
A window of opportunity? The foundation of the University of Luxembourg and the impact of a changing international higher education environment

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1 – Introduction

In 1999 Luxembourg was one of the countries that signed the Bologna Declaration, the European initiative to create a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The representative of Luxembourg thereby signed the declaration without actually having a university in the country. This fact was unique amongst the signatory states as the other small nations involved in the process at that stage – Iceland and Malta – had established universities despite, at first glance, having less favourable conditions than Luxembourg.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a wealthy country in the middle of Europe at the crossroads of various European cultures. It is a political and the judicial centre of the European Union and draws a large share of its wealth from being an international banking hub. And yet, it took the Grand Duchy until 2003 to get a university – an anomaly, at least when looked at it from the outside. However, the strangeness of the situation also did not go unnoticed in the country itself. In 1991, the Luxemburgish author Roger Manderscheid asked in a speech (quoted in forum, 1992: 37):

Why is there still no university in Luxembourg? All around along our borders universities have sprung up, why not here? Do we still not want intellectual unrest in our country? It seems so. The financial unrest does not bother us. And yet we are a place from the picture-book to learn and study European languages. We will get a Museum of contemporary art here. A good thing. Why not a university? We could attract the best international professors to Luxembourg and this way we could turn Luxembourg into an intellectual centre, a counterweight to the bombastic centre of banks.¹

A simple answer to explain the lack of a university at that time pointed at the size of the country with a population of just over 384,000 in 1991, including about 113,000 foreigners (Statec, 2013: 9).² But the small size of the country was not the central argument against such an institution. The main objection against a university in Luxembourg is related to a rather peculiar national culture: Luxembourger students traditionally went abroad to get a university degree which was perceived as benefiting the formation of a national elite. From that

¹ Own translation of the Luxemburgish original: „... firwat get et nach ëmmer keng universitéit zu lëtzebuerg? ronderëmmer si laanscht eis grenzen eng ganz rei universitéiten aus dem buedem geschoss, firwat net hei? wëlle mir ëmmer nach keng geeschteg onrou bei äis am land? 't schéngt es. déi finaziell onrou stéiert äis jo weider net. dobäi wire mir eng plaz, wéi aus em billerbuch, fir europäesch sproochen ze léieren an ze studéieren. lo kennt jo e musée d'art contemporain heihinner. eng gutt saach. firwat keng uni? mir könnten eis déi bescht international professeren hei op lëtzebuerg zéien, a lëtzebuerg esou zu engem geeschtegen zentrum maachen, als géigegewiicht zu deem bombastesche bankenzentrum.“

² The population has in the meantime increased rather dramatically to about 537,000 in 2013 though mainly due to the increase in the share of foreigners (up to almost 239,000). The share of Luxembourgers, in contrast, has only grown from about 271,000 in 1991 to about 298,000 in 2013 (Statec: Ibid.).

perspective, a university at home was not only an expensive endeavour but also counterproductive towards the reproduction of a well educated elite – it was simply not a necessary ingredient for the wellbeing of the state.

This perception was challenged with the international promotion – e.g. by the OECD – of the concept of the knowledge economy and its implication for higher education. This shed a new light on universities as they became associated with economic growth. Having no university was therefore potentially an economic disadvantage which appears to be of particular relevance in a country like Luxembourg that established its wealth on rather narrowly defined economic fields. Further developments like the Bologna Process (1999) and the Lisbon strategy of the European Union (2000) reinforced this international dimension and contribute to the impression that the founding of the University of Luxembourg (UL) was an economic necessity and a logical consequence of a changing European and international environment.

While the foundation of the UL at first sight looks like a prime example for the impact of internationalisation on national higher education systems, a closer look at the situation in the country reveals a more complex picture. At certain stages of the discussions surrounding the idea of establishing a university, international higher education developments seemed to be actually of little relevance, weakening the impression of the UL being a natural consequence of the changing international environment. In 1999, for example, four years before the university opened its gates, there was no public sign of such a project as a university was not mentioned once in the coalition agreement of the newly elected national government.

Under such circumstances, attention is drawn to the role of individual actors in the process and here in particular the role of the ministry of higher education. The ministry was not the driving force of the idea of a university in Luxembourg but it was the driving force when it came to the implementation of the idea thereby overcoming a deeply embedded resistance in parts of the society against the establishment of such an institution.

