

# TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: EMERGING EDUCATIONAL MARKETS

**Dr. Anita Trnavčević**  
University of Primorska, Slovenia  
[anita.trnavcevic@fm-kp.si](mailto:anita.trnavcevic@fm-kp.si)

**Dr. Nada Trunk Širca**  
University of Primorska, Slovenia  
[nada.trunk@fm-kp.si](mailto:nada.trunk@fm-kp.si)

**Mag. Vinko Logaj**  
National School for Leadership in Education, Slovenia  
[vinko.logaj@solazaravnatelj.si](mailto:vinko.logaj@solazaravnatelj.si)

## *Abstract*

*The purpose of the paper is to present and discuss the findings of the needs analysis in SE Europe and to reflect upon them through 'cultural diversity perspective' and marketization point of view. University of Primorska, Faculty of Management Koper, in accordance with the flow of internationalization, has developed a post-graduate study programme in educational management and leadership that could best serve the needs of the region and also beyond 'regional borders'. As a part of marketing approach to development and dissemination of new programmes, needs analysis in the area of educational management and leadership was carried out.*

**Key Words:** *higher education, internationalisation, marketization, commodification of education.*

## **1. Introduction**

In the area of education, the last decade has been coloured with major changes in educational policies which are embraced in processes such as decentralization, deregulation, de-concentration and lump-sum financing. These processes are labelled in the current theoretical discussions as 'marketization of education' (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Dehli 1996), which, on the other hand, is not the same as privatization in education. Marketization of education is closely related to globalization, internationalization of education and 'audit culture'.

If 'globalization' can be understood as the most (mis)used, almost mysterious and rarely well defined word (Beck 2003: 37) then internationalization, especially in higher education, is a 'more operational concept' than globalization. Teichler (2004) argues that internationalization in higher education means increased activities beyond the borders of nation-states and is closely related to 'physical' mobility, exchange, cooperation between higher education institutions, 'harmonization' of higher education (Bologna processes) and also to the emergence of educational markets.

Higher education institutions focus their efforts on the international recognition and comparability, and design programmes that can best meet the needs of 'international'

students (see [www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org); Teichler 2004). Knowledge, embraced in educational programmes is transformed into commodity, and driven by 'demand-supply' relationship. From critical, sociology-based perspective, commodification of higher education should be subjected to scrutinized analysis and discussions about consequences on the production, dissemination and use of knowledge as well as with respect to the role it plays in the globalised world of managerialism and neo-liberal politics (see Ball 2004; Beckman and Cooper 2004; Apple 2004; Baldwin and James 2000).

From the management and marketing point of view the essential question is related to audits, needs assessment, design and dissemination of programmes tailored as much as possible to best serve the needs of 'international' customers in order to embrace cultural diversity. Changing nature of education and the purpose of knowledge is not at the heart of 'marketing' discussions.

The purpose of the paper is to present and discuss the findings of the needs analysis in SE Europe and to reflect upon them through 'cultural diversity perspective' and marketization point of view. University of Primorska, Faculty of Management Koper, in accordance with the flow of internationalization, has developed a post-graduate study programme in educational management and leadership that could best serve the needs of the region and also beyond 'regional borders'. As a part of marketing approach to development and dissemination of new programmes, needs analysis in the area of educational management and leadership was carried out.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

In the last decade, higher education in Slovenia has been subjected to many changes, some of them associated with the transformation of university programmes, content and structure, in accordance with the Bologna processes. Some changes can be related to major shifts from 'socialist' to market-driven society and recently the emergence and expansion of market fundamentalism, associated with neo-liberal trends and discussions. Current trends in the Slovenian higher education can be discussed in the light of 'market-based' society. On the other hand, even a stronger standpoint can be taken by saying that the first traces of market fundamentalism can be noticed in the development of higher education. Somers and Block (2005) argue that "over the past twenty years, 'market fundamentalism' has moved from the margins of debate to become dominant policy perspective across the global economy" (p. 260). In their view, the concept of market fundamentalism can by no means be mixed with "the complex mix of policies pursued by governments in actually existing market societies" (p. 261). Somers and Block (2005) point out that market fundamentalism is more extreme than the nuanced arguments of mainstream economists; it emphasizes and subordinates, and in a way, suppresses society as whole to a system of self-regulating markets. Higher education institutions are, as other educational institutions, rigid and slow in introducing even necessary changes related to better response to movements in other areas of social life. However, this 'rigidness' can also be seen as positive when it critically resists the 'new managerialism' in higher education institutions as well as to market fundamentalism.

