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Introduction

In recent decades, profound changes have affected higher education systems all over the world, due to the immense widening of access to higher education, the founding of private higher education institutions through bottom-up initiatives, continuous cuts in higher education budgets by governments, and the globalization and inter-connectedness of the world. All of these phenomena have affected various aspects of the traditional roles of universities and other higher education institutions at international, national and institutional levels.

For over 800 years, since the establishment of Bologna University in 1088, which is considered to be the first university in Europe, universities were elitist in nature, and only a small fraction of the relevant age cohort had the privilege of pursuing academic studies. Since the end of World War II there has been a growing demand to widen access to higher education and change the elitist nature of universities by enabling all citizens to pursue higher education as a democratic right. In recent decades, the elite nature of studying at universities has gradually faded. Higher education worldwide has opened up to include a larger proportion of each generation (Bohonnek et al., 2010). The massive expansion of higher education across all continents has been one of the defining features of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By 2010 there were approximately 150 million students worldwide, whereas at the start of the 20th century only around 500,000 students were enrolled in higher education institutions over the globe (Clancy, 2010; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Such a growth constitutes not merely a quantitative expansion but a huge qualitative change in the functions and roles of universities and other higher education institutions. Martin Trow claims that the romantic era of the university as an autonomous venue for the education of gentlemen, like the Oxbridge tradition in England, and for the upbringing of broadly cultivated elites, as was typical of continental European universities, has today come to an end (Trow, 2005).

This article examines the main implications of the democratization of higher education systems on the structure and functioning of universities. It relates to some dialectical trends:

an increased diversity of higher education institutions side by side with harmonization policies; growing government steering, on the one hand, and prompting universities to become more entrepreneurial in their policies on the other; an emergence of a growing private sector that competes with public higher education institutions; increased competition concurrently with launching many collaborative ventures and consortia; and the urgent need of universities to be both attentive to national needs and to their functioning in a global network.

Diversity and Harmonization

The massification of higher education systems has led to a growing diversity of higher education institutions. In the early 1960s, when in economically advanced countries the view spread that an expansion of higher education would be essential for economic growth as well as being appropriate for democratic reasons, the conviction that an increasing diversity within higher education was desirable gained momentum (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007; Teichler, 2009). Two arguments were most powerful as far as advocacy for increasing diversity is concerned. First, most experts agreed that it is impossible to teach all of the large numbers of students in research universities, which are extremely expensive to sponsor. Therefore, it seemed obvious that other types of higher education institutions, geared mainly for teaching and professional training, are appropriate for absorbing the growing numbers of students. In Israel, for instance, until 1974 there were just seven research universities, whereas in 2011 the Israeli higher education was composed of 64 different types of higher education institutions. Second, a growth in diversity of backgrounds, talents and job expectations among the rising number of students should be accommodated by heterogeneous higher education providers.

Views about the desirable diversity, however, differed substantially at different periods. Over the years, the debates have changed substantially. Major policy concerns moved from those around education and economic growth concerns in the 1960s to equity and employment opportunities for graduates in the 1980s (Bohonnek et al., 2010; Teichler, 2009).

National systems of higher education vary substantially according to the extent of diversity. Many higher education systems are highly diversified and contain various types of institutions, while others are quite monolithic in their composition. Comprehensive universities reflect the nature of most higher education institutions in some national settings, while specialized institutions are the leading models in other countries. Liberal education and the cultivation of human nature constitute the supreme goals of some leading higher education

institutions, while professional training and response to market demands shape the nature of other higher education institutes (Guri-Rosenblit, 2010). In some countries, we note relatively clear boundaries between institutions of higher education in charge of both teaching and research, and institutions focusing mainly on teaching or professional training.

Since 1999, the Bologna Process set in motion an intensive process which aimed at establishing a harmonized joint Higher Education Area of Europe by 2010. Restructuring academic degrees in many national jurisdictions has initiated numerous changes in many countries. Profound changes took place in several Central and Eastern European countries. In order to change significantly the general conditions of higher education functions, restructure the higher education systems, and expand the higher education infrastructure, several top-down legal actions have been taken in countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007).

It seems that European higher education systems, under the Bologna Process, are currently becoming more flexible. Each stage in advancing the Bologna Process requires greater commitment to the commonality of purpose and action in the field of higher education, so that, by 2010 (or a little later), higher education services will be able to flow freely from one side of the continent to the other, as do material goods today (Commission of the European Communities, 2003; UNESCO, 2003). The tools given by the Bologna Declaration are intended to invent a European model of higher education sufficiently strong to establish its attractiveness *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world, and particularly *vis-à-vis* the American model.

Government Steering and Institutional Autonomy

Universities are not considered today as autonomous self-sustaining entities, but rather as part of a system in which they are embedded in common frameworks of societal expectations, regulatory frameworks, and cooperative or competitive linkages. "Higher education" and "a higher education system" became popular terms in the second half of the 20th century (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007; Teichler, 2009). The use of these terms suggests that there is a macro-structure of higher education. Higher education activities and institutions in a country have something in common and are interrelated. In most countries, this move towards a perception of a system became clearly visible when laws and governmental orders addressing individual institutions of higher education were replaced by a system-wide regulatory framework

(Teichler, 2009). Universities, as well as other types of higher education institutions, are subject today to growing government regulation.