The following paper will look at the national discourse surrounding the establishment of the UL, the different actors and the different interest and perspectives involved, and on the impact of the European and international environment. The analysis is mainly based on qualitative interviews with nine key actors that were present in the discussion process in the run-up to the university. It will further draw upon, reflecting the public discussions, an analysis of the contributions in the monthly magazine ‘forum’ as the main platform for in-depth societal discussions in Luxembourg.

While the paper will point out the specific conditions of higher education in Luxembourg, it will emphasise the important role played by European and international higher education developments in this context. In this vein the main thesis of this paper will argue that the pressure of internationalisation created a window of opportunity in the Luxemburgish context that allowed overcoming prevailing national opposition and enabled the establishment of a university in Luxembourg.

To approach the arguments supporting the thesis the following discussion will start with a brief summary of the changes in the international and in particular the European higher education environment, followed by a brief description of the general (historical) development in Luxembourg in the higher education and research field, followed by an analysis of the controversies surrounding the founding of the UL. The argument will finally conclude highlighting the importance of the external dimension in a national university project by outlining the conditions that contributed to the perception of a window of opportunity regarding the founding process of the UL.

2 – The Europeanisation and internationalisation of higher education: Bologna, Lisbon and the knowledge economy

Institutions of higher education have an inherent international element which, however, did in earlier years not translate into an international policy dimension. Universities were first and foremost regional institutions catering for only a limited number of people thereby representing a strong elite dimension. Under such circumstances universities were not of particular importance even in the national political arena. This situation changed dramatically with the quantitative expansion of the sector which also fundamentally increased the relevance of issues of higher education on the international stage. Arguably not at the forefront but certainly one of the most visible expressions of this development took place on the European level – the Bologna Process.

In 1999 the Bologna Declaration aimed at creating a European Higher education Area (EHEA) was signed by 29 European states. The declaration did initially not receive much attention but this changed fundamentally in the following years in many of the member states.

Without going into the details of an already widely discussed issue, the Bologna Process is a legally non-binding process outside the European Union with a focus on learning and teaching (and less on research). Its hallmarks are the introduction of a BA/MA degree structure and the

promotion of (international) student mobility. It is a process basically aimed at harmonising national higher education systems and on generally promoting higher education.

The importance of Bologna was underlined in the following year when the European Commission launched its Lisbon strategy with the ambitious aspiration for the EU, to use the infamous quote, “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” (European Council, 2000). Lisbon went well beyond higher education but its parallels with the Bologna Process became obvious in the coming years especially due to the role of the European Commission in both initiatives (see for example: Capano and Piattoni: 2011; Keeling: 2006). The Lisbon strategy, though, in its higher education dimension focused more on the aspect of research underlining the importance of a European Area of Research and Innovation. This focus was reinforced in 2002 at the Barcelona meeting of the European Council (2002: 20) which established the goal of spending three percent of the national GDP by 2010 on research, development and innovation (of which two percent should come from the private sector and one percent from the state).

Both, Bologna and Lisbon, are processes of Europeanisation and are embedded in the idea of the internationalisation of higher education which again provided the breeding ground for the notion of the already above mentioned knowledge economy. The knowledge economy carries with it the implication of a marketization or commodification of higher education resulting in an increased competition. The underlying logic behind the concept is that only states that invest in the knowledge foundation of their society will be able to compete in a global economy. The knowledge economy in its more extreme occurrence is thereby closely associated with the neo-liberal ideology. This ideology can, for example, be observed in the form of the new public management model, which has been branded by Marginson (2010:2) in the higher education context as an instrument that aims at “remaking educational institutions as business firms producing economic products within an open competitive market”.

The association of the Bologna Process with neo-liberal ideas of the knowledge economy is – despite the reputation of the process in some countries – less obvious. The Lisbon strategy in contrast appeared to have been more inspired by such concepts (Braband, forthcoming). Yet, the Lisbon strategy was ultimately not successful. It was, at least at the earlier stage of its development and within its higher education dimension, arguably too ambitious and too one-sided in its approach. Despite this failure, though, Lisbon left its marks, also or maybe even especially in Luxembourg as will be shown further down. However, to understand the impact

of Lisbon and the other international dimensions, it is necessary first to look at the higher education developments in Luxembourg.

3 – Background: Higher education and research developments in Luxembourg

There are two things that for a long time were deeply embedded in the history of higher education in Luxembourg: the purposeful absence of a university and the related tradition of studying at foreign universities.

