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Moving Beyond National Borders: Globalization, Higher Education, and International Politics

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has at least four far reaching implications for higher education. First is the constriction of monies available for discretionary activities, such as post secondary education. Second is the growing importance of techno science and fields closely involved with the markets, particularly the international markets? Third is the tightening relationship between multinational corporations and state agencies concerned with product development and innovations. Fourth is the increased focus of multinationals and established industrial countries on global intellectual property strategies. This paper argues interconnections among globalization, higher education and international politics, their different impacts and implications. In this paper the author offers a brief literature review about globalization and its impact on higher education. We argue that cultural institutions in general and higher education in particular, reproduce the dynamic of the social system in which they are embedded. The paper illustrates the phenomenon by which the higher education and its policies have been shifting toward the globalization model. It focuses on higher education as a non-political factor paving the way for mutual understanding and collaboration in international environments.

INTRODUCTION

The modern university exists and functions in an environment characterized by economic interconnectedness, political democracy, market economy, consumerism, restructuring in various domains, flat administrative structures in organizations, global ecological issues, emerging global multiculturalism values, and global interconnectedness via the information technologies, particularly the internet. Universities, which are essentially knowledge providers, can no longer function as cottage industries in such environment. Given the ubiquity of digital and information technology, they will become more learned-centered than faculty-centered. Like business, they will have to evolve into multinational consortia and from partnership in a number of creative ways among themselves and with various kinds of enterprises that were not traditionally linked directly to higher education. Since globalization will not disappear but will continue to predominate, the opportunities that it offers must be seized by higher education. (Stigliz, Joseph E., 2002)

Different broad environmental factors that impact on universities regardless of their physical location, tradition, current practices, or aspirations are proposed. The first of these factors is the fact of economic interconnectedness among nations. The economy of every country is impacted, if not linked, with those of countries surrounding it and around the world. The most dramatic illustration of this fact is the proliferation of multinational corporations, the loyalty of which is tied to shareholders, not nations and their economic impact is transnational. The Second environmental factor is the world shift toward democracy and especially, toward market mechanisms as opposed to command and control economic structures. Without going into an analysis of complex development, political systems of representative democracy are today more widespread than was the case twenty or thirty years ago. (Tyler, T.R., 2002, 195-207).

The Third environmental factor is the emergence of consumerism. There is a trend toward serving consumer needs and interests, whether in economic products or in governmental services to its citizens. The operative philosophy is that the individual comes first. If his or her needs are not served there will be political or economic repercussions against providers who do not provide-who fail to serve their customers. Fourth, there is a significant restructuring in the world of both national and also international organizations and governmental system. This restructuring fits in with the general shift toward market mechanisms, consumerism and the spread of democratic systems. It is characterized by decentralization. (Hayward Fred, 2002, 44-47)

Fifth, within organizations there is a clear trend to flatter, as opposed to hierarchical, organizational structures, joined with the breaking down of disciplinary lines. The idea is to give individuals and small groups more independence and discretion to further the missions of their organizations. Small groups within large organizations are increasingly encouraged to work across disciplinary and organizational lines on the grounds that doing so is less bureaucratic and more efficient. The sixth new context for universities includes the physical and biological environment, that is, global ecological issues. This issues leap over national lines, but also across university disciplinary lines, Such as the pollution of the air and water, the deforestation of the life-sustaining areas of the planet, and the complex issues of global warming. (Psacharopoulos, George, 1977, 69-90)

The seventh is the emergence of global multicultural values. Many parts of the world are full of ethnic and racial tensions and fragmentation, but there is also a countervailing trend: a deeper appreciation for the richness represented by the various ethnic groups, multicultural sports industry, represented by soccer, basketball, ice hockey and track and field that cuts across national lines. The eighth and final environmental change in many ways mixes the others; it is perhaps the most significant factor being faced: the Digital Age characterized by the internet and the World Wide Web. Technology and the new information systems will not replace human interaction, but everyone id now, like it or not, globally interconnected. The information technologies are revolutionizing how market products are produced, how ideas are exchanged, and how people simply communicate. If these information technologies are not recognize and exploited, the universities of the world, older and newer, larger and smaller, will be marginalized through the impact of now providers of information.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES AND UNIVERSITIES: IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS

These major contextual changes, and particularly the digital and information technologies, are fundamentally affecting universities all over the world. There is a huge impact on how they perform their responsibilities for discovering knowledge (research), transferring it to all who can profit from and use it (learning and teaching), and applying it through their outreach and engagement with the communities and social and economic interests that public universities, especially, are intended to serve. All universities of the world are going to be vastly changed; indeed, they must lead that change in the new digital and information technology age. (Kyoto Wachira, November 02, 2007)

