The Globalization of Higher Education and the Future of European Universities

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Abstract

The thesis of this article is that the Lisbon Treaty is one of the main factors that push the European and European candidate countries universities to rethink about a common reorganization in the years to come. Higher education is doubly affected by the local post-1989 transformations and by more profound and more long-lasting global transformations. So, the Lisbon Treaty is considered as one of the key forces that will push the Albanian and European Higher Education institutions to be the key factor of implementation of the treaty requirements directly to the students that are the future of Europe changes.

A brief summary of related literature review and some qualitative data collected from an in-depth interview with 45 university students of private and public universities will be analyzed. Among all traditional factors that determine the possible implementation fields of the Treaty the author finds that the factors like the teaching of democratic and transparency feelings and thoughts, common efficiency of European universities, the promoting of European rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security and the notification of European universities as an actor on the global stage are statistically important.

The Globalization of Higher Education and the Future of European Universities

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the necessity of grounding current discussions about higher education reforms in Albania in a wider context of global social, economic, and cultural change. The article is builded on the thesis that any thinking about reforms in higher education in general, outside a particular context of reforming the whole public sector remains incomplete. Similarly, any thinking about the institution of the university in particular while disregarding the past context of its modern, nation-state-oriented, social role, place, and function, provided by the old model in the new post-national global age, remains incomplete.

This is an account of a descriptive study about the common reshaping thought of European universities according to Lisbon Treaty in two groups of 40 private and public university students in Albania. The study is a qualitative one involving interviews with a convenience sample of students.

The aim of the study is to carry out the main issues related to the possible implementation fields of the Lisbon Treaty in Albanian Higher Education and to develop a model than can be used in Western Balkans universities and more. Higher education plays a central role in the social, cultural and economic development of modern societies. In Albania today, the challenge is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities.

2. Internationalization and Globalization of Higher Education

The Lisbon Treaty, probably would not give the European Union any fundamentally new competences in the field of social affairs and equal opportunities, but it rather would consolidate the existing competences and also would open up opportunities for the further strategic development of the social Europe. By this meaning, the Treaty, can be considered as a key force to pushing the European Higher Education Institutions to be the main factors of setting the values that the Treaty promotes, directly to the students that are considered as the future leaders of the future Europe.

In the Lisbon Treaty as set of values have been set, in addition to those in the existing Treaties (freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights). The Lisbon Treaty also lists human dignity and

equality as values of the Union. The Treaty states that these values are common to the Member States in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equity are important. Regarding this, Europe, must uphold and promote its values in its relations with the wider world. One of the best ways of doing this is promoting these values to the higher education institutions and having a common transformed European universities thought.

Regarding to higher education, several working assumptions can be made. First of all, the transformation of higher education seems inevitable worldwide, as much in the weal the OECD countries, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as in the developing countries, the forces behind change being global in nature. These forces are similar, even though their current influence varies from country to country and from region to region (OECD, 1998).

The main forces that are driving the transformation of higher education today are old forces (governmental and public pressure for transparency and accountability, the focus on costs, effectiveness, productivity, and quality assurance, etc.) and new ones (new providers of higher education, rapid advances in technology, and changing social demands for renewable skills in the global age). The old forces call only for the changing of policies, but the new forces may require new ways of thinking about policy scholarship and policy making as well (Carrington, Meek, & Wood, 2007).

The forces of globalization are of primal importance, yet they appear to be under estimated in current higher education policy and research. These forces are undoubtedly bound to change the nature of the academic enterprise to a degree that today seems almost unimaginable. In order to demonstrate the power of the forces of globalization of higher education that are transforming higher education, it is important to evoke the political, economic, and social contexts of globalization-driven transformations in thinking about the nation-state and the welfare state (Kwiek 2000). Globally, we are on the threshold of a revolution in thinking about higher education. Higher education is asked to adapt to new societal needs, to be more responsive to the world around it, to be more market, performance, and student oriented, to be more cost effective, accountable to its stakeholders, as well as competitive with other providers. Traditional higher educational institutions seem challenged and

under assault all over the world by new teaching and research institutions that claim to do the same job better and cheaper. Locally, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, academics are not prepared for these global challenges (Altbach 2001).