Although Luxembourg initially had no university, an early institutional expression of higher education dates back to the beginning of the 17th century (Meyer, 2009: 455), i.e. to the time before Luxembourg became independent in the 19th century. In the century of its independence and at the beginning of the 20th century the country witnessed attempts to stimulate the establishment of a university. In both cases the impetus came from the outside (French Jesuits in the one case and German academics in the other case) and both attempts failed due to internal resistance (Zotz, 2002: 3). The theme in a way continued and paved the way for the further development that was based on the rejection of a university as being too expensive for a small country with an agrarian society. While this argument might have been a sufficient explanation in the absence of national wealth (this became a characterising feature of the country only at a later stage) and in the absence of substantial student numbers, another argument reinforced that position and made it possible to uphold the rejection of a university well into the time of increased wealth and the fundamental expansion of the higher education sector: the education of national elites at foreign universities (see above).

Studying abroad was not only perceived as a way of saving the money for a university at home but was also considered to offer some genuine extra value as “... it became an adopted general opinion that a stay at a foreign university would help to keep the country open to the mainstream of scientific ideas and technological advance embedded in the institutions of higher education in the neighbouring countries” (Pondelinger, 1999: 151).³ In other words, it was believed that Luxemburgish students abroad would maximise the economic and social benefits for their home country by bringing not only back the latest knowledge but ideally

³ The name of the author of the article – Germain Pondelinger from the Ministry of Education of Luxembourg – is obviously misspelled. It is more likely to be Germain Dondelinger, a senior figure in the ministry and influential – and in the eyes of many observers – controversial actor in the founding process of the University of Luxembourg.

also by combining different versions of knowledge advancement from different countries in an, for example, economic setting.

The system behind this approach was, however, not straight forward as most students did not simply go abroad for their degree. Their period of study began rather in Luxembourg based on an evolving system resulting from various laws, which allowed for the students to study their first year and at a later stage their second year in Luxembourg at the, from 1974 onwards, designated *Centre Universitaire*. This way it was possible for the students to enter the foreign universities at a later stage of the degree, bypassing possible entrance qualifications and restrictions. While this potentially led to complications in the recognition of the Luxemburgish period of study at foreign universities, this situation eased with the creation of the *Centre Universitaire* as the institution was provided with the means of negotiating agreements with various foreign universities as regards the acceptance of the period of study in Luxembourg. In a further twist of the system representatives in leading positions (especially judges, doctors and teachers at advanced teaching institutions) had to do the final examination – despite having studied abroad – in Luxembourg. Only in 1969 was the so called *Collation des grades* system abolished and foreign degrees accepted (Pondelinger, 1999; Rohstock, 2010).

The necessity to leave the country to receive a university degree had many consequences. One of the more obvious ones – a possible brain drain – was not amongst them, at least not in the public perception (Rohstock and Schreiber, 2013: 175). A more visible effect of the situation is linked to the repercussion on elite formation in the country.

The ties between the students abroad and their home country were always strong. This is partly a result of geographical conditions with the most popular universities being located in the neighbouring countries of France, Germany and Belgium (Ibid.: 179), in more or less close proximity to the Luxemburgish border. More importantly, though, the ties are based on Luxemburgish student associations being established in many countries (Ibid.; Rohstock and Schreiber, 2012). These associations are traditionally supported by the state and act as network not only amongst the students but they also form a network with the social elite at home thereby facilitating the access to leading positions for the students after their return to Luxembourg. The study abroad experience became an almost essential entrance qualification for joining the national elite thereby creating a circle of elite reproduction based on narrowly defined criteria that had a strong element of exclusion as:

- access to a study abroad was not an option for every student (especially during times of less generous public student financing) and
- as the political support from Luxembourg for the networks was not based on accommodating diversity but more on strengthening traditional elements of the Luxemburgish society (e.g. religion (catholic) and political views (more conservative)).