New mechanisms of government steering and management have a substantial impact on the structures of the higher education systems (Bleiklie, 2004). Obviously, higher education in Europe is increasingly shaped by mechanisms of incentives and sanctions imposed top-down. It is generally assumed that these mechanisms help to increase the efficiency of higher education. However, some scholars claim that a strong emphasis placed on rewards and sanctions might undermine intrinsic motivation (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007). A strong managerial emphasis in higher education might lead to substantial tensions between management and academia. Both might elicit uncontrolled changes of the higher education system as a whole.

Budgetary cuts in higher education that took place in recent decades in many countries have created an interesting paradox in the interrelations between universities and governments. On the one hand, universities are subjected nowadays more than ever before to stringent quality control mechanisms and accountability measures. Governments are perceived today in many national jurisdictions as responsible for the erosion of universities' autonomy, and as adversaries rather than supporting partners with the higher education community (Douglass et al., 2009). On the other hand, governments encourage universities to mobilize alternative funds through operation beyond national boundaries, and are enhancing the universities' leaders to 'think out of the box' and find resourceful ways to operate in the global market. In this sense, they are promoting institutional autonomy in defining new missions and new student clienteles for each university, which in the long run could result in weakening the national affiliation of universities.

An emerging trend in many countries is the movement of many higher education systems towards charging tuition fees, combined with a system of appropriate cost recovery and providing support systems. More and more universities have become entrepreneurial in their search for diverse budgeting sources, mobilizing private resources and investing in areas of applied research which have the potential to yield revenues through patents and collaborative ventures with industry and the corporate sector. A handful of universities have managed to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them by being given more degrees of freedom to define their priorities both in research and teaching.

Public and Private Sectors

Quite evidently, privatization constitutes one of the most striking global changes in higher education systems in the 21st century (Altbach et al., 2009; Douglass et al., 2009; Dogramaci, 2008; Levy, 2008). Privatization has spread in recent decades to Asia, Latin America, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In some countries, the percentage of private higher education institutions is striking. In Indonesia, 96% of higher education institutions are private, in South Korea they constitute 87%, and in Japan 86% (Tilak, 2008).

The bottom-up expansion of private higher education in Europe took place because some countries were unable to meet the rising demand for studies in attractive areas of high market demand. Where national higher education systems have not responded to the widening and increasingly growing demand for higher education, a market of foreign providers of higher education in Europe has been established.

Private higher education is far from being uniform. Only a few private institutions provide elite or semi-elite options. Increasingly, the bulk of private higher education institutions throughout the world mainly accommodate the exploding demand for higher education. Beyond the few leading private research universities in the US, for instance, there are other types of private institutions, such as Phoenix University, which constitutes the largest for-profit distance teaching university in the USA, many non-profit and for-profit consortia, corporate universities that cater to various clienteles and expand access opportunities in American higher education, etc.

The positive aspects of the initiation of these new institutions include: widening of learning opportunities at various higher education levels by providing more choice for citizens in any given national jurisdictions; challenging traditional education systems by introducing more competition and innovative programs and delivery methods; helping make higher education more competitive; assisting in diversifying the budgeting of higher education; and benefiting through links with prestigious institutions, mainly in developing countries.

However, many of the private institutions have turned out to be 'diploma mills' and bogus institutions. Nowadays, many national and international bodies have established accreditation agencies, both state agencies and self-regulatory bodies of academic institutions, in order to enhance a quality assurance culture, setting clear criteria for the evaluation of quality of higher education provided by both old and new higher education institutions.

Competition and Collaboration

It is quite clear that, in the world of higher education, as elsewhere, it is impossible to avoid competition for scarce resources, be it research funding, good faculty or good students. At the same time, successful collaborative ventures have great potential for generating additional resources and recruiting new student clienteles. Many international bodies encourage, and even condition funding of research projects by forcing collaboration between several higher education institutions, preferably from different countries. This form of collaboration is influential in the research domain, and is reflected in a growing trend for forming interdisciplinary teams within and across institutions. Each higher education institution has to define today both its competing parties and its potential collaborators.

Unlike the Anglo-Saxon countries which have adopted an explicit competitive approach to the internationalization of higher education, most of the continental European countries seem to pursue a different approach, which is more cooperative in nature. According to van der Wende (2002) this may be explained from a political and a value-based perspective. In many European countries, free access to higher education is seen as an established right, which conflicts with the view of higher education as a commodity to be traded on a world market. The rationale to compete internationally may be absent, or even undesirable, in many European countries, such as France, Italy and Germany. Where higher education funding is virtually completely funded by the state, no fees can be charged to students, and limited autonomy is granted to institutions, with few incentives and no real options for competing internationally. Not surprisingly, most continental European countries pursue a cooperative approach to internationalization, which in terms of international learning and experience is compatible with the traditional and cultural values of European academia.