The modern university as a project of the nation state and its cultural identity, find itself in a complicated and indeed delicate situation at the moment, but what is clear is that nowadays, universities are highly involved in literally every kind of social and economic activity in our increasingly dynamic societies.(Clark, Burton R.2003, 65-67)

A review of the complex and dynamic processes of internationalization at different levels in higher education reveals that these processes are prompting increasingly rapid change in two rather different aspects. First, there is now a wide range of border crossing activities, many of them resulting from institutional rather than governmental initiatives, and these are certainly still on the rise. We can also see more substantial changes towards systematic national or supra- national policies, combined with a growing awareness of issues of international cooperation and competition in a globalizing higher education market. (Muller J, Cloete, N. and Badat, S., 2001, 33-45)

The contemporary university was born of the nation- state, their regulatory and funding context was, and still is, national; their contribution to national cultures was and still is, significant; students tended to be, and still are, trained to become national functionaries; universities are thus object as well as subject of "internationalization" or "globalization". They are affected by and at the same time influence these processes. (TFHES, 2005, 97-99)

HIGHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

There is evidence of the devastation of globalization on developing countries as the poverty gap has increased despite the fact that globalization was meant to benefit all members of the global community. Countries of the North with their competitive advantage compete with countries from the South, for best students, Faculty, administrators and researchers. As a result the intellectual resources from the South are being drained in the process.

Countries from the South are at risk of being further marginalized if their higher education institutions fail to participate in the knowledge production networks and activities that would make them relevant and more responsive to needs of a new economy.(Tilak J.B.G.,2004, 227-39)

In the globalizing economy higher education has featured on the WTO agenda, not for its contribution to development but more as a service to trade in or a commodity for boosting income for countries that have the ability to trade in this area and export their higher education programs. The world Bank report on higher education presents an argument for the indirect role that higher education can play in development, and in poverty reduction. Three key arguments are presented in the report. The first argument is that higher education can contribute to economic growth by supplying the necessary human recourses for a knowledge driven economy, by generating knowledge, and by promoting access and use of knowledge. The second argument is that higher education has the potential to increase access to education and in turn increasing the employability of those who have the skills for a knowledge driven economy. The third argument is that higher education could play a role in supporting basic and secondary education by supplying those sub-sectors with trained personnel and contributing to the development of the curriculum.(Jimenez, E.,2007, 22-29)

Changes taking place have put a lot of emphasis on the need for accountability to society beyond financial accountability, demand for intellectual leadership, and partnership that could contribute to development. We should be clear and unequivocal in the reasons why poverty cannot be overcome without the benefits of higher education while we get on with the work of building stable, high quality higher education systems in all countries.(McKenna, K. Y. Green, A.S., 2002, 9-31).

Higher education and poverty are linked because modern societies can become or remain materially wealthy only if they are managed by a large group of individuals with the right mix of sophisticated technical and organizational expertise. Lessons over the last decades of development assistance point to the critical role of capacity enhancement in promoting sustainable development. At the heart of capacity enhancement is the importance of intellectual capacity in analyzing national development challenges. Research on the benefits of higher education confirms its ability to influence people's skills and behaviours in ways that facilitate the transformation to the more knowledge-rich, flexible, adaptable forms of social organization associated with prosperity. Private education has grown, essentially to meet excess demand and differentiated demand for higher education. First, the social demand for higher education exceeds the public supply, and the private market seeks to meet the unsatisfied demand. Secondly, demand for different quality (presumably high quality) and content in education (such as, for example, religious education) also contributes to the growth of privatization.

The case for privatization of higher education exists mostly on the basis of financial considerations. Public budgets for higher education are at best stagnant, and are indeed declining in real terms, more particularly in relation to other sectors of the economy. Privatization is also favoured on the grounds that it would provide enhanced levels of internal and external efficiency of higher education, and higher quality of education; and as the private sector would have to compete with the public sector, the competition would result in improvement in quality and efficiency not only of private education but also even public higher education. In the long run, due to economies of scale, private institutions provide better quality education at lower cost than public institutions, as in Japan. (Castells, Manuel, 2004, pp. 14-40)