This way, the tradition of studying abroad contributed in a great way to and reinforced the elite formation in Luxembourg, largely excluding groups outside the traditional scheme and leaving little access points beyond this scheme.⁴

Altogether, the situation in Luxemburg leaves the impression that the historical perception of studying as being the privilege of a small minority appears to have survived longer in Luxembourg than in any other of the surrounding countries. From that perspective, it does not surprise that the country experienced a delayed process of adjustment to international higher education developments. This effect was also visible in the associated field of research. In 1963 an OECD report identified a rudimentary scientific environment (Meyer, 2009: 456) and although the creation of the *Centre Universitaire* in 1974 provided some impetus in this direction, something fundamental like identifying the share of the GDP spent on scientific research was in 1980 still impossible for the government to do (Meyer, 2008: 363). The underlying explanation behind this situation was – having moved from an agrarian society to a more wealth providing industrial society (steel industry) – that research was considered to be the responsibility of the big companies in the private sector (Interview, 16.06.2014). The growing importance of research, though, did not go unnoticed in the country. It found its recognition in the creation of *Luxinnovation* in 1984, an agency aimed at supporting innovation and research predominately in “small and medium-sized enterprises” (Meyer, 2009: 456). *Luxinnovation*, though, was more than a source of funding; it was also a reaction to a development on the European level.

In 1984 the first research framework program of the EU was released. While the funding provided – less than four billion Euros over a five year period – might not have been such a stimulating feature, the initiative showed something else more clearly: Luxembourg was at the bottom of the league in terms of research investment in the EU. *Luxinnovation* was a first step

⁴ Rohstock and Schreiber (Ibid.) go even further and associate the establishment of a national identity in Luxembourg to a large degree with the elite formation based on the study abroad experience.

in the direction of overcoming this deficit. Other initiatives followed that proved to be even more important in the context of this argument.

In 1987 a framework law was passed that, amongst other aspects, was aimed at organising research in the public sector and ensuring the cooperation between the public and the private sector in order to serve the economic development of Luxembourg (Meyer, 2009: 456-7). The most visible effect of the law – a clear reaction to the framework program of the EU (Interview, 16.06.2014) – was the creation of public research institutions. The framework law has furthermore been identified as an initial starting point of the political discussion of a university in Luxembourg (Interviews: 16.06.2014 and 02.06.2014). At this stage, though, it was still not a particular visible discussion and certainly not a major issue for the political parties (Interview, 16.06.2014).

At the beginning of the 1990s it seemed to be again a European development that had an influence on the national discourse. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 Treaty “recognized for the first time the EU’s responsibility to promote cooperation in education between European countries” (Mora and Felix, 2009: 195) and the creation of the single European market on 1 January 1993 created pressure resulting from the free movement of people and the related issue of the recognition of professional qualifications. In this environment, the discussions surrounding a university in Luxembourg intensified. The journal *forum*, for example, published in December 1992 an issue (No. 140) that was almost exclusively devoted to that topic (18 articles).⁵ The related discussions, however, did not fundamentally change the political situation as the minister of education (Fischbach, 1992) confirmed the traditional arguments against a university (too expensive, advantages of education abroad).

The next step on the way towards a university came in 1996 in form of the first framework law for higher education that was aimed at the *Centre Universitaire* and other existing institutions of post-secondary education.⁶ While the law attempted to reform the sector and increase the autonomy of the institutions (Pondelinger, 1999), the minister in charge at that time, Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, a conservative from the Christian Social People's Party (CSV), questions retrospectively the applicability of the law (Interview, 16.06.2014).

⁵ The editors of the journal still perceive the publication of the articles as a “milestone” in the discussions leading to a university in the country (forum, 2011: 48).

⁶ The other institutions were: ISERP – *Institut Supérieur d’Etudes et de Recherches Pédagogiques* (teacher training), IST – *Institut Supérieur de Technologie* (engineering) and IEES – *Institut d’Etudes Educatives et Sociales* (training of social workers).

The limited significance of the 1996 law regarding the development towards a university was underlined in the following year by the prime minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker (CSV) who stated in an interview his “fanatical” opposition against a university in Luxembourg due to a “fear of organisational blindness” of young Luxembourgers that “have not at least studied four years in a foreign country”. In short, he feared “the academic incest” (Juncker, 1997: 13).⁷

Such strong words of a powerful politician like Juncker could have been considered as a clear signal to the advocates of a university and indeed, the following years did not witness any further public progress toward this goal.

The 1999 national elections brought a change in the coalition government. While the CSV remained the strongest party, its coalition partner changed from the Socialist (LSAP) to the Liberals (DP). While the LSAP had at least one of the few politicians amongst its rank that played a more active role in the discussions surrounding the issue of a university in Luxembourg (Ben Fayot), the DP was an outspoken opponent of such a university. This, though, should not be misleading. The university was not an issue in the election campaign, nor was it a topic for the coalition agreement (see above) and the following government declaration (Stoldt, 2002: 11; Interviews: 26.05.2014; 16.06.2014).

