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Reflections on the Dissolution of the GDR Academy of Science and the Founding of Successor Institutes (2005)

Prof. Dr. Peter Joehnk, a West German co-founder of the Leibniz Institute for Solid State and Materials Research in Dresden, describes key steps in the dissolution of the GDR Academy of Sciences and offers a guardedly positive assessment of the effects of unification on East German science and research. Prof. Joehnk is currently serving as administrative director of the Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf.

The Dissolution of the GDR Academy of Sciences and its Absorption into New Structures – An Example of the Transformation Process in East Germany in the Wake of Unification

Introduction:

[...]

Not only did the old combines [*Kombinate*] of the GDR economy disappear in 1990, the academic landscape, too, was reshaped in a massive transformation process and was adapted to Western structures. The author of this article does not see himself as a historian, nor does he want to make any political assessment of the process as a whole. As a manager and participant in the process, he is focusing solely on the structure of the transformation process, on the process of preparing and making decisions, and on an analysis of the achieved results. Despite the uniqueness of the German unification process, the management mechanisms upon which it was based can be applied to other challenging cases in other countries – and that is what one can learn from this article.

When considering the chronology, readers should give particular heed to the fact that the monetary union between the FRG and the GDR took effect on July 1, 1990, and that unification officially occurred on October 3, 1990. Up to then, the laws of the GDR largely continued to apply unchanged in the East. This means that a large part of the activities listed below were banned or impermissible according to the valid law at the time.

I. Changes in the GDR Academy of Sciences [*Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* or AdW]

The following major steps in the AdW conversion process were reconstructed on the basis of publicly accessible sources and internal transcripts of meetings:

January 26, 1990

AdW directors' conference in Berlin

A declaration was drawn up that described the AdW as independent from state agencies.

March 1990

A task force presented a proposal for restructuring the AdW. The goal was to create a research community made up of individual AdW institutes, which were to be divided into sections and led by section councils. It was to be financed by the state. There was a proposal to merge those institutes whose work is of industrial relevance into a "Leibniz Society"; this was to be funded through the state budget (40%) and industrial contracts (60%).

The Max Planck Society and the Fraunhofer Society of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) strongly objected to this proposal in view of the future academic research community of united Germany.

(Bottom line: Germany does not need another academic research organization)

July 1990

Meeting between the research ministers Heinz Riesenhuber (FRG) and Frank Terpe (GDR)

It was agreed that the Science and Humanities Council [*Wissenschaftsrat*] of the FRG would evaluate the AdW institutes of the GDR and draw up recommendations on the following:

- the continuation of individual institutes
- or changes to their academic research profiles and/or funding sources
- or the closure of institutes

Minister Terpe and AdW president Horst Klinkmann addressed the staff of the institutes in an open letter. They explained the need for the reorganization process and called upon the

institutes to quickly discontinue work on projects that could no longer be supported by research (technological tasks, production, and services).

August 31, 1990

The Unification Treaty between the FRG and the GDR was signed. Article 38 of this treaty set December 31, 1991, as the date by which all AdW institutes had to close.

October 3, 1990

Unification

Federal states were created in East Germany in accordance with the West German model. The new federal states are:

- Mecklenburg-West Pomerania
- Brandenburg
- Saxony-Anhalt
- Saxony
- Thuringia

East Berlin was incorporated into the city-state of Berlin.

The individual AdW institutes became dependent institutions of the federal states and affiliated with the federal state in which they were based. The new federal states agreed to form a coordinating office from among the central leadership organs to deal with all the issues relating to the dissolution of the AdW institutes (Coordination and Phase-out Office for the Institutes and Facilities of the Former Academy of Sciences of the GDR [*Koordinierungs- und Abwicklungsstelle für die Institute und Einrichtungen der ehemaligen Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* or KAI-AdW]).

December 12, 1990

Adlershof Declaration

In this declaration, twenty-one AdW professors called for its immediate and unconditional dissolution on account of its lack of willingness to deal with the political past.

March 18, 1991

Meeting between Federal Minister of Research Heinz Riesenhuber, the science and research ministers of the new federal states, and Professor Dieter Simon, chairman of the Science and Humanities Council.

A recommendation was drafted, according to which new institutes would be founded in Eastern Germany with a total staff of approximately 7,000 to 10,000. The funding for these new institutes would be shared equally by the federal government and the respective federal state. Parts of the AdW institutes would be affiliated with universities and receive temporary state support (Researcher Integration Program [*Wissenschaftlerintegrationsprogramm* or WIP]; Higher Education Renewal Program [*Hochschulerneuerungsprogramm* or HEP]).

