of their work.

Another aspect frequently coming up in the conversation is the service mentality at AAU. All of the students emphasize that they have felt very welcomed and looked after by the university staff from day one (p.12, p.87, p.119, p.168). According to the informants, the feeling of being wanted has a strong impact on their generally positive attitude towards their studies at AAU.

Eight of the nine students display a very high level of satisfaction and do not regret their decision of joining AAU. Most difficulties stem from the differences to what they were “used to” in Germany – regardless if they were satisfied or not. The main coping mechanism in terms of ambivalent consumer behavior is modification. Only one student (S3) expresses a high degree of dissatisfaction. This can be led back to negative experiences with group work and the sentiment of unfairness on the part of her supervisors. Nonetheless, she is not dropping out (which would equal to non-purchase or return in consumer terms), but pursuing her master’s degree. On the one hand, her elaborations show clear signs of resignation and on the other hand, she is also modifying her expectations: although she did not enjoy the experience, she is “at least” receiving a degree (S3, p.55).

5.3 An Academic Career

5.3.1 Picking the Path

When asked why they decided to pursue an academic career after “Gymnasium” (high school) in the first place, all the informants answer that it was either self-evident or that they did not have a concrete image of what they wanted to do. In the latter case, they thought that a broad theoretical study program would leave room for development and inspiration. Seven of the nine students come from an academic family background and state that enrolling at a HE institution was an established fact that was neither questioned nor talked about. It appears as if belonging to a certain social class – which highly values HE – already set the course for most students who either did not feel they had a choice or were motivated to become a “more adequate” member of this social group. S9 reports that he felt pressured by his environment especially because he did not do well in high school: “For me, the pressure was pretty big to begin an academic career because the largest part of my family did and the expectations were there” (S9, p.171). However, he also says that he longed for the student life that he could observe through his older brother (S9, p.172). Just like him, half of the students describe that they perceived the student life as particularly attractive and associated it with social interaction and independence. According to Bogler’s and Somech’s (2002) typology, these motives can be classified as collegiate ones. Students who engaged with engineering and business-related

studies in their bachelor's degree describe motives that are more instrumental, especially in comparison to those who have taken up a program within the humanities. Scholastic motives can only be sporadically detected when the informants talk about their bachelor's degree. However, those motives which are connected to the "pure thirst of knowledge" flare up more intensely when they speak about their master studies. Seven of them regard their master's degree as a second chance and as an opportunity to change directions in their careers. S2 and S6 report that after their dual business-degrees, they felt a great urge to move away from the profit-oriented, competitive workplace and needed to engage in something more "fun" and "idealistic". S6 utters that after graduating from high school her focus was on a highly-paid job but now she wants "to do something that she likes" and "something that is good and right and makes sense" (S6, p.113).

There is a general notion among the students that they did not want to extend the field of knowledge from their bachelor education but turned towards a subject they are "really interested in" or passionate about instead. Only S9, who switched from political sciences to a more business-related field states that he became worried about his future and therefore wanted to acquire skills that are needed by the industry (S9, p.183). Here, S9's motives have shifted from collegiate and the need of conforming to his surroundings (which Bogler and Somech (2002) have not listed specifically) to purely instrumental.

Some of the students did not only feel the pressure to enroll at university but also in regards to which study program they had to choose. S1 says: „From my parents I already knew that I should pick something that could be concretely transferred into a job" (S1, p.2). Without their parents directly telling them, the external pressures the rest of the students describe are linked to general sentiments within society. After studying social work in her bachelor's degree, S3 decided to switch to a different program in her master studies. Although she enjoyed the work itself, the lack of monetary and non-monetary recognition in German society brought her to study a program with a "more impressive title" (S3, p.69). She exclaims: "I was pretty good but then I realized you don't earn anything (S3, p.45) ... social work, I mean the degree, is much depreciated in Germany. You are somehow that street worker, like whatever, anyone could do it" (S3, p.69). All students appear to be quite aware of the (perceived) status that their field of study has in society. Only at the end of the interview, S7 reveals that his bachelor's degree has a different title that could be made fun of by other people:

I always said that I study industrial engineering science but the discipline is actually called "Facility Management". Why aren't you laughing? (...) You can describe the facility manager as a better janitor if you put it in a negative way (S7, p.143).

Also S3 perceives jobs that do not require a university education as not as appreciated in society: "If I say that I am doing an apprenticeship to become a hairdresser ... that is not that cool. I really have to

admit it. But when I say I study (...) wow, that is *really cool*" (S3, p.69). It is remarkable how most students describe that they dislike society's degradation of certain professions or study fields, but are at the same time an active part of it and confirm their observations through their own comments. While all of the informants agree that studying law or medicine has a much higher status in society, most of them feel that there is a sense of wrongness or shallowness to value a person according to their profession. They emphasize that, first and foremost, the profession needs to make the individual happy and not society. Nonetheless, it seems as if this happiness cannot be felt without the (non-)monetary recognition from society. S2 admits that although she dislikes the pressures and judgments from others, she cares for prestige and that she would want her children to thrive in HE as well: "I guess I am a bit snobbish after all" (S2, p.42).

First of all, the strong recognition of older disciplines like law and medicine seems to be a remnant of the "elite university era" when university students were mainly trained to fill in position with high social responsibility. S1 says that her parents would be much more relaxed about her future if she would have chosen a career in law or medicine (S1, p.20). S6 turns this high appreciation into something negative and claims that people who study law or business would not be interested in the subjects but only in high salaries later on (S6, p.114).

On the one hand, some of the students complain about the society's stigmatization of certain jobs or study fields, but on the other hand, there is a stigmatization they exercise on their own part, especially with those professions or disciplines they opted against in their master's degree. "Doing whatever a money-driven society tells you to do" is seen as generally negative, but the awareness of it does not take the student out of the equation. It seems as if being aware of stigmas and expressing dislike does not change the fact that the interviewee's personal opinions are still shaped by a collective sentiment. After all, students like S3 abandoned her idea of becoming a social worker as German society does not think highly of them. The construction of her identity happens under the scrutiny of society and although aware and not pleased, she cannot withdraw herself. Just like in Hall's (2004) identity definition, the individual's identity is still subject to the surroundings and the surrounding's reactions. However, this might be only one of the reasons behind her decision to quit social work.

5.3.2 The Student Identity

All of the interviewees strongly identify with being a student or living an academic life. This observation goes well with Belk's (1988) theory of the extended self through consumption. Being a student is an integral part of their identity that they have consciously chosen by enrolling at a HE

institution. Although they are all more or less passionate about the knowledge they gain, another important goal is to attain the degree and thus have a different status. S6 says:

I mean when you introduce yourself, the first thing you say is what you study or what your job is. That means you define yourself through your job or what you study. You define yourself, especially in Germany, through your profession and I think it is a social pressure that you do something that makes you successful because then people see you differently, too (S6, p.114).