A more important development took place on the ministerial level. Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, the minister of education and cultural affairs in the former coalition government took over a rearranged ministry of culture, higher education and research. While a ministry of higher education in the absence of a university caused amusement amongst some commentators (forum, 1999: 5),⁸ the reasons behind this rearrangement are not entirely clear. The minister herself insists that the new ministry was based on her own wish (Ibid.) and not based on the new coalitions partners demand to take over the more important ministry of education. There is some evidence, though, that the minister played a more active role in the reshuffling of the ministerial arrangements. After all she was the president of the CSV at that time but more importantly, six days after the national election (13 June) and two months before the new government was formed Hennicot-Schoepges signed the Bologna Declaration. From that perspective the new ministry with its explicit focus on higher education had more than just a symbolic meaning and can be seen as a turning point in the development towards a University of Luxembourg.

⁷ Own translation (original in German)

⁸ Higher education was before only a department in the ministry of education.

While other national developments underlined the perception of an increased engagement in the wider field of higher education and research – whereby the focus appeared to be more on the economically more interesting research as witnessed by the foundation of the National Research Council (FNR) in 1999 – the next substantial impetus was again of external nature.

In March 2000 the Lisbon strategy of the European Commission with its request to invest more into public research was initiated. From there on it went quite quickly.

In May 2000 a white paper on higher education was published by the ministry offering a review of the current situation and the prospects for development (Ministère de la Culture, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2000). Less than two years later, in March 2002, the ministry of higher education presented its plan for the establishment of a university at a seminar in the town of Mondorf. Instead of the seminar marking the beginning of a public discussion process, the project went ahead bypassing any such general discussions. The law establishing the University was passed in August 2003 and came into effect two month later. Within a little bit more than four years, the non-topic of a university in Luxembourg had become a legal reality. The consequences of such an extremely accelerated process – especially against the backdrop of the traditional opposition in the country – will be looked at in the following section.

4 – A controversial *national* topic: Establishing a university in Luxembourg

Before the ministry made its plan public to establish a university, the topic of such an institution in Luxembourg might have been controversial but the controversy was enclosed in a small arena of people interested in the subject. For the rest of the country it was not controversial at all as they were simply not interested in the topic: it is not possible to identify something of a public discourse embracing the whole (civic) society of Luxembourg. The country had arranged itself with the existing system and appreciated its advantages. In the absence of a major upset to that system, there was no identifiable need to change the situation. In such an environment the advocates of a university – low in numbers anyway – could not provide enough input to even just stimulate a broad public discussion about the issue despite some of the traditional explanations for not having a university having become less strong.

The central argument, for example, of a university being too expensive was at the beginning of the 1990s already highly questionable. Luxembourg had not only moved on to the wealth bringing steel production but in the meantime had found another main pillar to preserve and

expand its wealth – the banking sector. This resulted in a high GDP and a level of the national debt that tended towards zero percent (Irsigler, 1992: 35). To label a university as too expensive was therefore branded by one actor as “nonsense” (“*Schwachsinn*”) (Wehenkel, 1992: 25). Almost logically, the argument started in combination with the study abroad tradition to carry a different connotation and was characterised in the country itself as “parasitism” (“*Schmarotzertum*”) thereby also recognising a perceived reputation in the surrounding countries (Ibid.: 24; Fischbach, 1992; Interview, 12.06.2014).⁹ The reaction to such a strong accusation was less dramatic: the announcement of an increase to a two-year cycle at the *Centre Universitaire* before going abroad (Fischbach, 1992) or a simple reference by the umbrella organisation of the student abroad networks to the money spent by Luxemburgish students in the host countries (ACEL, 1992: 17).¹⁰

Such variation in the perception of the situation stems from a simple area of conflict. There are those who saw the university not just in terms what it would cost but also in terms of what the benefits of a university would be (research output, big employer, more generally increasing the attractiveness of Luxembourg as a location to attract further business etc.) and on the other side were those who emphasised the advantages of a study abroad period. Their opposition was arguably based on a concern that Luxembourgers could not go abroad anymore if there is a university in the country. A simple reference to the constitutionally (!) embedded right to study wherever one wants to (Article 23) should otherwise have been enough to reduce such fears.¹¹ Their objections were probably more directed at the *Centre Universitaire* as the nucleus of a future university (ACEL, 1992)¹² or directed at a “Luxembourger model” (Interview, 04.06.2014; see also: Greisen, 2003) where everybody knows each other and provide each other with jobs (the “academic incest” argument of Juncker (see above) is pointing in this direction). Yet, these scepticisms can be equally found amongst the supporters of a university (see for example: Theis, 1992).