Relying upon 'supply-demand' exchange in the market has some implications, one of them being the commodification of education. Miller (2003) in his discussion on commodification of higher education in the USA argues, that commodification of

education is essentially related to understanding students as consumers, making rational choices. “/.../ we can see a tendency across the entire degree-granting sector of transferring the cost of running schools away from governments and towards students, who are regarded more and more as consumers who must manage their own lives, and invest in their own human capital/.../ (p. 901). In his view, there is an important consequence which has redesigned and restructured academic institutions. “Academic institutions have come to resemble their entities they serve now; colleges have been transformed into big businesses. /.../. The mimetic managerial fallacy also leads to more and more forms of surveillance from outside” (p. 902). He argues that in the US they have noticed “ever-increasing performance-based evaluations of teaching conducted at the departmental and Decanal level, rather than in terms of the standard of an overall school” (p. 897), which are linked to budgeting. Such policies and politics of higher education lead to realignment of power and also to transformation of ‘knowledge’. Education, as Lyotard (1984) argues, has become a commodity and so has knowledge. Roberts (1998) claims that “the philosophy of ‘user pays’, routinely cited as a justification for charges in a whole range of public service areas, has become the order of the day” (p. 7).

Slovenian higher education has been moving in line with current trends. Internationalization, grounded in standardization, performativity, enhanced ‘audit culture’, and ‘quality assurance’, technically operated by credits and their transfer, and comparable in terms of programmes (structure and content) has coloured changes in higher education. Alike universities around the world Slovenian universities are also seeking new markets and try to expand their network beyond national borders.

In the SEE, Slovenia has been well positioned for students who are seeking programmes in educational management, leadership and administration. In order to best meet the needs in the region, a survey was conducted. The questionnaire was electronically accessible on the faculty’s web page and e-mails were sent to 24 e-mail addresses in the region, all to persons who had been in contact with the Faculty previously and have held positions in the NGO’s, Ministries of Education and other professional institutions. These persons were also asked to disseminate the information about the survey to their colleagues who work in education. The results of the needs analysis were meant to provide informed ‘ground’ for programme design.

### **3. The Analysis**

Despite personal encouragement to a group of approximately 30 participants from the region who attended the meeting in Macedonia in May 2005, and two e-mail requests to 24 e-mail addresses, only 16 questionnaires were filled in. This section, therefore, cannot ‘provide’ data that could be used as substantial and generalized contribution to a better understanding of the needs in the region and hence to tailor programmes toward these needs. Rather, we use the data and take the concept, developed by Somers and Block (2005), labelled ‘market embeddedness’ to be suggesting that market based development of higher education ignores cultural diversity and actually leads to the ‘sameness’ in terms of programmes’ structure, content and modes of delivery. Firstly, we present the data gathered by a survey and secondly, we discuss them through a cultural diversity perspective in relation to market embeddedness.

### 3.1. About the Needed Courses

16 respondents in the survey, 10 female and 6 male, are from 12 different countries from SEE region, with working experience between 2 to 21 years. They work for HE institution (4), Ministry of Education (1), NGO (5), industry (1), public schools (4) and private school (1). On the scale from 5 to 1 (5 highly needed and 1 not needed at all) they were asked to estimate how the following courses are needed for the work carried out by themselves and their colleagues at work.

Table 1: Frequency of the estimation of courses needed for the work

Courses	5	4	3	2	1
Management Processes	14	1	1	0	0
Organisation Theory and Managing External Relations	8	7	1	0	0
Managing People	14	0	2	0	0
Business Communication	7	1	4	4	0
Communication in Educational Practice	12	3	0	1	0
Leadership in Educational Organisations	11	4	0	2	0
Classroom Management	6	4	2	2	1
Curriculum Management	8	4	1	2	1
Managing Quality	12	4	0	0	0
Managing Continuing Professional Development	10	4	2	0	0
Managing Teacher Performance	6	4	4	2	0
Marketing in Educational Organisations	7	2	5	1	1
Effectiveness and Improvement of Educational Organisations	11	2	3	1	0
Evaluation of Educational Organisations	11	0	1	3	1
Strategic Management and the Management of Change	13	2	1	0	0

