



First International College Forum (Frankfurt)

Liberal Arts and Science: Education for Agents of Transition

Introduction

On May 24, 2012, the Maleki Group will hold the “First International College Forum Frankfurt” in order to establish a new forum for discussion and a meeting point in Frankfurt am Main concerning itself with questions related to *new ways of academic education*.

The *target audience* of the conference comprises a wide range of decision makers in science and economy, active designers in the public and private sector of institutions of higher learning, investors, consultants and representatives of local authorities as well as students from home and abroad.

This conference will be co-hosted by the German Society of Human Ecology and conducted under the guiding theme of “Liberal Arts and Science: Education for Agents of Transition.”

Two open rounds of discussion will be dedicated to the challenges – such as climate change, shortage of resources and demographic change – our economies and societies in transition are facing. In collaboration with representatives of American and German top universities the excellence of an academic education patterned after the principle of Liberal Arts and Science and its ensuing chances will be highlighted. It is about an education that particularly includes *external practice* in firms and organizations, but *is neither solely vocational nor one-sidedly scientific disciplinary in orientation*. An education of this type can take into account each individual student’s potential of development. He or she will be well equipped for a future role of agent of transition and be in a position to apply the *knowledge and skills* necessary for our societies and economies *to navigate the processes of the great transition*.

Not only will the special character and the *competence associated with Colleges of the Liberal Arts type* in general be elaborated upon, but also the particular college to be founded in Southern Germany is to be described being the first branch of one of the most renowned academia of the US, the College of the Atlantic. It will be the first of its kind in Europe in general and in Germany in particular. Finally, the question will be addressed, which *networks* and which *private and public initiatives and supports* will be mandatory for an independent establishment of the planned educational institution.

Background

Given the present state of the world we face enormous challenges of a global extent concerning the *conservation of humankind’s livelihood*: mitigating climate change, switching from fossil to renewable energies, reducing the resource consumption to a sustainable level, sustaining an overall still growing – in some countries of the North yet shrinking – population, stopping the progressing extensive

landscape destruction. In our relationship to the environment we need *new modes of behavior and action*. Young motivated people must be given access to an academic study program that offers the possibility to not only absorb established scientific knowledge, but also to gain practical experience in project work as well as to develop transdisciplinary perspectives. In addition, all this should be geared to *individual educational needs* and be acquirable to a large degree in a process of *tutored self-learning*.

Exemplary in the USA is the “Eco-League”, an association of five colleges. All of them offer a *wide-ranging study program*, patterned after the “*Liberal Arts*” idea and focused on the topic of pressing environmental problems. The outstanding model for us is the *College of the Atlantic (COA)* at Bar Harbor, Maine, by now one of the most renowned schools of this type in the US. Its four-year academic program relies on a combination of courses residing in *three distinct resource areas*: sciences, humanities and arts and design (creative work in traditional crafts and arts, but also on the computer). Advanced students, however, can, within bounds, also follow a course of specialization according to their specific interests. The degrees offered are a *Bachelor of Arts in Human Ecology* and, after the fulfillment of additional credits, a *Master of Philosophy in Human Ecology*.

In Germany a comparable institution was the “*Bauhaus*” in Weimar and Dessau, existing from 1919 to 1933. According to the spirit of the time its thematic focus was different then, but its educational model was equivalent. Today there are a couple of universities which have programs of a universal character, but none which, similar to the COA, dedicates itself to the *building of bridges* between the different areas of knowledge and experience important in an *environmental context*. Therefore, a study group of the German Society for Human Ecology (DGH) has embarked on a planning process towards the foundation of a “*College of Human Ecology for Europe*” (COH). It will connect to the old Bauhaus tradition on the one hand and, given the present needs, offer a thematic program patterned largely after the COA scheme on the other hand. To this end the European College will start in part as a branch of the COA, in this way facilitating *cooperative exchanges* between academic programs.

Meanwhile the planning process has reached a crucial point: The *first steps of realization* have been worked out, their initiation only awaiting the provision of the necessary financial funds. *Emmendingen*, a town of 27,000 inhabitants, ten minutes by train northbound from Freiburg im Breisgau, is very much interested in the college project and lends itself as an excellent geographical location. With the town’s support a *four-day “charrette”*, an open public participation procedure, took place in February 2011. In its course the participants inspected and evaluated possible locations for the College, conducted a regional analysis concerning potentials for project-oriented work (organic farming, environmental technologies etc.), compiled desirable contents of the study program and carried out an initial assessment of building sites and associated costs. A follow-up action took place in November 2011 when the *Council for European Urbanism Deutschland (CEUD)* dedicated its three-day annual conference to a thorough review of the charrette results, particularly of the object locations. Preference was given to the idea of a campus near the town center, as it would be capable of establishing links to the whole town – true to the interconnecting principle of human ecology.