⁹ Juncker (1997: 13) also acknowledged the issue but without using the term “Schmarotzer” (parasite).

¹⁰ The umbrella organisation *Association des Cercles d'Etudiants Luxembourgeois* (ACEL) was founded in 1984 (for more information, see: Rohstock and Schreiber, 2013).

¹¹ This is not to say that such fears did not exist (see e.g.: Schoentgen, 1993) but the actual numbers of students at foreign universities underline that the University of Luxembourg did not lead to a decline in students going abroad. In the academic year 1990/91 3,033 students from Luxembourg studied abroad (forum, 1992b: 13). In 2000 the number has grown to just over 4,000 reaching 4,500 in 2004 (the year after the UL was founded) and almost 5,000 in 2010 (Rohstock and Schreiber, 2013: 180).

¹² The *Centre Universitaire* is itself an institution that caused some controversy due to leadership problems and the status of its teaching and research staff (normally recruited from grammar schools). A discussion of the topic, though, would go too far here.

This points at other aspects that are more difficult to grasp. A university in Luxembourg was a threat to the various existing networks involving the students abroad and the social and political elite in Luxembourg. A university in the country would certainly create a disruption to this existing system by adding another elite dimension at home with the extent of this disruption not being fully foreseeable in its consequences. Furthermore, it was clear that a university even if created due to strong economic interests would produce a new arena for a critical reflection about the Luxemburgish society and identity (pointed out in various interviews; see also: Kmec, 2013 and Hirsch, 2013). Thereby a space would open up that would allow for the prevailing societal discourses and interpretation of national identity – according to Rohstock and Schreiber (2013) an elite construction influenced by the study abroad tradition; see above – to be challenged (see also: forum, 2011). These aspects – a new level to the elite reproduction and a new instance of critical societal discourse – would potentially undermine the traditional elite formation and question the role and status of the existing elite.

Such an analysis already indicates that reducing the opponents and proponents of a university to a simple duality based on a teaching dimension or on an economically more viable research dimension does not present the full picture. Research and teaching create an area of conflict that is only one of many that can be identified in the discussions. The others, for example the tension between a university as an economic factor and the university as an instance to critically review the society, or the tension between the existing institutions of post-secondary education and the future shape of the university (against initial plans, most of the existing institutions were integrated into the UL) contributed all to a diverse picture that makes it difficult to clearly define and separate the arguments. This becomes especially visible when it comes to defining the position of the supporters of the university. They might have been united in the wish to establish a university but had very different views about what the future university should look like.¹³ Under such circumstances it might surprise little that the various actors did not create homogenous groups in favour or against a university (Interviews: 12.06.2014; 04.06.2014). It was more “diffuse” and it was not a “black and white” topic (Interview, 12.06.2014). On top of that, to pick up the argument from above, the biggest group of all was the one that did not participate in the discussion at all based on indifference to the issue as there was no societal discourse (Interview, 16.06.2014). This was highlighted

¹³ One senior academic expert points out that the struggle to define the future shape of the university led to “the greatest higher education policy battle” (own translation of the German original) of all (Interview, 26.05.2014).

by the lacking relevance of the university as a public political theme in elections and government formations. One senior academic figure, in recognition of these conditions, summarised the consequences of this environment by stating that the university did not have many supporters and that it was a “miracle” that it was at all established (Interview, 09.04.2014). Which poses the question of what was behind the miracle?

