

Development of the Social Dimension

—

Stocktaking and Future Perspectives of Student Services/Student Affairs in the European Higher Education Area

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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
State Secretariat for Education and Research SER

Centralisation vs. Decentralisation

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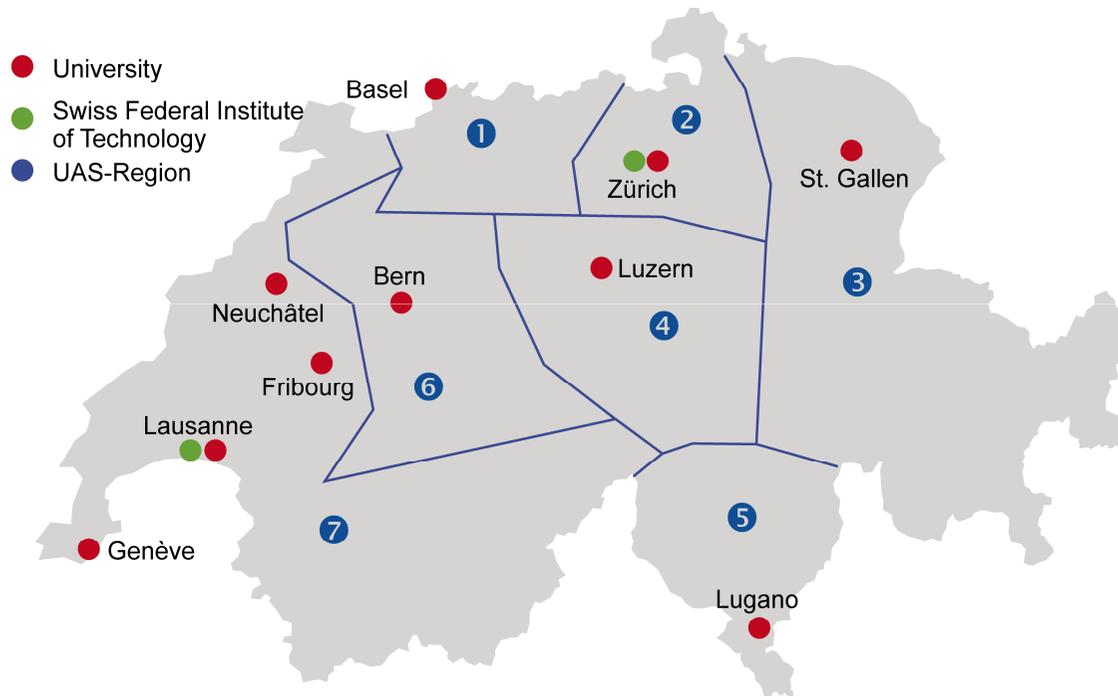


Overview

- 1.) Swiss Higher Education System
- 2.) Student Support Services
- 3.) Grants and Loans Systems
- 4.) Conclusions



1.) Swiss Higher Education System



Responsibility

A) Swiss Confederation

- ETH Domain (with ETH Zurich and EPF Lausanne)

B) Cantons

- Cantonal Universities
- Universities of Applied Sciences (co-operation with the Confederation)
- Universities of Teacher Education



2.) Student Support Services

The Higher Education Institutions usually provide the following student support services:

- Academic guidance services
- Career guidance services
- Psychological counseling services
- Financial guidance services
- Military guidance services
- Accommodation counseling and (sometimes) provision



2.) Student Support Services

Due to the federal system, the student support services are run and regulated at the local level.

Advantages of a decentralised provision

- Student support services tailored to fit the local needs.
- Quick feedback loops to improve the services.
- Laboratory of ideas.
- Student support services as a competitive advantage for HEIs (esp. career guidance services).

Disadvantage of a decentralised provision

- Difficult to have an national overview of the different practices.



3.) Grants and Loans Systems

The cantons are responsible for the main grants and loans systems.

The Confederation supports the cantons by means of a lump sum subsidy for grants and loans at the tertiary level according to the number of inhabitants. There are also some federal grants systems (Erasmus, SNSF, etc.)

Advantage of a decentralised provision

- Grants and loans systems designed to meet the needs and special situation of different cantons.

