Plagiarism across Europe and Beyond || Shaping Ethics in Academia and Society

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Plagiarism in German doctoral dissertations - still a marginal issue 8 years after the Guttenberg case

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In February 2011 a paper was published documenting some plagiarism in the doctoral dissertation of then German minister of Defense Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg. His denial of academic misconduct sparked a collaborative effort to document the quite extensive plagiarism to be found.

A country-wide discussion about academic misconduct ensued, as the collaborative effort moved on to document plagiarism in other doctoral dissertations. Eight years later over 200 documentations have been published and the universities in question informed of the issue.

Although all universities in Germany have rules for dealing with academic misconduct that were formulated as a response to a large research scandal in the 90s, some universities are unaware that they have such rules. Even those who do know their own rules often don't follow them with respect to the whistleblowers.

A large body of legal cases has found that universities who follow their own rules are well within their rights to rescind doctorates even decades after granting them. But the topic of academic misconduct is still quite marginal at many German universities.