S8 claims that it has not always been like that and that students with the short-term goal of collecting a degree as fast as possible are nurtured by international competition and counterproductive reforms: "It [university] has drastically changed through the Bologna Process (...) a university is not built on traditional values anymore but a university is a clearly defined period of time in your life in which you collect certificates" (S8, p.164). In the eyes of the informants, there is an overall trend towards "fast food" HE which would signify the negligence of Batchelor's (2008) most important ontological voice. However, they stress that they morally disapprove and count themselves to those that long for critical thinking and "true" knowledge expansion. Or at least, they would like to be among the latter. It appears as if they were torn between the short-term goal and the long-term goal, whereas the long-term goal of becoming a well-rounded individual serving society is the one they want to identify with more. Yet, the being and becoming is not traceable through exam performances – which is what they are used to – and therefore very difficult to grasp for them. In all of them, there is a great effort visible in trying to reconcile monetary and prestige-related goals with idealistic or moral aspirations. S9 says:

It is difficult to tell you the real truth [about why I study] and not what I wish would be the truth. I still [apart from doing something "good"] want more that whatever I do has economic revenue, because I also believe that when you play the game you can change a lot more than as if you said, okay, I reject this and isolate myself (S9, p.187).

S7 points out that nowadays, if you want to "have a promising career, "the nice house by the lake" or the "company car", you "need to have a master's degree" (S7, p.140). He also states, however, that a career in engineering does not only have financial incentives but that at AAU, he can combine them with "green thinking". Hence, he feels like he is helping the environment and pushing society into the right direction through green energy planning and sustainable resource management (S7, p.140). What he describes appears to be the ideal future for all of the students: doing (social) good and earning enough money to live in above-average comfort. Nonetheless, they are also afraid that these are two demands that cannot always be combined. Apparently, especially those students who are enrolled in a subject within the humanities and "are not as demanded by the industry" are stressing the fact that they are engaged in a subject that makes them happy and that will help other people in the long run. They even put themselves above those that pick a university career for purely

instrumental reasons. Alongside, those interviewees in engineering and sciences who perceive that they have better job opportunities and good financial compensation try to distance themselves from the instrumental motives and point out the positive moral attributes of their subjects. S7 points out the environmental aspect in his engineering program and business student S9 claims that immoral conduct could only be changed “from the inside” (S7, S9, p.140, p.187). Here, it shows how all the students cope with two different demands from society. The first one, having a prestigious, well-paying job that is needed by the industry and the second one, being fulfilled by one’s profession and doing social good at the same time. The first “humanities group” feels a need to justify why it chose interest or happiness over attractive career options. The second “engineering/business group” feels a need to stress that their motives are not purely money-driven but can have a very positive effect on society as well. S9 harshly criticizes society’s different demands and refers to them as “hypocritical”. In his eyes, society tells people to love what they do, but on the other hand, it also tells them what to do. His solution is that “people have to find their own way” (S9, p.187). Taken this into account, the students might be reluctant to adopt “finished identity pieces” as suggested by Batchelor (2008) and Dittmar (2007) and are in fact looking for an “authentic” academic identity.

All the interviewees agree that in the first place everybody should study what they are interested in. They criticize students that “just want to get a degree for climbing up the social ladder”, but also those that are too idealistic and “dreamy” and thus, cannot contribute to the improvement of society. S1 says:

I don't want to live in a world where people study because of some ideals, because they want to save the world or because they only live in their heads. It is too idealized these days and maybe that is why we are having this discussion. Because it is idealized when you are intellectual, when you are a professor... There is a clear hierarchy and therefore a lot of people study to find a place a little higher in the hierarchy (S1, p.18).

In this excerpt, S1 attacks two kinds of people: “people who want to save the world” and people who study in order to achieve a higher social status. This example shows that the perfect combination for S1 (and most others) includes genuine interest in the subject that is not money or status-driven and also the desire to apply the learned knowledge to the society for improving it. None of the interviewees fit into this “perfect mold” which they are more or less aware of.

5.3.3 Expectations from a University

On the one hand, the students experience demands from society that are difficult to live up to and on the other hand, they have high expectations and different demands when it comes to “the ideal university”. All of them agree that the ability to think critically and to deal with abstract knowledge should be the main focus and few of them stress the importance of personal development and character building. The latter is much more emphasized among the humanities camp. S9 thinks that

human development should be a by-product of a university education, however, he also declares that students should not be trained to fit into a certain mold but that there should be plenty of room for developing vast abilities and competencies with special attention to ecological, social and economic problems (S9, p.184). The informants stress how important it is to gain a firm theoretical background but at the same time, they stress the importance of applying the knowledge to a real life context. According to Batchelor's (2008) definition, the informants long to develop their epistemological, ontological and practical voice in more or less equal parts. The ontological voice is either indirectly mentioned as a by-product or seems to be self-implied. As mentioned before, the "voice of being and becoming" is a difficult one to grasp for the students. Reasons like "I want to know something" or "I want to do something" are much more tangible and plausible than a reason like "I want to be and become". This could be, as Batchelor (2008) describes it, due to the universities' muting of the ontological voice which would then be projected onto the students. But it could also be that it is too complex for the individual to define as the students find themselves in the middle of developing their academic identity and the "being and becoming". After all, according to Taylor (2008) and Quigley (2011), academic identity is under constant construction and a constantly shifting target. Therefore, it might be difficult for the students to take a snap shot and present their current "stage" to somebody. When asked how they have changed since their enrollment at a HE institution they name different academic and also social competencies. The main emphasis lies on "fighting through the system", realizing what they are really interested in and becoming more independent, taking on the role of a grown-up. S5 says that during his dual program, he did not experience a personal gain through university lectures but rather through practical work (S5, p.102). S9 stresses that the competitive environment in his former studies forced him to learn how to present himself best and how to stand out (S9, p. 179). Those students who were more satisfied with their bachelor program in terms of the teaching and learning environment also report to have gained the most from their education. S8, who enjoyed a mix between a theoretical and practical approach is the most satisfied and states that she has developed a solid foundation in technical and social areas (S8, pp.151-152). From her descriptions, the epistemological and the practical voice seem to have a healthy balance and the ontological one can be detected whenever she talks about her skills to abstract and think critically which, according to her, also affected her personality and the way she approaches others and new knowledge. It seems as if the ontological voice thrives through the knowing and the doing, if both are done in a critical manner. And all of the students stress that the critical attitude is something they would like to see developed in a university context. While they are claiming that this is something they strive to do (or are doing), they also point out that there is a general tendency of avoiding this critical attitude among peers. Next to blaming the transforming university system, the majority states that it is up to the individual to adopt a critical learning attitude

because it represents a conscious choice that a university can support but not force onto a student. However, they all agree that recent changes have made it easier for students to “just being pushed through the system” without gaining critical in-depth perspectives on knowledge and society. S2 utters:

Generally it is a good development that they are trying to align [education] internationally. [But] I have the feeling that they are trying to usher people through the system [like cattle] in order to produce as many graduates as possible that learn everything in high speed for spitting it out...(S2, p.38).