Data show that the modules/content of a programme entitled *Post-graduate programme in the area of educational management, administration and policy* highly correspond to the modules, identified in a study of Erculj et al. (2005) where the comparison of training programmes for educational leaders in 8 European countries was done. Management processes, managing people, communication in educational practice, leadership in educational institutions, managing continuous professional development, managing quality, effectiveness and improvement of educational institutions, evaluation of educational institutions and strategic management are the modules that at least 10 out of 16 respondents assessed as the most needed in the programme. These modules are in tune with the policy trends and developments in Europe and worldwide. Quality, effectiveness and improvement, evaluation and strategic management are, in the current ‘knowledge rhetoric’ the imperatives of educational institutions and national education policies. In a way they can be seen as part of the market embeddedness discourse, where “ideas, public narratives, and explanatory systems by which states, societies, and political cultures construct, transform, explain, and normalize market processes. No less than all the familiar mechanisms by which markets are shaped, regulated, and organized, so too, they are always ideationally embedded by one or another competing knowledge regime” (Somers and Block, 2005: 264). This market embeddedness has almost taken a ‘trans-national’ character which is needed for the programmes being accepted internationally and is

reflected in explanatory system of the audit culture. Markets, although claimed to be ‘free markets’ do not lead toward deregulation of educational systems but, paradoxically, toward re-regulation and increased re-centralization within different paradigm. The promise of ‘free markets’ has been critically reflected by McCowan (2004) who argues that education systems worldwide are far from resembling the free markets in which commodities are traded. In his view, even ‘market proponents’ tend to advocate a system in which some state intervention is necessary. Apple (2004: 617) points to enhanced power of the State as there has to be “the constant production of evidence that you are doing things efficiently and in the correct way”.

Needs surveys play an essential role in the estimation of correctness and efficiency when an institution is launching a new programme, especially if the programme is meant to be stretched beyond the national border. These surveys also succumb to the rhetoric of ‘addressing cultural diversity’, where data gathered by such surveys can be used for a claim that programmes are internationally relevant, needed and comparable. Our data were gathered by Likert scale, there is a specific ‘limitation’ or a framework, implicitly imposed to respondents, to judge and estimate their needs within internationally recognized and comparable programmes rather than to identify their specific needs emerging from different cultural and educational traditions. Open question about their suggestions partially reduced the ‘limitation’. 5 respondents suggested some topics and 1 suggested the area (managing quality in health care). Interestingly, these suggestions can also be seen in the light of current education rhetoric, because they focused on ICT, knowledge management and intercultural communication – the latest trends in education policies worldwide.

### ***3.2. About the Relevance of the Programme***

In order to find out relevance of the programme for different target groups, respondents were asked to mark on the scale 5 to 1 (5 highly relevant and 1 not relevant at all) the level of relevance of the programme.

Table 2: Frequency of the estimated relevance of the programme for target groups

Target groups	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers in schools	10	3	1	2	0
Principals (head-teachers)	14	1	1	0	0
Policy makers in the educational area at the local level	10	3	2	1	0
Policy makers in the educational area at the municipality level	10	3	2	1	0
Policy makers in the educational area at the regional level	11	4	1	0	0
Policy makers in the educational area at the national level	15	0	1	0	0
Policy makers from non-profit organizations	10	5	1	0	0
Employees in non-profit organizations	8	6	2	0	0

At least 10 out of 16 respondents found the programme highly relevant for teachers in schools, principals, policy makers in the educational area at the local level, at the municipality level, at the regional level and at the national level and policy makers from

NGO's. 'Only' 8 out of 16 respondents found the programme highly relevant for employees in those institutions and in NGO's.

Educational management and administration (leadership) post-graduate programmes are focused on these groups of participants (see, for example, MMU and University of Antwerp). The question, however is, how these programmes reflect cultural and educational 'national' traditions and how 'universal' they are. In the international context, by identification of a large group of potential customers, cultural diversity is seemingly addressed because target groups are not 'the same' by the position they hold in an institution, but also by their cultural background.

Taking a stance that marketing addresses cultural diversity (see Kotler 2001) and through segmentation requires 'knowing the customer' and responding to specific needs of a segment, then needs analysis should go beyond general facts about 'content needed' and 'content relevance'. However, in-depth market analysis would require profound data gathering from local environments. A survey, electronically accessible and based on the assumption of ICT breaking the national borders, failed to provide extended data. Also, the questionnaire was only a 'slip' into the surface of needs. Therefore, data cannot be built into a solid foundation for programme design that would guarantee success in the region.