On the other hand, privatization is opposed on at least three sets of reasons. The existing market system does not ensure optimum social investment in higher education, as externalities exist in the case of higher education, which is a ‘ quasi-public good’. The market system also fails to keep consumers well informed of the costs and benefits of higher education. It is likely that the costs of private education is much higher than public education as in the United States and the Republic of Korea. Finally, a private system of higher education is also insensitive to distributional considerations, and in fact contributes to socio-economic inequalities. Accordingly, public education is not only superior to private education, but private institutions cannot even survive without state support (Dovidio, J. Kawskamai, K., Johnson, 2007 33, 510-540)

One of the most common myths is that there is huge demand for private higher education, as private education is qualitatively superior to public education. But the available evidence shows that the higher quality of private education compared with public higher education is exaggerated. (Wood, W., 2000, 539-570)

It is also argued that as the private sector has to compete with the public sector, the efficiency of the former and, equally important, the efficiency of all higher education, including public, improve significantly. But in countries where mass private sectors prevail, or in countries where private sectors play a peripheral role, there is little scope for competition, and as a result, the private sector may turn out to be very inefficient, and even economically corrupt.

Secondly, it is widely believed that graduates from private universities receive higher rewards in the labour market in the form of lower unemployment rates, better paid jobs and consequently higher earnings, but the empirical evidence does not support these assumptions. Unemployment rates among graduates from private universities are generally higher than those from public universities in many developing countries. (Castells, Manuel, 2006, 34)

Some argue that private institutions provide considerable relief from financial burden to the governments, as they are self-financing. But as well known, most private institutions are not totally private, at least from a financial standpoint, they receive huge subsidies from the state.

Thirdly, it is felt that the private sector responds to the economic needs of the individual and society, and provides relevant types of education. In most countries, private higher education institutions offer mainly low capital-intense disciplines of study.

It is also claimed that private higher education can improve equity in education, by providing access to many more students, who, otherwise, would not have gone to higher education. It is important to note that private universities are created mainly to protect the ‘elitist’ character of education, and to keep the masses away from higher education.(Bargh, J. A. 2002, 1-8)

Some argue that privatization of higher education improves income distribution, as public funding of higher education, with all its ‘perverse effects’ is generally found to be regressive. Again, systematic research has shown that it is not true.

The goals and strategies of the private sector in higher education are on the whole highly injurious to the public interest. First, the private sector has turned the 'non-profit sector' into a high-profit-making sector not only in terms of social and political power, but also in terms of financial returns, and as profits are not allowed in educational enterprises in several countries, private educational enterprises have resorted to illegal activities in education. (Tilak, Jandhyala B.G., 2002, 33-36)

Fourthly, by concentrating on profit-yielding, cheap, career-related commercial studies, the market-oriented private universities provide vocational training under the name of 'higher education' and ignore 'broader higher education'. Private universities also totally ignore research, which is essential for sustained development of higher education.

Finally, by charging high fees, private institutions create irreparable socio-economic inequities between the poor and rich income groups of the population. Private education is 'socially and economically divisive.

CONCLUSION

Universities are many things, they are especially knowledge providers, but today, they increasingly face enormous competition from other providers of knowledge. Education will no longer be neatly segmented and synchronous but, instead, asynchronous and presented in new ways.

This new situation requires, among other things, that the best, strongest, and most vital universities be those that form partnership with businesses, with governmental and private agencies, and above all with one another. The great resource that universities have is their ability to discover knowledge, but the knowledge so-discovered must be harnessed and delivered so as to serve the economic and social needs of societies.

Higher education is an important from of investment in human capital development. In fact, it can be regarded as a high level or a specialized form of human capital, contribution of which to economic growth is very significant, higher education systems in many developing as well as developed countries are characterized with a crisis, rather a continuing crisis, with overcrowding, inadequate staffing, deteriorating standards and quality, poor physical facilities, insufficient equipment, and declining public budgets. Moreover importantly, higher education is subject to neglect and even discrimination in public policy. The neglect also followed a general presumption supported by thin empirical evidence that higher education has no economic growth, equity, poverty reduction and social indicators of development in developing countries. The role of the state is very important in providing and financing education everywhere. Excessive reliance of the governments on private sector for the development of higher education may lead to strengthening and even producing new inequalities, besides adding to the problem of quality. On the whole, it seems that initial government investments on a large scale are important in higher education; but only after some time, and certain level of educational and economic development is achieved, private sector may or can complement the state efforts in higher education.

Comparing the experiences of several countries, one may conclude that these policies succeeded only in those countries that have invested heavily in education, including specifically higher education.

The issue is not one of whether or not these trends and developments will continue; they will. The issue is whether or not universities, be they in Asia, Russia, Europe, or the United States, will adapt and change and lead in their notational systems. And that will not happen unless there are men and women with vision and willingness to lead.

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