The federal government considered larger scale financial support for job creation measures (ABM), e.g., occupational retraining programs.

The property of the AdW institutes would go to the federal states in which they were based.

May 10, 1991

Meeting of the science and research ministers in Berlin.

At this meeting, the “guidelines for institutional support in the new federal states” were passed with the following key points:

- Founding of new institutes by December 31, 1991
- Announcement of scientific leadership positions, in each case in collaboration with a university (joint appointments)
- Appointment of founding directors
- Selection of personnel based on the criteria for civil service appointments (anyone who previously worked too closely with the state, e.g., for the state security service, could not be hired)
- Degressive financial assistance for staff cutbacks
- A balanced academic research landscape should be aimed for.

August 16, 1991

Regulations to safeguard research findings and trademarks/patents by the interim administration, KAI-AdW.

September 19, 1991

Conference in Dresden of the science and research ministers of the new federal states with representatives of the Federal Ministry for Research and Technology and the Science and Humanities Council.

- The evaluation was completed. The AdW institutes would be divided up among a small number of larger research institutions; a large number of facilities would be jointly financed by the federal government and the federal states as well as by institutes and working groups of the Fraunhofer Society and the Max Planck Society.
- The only thing that remained uncertain was the status of the Rossendorf Research Center [*Forschungszentrum Rossendorf* or RFZ] (major research center or not?)
- Roughly 10,000 employees would be moved into new jobs.
- The new institutes would have 100 million DM at their disposal as start-up funding, which was to be used primarily for investments in new equipment.
- The AdW staff was reduced from 24,000 employees in May 1990 to 16,766 in August 1991.
- Roughly 2,000 applications were submitted for the Researcher Integration Program. The universities called for the time limit to be extended beyond 1993.

March 10, 1992

The German Federal Constitutional Court confirmed the constitutionality of the regulations in Article 38 of the Unification Treaty (evaluation of the AdW by the Science and Humanities Council of the FRG, dissolution of the institutes by December 31, 1991).

June 30, 1992

The Coordination and Phase-out Office for the Institutes and Facilities of the Former Academy of Sciences of the GDR concluded its dissolution of the institutes. The Academy of Sciences of the GDR ceased to exist.

[. . .]

V. Impact on the Academic Community in Germany

[. . .]

The following related theses can be proposed today:

- Due to the restructuring of the academic community in Eastern Germany, many new, modern, and efficient institutes have emerged, some of which even set a standard for good Western German institutes.
- The development of the instrument of joint funding by the federal government and the federal states has been greatly influenced by the thirty-three new institutes in the East.
- Strong impetuses for the internal process that these institutes underwent came from the East itself. This made it possible for the Leibniz Institutes to become one of the four pillars of the system of research and development in Germany.

The significance of the Leibniz Institutes as regards scientific policy prompted the Federal-State Joint Commission for Educational Planning and the Promotion of Research Activities [*Bund-Länder-Kommission* or BLK] to make the following statements at its September 4, 2001, session:

- Important instrument for academic research policy in Germany
- Nationwide significance, R&D policy interests of the country as a whole
- Offers the federal government and the federal states the option of a flexible response
- Enables important research across federal state borders
- Facility results are rated “good” to “very good,” sometimes top results internationally.

The other research organizations were greatly affected by the unification process as well. To name just one small example, the largest institute of the Fraunhofer Society today is in Dresden, Saxony, and the Max Planck Society operates three major institutes in Dresden alone.

VI. Conclusion

Even for those involved in the process, the past fifteen years have brought some surprising results and successes that would not have been considered possible during the individual steps. Time passed very quickly.

Today, all those involved can look back proudly, or at least contentedly, on their achievements, which would not have been possible without their active and sometimes courageous participation. But perhaps they had no choice but to look ahead and shape their future with their own hands.

Good management in the institutes was indispensable, as was the support of the financial backers. As always, the main thing was quality: good research costs money, but no one can afford to do bad research.

Source: Peter Joehnk, "Die Auflösung der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR und ihre Überführung in neue Strukturen – ein Beispiel für den Konversionsprozess in Ostdeutschland in Folge der Wiedervereinigung" ["The Dissolution of the GDR Academy of Sciences and its Subsumption into New Structures – An Example of the Transformation Process in East Germany in the Wake of Unification"], www.internationale-kooperation.de/doc/report_joehnk_964.pdf, 2005.

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