All informants strongly lean towards a more practical approach in learning and eight in nine heavily criticize the classical teaching and assessing methods they know from Germany. Yet, they also stress the importance of a good theoretical foundation that can only be acquired through lectures and “cramming”. S9 calls it “an immense task” that HE institutions have to fulfill (S9, p.185). According to S5, a university should provide “the theoretical construct” but then he adds that the knowledge gained in a university is of no use if students do not know how to transfer it into the “real world” (S5, p.104). S4 is following a similar thought process and says:

I think actually critical thinking is more important. I mean, of course, also theory but critical thinking overall and sure, when you find a job then you shouldn't be focused on critical thinking only, but maybe with 60% and with 40% real doing (S4, p.94).

Eight in nine students state that a practical learning approach guarantees the best outcome and most of them complain about the lack of “real life application” in the classical approach. But later on, they affirm that a university’s task is not to equip the students with practical tools for a certain job. Then, they all agree, a person would have to take up an apprenticeship and not go to university. Apparently, some of the students’ demands are contradicting each other, or at least all of the informants are in one way or another looking for a “perfect hybrid” between gaining knowledge, critical thinking and doing. This would mean that they are indirectly aware of Batchelor’s (2008) three voices and that they find her development ideal within HE appropriate. If we take Quigley’s (2011) definition of academic identity, then the forming of academic epistemologies signifies just as much to the students as the academic ontology, or how they come to be, even though the latter can only be detected indirectly. All the informants see themselves as critical thinkers who are studying with dedication and interest (at least in their current program). Yet, they also describe the shift of academic values that Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) refer to. The students hold the Bologna Reform, the rising competitiveness, society’s idealization of academics and fast food education responsible for this transformation. They also clearly notice and condemn the shift from independent traditional university practices towards business oriented practices in both Germany and Denmark. However,

their negative opinion about universities being more and more influenced by economic powers does not always influence their stance on university marketing.

5.4 University Marketing

When asked how they found their German university for their bachelor's degree, most of the informants claim that they more or less knew the institution beforehand through word of mouth. Two of them relied on Germany's official "Studienführer", a study guide provided by the Federal Employment Office listing all existing study options within the country. Three of them also mention the most popular German university ranking from the magazine "DIE ZEIT" and one got in touch with his university through an education fair. All students confirm that there were no visible advertisements that drew their attention to a certain HE institution. Six out of nine also picked a university that was in or very close to their home region. Finding AAU for a master program was usually preceded by the wish for studying abroad. The high majority claims that they would not have had the option for a change in academic direction in Germany and therefore got used to the idea of studying abroad. Five students found their master program at AAU through using a search engine typing in the program that they were looking for. Furthermore, two students point out publications by AAU that got their attention and another two were referred to the university through a personal contact.

5.4.1 Higher Education Marketing in Germany

The observation that German universities are not as actively marketing themselves to "potential customers" as other countries can be rediscovered in the students' descriptions. Especially compared to AAU, all of them confirm that there is a strong sense of corporate identity and that university branding efforts are present all over town.

Referred to Germany, all informants associate HE advertisements or marketing efforts with unknown institutions, high tuition fees, business-related studies or online courses. They also see a strong connection to very job-oriented study profiles. Some of them say that for traditional and reputable German universities it would be unthinkable to advertise for education programs and to present themselves in an attractive light through marketing/advertising:

When somebody is advertising then there is a certain intention behind that. And at Humboldt [University] or the FU [Freie Universität Berlin] the offer speaks for itself. The reputation of the research institution speaks for itself and they [universities] are not dependant on any advertisements (S9, p.175).

It turns out, however, that some of the more traditional universities in Germany have been undergoing a tremendous effort to market themselves in a more modern and attractive way. S4

reports a recent complete image change of her former university and its increasing involvement with private companies. The marketing efforts are limited to “marketable” subjects within economics:

They did marketing not only for students but also for corporations. We had a “House of Finance” with a Commerzbank room and a Sparkassen room [money institutions in Germany]. I find marketing to this extent very concerning because frankly, neutrality is completely spoiled and if it is targeted at students then it should be for all disciplines and not for certain subjects in which they want to prove excellence (S4, p.74).

Here, Scott’s (2004) erosion of boundaries between the academic and economic sphere has clearly taken place. And also Naidoo’s and Jamieson’s (2005) concerns manifest themselves in this case. The particular university has adopted business practices and lost its independency from economic forces: it does not only advertise for itself but is offering its own space as an advertising platform to their sponsors. All of the informants stress that they would strongly prefer a HE institution that is not influenced by economic powers. S2 says that HE was “the last bastion” before it had to “bow down” to market principles (S2, p.26). According to her, being dependent on external powers, results in a loss of independent thinking (S2, p.38). Not only S4, but also S8 reports a drastic image transformation that her home university went through. The need to apply extensive marketing strategies was accompanied by an expansion of the economics department and heavy cutbacks on the university’s pedagogical programs which used to be the institution’s trademark. She says:

We live in a globalized [world] and everything is becoming neoliberal and I think that a university should not become neoliberal because education is still free and should not be privatized and the Humboldtian ideal should prevail. And I think it is scary that universities are turned into companies, more and more and everywhere in the world. That the university now has to compete and that human capital is worth so much. I am really critical towards this process that cannot be stopped. That is the trend, the business trend (S8, pp.148-149).

Since the transformation process at her university was not a smooth transition, S8 and her fellow students were confronted with drastic changes and thus, “turning university into a business” was an often discussed topic. It has to be remembered, however, that S8 is also the only informant who experienced such extensive “re-branding” efforts at a German university.

5.4.2 AAU: The Positive Effects of Marketing

Those students who experienced negative emotions connected to university marketing (rising competition, privatizations, and business-like practices) also have a more critical stance on HE marketing and do not find it appropriate. The rest of the students however, point out the positive aspects that university marketing could have and comment positively on AAU’s marketing efforts. S3 mentions that due to a wider range of subjects, the marketing of study programs is absolutely essential in order to get noticed by potential students. However, she stresses that it should only

inform the public and refrain from populist “money-focused” promises to future students (S3, p.48). That university marketing does not necessarily have anything to do with “unethical business practices” but that it can actually serve as a good way to inform is also supported by S5:

I don't see it like that to be honest [that universities should “stay away” from marketing]. Actually, it is the exact other way around. If universities sell themselves well it can be a good thing. I mean if it would be just about this elitist standard, how could new unknown universities get any attention? That would be impossible. Then we would be stuck with the same old conservative procedures (S5, p.99).

Subsequently, he adds that universities should sell themselves in a fair and realistic way and not promise something they cannot keep (S5, p.99). If the marketing “is done right” then – according to S5 and S3 and Gibbs (2008) – a university can inform students about their mission and concept. Thereby, it can reach students that represent a good match and also manage expectations. Just like Gibbs (2008), S5 indirectly suggests that a university could learn from the business world and leave its conservative and aloof personality behind.