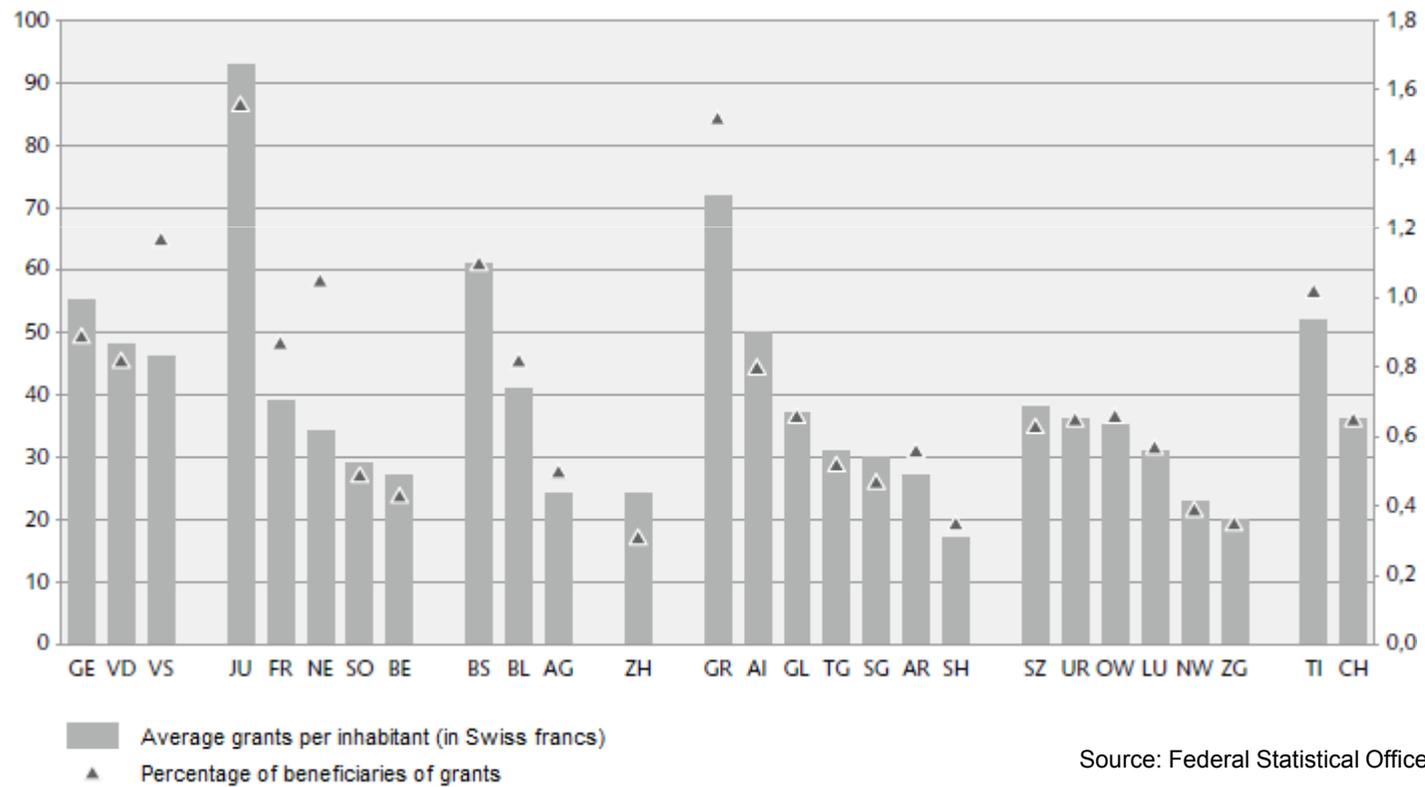
Disadvantages of a decentralised provision

- Different regulations lead to important disparities in the conditions of attribution and the amounts of grants and loans.
- The funds available decreased in the last decades.



