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Main trends in the world of higher education, internationalization and institutional autonomy

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Abstract

We witnessed a rapid change in higher education in the 1990's, which has continued with a higher speed into the 2000's. These changes include, but not limited to, internationalization, massification, diversity, ICT revolutions, increased competition and collaboration, marketization, and new teaching and financing methods. This paper aims at reviewing the main trends and policies in higher education, and explores the dimensions of internationalization and the future of higher education. For this purpose, the change in the landscape of higher education and the roles and autonomy of higher education institutions are analyzed.
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1. Introduction

In today's world, we live and work in technology driven and knowledge-based societies and economies in a global world, where knowledge itself is an industry (Calzolari, 2010; Günder, 2009; Peters, 2002; Gibbons, et. al., 1994). Revolutions in technology and telecommunication have been making knowledge the main input for production and productivity (Kurtoğlu, 2008: 203), increasing the need for qualified workforce. Today, economic growth is as much a process of knowledge accumulation as of capital accumulation (World Bank, 2002: 8). In such a world, the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in society and economy is increased (YÖK, 2007: 39). The need for higher education and advanced research has gone up, and many new private HEIs in almost all countries have established over the recent past, with only a few exceptions such as Greece. The number of non-profit private universities in Turkey has reached 60 as of May, 2010, up just 1 in 1984. Total number of universities in Turkey is 165 as of May, 2010, up from 19 in 1984, and 84 in 2004. In short, the landscape of higher education has changed to an unprecedented degree within the last two decades, and it is important to take this change, its causes and consequences into consideration to help HEIs do their job better.

This paper aims at reviewing the main trends, changes and challenges in the world of higher education, and explores the responses developed by European Union and Turkey. For this purpose, the change in the landscape of higher education and the roles and autonomy of HEIs are analyzed. Besides, the dimensions of internationalization and the future prospects in higher education are explored shortly. The data come from several reports by European

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Union, European University Association (EUA), OECD and World Bank, and some studies by prominent scholar in the field are also utilized in the study.

2. New landscape of higher education

Rapid changes and developments in the world of higher education involve increased cross border education, massification and enlargement in higher education, rise in the numbers of international students, diversified body of students, multiculturalism, marketization, decreasing state funds, increased expectations for quality, higher competition for better students and researchers, among others. The demand for higher education, for instance, has always been very high in Turkey. While many EU countries worry about their aging population and decreasing number of students (Teichler & Bürger, 2008: 158), each year more than 1,5 million students take a national qualifying exam in order to secure a place in universities in Turkey.

Figure 1. Information triangle
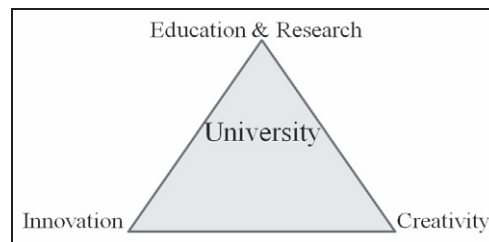
Today, university is considered to be at the center of "information triangle" and to have the power of shaping the 21st Century. The President of European Research Council, Kafatos (2008) points out that university is particularly important in the areas of innovation and creativity along with education and research (See Figure 1).

The Czech member of European Union (EU) Commission, Jan Figel, pointed out in a UNESCO and OECD meeting on "Higher Education to 2030" in Paris in 2009 that "the future has already started yesterday" with reference to the recent developments in higher education and the Bologna Process. In March 2000 EU Lisbon Submit, Lisbon's strategy was adopted. According to this strategy, a competitive and innovative economy would be achieved by 2010 by following the principles and goals of investing in human capital, fighting against social exclusion, supporting a viable economic policy and sustainable development. Of course, the basic instruments of European Union to reach these goals are higher education and research (EU, 2009; Kurtoğlu, 2008: 204). In today's global world, economic development is increasingly linked to a nation's ability to produce, acquire and apply technical and socio-economic knowledge, and educate a workforce with skills to utilize this knowledge and technology as needed. This process is competitive in its nature, and requires cooperation and cooptation (competition by mutual support and exchanges). The former Italian Minister of Innovation and Technologies, Stanca (2004: 100-101) argues that "a modern university can be defined by three essential features: autonomy, openness and competitiveness."