While all of the students agree that a modern marketing approach would not “sit right” with some of Germany’s most traditional universities, they perceive it as something positive in relation to AAU. In their eyes, AAU’s identity as a young institution with an alternative approach to learning can easily be combined with a modern marketing approach. To them, this combination seems believable and authentic, whereas an “old-fashioned” traditional German university that is trying to pick up a marketing strategy would come across as “trying too hard” and farcical. It is important to mention that the students are also aware of the fact that some universities need to market themselves in order to survive in a competitive world. The students describe AAU’s corporate identity as very-down-to-earth and friendly, non-elitist and respond rather positively to the slogan “Learning seriously affects your brain” which they were already familiar with before the interviews (see Background Information). They perceive the image that AAU portrays to the outside as honest and adequate to the experiences they have had at AAU. The slogan is described as original and funny by most of the informants. However, S9 finds it too informal and too bold for a HE institution. It reminds him of “a cheesy calendar phrase” and he states that it probably would not make enough of a scientific and elitist impression if shown to his friends in Germany (S9, p.181). In his opinion, the very friendly tone could evoke the wrong impression if used in Germany. S3 makes the sarcastic remark that those people who are serious about studying and pursuing HE would be fully aware of what education will do to their brain because they surely “have studied once before in their life” (S3, p.61). These two remarks aside, it seems as if it does not so much depend on the tone of the marketing messages but whether it comes across as informative and authentic.

In Germany, most of the students were not exposed to extensive HE marketing. The few students that were, however, connect a negative sentiment to it. Since they are not used to seeing universities

(that they would pick) advertising, they doubt whether they would have paid attention to an “AAU ad”. On a more positive note, seven out of nine perceive AAU’s friendly tone, its marketing efforts and the strong identification with the city as something “refreshing” and likable. They also claim that the posters, ads and videos that they have seen reflect AAU’s spirit and teaching approach adequately. Although some students point out that they are concerned about the rising entanglement of the industry and universities in Germany, they do not express the same in connection with AAU. This is quite interesting since AAU is openly cooperating with businesses when it comes to the education of their students and research activities. After all, this difference in perception can be led back to Denmark’s universities being predominantly funded by the government while Germany’s universities record a growing dependency on third-party funds.

All students point out that they missed a certain service when they studied in Germany. In fact, even when paying the relatively low tuition fee, they did not feel entitled to any kind of service. To that effect, they were all positively surprised when they experienced a strong service mentality at AAU. It almost seems as if not having to pay a tuition fee at AAU, a high quality service was not expected at all. S3 points out that the more she would have to pay for her education, the more she would expect a certain service (S3, p.70). S8 agrees:

If I pay for something then I expect a service. And since I don't pay here [at AAU] this is the icing of the cake. I decided to come here and I didn't know what's going on here and I was looking forward to the education, but I was positively surprised that someone actually cares about me here (S8, p.169).

Also the rest of the students feel extremely welcome and “wanted” at AAU which contributes to a positive learning atmosphere and influences their whole stay in Aalborg. S8 predicts that the nice treatment of students and the fact that one is “not just a number” but a real person will get around and thus, attract more students in the long run. Further, she adds: “From a tactical perspective I think they are doing a pretty good job” (S8, p.168).

Apparently, the need to recruit more students which leads to stronger marketing efforts can result in a more service oriented mentality at a HE institution. In this case – and according to their own descriptions – it does not seem to “harm” the students, as proposed by some theorists and as seen from the examples of German universities, but it actually has positive effects on the learning and research environment. On the one hand, students are treated as customers, but on the other hand they are still encouraged to contribute to the product. It can be assumed that this also cultivates consumer satisfaction and helps the students to cope with dissatisfaction and thus, facilitates in modifying expectations. Once again, Gibbs (2008) speculations about the positive effects of competition in the HE marketplace can be drawn on. In the next section, these and all the other findings are discussed and put into context. Afterwards, the conclusion is drawn, followed by the last

section “Recommendations”.

6 Discussion

Opposed to the introduced theories that are all written from the perspective of scholars observing transformations in the HE landscape, this research gives voice to the central subject of the discussion: the student. Although many aspects mentioned by the theorists could be rediscovered in the informants’ elaborations, they need to be relativized within the frame of a critical discussion.

A general tendency towards “fast food” degrees and the negligence of the students’ ontological voice were clearly reflected in the interviews. However, to blame the marketing of HE for this phenomenon would be too simple. Apparently, marketing can be used as a tool to inform students about study programs and to present an authentic image of the institution without selling out to unethical business principles and/or losing established academic values. AAU seems to be a fairly good example: although the German students are not used to this kind of market communication or have experienced it as very negative in their home country, they describe AAU’s advertisement and branding efforts as mainly successful and sympathetic. In contrast, the marketing efforts by German institutions, as described by the participants, have a rather money-oriented appeal that does not sit right with the idea of a university. This could be led back to AAU mainly being supported by governmental funds, while German universities have a much higher dependency on third-party funds. Hence, the relationship between the business and the educational world is not primarily based on training and educational cooperation as in the case of AAU, but it comes with strong financial entanglements and interests. According to Bourdieu’s (1986) elaborations, the academic capital of some of the German universities has been laden with economic assets which resulted in “the erosion of academic capital and the valorization of economic capital” (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005, p.271). This shift is also felt by the students. Yet, it is questionable whether the “use-value” of the educational process has turned into an “exchange-value” through the commodification of programs and tuition fees as Naidoo and Jamieson (2005, p.271) claim. If we take a closer look at how the “elite university” from the past is described and what was said by the students who are not paying tuition fees, there is – and has always been – an exchange value, even though not necessarily in a monetary sense. In the frame of Belk’s (1988) theory of the extended self, the possession of a university degree which can comprise the certificate itself or knowledge and special skills, extends the identity of a person and grants him or her a certain status and social recognition. This recognition and prestige goes way back to the beginning of the university (see status of German professors) and seems to be one of the main underlying reasons why the informants started an academic career. In this light, studying at a

university has always been closely connected to consuming a product. Making this product accessible to more people, clearly defining its content and its value for the industry – and in some cases asking for money in return – has possibly underlined the consumption aspect as it resembles the consumption of other more tangible commodities.

Taking AAU as an example, the real problem seems to be not the marketing of study programs itself, but how it is executed, which financial dependencies are involved and how international competition is handled by the government and institutions. In Germany, the transition to the Bachelor-Master-system and monetary entanglements with private companies have created a counterproductive and competitive learning environment and thus the “bad metaphysics” that Gould (2004) mentions (p.454). Fear of failing, cramming knowledge without reflection and removing pages from library books in order to keep others from learning are the opposite of what academic ethics try to ensure.

The findings also show that those German universities that tend to be more traditional in their teaching style – regardless if they make use of marketing practices – are not necessarily perceived as “better” or more ethical learning institutions. On the contrary, the students report a very low satisfaction when it comes to the (lack of) interaction with the teaching staff and the actual value drawn from lectures and examinations. One could argue that the high pressure on German students and the rising competitive atmosphere was intensified by the Bologna Reform. After all, the reform was also based on the intention to make European universities more competitive in the international market. As a result, a “traditional” result-oriented teaching and assessment style that was not designed for “knowledge in bulk” worsened the learning conditions in Germany considerably. The distant student-teacher relationship on the other hand is probably due to historical and cultural reasons. A general more social-oriented mentality in Danish culture is also held responsible for the close cooperation between students and teachers at AAU which is even enforced through the PBL method.