3.) Grants and Loans Systems

Percentage of beneficiaries of grants and average grants per inhabitant in the Swiss cantons (2009)

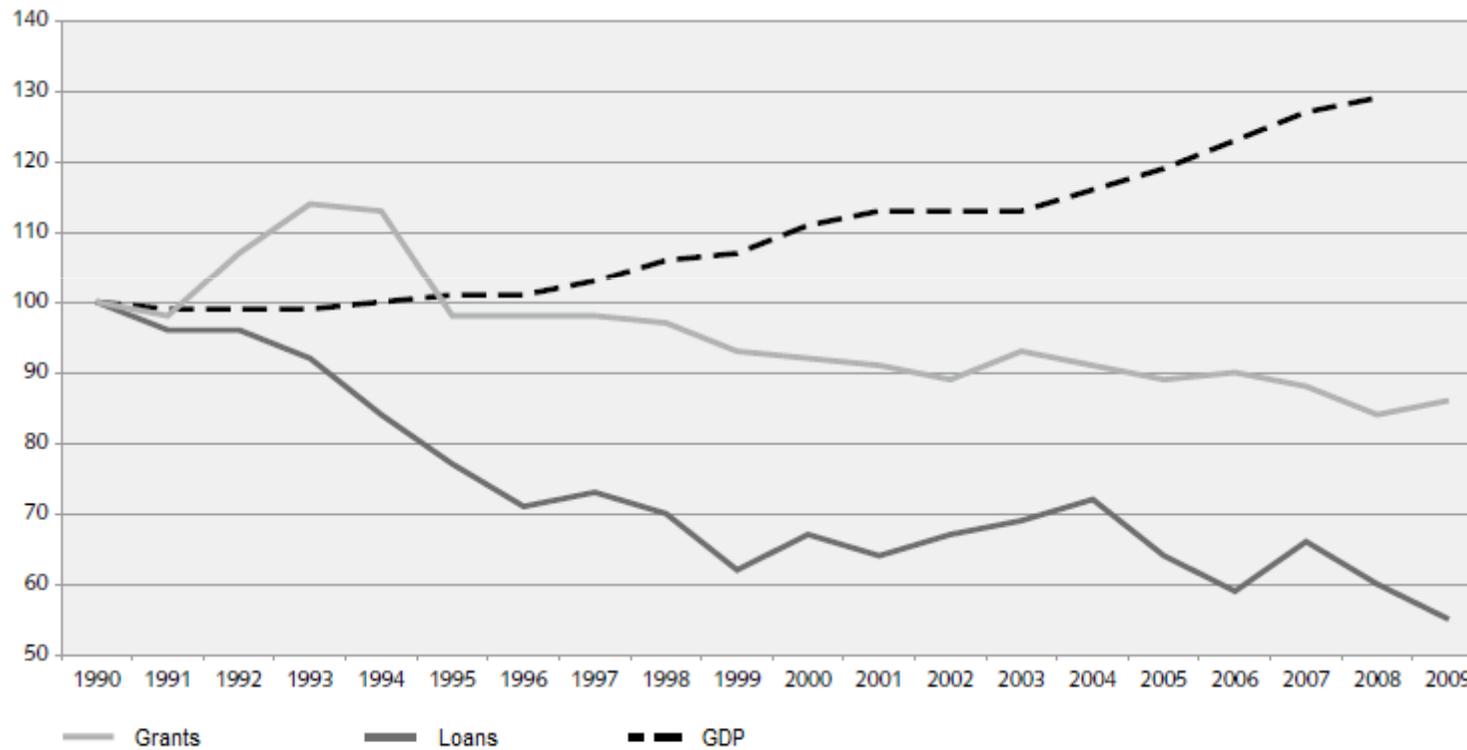


Source: Federal Statistical Office



3.) Grants and Loans Systems

Cantonal grants and loans (real terms, indexed, 1990=100)



Source: Federal Statistical Office



3.) Grants and Loans Systems

The current situation is often felt to be unsatisfactory. Two possible solutions are pursued:

- A **popular initiative** asking to transfer the responsibility for the grants and loans systems entirely to the federal level has been launched by the student organisation VSS-UNES.
- The Swiss Conference of the Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) has passed an **inter-cantonal agreement** which is now in the course of being ratified by the cantonal parliaments. The purpose of the agreement is to harmonise the grants and loans systems while combining the advantages of a decentralised and a centralised system. It determines common minimal standards for the attribution of grants and loans as well as minimal amounts.



4.) Conclusions

- The advantages of a decentralised provision of student support services seem to prevail: The services can be tailored to fit the local needs, quick feedback loops allow a constant quality improvement, HEIs can learn from one another and get a competitive advantage by providing certain services (esp. career guidance services). A national overview of the local practices might be useful.
- A decentralised provision of grants and loans also has advantages. However, it seems that at least a certain coordination and some minimal standards are necessary in order to avoid large disparities in the conditions of attribution and the amounts of grants and loans.