These changes and developments in turn seem to create new challenges for HEIs. One of the main challenges is to meet increasing expectations for quality and diversity in an era of financial austerity. To meet these expectations, universities resort to such methods and tools as ICTs, international and interdisciplinary co-operation and networking in research and education, mobility, use of market mechanisms, establishment of evaluation and accreditation mechanisms, etc. In addition, new participatory management styles are also applied. Students are invited to take part in university affairs, and the way that education is done has become more student-centered. Students are seen as "full partners in higher education governance", as stated in 2007 Berlin Communique. Similarly, In 2009 London Communique, "the preparation of students as active citizens in democratic societies" is indicated as a core mission of HEIs. EU welcomes the involvement of students as "competent, active and

constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of EHEA" (Prague Communique 2001). External stakeholders are also involved in the governance of HEIs, inherently implying more university-industry partnerships. As stated in 2009 London Communique, the ministers of EU "reaffirmed the importance of stakeholder engagement for the success of the Process as a whole."

HEIs search for new schemes of financing their services and for fair and accessible ways of providing quality higher education to a highly diversified body of students. There is also an increased focus on employability and the education of students according to the needs of today's knowledge and technology driven societies. Moreover, new global, technology-knowledge-market driven and competitive world drive HEIs to adopt cooperative methods and networking as the main mechanisms and tools in order to meet the challenges of the new era. Cooperation is used to build quality assurance and accreditation systems, to achieve high quality, creativity and innovation, to increase mobility in education and research, and to establish research networks, etc. Projects under ERC, FP7, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo Vinci, Grundtvig, Twining, IAU Leather Program etc. all require multi-national make-up of research teams. The Bologna Process itself is a collaborative process, and includes 46 countries. Creating European higher education, research and knowledge areas are also among the top goals and collaborative tools of the Bologna Process.

The need for developing innovative methods to continue providing quality higher education services is also brought about by the fact that the involvement of state in higher education and public funds available to HEIs have decreased (Felt & Glanz, 2004: 17). For example, many European countries have not increased public funds allocated to their universities to the extent needed to maintain past expenditure per student levels. As a result, budgetary difficulties in HEIs have deepened, endangering the quality of higher education. Average spending per university student in most European countries is now well below half the level in the United States (OECD, 2008: 16). And this forces almost all European countries and Turkey to invent new service provision methods and financial schemes in higher education. So, the main challenge here is to continue providing high quality higher education services with shrinking state funds without compromising equality of opportunity. Yet, the basic acknowledgment of higher education as a public good among EU countries and in Turkey means that new finance schemes have to involve some sort of state support for HEIs to guarantee the access of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups to higher education.

Developing innovative and creative solutions to all the above mentioned challenges require that universities have more space to maneuver and, thus, more institutional autonomy. Institutional autonomy means running a university's own affairs without direction or influence from any other level of government. In addition, it includes both the power to set one's own goals and programs, and the power to determine the means to reach these goals, and involves freedom from economic power and political authority (Nokkala, 2010). There is a tendency towards institutional autonomy. Decreasing state involvement along with increased use of diversified funding by HEIs also seems to contribute to this tendency towards more institutional autonomy. Yet, Turkey is one of the few exceptions to this trend. Centralized university system and Higher Education Council (YÖK) on top of it are the basic barriers before increased autonomy for universities (particularly the public ones) and academic freedom in Turkey. There is some system autonomy for YÖK but no autonomy for universities. If YÖK became just a coordination and accreditation body instead of a supervising and controlling body, there would be more opportunities to provide greater autonomy to Turkish universities. More power should be devolved down to university bodies from YÖK (Ergüder, 2010). As of October 2010, the current Turkish government works on an overhaul of YÖK.

3. Changes in the method of teaching and learning

The way that education and research is done has also changed. Education does not need to take place within classrooms anymore. Besides, education is not just the transfer of old knowledge and attitudes to the new generation by lecturing, note-taking, memorizing or reproducing. Maclellan and Soden (2004: 254) argue that "Lecturing is based on a model in which teaching is predominantly telling and showing. If we want people to know what we know, we tell them and/or show them." In this traditional teaching model, it is assumed that knowledge is "some sort of commodity which can be passed from person to person in inert form." However, education is now understood

as a process of learning in a group coached by an instructor. In this new environment of education, the learner's construction of knowledge is basically a self-regulating process, and learners acquire knowledge by actively participating and collaborating with others. In this form of learning, "knowledge is not passively received from the world, from others, or from authoritative sources." Rather, all knowledge is created as individuals (and groups) adapt to, and make sense of their experiential worlds. "Learners are intellectually generative (with the capacity to pose questions, solve problems, and construct theories and knowledge) rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled; instruction should be based primarily on the development of learners' thinking; the locus of intellectual authority resides not in the teacher nor in the resources, but in the discourse facilitated by both teachers and learners" (Maclellan & Soden, 2004: 254-255). Such developments and tools lessened demand for traditional lecture space and enabled courses to take place anytime and anywhere. Research also seems to have developed as an area of interdisciplinary collaborations (OECD, 1998; Levitt & Thelwall, 2008).