The findings also reveal that a more job-oriented, practical education as in the case of AAU neither devalues the ontological voice, nor does it support “short-termism” among the students. On the contrary, the students experience a more active way of discovering new knowledge and are encouraged to reflect critically on their own projects. This process of self-realization and of being and becoming an academic seems to be entirely up to the student. AAU offers the space and the possibilities as it seems, but according to the informants, not all students are making full use of it. Maybe this also represents PBL’s biggest weakness: the lack of pressure for unmotivated students due to a highly independent learning environment. Further, it is difficult to “control” how much each individual student has actually contributed. These are issues that AAU has to address in the future.

The transition from the classical teaching method to PBL was welcomed by the German students; however, most of them struggled with the independency of the learning process. It appears as if the cramming of knowledge and the frequent examinations created an “illusion” of knowing something. Although all of the students confirm that they can learn more and better through PBL, they are still in the habit of being tested and learning knowledge by heart which they might “miss” studying at AAU. For some, this creates an uneasy feeling of “not doing or learning enough”.

The reasons why the informants have taken up an academic career vary from student to student. Clearly, there is a mix between scholastic, instrumental and collegiate motives with dominating scholastic motives in their master studies. Another motive that is only indirectly implied in “instrumental reasons” and could be detected among some students is the need to conform to external/parental demands. The need to belong to a certain social class and being recognized as an intellectual member of society often appear to be more important than monetary rewards. All of the informants describe a growing tendency towards a money-driven society that values certain kinds of knowledge more than others and an increase of students who study “for the wrong reasons”. Natale’s and Doran’s (2011) observation that subjects within the humanities might be undermined and that students “are torn between self-development and the need to have marketable skills” (p.188) could be detected as well. The need to reconcile between society’s and internal demands leads them to make compromises in their academic choices. Further, there is also a tendency to justify these choices depending on them being perceived as “too idealistic” or too “money-driven” by others. The informants seem to be very self-aware of their surroundings and are critical towards the university’s values, society’s demands, their own values and how much they have to modify those in order to “succeed”. But even though they had the impression that their studies were very grade-focused, they cannot be called a passive student body as described by Natale and Doran (2011) and Naidoo and Jamieson (2005). This image depicts the student who without any awareness accepts the circumstances that universities have created due to economic incentives. However, the informants do not feel comfortable in the role of the “shallow consumer” or in taking on finished identities (Batchelor 2008), but long for self-development and inspiration for critical thinking. Their strong engagement with the subject and their interest in their current program show that apart from the underlying wish to belong to a certain social class, they are genuinely interested in expanding knowledge. In the presented theories the authors neglect looking at the problem from the student’s perspective. The student comes across as part of a rather robotic mass that is accepting the circumstances without resisting or complaining. Just like Gibbs (2008) points out, pursuing a degree is always about the full experience which is comprised of many different variables. Depending on their negative or positive quality, students use them to balance out and to modify their expectations in

order to achieve consumer satisfaction. Furthermore, they are quite reflective about and aware of these modification processes. On the one hand, they complain about different demands in society and they condemn social class divisions and elitist thinking among academics (which is not a new phenomenon). On the other hand, they are also consciously subject to these collective sentiments and adjust their life paths accordingly. Once again, we are dealing with mixed emotions. From a different perspective, one could argue that coping with frustrations and disappointments (on and off campus) could represent an integral part of the growing process: at least these informants seem to have developed critical thinking and self-awareness despite or maybe even *because of* the change in HE values.

Just like the students, so do today's universities face moral challenges. The data supports this assumption. The informants expect to be prepared for the working world, but they also want this to happen on a more complex and theoretical level without losing touch with "reality". They also acknowledge an increasing negative influence on academic ethics by the industry (at least in Germany). Considering this development, Miklavič (2012) might be right: in order to avoid undesirable meanings, universities should restate their mission and explain what they stand for in society. Formulating a marketing strategy could force them to define this mission that Schwartz (2006) and Gibbs (2008) are asking for. Depending on the authenticity and content of this message, students could already assess whether the institution's self-presentation conforms to their internal values. AAU's example of a more service-oriented student approach – as part of its culture and marketing strategy – shows that caring about the individual student and making him or her feel welcomed does not necessarily have to result in a passive consumer attitude but that it can actually contribute to the learning atmosphere and positive spirits.

As mentioned before, this particular student body is not passive at all but very reflective, critical and insightful. The students tend to express their opinions and – at least in the interviews – stand by their sometimes contradictory thoughts and are willing to speak about personal obstacles and nuisances. They also analyze their own behavior and desires within the context of society's and universities' demands. Taking these nine students and putting them into a more global framework, it is difficult to tell in which way the student body will transform and which one of the depicted future scenarios mentioned in the introduction will be confirmed. For once assuming that the interviewees are not isolated cases, the chances are high that students might not accept undesirable meanings of HE and will in one way or another "rebel" against overemphasized economic values. Additionally, the age of social media might even facilitate accumulating resentment lending them a bigger platform and louder voices.

An additional observation in this research shows that the introduction of more modern and applied programs that were created by demands of the industry does not have to abandon ethical standards and social responsibility. On the contrary, engineering programs that focus on sustainable energy or communication and business programs that focus on international dialogue and diversity management are adapting to a changing society without abandoning “good” values but by integrating them purposefully.

Furthermore, each interviewee stood out with a very personal approach and opinion regarding HE and university marketing. Thus, we are not dealing with a typical German student that reacts typically to “new” academic values and marketing efforts. The assumption is that the student population is just as diverse and complex as any other cultural subgroup, especially when considering aspects like internationalization and mass education. Thus, every student might respond differently to university marketing and therefore “the German target group” does not actually exist, but different types of potential German students who have different sets of priorities.

During the investigations it also became clear that referring to “the European university” is rather difficult as every country has its cultural-specific traits that have influenced the informants and their respective institutions. Naturally, engrained cultural habits and mentalities influence the student-professor relationship and probably also how marketing practices are adopted and executed. For instance, a universal over-emphasis on high-achievement and status symbols in Germany could lead to a different approach in transforming universities into strong competitors on the international market. Cultural values that are anchored in Danish society then also have an effect on how it trains and shapes its students, even under international marketization pressures. I find it extremely interesting – especially in regards to the teacher-student relationship – to explore these cultural implications within the process of HE transformation.

On a different note, the relationship between students’ application in the learning process and tuition fees could also be looked into in further research. The informants complained about unmotivated, passive group members at AAU, a HE institution that raises no tuition fees for EU-students. One could explore if charging money for HE would in some cases actually result in higher learning involvement and motivation as the student has to make a financial sacrifice. This assumption would go against Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) who claim that a commercial transaction turns the student into a passive knowledge consumer.

In regards to my methodology, conducting relatively long one-on-one interviews turned out to be a useful method that offered fruitful and profound material for the analysis. The volume of the

outcome could serve for an analysis that is even more in-depth, especially dealing with country-specific traits, the students' backgrounds and how their study subject influences their perceptions. A strong connection between personal and cultural values and the field of study could be detected and could serve as a starting point for further investigation. On this note, the rather broad theoretical framework – integrating identity theories, HE transformation and consumption theories, allowed me to “attack” the problem from different angles. Nonetheless, each single one of them could have been thoroughly explored creating a much larger body of work.