However, it is important to note that one of the major goals of the Bologna Process has been not only to consolidate and harmonize the European higher education systems, but also to enhance the international competitiveness of European higher education, mainly *vis-à-vis* American higher education. Such a goal promotes competitiveness in the continental European countries. Furthermore, there is already a competitive market in many European countries, enhanced by the proliferation of many private providers, mainly in niche areas, such as business administration, international law, computer science (Levy, 2008).

There are three major strategies that can be adopted by higher education institutions in responding to the growing competition: to strengthen their relative advantages and demonstrate excellence in specific areas; to collaborate with other competing institutions in an

attempt to reduce the competitive risk; and to extend their operation beyond local and national boundaries to international markets. Partnerships, if they are successful, create greater strengths. The basic underlying idea behind cooperation is that the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. The synergy that comes from collaboration can often yield benefits well beyond those originally envisioned. Failure to collaborate often results in an unnecessary duplication of efforts and in ineffective investment of scarce resources.

Globalization and National Needs

Universities need today to be attentive to both local and global needs and opportunities, i.e., to adopt a 'glocal' network policy. The term "glocalization" is a portmanteau word of "globalization" and "localization". Many universities and colleges are torn nowadays between the growing pressure to operate in the global higher education market in order to diversify their funding base, and their traditional roles of serving national priorities and accommodating mainly the needs of their local surrounding environments (Guri-Rosenblit, forthcoming). As a matter of fact, many supra-national reforms, such as the Bologna Process in Europe, combined with the encouragement of governments to extend the operation of their universities beyond their national boundaries, challenge the cohesion of national higher education systems, and reinforce the creation of a global higher education network.

Many universities are at present engaged in becoming partners in inter-institutional schemes and pushing forward in the drive towards globalization. Students, academic staff and curricula are transferred and exchanged between institutions; accreditation agencies ensure promptness in accrediting previous experiential learning and previous academic studies; governments append their signatures to cooperative projects in higher education. Strengthening agreements between academic institutions within a particular country and across national borders will be central to the mobility of adult students (Guri-Rosenblit, forthcoming).

Obviously, the institutional missions of different types of higher education institutions vary immensely. The need to adopt a glocal (combining global and local policies) policy forces each university to define clearly its glocal missions. Being, or aiming at becoming a "world class university" requires totally different infrastructures and operational strategies as compared to those needed by a conventional university; being a public university differs meaningfully from operating as a private institution; and being a campus university that

teaches a few thousand students differs from being a distance teaching university, that enrolls dozens of thousands, or even over a million, students.

Concluding Remarks

This paper attempted to give a brief overview of the implications and challenges following the wide expansion of higher education systems and the adoption of a universal access policy in many national jurisdictions. The increasing number of students coming from different backgrounds and possessing different abilities and study inclinations has resulted in a greater diversity of higher education institutions. Side by side with a growing diversity, great efforts have been invested to harmonize and create linkages between various higher education systems to enable the mobility of students, programs and faculty. The Bologna Process in Europe is most notable in its effort to harmonize between 46 higher education systems, some of which are outside Europe.

The democratization of higher education has initiated some dialectical trends. Government regulations have increased in most nation states, greatly limiting the autonomy of higher education institutions, and changing the historical roles of universities of educating mainly broadly cultivated men to contribute to the intellectual elite of nation states. However, even today in the growing maze of various types of higher education institutions, there exists a small group of elite world-class universities responsible for conducting advanced breakthrough research and for educating scientific and social elites.

Governments are unable today to sponsor generously the large number of students as was the case when a small fraction of the society had the privilege of pursuing studies at universities. Thus, many governments nowadays encourage universities to mobilize alternative funds through operation beyond national boundaries, patenting innovative research products, and offering long life-learning programs and short-cycle professional updates. Universities are called upon to become more entrepreneurial in defining their policies and missions. For many higher education institutions, the potential of globalization and entrepreneurship offer exciting new opportunities for study and research no longer limited by national boundaries, but for others it still seems a threatening phenomenon which forces them to change drastically their policies and search for innovative ways of engaging in a totally new world, whose rules depart sharply from old and well known conventions.

Universities are requested today to adopt their structure and operations to the needs of the knowledge society. Operating in a global and networked landscape has a crucial impact on

shaping the missions, strategic planning and operational practices of higher education institutions. The major challenge facing universities and other higher education institutions in the 21st century is how to successfully navigate their policies between contrasting trends. They do not normally have the privilege of choosing one alternative over the other, but rather must find the delicate balance between opposing policies. They have to identify their potential competitors as well as launch collaborative ventures with suitable partners. They have to decide the extent to which their missions serve local and national goals, and the extent to which they operate in the global higher education landscape, transcending national boundaries. Traditional universities have to acknowledge that they operate in a most stormy and dynamic market. They have to define clearly their merits and advantages, and at the same time see how to overcome their limits and shortcomings. They have to decide who exactly their potential student constituencies are – mainly national or transnational students, focusing on research or training mainly for the market, teaching only towards academic degrees or also offering short-cycle professional diplomas, etc. – and act accordingly.

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