### ***3.3. Modes of delivery and ICT***

15 out of 16 respondents found the online delivery of the programme acceptable. Their answers indicate that they have access to ICT. We can only speculate that they find themselves comfortable with online studies. From the provider's side this data indicates that online could be the 'right' way for provision of educational programme, especially when the mode of delivery, being summer school 'on-site', and online courses during the academic year, are combined. The answers also indicate that the combination of modes of delivery, acceptance of ICT and low opportunities to afford the programme if no scholarships are ensured, leads to 'addressing' diversity and different needs of students in the best possible way.

Programmes might be seen more 'marketable' if they are ICT based, and they can address diversity by loosing 'spatial' limitation, but it would also be worth considering that ICT 'unifies' within 'cyberspace'. We are taking Kenway and Buullen (2001: 141) critical argument about style that "allows people and schools to imagine themselves differently, providing an opportunity to define and redefine themselves. To quote Barthes (1975), it can be 'a dream of identity' " to be suggesting that ICT enables to define and redefine people, which can be 'a dream of identity', but they also construct marketable power of consumers in relation to education institution. In 'physical' world this power is very much limited by financial sources and resources.

## **4. Concluding Discussion**

We started the survey with the purpose to gather data and hence to build the new programme on solid data-based grounds. We were concerned with cultural diversity issues and the idea that needs analysis as part of marketing can be the best 'tool' to find out the needs that would reflect cultural background of potential students. As the study evolved

some other issues were raised, therefore the concluding discussion can be divided into two parts – needs analysis, data and conclusions and reflections upon this data through market embeddedness and market fundamentalism point of view.

#### ***4.1. Discussion About the Survey***

The questionnaire consisted of 14 close-ended and open-ended questions. It was electronically accessible at the Faculty's web page. Despite kind requests to 24 colleagues to disseminate the information about the survey among their colleagues and despite the encouragement of a group attending a seminar in Macedonia and two additional e-mail requests, only 16 respondents filled in the questionnaire. The respondents were from 12 different SEE countries. They worked for different educational institutions and NGO's. They also differed with regard to their working experience. In their views the courses proposed in the new educational management and administration (leadership) programme were needed and relevant for different groups of employees in educational institutions and NGO's. They found online course delivery acceptable and were also keen on summer school as well as on other modes of delivery. However, they lacked personal financial resources in order to be able to enrol in the programme. Therefore, some financial support was expected in the form of scholarships that could cover the accommodation during the 'face-to face' provision. The data could not be generalized and could not provide the ground on which the faculty management could make decisions.

One might argue that sending e-mails to 24 respondents and receiving 16 questionnaires represents a high response rate. However, these 24 persons were not meant to be the whole sample. They were asked to spread the information about the survey and hence to acquire more respondents. It seems that the survey 'failed' in terms of the size of sample although low response rate has been reported by our Master students and others, who conducted surveys. The question is, however, if a survey is needed when programmes are internationally comparable in terms of the content, structure and also mode of delivery and how can a needs analysis in the area of educational programmes granting degree contribute to changes in the programme.

#### ***4.2. Reflections***

Addressing cultural diversity has become an imperative for educational systems worldwide. Education, although nationally 'bounded', has, especially in the area of higher education, crossed national borders and became an international 'business'. Education, transformed into commodity in the marketplace, has to, therefore, address cultural diversity and the needs of 'international' customers. There are many ways to address diversity and one of them, emerging from 'market embeddedness' and traced 'market fundamentalism' is also related to market and managerialism-oriented approach of higher education institutions to 'run their business'. Part of this 'business' is also to expand educational markets beyond national borders. When going 'beyond', cultural diversity needs to be addressed in order to be competitive. However, addressing diversity requires more than 'embellishments' in educational programmes, which could also be labeled as 'style' packaging which could create a dream of identity. Diversity is closely associated with differences, specifics and local traditions rather than constituting specific 'sameness' in educational programmes, grounded in 'audit culture' and comparability. The question we raise is related to educational markets and the requirement to be different yet within the

'audit culture' and commodification of education this notion of 'different' is embedded within 'the sameness'.

Our purpose is not to provide a nostalgic view of education being isolated and closed within universities and research institutes. Rather we aimed at raising critical perspective to current marketization and commodification of education flows and to set the ground for further discussion. The survey reflects the need of the faculty to be internationally comparable and competitive, while data which are rather 'thin' and not generalizable reflect specific 'market embeddedness' especially when topics, courses and target groups are discussed. Respondents did not suggest 'specific' topics that would not be included in any education management and administration Master programme, perhaps the only 'new' piece of information was about the lack of resources to afford studies. However, this information too was assumed even before the survey was disseminated. What, then, was gained?

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