Of course, this new form of education is also facilitated by the developments in ICTs. We live in a borderless world, where the fantastic progress in high capacity transmission of information at very low cost has cut down the barrier to communication represented by distance (Calzolari, 2010). Internet, video sharing portals, social networking systems such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter all interconnect millions of people, and make new means of providing education possible. With widening wireless and mobile internet access, users of these networking systems will certainly go up. Distant learning or e-learning, network-based information delivery and webinars have all also changed the way of learning and reaching information. As a result, this increasingly digital environment has already transformed the perception of university and student, and changed what universities, research institutions, libraries etc. do, and how they do it. Demands for lifelong learning, career planning and employment oriented education seem to have increased in recent years. People in general and students have much broader availability to educational and research materials. Accordingly, higher education institutions have to adapt to these changes by changing their structures and curriculums. For instance, currently many of the world's leading universities broadcast their lectures on the Internet, such as MIT, Yale University, University of Tokyo, ParisTech, Open Universiteit Nederland, China Open Course for Education, Open University (UK), among others. Some people have considered such methods of open course material on the web as "giving away the intellectual property to the world for free" or "leaving university buildings empty and useless." However, people's worries have not come true, and students have continued to attend regular classes because open course materials on the web do not offer any degree or formal education, and are not there to replace formal education.

Another issue regarding today's higher education is internationalization, multiculturalism and diversity in student population. New student profile involves more diverse age groups, mature and working students, students from different ethnic and national background, more female students, etc. For example, the ratios of female students and international students have increased, and are expected to go up in the future. As an average for developed OECD countries, female university graduates made up 54 % of all graduates in 1998, 57 % in 2005, and are expected to constitute 62 percent in 2015. To give a specific example, in Sweden, where 59 % of university graduates were already consisted of female university graduates in 1998, female university graduates are expected to constitute three fourth of university graduates in 2015. However, only exception to this general trend is Turkey where the ratio is expected to go down to 35 % in 2015, from 44 % in 2005, which was the same ratio as in 1998 (Vincent-Lancrin, 2008: 271, Table 10.3). Similarly, EU's economic program also involves a great deal of short term exchanges of students and academics, fostering internationalization in higher education and intercultural dialogue.

Table 1. Rise in the number of international students (in thousands, OECD, 2008: 373, Table C3.6.)

	2000	2002	2004	2006
Number of International Students	1.895	2.268	2.698	2.925
Percent Increase	-	19,7 %	19 %	8,4 %

The research by Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (1996) indicate that increased diversity in the body of international students places unprecedented demands on HEIs, and decision and policy makers. In order to meet these increasing

demands, more collaboration and investment in higher education, research and innovation are needed. It is predicted that student flows from developing countries to the developed western countries for higher education and research will continue (OECD, 2008).

The last, but not the least, trend regarding higher education is internationalization. In our age, national borders have lost their meaning for higher education, and higher education is perceived as an international service. Accordingly, mobility and cross-border education have become widespread in order to educate a labor force that think and act globally. ICTs and international knowledge networks and knowledge pools (new publications concerning HEIs, Wikipedia, free access to university sources etc.) also contribute to internationalization and global interconnectedness in an era of global competition.

4. Future prospects for higher education

According to EUA-Trends 2010 Report, European universities consider the following developments within the last 10 to 3 years as the most important ones (Sursock & Smidt, 2010: 18, 26): a) Bologna Process (78%); b) quality assurance reforms (63%); c) internationalization (61%); d) enhanced cooperation with other HEIs (53%); e) governance reforms (49%); f) funding reforms (45%); g) European research and innovation reforms (43%); h) more autonomy (43%); i) increased cooperation with industry (42%); j) more diversified funding (41%); k) more competition with other HEIs (38%). These findings indicate that mobility, quality assurance and accreditation, compatibility, cooperation (all among the main dimensions of the Bologna Process), internationalization, research and innovation, autonomy, increased use of market mechanisms have been and will be the dominant themes in the area of higher education.