7 Conclusion

In this research, the aim was to find out how German graduate students perceive studying at AAU as compared to studying in Germany and which values they ascribe to their education in a marketized higher education landscape. Furthermore, I asked myself how the marketing of higher education programs would influence the students' perception and how AAU could market itself successfully to the German student.

If the research paradigm would allow for generalization, one could say that the German university has experienced a corrosion of academic values especially since or because of the execution of the Bologna Reform. Also the universities' financial entanglements with the business world and their marketing efforts – in case they are present – result in an overemphasis of economic values and in unhealthy competition among the students disregarding the often stated social mission of the university. However, this is more applicable for study fields outside of the humanities. The observations show that the rise of international competition and commodification of study programs can have the feared dreadful outcomes that the introduced scholars have depicted depending on how these transformations are handled by the HE institutions. According to the informants, the shift in values, paired with the traditional teaching and assessment style neglects their ontological voice and “mass-produces” graduates who are simply collecting degrees in order to reach social and monetary recognition while feeding the industry's needs. However, the wish for such recognition might not be something new at all as well as the act of consuming HE itself. It is the circumstances that have changed such as the “array of products”, the amount of (competing) consumers, the pace of consumption and external pressures and demands.

In terms of student identity, internal values have to be adjusted to external needs and the possibilities for self-development and self-realization have been reduced. Clearly, the Bachelor-Master transition in Germany shows tendencies that turn against the praised academic principles of the Humboldtian model and the formation of “good” values, social responsibility and empathy.

However, those informants who describe this kind of study experience in Germany are still aware of what they want and can do for society. The desire to develop an ontological voice, an attitude of critical thinking and resentment towards an “unhealthy business trend” in the HE sphere was detected among all the interviewees. This insightfulness that the students “brought to the table” painted a diverse student picture and contradicts the image of “the passive student body” that moves homogenously into one direction. In a more global context, the discussed unhealthy tendencies do not only have to form the student but the student also forms his or her opinion about these tendencies which then gives him or her a unique critical voice judging quality, integrity and credibility of the learning institution. Combined with a rise in student mobility and accessible (shared) information online, students can make a conscious choice against a certain university based on how it presents itself and based on what other students say. This seems to be an aspect that the theorists have not included in their future predictions so far.

There was an overall satisfaction when the students talked about their education at AAU. The close relationship to teachers, the non-competitive environment, friendly service and the teaching method came up as very positive points. Although the PBL method seems to emphasize students’ preparation for the future job – an aspect that is often criticized by theorists who want to preserve “the old ways” – it still encourages the students to think critically and to engage actively with peers in the learning process. Thus, this “unconventional” way of teaching that stresses students’ practical voice and the close collaboration with the teachers and students conforms to the ground ethical principles of the idea of the university much more than the current dominating German system. On a more critical note, the research also revealed that AAU might be experiencing problems with the execution of PBL, especially when it comes to the communication about work load and distribution within project groups.

The interviewed students seem to be aware of their choices and how external pressures influence their academic decisions. However, the awareness of being trapped in a situation does not enable them to free themselves from common opinions, expectations and stereotypes. The students recognize which values and demands they do not approve of or do not want to identify with. Yet, they have already internalized some of these collective values (especially when it comes to the depreciation of “low” professions) which they are also aware of. Hence, internal and external demands have to be reconciled and expectations need to be adjusted. There is a student crisis that can be paralleled to the “old crisis of the university” mentioned in the introduction (Gibbs, 2008, p.3). The question boils down to whether universities can produce wisdom and utility at the same

time. In the student version the question would be whether students can develop their academic self while simultaneously satisfying the industry's needs.

As it also turned out, marketing efforts by universities can affect the students' perception of HE in both positive and negative ways. The few examples from Germany are extremely negative and formed the students' opinion about business practices within the HE sphere. Although the informants agreed that marketing campaigns would not go well with reputable, traditional German universities, they find them suitable for AAU as they match its modern teaching approach and overall identity. Moreover, the AAU branding and marketing campaigns are not described as obtrusive but sympathetic, funny (sometimes "too funny") and honest. It appears as if the more informative and subtler the market communication is, the more positive it will be perceived by the target audience. The "authentic" and socio-oriented academic identity that the students are striving for goes hand in hand with the identity of their imagined "ideal HE institution".

After all, promoting study programs might not go against an engrained ethical sentiment as it was assumed in the introduction of this research. Then again, the interviewed audience's perception had already been mixed with a real life impression of AAU. The latter has many strong selling points for attracting especially German students: the preference of Germans to study in a neighboring country and the desire for a more fruitful learning experience and a change in academic direction as well as no tuition fees play in favor for AAU.

In light of the findings and from a more distant perspective, ethical academic values within a transforming HE landscape appear to be more vulnerable than ever before. Therefore, they require "special protection" (in some countries more than in others). Conditioned by financial dependencies, marketing practices for HE cannot only harm these values but they can also help in preserving them depending on how the adaption to on-going globalization and internationalization trends are handled by governments and institutions.

7.1 Recommendations

Once more, if it was possible to generalize, there are several recommendations that can be made on the basis of the findings.

It is important to mention that the positive reception of AAU's branding and marketing efforts happened when the students were already enrolled at the university. Thus, they had a real impression of the institution and were then confronted with AAU's market communication (i.e. its brain logo) and its overall presentation to the public. All of the students admit that they have never paid attention to a HE advertisement when they were still living in Germany since they did not see a

relevant connection to a potential HE institution. One reason is that they associate these types of ads with universities that charge high tuition fees or are limited to only business or technical studies. The first problem could be circumvented by including the caption “no tuition fees”. On a second thought, it is to consider how potential students would perceive this particular selling point. After all, it could seem as if the financial aspect would be over-emphasized and thus other aspects like the quality of teaching and learning or the variety of programs could be reduced. Therefore, future research that involves presenting different versions of AAU advertisements to a German test group (not enrolled at AAU) should be conducted. The second problem could be solved by including the areas of study or AAU’s different faculties. Nevertheless, the “right” kinds of ads do not change the fact that the “German eye” is not trained to find advertisements from the HE sector. Therefore, the results of this research suggest that other additional promotional efforts have to be made in order to get the attention of the target audience that is already very diverse in itself.

Through the interviews it became clear that considering the counterproductive teaching methods in Germany, PBL represents a strong selling point. However, although students informed themselves beforehand, they only had a blurry idea of what PBL actually was. Therefore, AAU could encourage its enrolled German students – maybe through a small incentive – to write online and offline reviews about their study experience. These could be published on renowned German online portals like DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) or student journals that inform about studying abroad. A good personal report would not only establish another level of trust and work as word of mouth recommendation, but could also explain PBL from the student’s perspective. This could also be achieved by shooting promotion videos in German “starring” German students at AAU. Since the informants responded well to reputation (two of them found AAU through published articles and a university ranking), AAU should also make sure to use its positive rankings and the UNESCO chair of PBL for marketing itself to German students. The majority of informants were also eager to change direction in their career: communicating to potential students that they can pick a different program at AAU more easily than in Germany could be of great importance.