5 – The missing link: The impact of Europeanisation and internationalisation

It is no coincidence that the international dimension was lacking in the analysis of the previous section. It simply did not play a discourse shaping role. The international element was not a dominating feature in the discussion, neither before, nor, as one would expect due to Bologna and Lisbon, after the university project was made public. To the outside it was an almost exclusive national debate, dominated by national issues. The announcement of 2000 intensified and widened the discussions (the topic of the internal governance of the university, for example, was intensively disputed) but it remained predominately focused on the national dimension while still not going far beyond a discussion circle of insiders.¹⁴

Even at the current time when the impact of the internationalisation of higher education on national systems is more obvious and something like the Bologna Process has established itself as a development shaping element (which was not as obvious in the run-up to the UL), the people interviewed for this paper presented – despite increased awareness for the topic – a rather diffuse picture in terms of their perception of the role of internationalisation in the creation of the UL. Bologna is generally not recognised as a driving force in the process leading to the UL (with two telling exceptions; more about this further down) despite the mobility focus of Bologna providing potentially valuable arguments to meet the opposition of the study-abroad tradition. Even the economically more ‘interesting’ Lisbon strategy is only associated with a bit more of an impact. Going beyond the specific example, the general role of internationalisation and the knowledge economy, however, are viewed as more or less important themes (without them, though, being identified as dominating aspects). While the analysis of the public discourse at the period in question is not based on all available sources, the selection of articles used here shows an even greater absence of the international aspect in

¹⁴ The involvement of international higher education experts at various stages of the process – an aspect that would need to be addressed at the next phase of the research – did not fundamentally alter the situation.

the discussion at the time of the actual process.¹⁵ This underlines the dominance of the national element in the discourse at the time of the founding period of the UL. It has to be added, however, that this analysis needs a qualification.

Even if not directly observable amongst the actors it can be safely assumed that a country that is so central to the EU (geographically and politically) and is so exposed to issues of internationalisation (banks, steel industry) is less in need of an explicit public discourse on the effects of internationalisation on higher education. The study-abroad tradition itself is part of it as it not only lead to the creation of national networks but also to the establishment of European and international networks. Luxembourg, in the words of Justin Powell (2014: 125), is "... a hyper-diverse society marked by migration and mobility [where] internationalisation has been present from the start". Internationalisation is – at least amongst the national experts – inherently present in the discussion without being that visible. This argument is underlined by the perception of two actors – a senior politician and a senior academic administrator – who recognised the impact of internationalisation in the founding process of the UL but who at the same time did not identify a specific pressure (Interviews: 05.06.2014; 02.06.2014) with one of them explicitly stating that the arguments in the discussions were influenced by the issue of internationalisation (Interview, 02.06.2014).¹⁶

The pressure of internationalisation or the more specific pressure of Europeanisation is in particular visible in the form of the role played by the ministry of higher education. Germain Dondelinger, an influential senior policy administrator in the ministry acting himself as the Luxemburgish representative to the Bologna Process for many years, identified both, Bologna and Lisbon, as driving forces in the founding process of the university (Doerner, 2013).¹⁷ This is further confirmed by the minister herself, Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, in an interview (16.06.2014). She saw in particular the Lisbon strategy and its requirement to invest one percent of the GDP in public research – which Luxembourg was far away from and still has

¹⁵ One of the exceptions is the article of Pauly and Zotz (2003: 30) who criticised the government for embracing the Lisbon strategy too much.

¹⁶ Another example, though from a different angle, that indicates the presence of the international factor in Luxembourg is the establishment of the *European University Foundation Campus Europae*, a network of universities from different countries which has its headquarter in Luxembourg due to the initiative by Juncker who announced the project in 2001 (Juncker, 2001). The impact of Campus Europae, however, is in the context of the argument here limited as – due to the nature of the network – it is not considered to be a stepping stone towards the UL.

¹⁷ Dondelinger (see also footnote 3) participated in the Bologna Process from the beginning. Also because of that he acquired a leading position in the administration of the process in the European arena thereby acquiring a strong European and international dimension that – via his role in the ministry – fed back into the national arena. For an in-depth discussion of the relationships between the European arena and the various national arenas in the member states of Bologna, see: Harmsen (2013).

not reached – as offering her a “powerful instrument”. It served as an instrument to invest in a university and it served as an instrument to convince the prime minister Jean Claude Juncker of the necessity to open a university in Luxembourg (Ibid.).¹⁸ In other words, Juncker changed his mind because of the Lisbon strategy (Interview, 12.03.2014).