It shall also be expected that the demands of university students for being equipped with qualifications needed in global and knowledge-based economy will continue rising. Hence, HEIs will have to pay more attention to the outcomes of education and employability in order to meet these expectations (Sörlin & Vessuri, 2007). "97 % of students believed that it was important to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in the labor market" (EU, 2009).

A further expectation is that fair access to education for all will continue to be challenge for HEIs and governments. Increased use of distant education and e-learning along with other web based information sharing and education methods will help improving access of a wider and diverse group of people to higher education. Yet, there is a need for more evidence to see if such developments would increase the access of particularly socioeconomically disadvantaged groups to higher education. Besides, decreasing state involvement and use of increased market mechanisms may lead to cutting down government funds available to universities and economically-disadvantaged students, which would, in turn, lead to marketization and privatization of higher education. In this environment, difficulties in accessing higher education and in building skills necessary for knowledge-based economies, and cleavages and inequalities in societies would exacerbate. In fact, some researchers identify a 'growing culture of disengagement' among students. It is argued that students and their parents are approached just like paying customers. This notion of students as consumers – 'consumerism' has also results in a growing commercialization of higher education (Sperlich & Spraul, 2007: 4).

The rapid rise in the number of new universities has brought about problems of quality and accreditation, particularly in newly established universities. Some international quality and accreditation agencies have been established to monitor quality and accredit HEIs to be recognized internationally. Yet, a rise in the number autonomous national or international accreditation bodies is expected. Besides, there is a big gap in demand for and supply of qualified teaching staff and researchers. Thus, HEIs have to invest in improving their research facilities so that young and talented academic personnel and researchers could be attracted. State would have to back up such efforts as well since research has a very high level of economic and social spill-over effects. Such efforts would contribute to build the university of the future where excellence in research, new knowledge production and innovation, change management, and the production of solutions to the world's most pressing problems would be the main concerns.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The issue of higher education has to be considered strategically from a global perspective. Higher education has taken on a strategic and important role in solving socio-economic problems that we come across today. This makes the issue of provision of quality higher education services critically important in a competitive global economy. Good governance of universities has also become more important than ever before. Organizational learning and quality culture have to be a part of the management of HEIs in order for increased quality in education and research. Towards this goal, the efforts of harmonization of higher education systems with international trends and requirements have to be taken into consideration and given priority, and national higher education strategies ought to be developed accordingly. New technologies, new student profile, marketization, financial austerity etc. all mean certainly a new environment for higher education. In order to survive in this new highly competitive environment, countries have to invest in higher education, and develop policies to support research, information and technology production. Even though such efforts are set back by decreasing public funds, the perception of university as one of the key actors in society and economy is a major opportunity today (Felt & Glanz, 2004: 19). Knowledge-based global economy means more research, innovation and technology, increased need for talented researchers and skilled workforce, and, therefore, more roles for universities. Steps towards incorporating ICTs into higher education strategies, increasing access to higher education, improving quality, mobility, international networking and cooperation, among others, would also complement these developments and changes. Participatory governance of HEIs and industry-university collaborations are also promising.

There are also downsides to these promising developments and changes in the world of higher education. There is no clear evidence that the proliferation of higher education and the use of ICTs expand the access of students from low-income, immigrant or ethnic backgrounds to higher education. "We have realized that the benefits of global economy are shared in unfair way throughout the world. Nobody could expect that the 1,2 billion people living with less than 1 dollars a day could believe easily to live in a "flat world", which losses its importance with an increasing digital gap" (Calzolari, 2010). James (1891: 350, cited in Calzolari, 2010) asserts that "the progress does not have ears for the "cries of wounded." So, HEIs have to pay attention to the issue of fair access to education and reconstruct their way of providing services according to diverse student populations. Of course, governments have a major responsibility for making this happen through legal and financial means. It would not be only ruthless but also unwise to make higher education available only to those people who have money because creativity, innovative thinking or / and disciplined work are not only distributed among them. In fact, energy and hardwork may be found more in those who have grown up in harsh living environments. Therefore, it is important that all socioeconomic groups demanding higher education have access to it, and adapting such a policy would require that higher education be adequately funded by the state.

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