To meet the global demand, many developing countries have started integrated their higher education services into the world community. However, the two concepts, internationalization and globalization, are very different in their approach and carries different consequences for different nations (Yang 2002). They have often appeared in the discourses of various levels over their meanings and rationales. For examples, Yang argues that "internationalization lies in an understanding of the universal nature of the advancement of knowledge" that is based on the common bonds of humanity (Yang 2002). Knight also depicts that internationalization of higher education should help enhance students competencies and create a culture or climate on campus that promotes and supports international/intercultural understanding. This conception refined definition of internationalization of higher education which is a process integrating an international/cultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institutions (De Wit & Greenwood 2002). Knight's view is of reference value in that internationalization of higher education needs to aim at preparing future leaders and citizens to address global issues and challenges like shaping sustainable development, international solidarity and global peace in a highly interdependent globalized world (Knight 2004). The above definitions are actually based on the profound belief that cultural heritage of people is universal and humankind shares the bond of humanity in the process of advancement of knowledge.

Globalization entails the formation of world-wide markets operating in real time in common financial system and cross-border mobility of production and also rests on the first world-wide systems of communications, information, knowledge and culture, tending towards a single world community. However, by contrast, globalization in nature is, to a great extent, incompatible with the rationale of internationalization of higher education as it is perceived as having negative force for higher education in many aspects. Yang envisages it as a process stemmed from the rise of Western imperialism and capitalism and is concerned with single-sided economic advantages by means of

"competition, combat, confrontation, exploitation, and the survival of the fittest" (Yang 2003). Since globalization is a market-induced and driven process for expansion, it is visualized as a universalization of capitalism . Slaughter and Lesslie put forward a more severe critique in that globalization imperatives are of the nature of power, control, economy and efficiency (Slaughter & Leslie 1997). Critics of globalization have further conceptualized the process as an action of neo-colonialism that implies a form of contemporary economic imperialism. It highlights that multinational business corporations have still had economic control over the decolonized regions through exploiting the resources of peoples. The common bond of humanity and culture will eventually vanish due to its economic driven motives. Thus, Yang (Yang 2003) contends that global exchange, under such a context, in economic, cultural and education domains will continues to be unequal. Gap between the developed and undeveloped has been widened in the process. Globalization also displays immense power over other cultures and is in general envisaged as disadvantages to cultures of developing and underdeveloped countries. Based on the Western theory of cultural imperialism, there is a fear that globalization will cause cultural homogenization especially in the process of internationalization of higher education. Thus, globalization being fuelled by neo-liberal ideology emphasizing entrepreneurship, cost-effectiveness, and customer orientation cannot be easily fended off by national governments (Chan 2004) and by the development of hybrid world cultures created by the mingling of global-brand culture and indigenous traditions.

Restructuring HEIs by means of adopting European standards, marketization and corporatization are then the salient features in transnational education nowadays. Impacted by the tidal wave of these market driven forces, the most prominent challenge of the higher education policy includes the gradually diminishing of culture values and civic missions that higher education used to promote. Hence, what is missing in the internationalization process is higher education that should be embedded with the vision of preparing future leaders and citizens to address global issues and challenges like shaping sustainable development, international solidarity and global peace in a highly independent globalized world, but these goals are becoming limited because HEIs would rather incline to the impetus of income generation.(Marginson 2004).

On the other hand, the research conducted by Romm et.al. (1991) confirmed that failure of social interaction with domestic students was a major source of course dissatisfaction for international students. Research findings inform us that a number factors affecting the study life of overseas students, such as students' aspiration,