Hennicot-Schoepges saw Lisbon as providing her with a window of opportunity to establish a university in Luxembourg and she feared that if a university would not be secured before the next national election in 2004, the institution would not materialise (Interview, 16.06.2014).¹⁹ This time pressure and the concern about a public discussion that in her perception would undermine the whole project (Ibid.) led to a top-down process that was neither transparent nor engaged the society. Such an approach was obviously not particularly popular leading one observer to point at the “insane speed” (“*Wahnsinnstempo*”) of the developments (Interview, 02.06.2014) while another one, the senior academic Michel Pauly (2004: 6) criticised the lacking communication as public debates were “avoided like the plague”.²⁰

The speed and the style of the process were also to serve the original idea of what a university should look like. It was supposed to be a research university with limited teaching (mainly postgraduate teaching). This served two purposes: first, the research focus reflected the Lisbon strategy and, second, it helped to keep quiet the opponents of the university that perceived a university as a threat to the study-abroad tradition. Yet, while the public discussion was limited, the combination of various factors (critical statement of the Council of State, demands resulting from the existing institutes and their staff etc.) created so much pressure that the model had to be adjusted and most of the existing higher education institutions had to be integrated, bringing with them a much stronger focus on learning and teaching. This way, international developments helped to push through the university project but the national dimension finally shaped the institutional outcome.

At the end, the ministry forced through the project and Hennicot-Schoepges accomplished her goal of establishing the university before the next election. Even a critical academic involved

¹⁸ This is underlined by the fact that in 2001 Juncker emphasised the importance of a new higher education policy for Luxembourg (Juncker, 2001; Doerner, 2013).

¹⁹ There were also some favourable national conditions that contributed to the window of opportunity. First and foremost this concerns a former industrial site in Belval (southwest of the country) that formed the base for the *Cité des Sciences* project (see: <http://www.belval.lu/en/>). It is itself a controversial topic that cannot be looked at here in detail even if one interviewee (02.06.2014) claims that Belval was a main reason to establish a university (in the sense of: something had to be found to fill the site). Belval plays a role but there is no further evidence from interviews or the literature looked at that would justify attributing a greater or equally important impact to Belval (in comparison to Europeanisation/internationalisation) in the creation of the university.

²⁰ Own translation of the German expression „... Debatte ... scheuen wie der Teufel das Weihwasser“.

in the process acknowledges her role and states that nobody else but her could have achieved this (Interview, 26.05.2014). However, Hennicot-Schoepges had a price to pay for this. After the next election in 2004 the CSV stayed in power as the strongest party but she lost her job as minister, apparently without any advanced warning (Interview, 12.06.2014), reinforcing the perception of a window of opportunity for the creation of a university in Luxembourg.

6 – Conclusion: A window of opportunity?

The establishment of the UL appears to be a specific example of the impact of internationalisation on a national system. In the light of a tradition that served the needs of a policy shaping national elite, it is difficult to identify any other substantial force that could have brought a university to Luxembourg. There was simply not enough internal pressure for a university to be established despite the apparent advantages of such an institution in the country. And yet, in the specific national arena, internationalisation as a force itself was not enough, it needed the right access point to develop its influence. This access point was provided by the ministry and its actors. Without these actors in a powerful position willing to take on the project, a university might not have materialised. The period after Hennicot-Schoepges disappeared as a minister might already indicate that as in the governmental declaration after the 2004 election, the UL was only briefly mentioned (Graf, 2004). Furthermore, while Bologna continued to expand its influence, the Lisbon strategy – a strong focus point of the ministry – went from one problem to another going through various attempts to revive it and is currently visible as the *Europe 2020* strategy. In addition, the worldwide financial crisis also had an impact on the finances in Luxembourg and thereby gave new life to the ‘too expensive’ argument. And finally, in the absence of a society still not wholeheartedly embracing its university, it is difficult to see against the backdrop of the specific history of higher education in Luxembourg, how a university could be founded nowadays. It would require another window of opportunity and engaged actors. Alternatively, a broad societal and political discourse could provide a more substantial legitimacy for founding a university even in the absence of a window of opportunity.

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Interviews (location):

12.03.2014 (Walferdange) – senior academic

09.04.2014 (Walferdange) – senior academic

26.05.2014 (Luxembourg) – senior academic

27.05.2014 (telephone interview) – external senior higher education expert

02.06.2014 (Steinheim) – senior academic and senior administrator

04.06.2014 (Luxembourg) – senior academic

05.06.2014 (Luxembourg) – senior politician

12.06.2014 (Luxembourg) – senior administrator

16.06.2014 (Walferdange) – senior politician