Needless to say, direct contacts with students would probably work better than any other advertisement. Presenting AAU in a positive way at selected education fairs and organizing information events for students are on the one hand expensive, but on the other – and regardless of the shorter outreach – they promise the best results. Two students applied for a program at AAU based on personal recommendations. In the future, AAU should find a way of keeping in touch with German alumni who could help in promotional activities in Germany on a voluntary basis. Last but not least, this research uncovered some weak points within the PBL method. According to most students, AAU needs to improve the framework of PBL and state much clearer what is expected of the individual student. The loose structure might need some revision and there should be a better

control mechanism that ensures that each student is adequately contributing to the group work. Although this is a tough nut to crack, it would ensure a higher degree of satisfaction in the learning process – at least within the interviewed group. Nevertheless, if it was possible to generalize, other AAU students might be struggling with problems similar to those found in this research.

List of References

- “Aalborg University of Denmark” (2010). studytoabroad.com. Retrieved from:
<http://www.studytoabroad.com/aalborg-university-of-denmark/>
- „AAU film og TV” (2010). Hjerneaktivitet 2010 – animation med Aalborg Universitets hjernelogo.
Retrieved from: <http://www.aau.dk/Nyheder/AAU+film+tv/>
- “About Aalborg University” (2013). www.aau.dk. Retrieved from:
<http://www.en.aau.dk/About+Aalborg+University/>
- Anderson, Robert (2010). The ‘Idea of University today’, History & Policy. Retrieved from:
<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-98.html#S4>
- “Auslandsstudium: Das Fernweh deutscher Studenten wächst” (2012). Spiegel Online. Retrieved
from: <http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/deutsche-studenten-studieren-immer-oefter-im-ausland-a-871343.html>
- “Ausgaben und Drittmiteleinahmen der Hochschulen im Land steigen” (2013). Bio-Pro. Retrieved
from: <http://www.bio-pro.de/magazin/umfeld/index.html?lang=de&artikelid=/artikel/09192/index.html>
- Arnold, S. J. and Fischer, E. (1994). Hermeneutics and consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), 55-70.
- Batchelor, D. (2008). Have students got a voice? In Barnett, R. and di Napoli, R. (Eds.). (2008).
Changing Identities in higher education. Oxon: Routledge.
- Barge, S. (2010). Principles of Problem and Project Based Learning. The Aalborg PBL Model.
Harvard University. Retrieved from:
[http://www.en.aau.dk/About+Aalborg+University/The+Aalborg+model+for+problem+based+learning+\(PBL\)/](http://www.en.aau.dk/About+Aalborg+University/The+Aalborg+model+for+problem+based+learning+(PBL)/)
- Belk, W. R. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *The Journal of Consumer Research*,
Volume 15, Issue 2 (September 1988), 139-168).
- Bhandari, R. and Blumenthal, P. (2011). International Students and Global Mobility in
Higher Education: National Trends and New Directions (International and Development
Education), NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burchard, A. (2013). Zöllner: Ausländer sollen Studiengebühren zahlen. *Der Tagesspiegel*.
Retrieved from: <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/hochschulfinanzierung-zoellner-auslaender-sollen-studiengebuehren-zahlen/8140124.html>
- Bogler, R. and Somech, A. (2002). Motives to Study and Socialization Tactics Among University
Students. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142(2), 233-248.

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital, in: G.R. Richardosn (Ed.) Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education, NY: Greenwood Press.
- Bryman, A. (2008). Social Research Methods. 3rd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). Social Research Methods. 4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Debesay, J., Nåden, D., and Slettebo, Å. (2008). How do we close the hermeneutic circle? A Gadamerian approach to justification in interpretation in qualitative studies. *Nursing Inquiry*, 15(1), 57-66.
- Denzin, N.K. (2001). *Interpretative Interactionism (Applied Social Research Methods)*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- “Die Historie der Studiengebühren in Deutschland” (2010). Ländercheck. Stifterverband für Deutsche Wissenschaft. Retrieved from: http://www.laendercheck-wissenschaft.de/archiv/studiengebuehren/historie/laendercheck_studiengebuehren_historie.pdf
- Dittmar, H. (2007). *Consumer Culture, Identity, and Well-Being*. Psychology Press; 1st ed.
- „Duales Studium“ (n.d). Retrieved from: <http://www.duales-studium.de/allgemein/duales-studium-im-detail>
- Eagle, L. and Brennan, R. (2007). Are students customers? TQM and marketing perspectives. *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 15, No. 1. Emeralds Group Publishing Limited.
- “Ende der Studiengebühren beschlossen” (2013). Bayerischer Rundfunk. Retrieved from: <http://www.br.de/nachrichten/kabinet-studiengebuehren-beschluss-100.html>
- “Facts 2011 – Aalborg University”. Retrieved from: http://www.okonomi.aau.dk/digitalAssets/53/53095_uk-5.-designdraft--26.-juni-2012.pdf
- Fries, M. (2010). Der Ing. bekommt sein Dipl. wieder. ZEIT Online. Retrieved from: <http://www.zeit.de/studium/hochschule/2010-08/diplom-ingenieur>
- GATE Germany (2010). *Konsortium Internationales Hochschulmarketing*. Retrieved from: http://www.gate-germany.de/fileadmin/bilder/Expertenwissen/internationales_hochschulmarketing_an_deutschen_hochschulen.pdf
- “Generalizability and transferability” (n.d.). CSU Writing Guide. Colorado State University. Retrieved from: <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/guide.cfm?guideid=65>
- Gibbs, P. (2011). An Aristotelian model for ethical higher education marketing: The role of practical wisdom, *Journal Marketing for Higher Education*, 21:2, 203-214.
- Gibbs, P. (2008). *Marketing Higher Education: Theory and Practice*. Berkshire, GBR: Open University Press.