We have a deep belief that internationalization of higher education will be undergoing a "humanizing process" that multicultural and intercultural characteristics of mankind in the globe are respected. Chan et.al. (2004) highlights that the creation of a fair, just, tolerant and caring society is not one which can be left to the market. After all, cross-cultural and multi-cultural understanding, tolerance and the creation of democratic communities do not appear by themselves. There is a need to create a possibility of a citizenship which transcends national boundaries: the citizens of Europe. In this regard, it seems that there is need for a more moral and civic tune or to regain balance between responding to market pressures and liberal and civic values in higher education (Haigh 2008). Nevertheless, "citizenship" and "cultural awareness" as two of the most important aims in the internationalization process is missing in higher education agenda. Knight's et.al (2004) survey with 526 HEIs in 95 countries on the aims and objectives of internationalization for the International Association of University (IAU), UNESCO has found that in the area of "Rationales Driving Internationalization", HEIs around the world ranked "competitiveness", "strategic alliances" as the two most important rationales whereas "cultural awareness" and "international cooperation" were of comparatively low priorities at both national and institutional levels respectively. On the other hand, in area of "Benefits of Internationalization", "academic quality" and "strengthen research" were ranked as most important benefits but "national and international citizenship" and "brain gain" were treated as least important at both national and institutional levels. The survey shows that many HEIs neglect the important mission of socializing our university students to be active citizens in the civil society of the nation and the globe.

It is believed that higher education institutions could be motivated by both the finance-driven ethos and the communal aspirations of civic engagement through reengineering their curricula. Academic values and civic missions in higher education institutions are also at the heart of the aspects

such as human rights, multilateralism and global citizenship (Schot 2003). Increasingly, universities around the world are expectedly to play a key role in advancing the cause of humanity and citizenship because international education should be a trading game for students' self enrichment Haigh et.al (2002) echoes by saying that internationalization of higher education should be motivated by education for global citizenship rather than dominated more by the desire for income than better education. It seems problematic to integrate concepts of citizenship, social justice, ethics and sustainable development within HEIs being oriented to goals of fund generation. In this regard, Haigh argues that the main challenge facing internationalization and effective education for global citizenship is the HEI. Internationalization of higher education should be committed to encouraging democratic inclusivity and ethical living. At the system level, it relies heavily on the governments' effort to realize the aim of internationalization of higher education for humane and civic missions that include education for democratic values, global citizenship, world peace and sustainable development (Knight 2004). At the institutional level, if learning is linked to social change, pedagogy can help reinvent the HEI as a community as relevant and positive influences in a sustainable future. Therefore, university faculties engaged in internationalisation can assist by designing courses that promote responsible global citizenship (Haigh 2002).

Also, the curriculum needs to be reformed with inclusion of curriculum theory and historical inquiry so that bias in textbooks, media, and other educational materials can be detected easily by educators, students, and other stakeholders. Curriculum reform strives to expand the traditional course contents that are primarily monoethnic through inclusion of multiethnic and global perspectives. For most educators, this reform requires active inquiry and development of new knowledge and understanding of the historical contributions of contemporary and past ethnic groups to the current body of knowledge in the content areas and academic disciplines (Wiles & Bondi 2002).

Teaching toward social justice requires adequate understanding of the demographics of the students, culture, and race in popular culture, and development of social action skills. It also emphasizes the clearing up of myths and stereotypes associated with gender, age, and the various races and ethnic groups by stressing basic human similarities (Nieto 1996). In addition, teaching

toward social justice promotes developing an awareness of the historical roots and an understanding of the evidence of individual and institutional prejudice and discriminations such as cultural racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. The 2006 Spring European Council outlined the twin challenges which Europe's education and training systems face when it concluded that they are critical factors to develop the EU's long-term potential for competitiveness as well as for social cohesion. It stated that reforms must be stepped up to ensure high quality education and training systems that are both efficient and equitable (European Consilium 2006). Higher education is a key sector of the knowledge-based economy and society. It is at the heart of the 'knowledge triangle' of education, innovation and research. As the Commission's Communication on the Modernization of Universities makes clear, the EU higher education sector faces numerous challenges and needs to be modernized if it is to become more competitive and promote excellence. One challenge is to create diversified systems which allow equitable participation for all, while remaining financially viable and playing their roles more efficiently. Final Across Europe, in the context of public budget constraints and the challenges of globalization, demographic change and technological innovation, greater emphasis is being placed on improving efficiency in the education and training sector (European Commission 2006). The University is currently involved in dynamics of change that has a potential for transforming its institutional identity. At stake are the University's purpose, work processes, organization, system of governance and financial basis, as well as its role in the political system, the economy and society at large. The rethinking, reorganizing and refunding of the University are part of processes of change in the larger configuration of institutions in which the University is embedded. These processes link change in the University to change in the role of democratic government, in public-private relations, and in the relationship between the local, national, European and international level. The European case illustrates that debates and reforms concerning the future of the University can evoke several, competing visions of the University and that they can be driven by a confluence of processes taking place in different organized settings, and not by a single dominant process taking place in a single setting (Allègre 2001). A sustainable level of competitiveness is seen to require many different and not easily reconcilable things: concerted action, better investment in knowledge,

