

12.7.2025

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**Title**

Ambivalence and the politics of knowledge : the struggle for change in German higher education

**Publication year**

2005

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 49 (2005) 1 - 2, S. 177 - 195

**Inventory number**

18973

**Keywords**

Hochschule : Idee und Aufgabe ; Hochschule : gegenwärtige Situation ; Hochschulreform : allgemein

**Abstract**

This article argues (a) that universities are profoundly ambivalent institutions; (b) that this ambivalence explains a great deal about their behavior that would otherwise remain inexplicable; (c) that one of the most striking manifestations of this ambivalence can be found in universities attitudes towards change; and (d) that this ambivalence has its roots in a fundamental tension in modern society about the universitys purposes. There is good reason to believe that this set of observations holds true for universities everywhere, albeit to different degrees and in different ways. As a case in point, this article focuses on the process of change (and non-change) in German higher education over the past ten years. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)