- Gidley, M. J. (2012). *Re-imagining the Role and Function of Higher Education for Alternative Futures through Embracing Global Knowledge Futures*. Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands. Book: *European Higher Education at the Crossroads*, 1019-1037.
- Gould, E. (2004). *The University and Purposeful Ethics*. *Higher Education in Europe*, Vol. XXIX, No.4, December 2004.
- Grunenberg, N. (2011). *Mythos Professor*, *Zeit Online*. Retrieved from: <http://www.zeit.de/2011/30/C-Mythos-Professor/seite-4>
- Guba, E. C. (1990). *The Paradigm Dialog*. University of Indiana: Sage Publications.
- Haerder, M. (2012). *Auf den Spuren von Bologna*. *Wirtschaftswoche*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wiwo.de/politik/deutschland/bildungspolitik-auf-den-spuren-von-bologna/6145066.html>
- Hall, D. (2004). *Subjectivity*. NY: Routledge.
- Hansen, E. and Schmidt, T. (2006). *Marketing Danish Higher Education. A Service Marketing Approach*. Master Thesis, Aalborg University.
- "Higher Education Finance" (2011). HRK, German Rector's Conference. Retrieved from: <http://www.hrk.de/activities/higher-education-finance/>
- "Higher Education System" (2011). HRK, German Rector's Conference. Retrieved from: <http://www.hrk.de/activities/higher-education-system/>
- Hiller, H. H. and DiLuzio, L. (2003). *The Interviewee and the Research Interview: Analysing a Neglected Dimension in Research*. Calgary: University of Calgary.
- Hirschman, E.C. (1986). *Humanistic Inquiry in Marketing Research: Philosophy, Method, and Criteria*. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 23, 237-49.
- Howe, K. A. (2004). *Critique of Experimentalism*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10 (4), 42-61. Publications, Inc.
- "Informationer om den samlede studiebestand" (2010). AAU i tal. Retrieved from: <http://www.tal.aau.dk/studerende/studerende+i+alt/>
- Knight, J. (1999). *Internationalisation of higher education*. In J. Knight, & H. de Wit (Eds.). *Quality and Internationalisation in higher education (13-23)*. Paris: OECD
- Kvale, S.(1992). *Ten Standard Responses to Qualitative Research Interviews*. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. UK: Sage Publications.
- Lawler, S. (2007). *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. UK: John Wiley & Sons. 1st ed.
- Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Magna Charta Universitatum (1988). Retrieved from:
http://www.cicic.ca/docs/bologna/Magna_Charta.en.pdf
- Marginson, S. (2006). Values and Globalisation. Centre for the Study of Higher Education. University of Melbourne, Australia. Retrieved from:
<http://www.oecd.org/site/imhe2006bis/37474417.pdf>
- Marr, L. and Forsyth R. (2011). Identity Crisis. Working in Higher Education in the 21st century. UK: Trentham Books Limited.
- Miklavič, K. (2012). Academic Values Against the Commodification of Higher Education. European Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms.
- Morgan, G. (1983). Beyond Methods: Strategies for Social Research. CA. Sage Publications Inc.
- Naidoo, R. and Jamieson, I. (2005). Empowering Participants or Corroding Learning? Towards a Research Agenda on the Impact of Student Consumerism in Higher Education, Journal of Education Policy, v20 n3, pp. 267-281, May 2005.
- Natale, M. S. and Doran, C. (2012). Marketization of Education: An Ethical Dilemma. Journal of Business Ethics, 105: 187-196.
- Newman, J. (1854). What is a University. Salt Lake City, Project Gutenberg.
 "Observatory of the Magna Charta". Retrieved from: <http://www.magna-charta.org/>
- Oddershede, J. (2009). Danish universities – a sector in change. Danske Universiteter. J.nr. 2009-1111-07. Retrieved from:
<http://www.dkuni.dk/English/~media/Files/Publikationer/A%20sector%20in%20change.aspx>
- OECD (2012). Education at a Glance 2012: Highlights, OECD Publishing.
 doi: 10.1787/eag_highlights-2012-en
- OECD (2004). Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges, OECD Publishing. doi: 10.1787/9789264015067-en
- Otnes, C.; Lowrey, T. M. and Shrum, L. J. (1997). Toward an Understanding of Consumer Ambivalence. Journal of Consumer Research, vol. 24, issue 1, 80-93.
- Pedersen, J. (2013). Personal Communication. Email see enclosed CD-ROM.
- Ruvio, A. A. and Belk, R.W. (2012). The Routledge Companion to Identity and Consumption. Routledge; 1st ed.
- Rüegg, W. (2010). Geschichte der Universität in Europa. Band IV. Verlag C.H. Beck oHG, München.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009). Research methods for business students. 5th ed., Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh.

- Schwartz, S. (2006). Value, Ethics and Teaching. In: "Values and Ethics: Managing Challenges and Realities in Higher Education" IMHE/OECD: Paris.
- Scott, P. (2004). Ethics 'in' and 'for' Higher Education. Higher Education in Europe, Vol. XXIX, No. 4, December 2004.
- "Study in Denmark" (n.d.). Topuniversities.com. Retrieved from:
<http://www.topuniversities.com/where-to-study/europe/denmark/guide>
- Taylor, P. (2008). Being an academic today. In Barnett, R. and di Napoli, R. (Eds.). (2008). Changing Identities in higher education. Oxon: Routledge.
- "Why study at Aalborg University" (n.d.). Brochure, Aalborg University. N.d.
- „Wissenschaft und Forschung“ (n.d.). Lebendiges virtuelles Museum Online. Retrieved from:
<http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/weimar/wissenschaft/>
- Quigley, Anthony S. (2011). Academic Identity: A Modern Perspective. Educate. Vol. 11, No. 1, 20 - 30.

Interview Guide

- When you hear the term “university” what are the very first things that come to mind?
- What do you think would your parents/grandparents think of?

Describe your previous education in Germany:

- Why did you decide to pursue an academic career?
- Why did you pick the program you studied?
- Why did you pick the university that you chose?
- Who do you think influenced you most in your decisions (friends, family etc.)?
- How did you learn about the university you chose?
- Did the university do any marketing (that you know of)?
- How do you feel about universities marketing themselves?
- Do you know examples of German universities marketing themselves?
- Did/do you have a clear vision about your future?
- How were you taught? How did you learn new knowledge?
- What did you learn?
- How do you think did the results reflect your academic abilities?
- How do you think did studying at a university affect your personality? Did you change?
- How was the relationship to the teachers/other students?
- What was the atmosphere like at the university? Was it collegiate or rather self-centered?
- How did the university present itself to the outside?
- Was the staff helpful? How was the relationship?
- Apart from the study content, did you learn any soft skills?
- How did you feel coming out?
- Did you feel qualified for a job?

- How did it make you feel different from non-academic friends?

Describe your study experiences at AAU:

- How did you learn about AAU?
- Why did you want to come here?
- What did your parents/friends say?
- Which study program did you choose and why?
- Did you know about PBL before?
- Do you think AAU is presenting itself differently than any other German university?
- What are the main differences that you came across?
- Was it difficult to get used to the PBL model?
- Where do you see benefits and where do you see problems?
- How did working in a team like that work out for you?
- Do you think PBL is a good model for everyone?
- Do you think the results really reflect your academic abilities?
- How would you describe the relationship to the teachers?
- How would you describe the atmosphere at AAU?

Universities and Values:

- In your opinion, what does/should a university stand for?
- What is the purpose of going to university in the first place?
- What, in your opinion, is the main responsibility of a university?
- What kind of attitude do the people have that study with you?
- How do their attitudes affect your study experience?
- Are they rather ambitious, are they career-oriented?
- Why do you think do they/most people study?
- In the media, we hear a lot about the inflation of university degrees because more and more people are getting degrees; how do you feel about that?

- If you could go back to your high school graduation, would you make the same decisions with what you know now?
- Do you have the feeling that certain disciplines are recognized much more than others?
- If you look back, were you more driven by your interests or the by the demands of your surroundings?
- Did your focus change in terms of what is important in life and what you should be striving for?

CD-ROM:

- 9 Student Interviews:
 - Audio Files
 - Transcription File
- Email communication with AAU employee Jens Pedersen (2013)