adequate and sustainable incomes, ensured autonomy, professionalism in academic and administrative affairs, priority to excellence, contributions to local and regional needs and strategies, closer co-operation between universities and economic enterprises, and the fostering of a coherent, compatible and competitive European Area of Higher Education and a European Area of Research (Edler, Kuhlamann, Behrens, 2003)

3. Sample and Data Collection

A sample of 20 students, was invited to take part in the study. The sample was a convenience one and the snowball approach to sampling was adopted. Each respondent was asked to recommend to the researcher another student who might be able to articulate their views about the future European Universities. There appears to be no general agreement about sample size in qualitative studies. Reports describe single-person studies. Twenty students of 3 public and twenty students of four private universities are interwied. The universities are the ones in the capital city of Tirana, except one that is located in Durres. It was felt that 40 respondents should be able to supply varied and detailed accounts for the purposes of this study. All students were interviewed by the researcher on two occasions, for between 30 and 45 min. All interviews were recorded, with the permission of the students being interviewed. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into computer files. Care was taken by the researcher to assure the respondents that they and the place of their work would not be identifiable in any subsequent report. Once the final research report was written, the tapes from the interviews were destroyed.

4. Data analysis methods

All of the interview transcripts were read by the researcher and coded in the style of a grounded theory approach to data analysis. Six category headings were generated from the data and under these all of the data were accounted for. Two independent researchers were asked to verify the seeming accuracy of the category system and after discussion with them, minor modifications were made to it.

5. Discussion of the Results

In general, there is no meaningful difference between the answers of the students of public and private universities. Further; all the Albanian students dream a common step to European universities

and think that the social dimensions of Lisbon Treaty are really valuable to be implemented in their higher education system. They think that the teaching of democratic and transparency feelings and thoughts are what they miss to have. According to a student named D. studying in a private university;

"My parents have studied in the communist regime. Now they are happy that I'm studing in a democratic era and I feel free to discuss to my lecturers. I also think that studying in a university that is adopting Bologna System, will make my future easier and same to the European youngs".

In general, the interviewed students think that Albanian universities can not still be classified as efficient European universities.

"S. is a student who has studied a semester in a European university abroad. She thinks that Albanian universities are really attempting, but they really have to do it more, especially in teaching methods, infrastructure and equipment and lecturer qualification".

About the promoting of European rights and values and adopting a European higher education culture; students think that Albanian universities are really doing well. They think that the government politics motivate the European culture and the universities really promote this culture.

"A student called K., said that her dream is to a real European. For this, she thinks that needs to know the values and culture of European Union. She said that she is really learning this values in her lessons and from the free talkings to her lecturers".

The notification of the European universities as an actor on the global stage is one the main factors that affects the Lisbon Treaty implementation on higher education transformation process in Albania and more. The students interviewed think that it is the moment for the Europeans and the European universities to be the most powerful force in the world.

"According to A., European students must be the force and the voice of making Europe the main force in the world. For this said A. we must walk together and induct ourselves common social and ethical values. We also must be toughed by the same principles and as Albanians must be helped by our European neighbours to perform it in the best way we can".

Results

Among all traditional factors that determine the possible implementation fields of the Treaty the

author finds that the factors like the teaching of democratic and transparency feelings and thoughts, common efficiency of European universities, the promoting of European rights and values, freedom, solidarity and security and the notification of European universities as an actor on the global stage are statistically important.

So, the Lisbon Treaty is considered as one of the key forces that will push the Albanian and European Higher Education institutions to be the key factor of implementation of the treaty requirements directly to the students that are the future of Europe changes.

Looking to the future, Europe's universities will play a fundamental role in further developing Europe and in responding to the needs of citizens. Acting at local, regional, national, European and global level, constructing a shared community based upon common values, one of their main objectives is to find the way of implementing the social values that the Lisbon Treaty mentions in the university curricula and culture.

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