

International Conference

“Multiple Competition in Higher Education – and Beyond”

April 4th and 5th, 2024

Competition is a global societal phenomenon that shapes various aspects of social life, particularly economic activities. Social scientists, by and large, agree that forms of competition have proliferated since the late 20th century. The principle of competition itself has also been endorsed by policy makers in sectors such as healthcare, the school system or public administration.

In the higher education sector, the principle of competition did not have to be introduced by outside forces upon universities and their members. Indeed, competition among researchers for novelty and related reputation has been widely analyzed in the fields of philosophy, history, sociology, and economics of science. However, the current proliferation has led to new configurations of competition as the principle of competition has been established more widely and on different levels. Regarding individual researchers, more dimensions of activities (e.g., research funding, research cooperation, teaching, international stays, public engagement) have become scarce goods for which they compete. Over the last decade, for example, the competition for external funding has become much more intense among junior researchers, both for the basic ability to conduct research and as a reputation marker. Beyond the individual level, universities now position themselves more actively as competitive collective actors in their own right instead of mainly providing an organizational framework for the competitive efforts of individual actors. In the context of New Public Management reforms, universities have been transformed into strategically-oriented competitive actors in many different countries worldwide, whereas in the United States, this process started much earlier and is driven by political reforms. Finally, state actors can be perceived as competitors in the political competition with other states in a federal system or national higher education systems on a global scale. State actors also increase the number of competitions and the intensity of competition among individuals and universities and increasingly use competition as a governance instrument. One example is the worldwide trend of growth in competitive funding in addition to – or at the expense of – basic funding for universities.

The aforementioned trends at the individual, organizational, and state levels contribute to the multiplicity of competition in higher education. Most of the time, actors in this sector are involved in not just one but several competitions. Universities as organizations, researchers as individual actors, and partly also state actors are simultaneously embedded in different, nested, and interdependent competitions, i.e., multiple competitions. Individual and collective actors must face heterogeneous – albeit interrelated and even self-reinforcing – forms of competition for scarce symbolic and material goods like attention, reputation, ranking positions, research grants, high-quality publications, personnel, and employment.

In the research group “Multiple competition in higher education,” funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), researchers are working together in eight sub-projects at ten universities to develop a comprehensive understanding of multiple competition in higher education based on contributions from sociology, economics, and management studies. Given the complexity and novelty of our research, the main focus of the first three years has been on the German higher education system. At the end of that funding period, we would like to share and discuss our results with related research from other scholars at an international conference. At the same time, we invite contributions related to the topic of our research group. Particularly welcome are contributions that add a comparative perspective on the issue of multiple competition. For example, these could either ask how multiple competition unfolds in the institutional configuration of other national higher education systems or focus on constellations of multiple competition in other sectors of society (business, politics, arts, healthcare, public administration, etc.).

Keynote lectures:

- Christine Musselin, Sciences Po, Paris
- David Stark, Columbia University, New York

Submitting Proposals

Please submit your abstract by email to multiplecompetition@incher.uni-kassel.de by **November 15th, 2023**. The abstract should be at most 500 words. All abstracts will be reviewed, and applicants will receive a notification of acceptance by **December 15th, 2023**.

Organizer/Venue

International Center for
Higher Education Research (INCHER)
University of Kassel, Germany

Conference Fees

Attendance at the conference
is free of charge for participants.

More Information

www.uni-kassel.de/go/multiplecompetition