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“Globalization and Higher Education”

**OUTLOOKS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL HIGHER
EDUCATION COMMUNITY IN CONSTRUCTING THE
GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY**

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Towards the global knowledge society

Enormous changes are taking place in the world's economic, political, social and cultural systems. The interconnectedness and combined effects of these changes make it difficult to distinguish analytically between them. In their aggregate impacts they form a massive and powerful social transformation of which the final stages and resulting equilibriums – if we will ever reach a new stability – are not yet clear. Umbrella concepts such as globalisation and the knowledge society then offer the best conceptual frameworks to understand these changes, even if there still is a lot of debate about the actual meaning and explanatory power of such concepts. These concepts indicate that the contemporary world is increasingly operating at a global scale and that these global processes tend to transform societies into knowledge societies.

The importance of a number of specific trends within this overall transformation to global knowledge societies is evident. The World Bank (2002) lists four crucial trends, each representing sources of great opportunities and big threats: (i) the increasing importance of knowledge as a driver of growth in the context of the global economy, (ii) the information and communication technology revolution, (iii) the emergence of a worldwide labour market, and (iv) global socio-political transformations. There is much empirical evidence to document these trends and to demonstrate their significance. Globalisation also can be approached in other ways. On a higher conceptual level Giddens (1990) distinguishes four interconnected dimensions in the globalisation of modernity: (i) the world capitalist economy, (ii) the nation-state system, (iii) the world military order, and (iv) the international division of labour. Essential in the nature of globalising processes to Giddens is the reordering of space and time, and more specifically the compression of space-time. To Castells (2000) this space-time compression makes us understand the nature of contemporary society as a global network society in structure and an informational society in content. Common to these and other approaches of globalisation seem to be the following elements: (i) the driving force of technological innovation, more specifically in ICT, (ii) the resulting intensification and space-time compression of social communication giving way to a global network society, (iii) the restructuring of the world economic order based on the utilisation of new sources of productivity, post-Fordist modes of organisation of production, worldwide reallocation of production and distribution, global flows of capital and an international division of labour, (iv) the increasing importance of knowledge and information in various levels of the organisation of society, and (v) the integration of the global political world order based on the nation-state system. To this must also be added the cultural sides of globalisation, with cultural homogenisation and increasing multiculturalism on the one hand and cultural differentiation and segregation on the other, and the socio-psychological impact of dislocation and fragmentation on identities.

There is much debate whether globalisation really is a new phenomenon and whether its overall direction really is towards greater convergence and integration. Indeed, it would be a

mistake to overestimate the internal coherence and almost teleological nature of the processes of globalisation. It is better to see the transformation towards a global knowledge society as a more or less contingent combination of various processes resulting in increasing uniformity as well as in new forms of heterogeneity. Multiple identities refer to the global as well as to the local. The interconnectedness and interdependence of these processes, made possible by technological innovation and the role of knowledge and information, seem to be their distinctive features, not their common single logic. In a similar way it must be stressed that the transformation to a global knowledge society is not – some would say ‘not yet’ – equalising economic, social and political chances. Globalisation produces alongside convergence also new inequalities; both equalisation and ‘unequalisation’, inclusion and exclusion are inherent in globalisation (Therborn, 2000).

Globalisation often is mixed up with neo-liberal policies of market liberalisation and privatisation. The combined impact of trends towards globalisation and the knowledge society on the one hand and the political hegemony of neo-liberal tendencies on the national and international level on the other, have created political resistances and anti-globalist movements. The impact of changes on the lives of people, the fate of nations, the identities of social and ethnic groups and the political capacities of national states and civil societies often is massive and dramatic. There is a general feeling of loss of control by the traditional political institutions due to the increasing role of the (invisible hand of the) market, the complex nature of the transformation processes and the larger scale on which social conditions are determined. Political reactions to globalisation often stress the importance of other frames of reference than the purely economic or market-driven rationales, such as democratic development, human rights, ecological sustainability, social solidarity, social cohesion, or cultural participation. While it is clear that globalisation can result in major benefits and opportunities and that regressive protectionist policies will do more harm than they can solve problems in the long run, it also must be recognised that the construction of a global knowledge society only can be sustainable if the economic drivers are accompanied by a genuine political concern for other dimensions of human development and social progress.

Even if the processes of globalisation are very complex and the political reactions to them difficult to predict, there is little doubt on their outcome, namely the advent of a global knowledge society. Because of the diversified impact of these developments on various parts of the world and the many inequalities that will shape them, many would prefer to speak about knowledge societies in plural. However, for the purposes of this paper the interconnectedness of developments on the global level deserves full attention, which makes it legitimate to speak of a global knowledge society.

The roles of higher education in constructing the global knowledge society

Higher education is closely linked to crucial trends within the transformation to a global knowledge society. Higher education institutions and policies are challenged by these trends and need to adapt to them. These adaptations may include changes as diverse as adjusting curricula to new education and training needs, recruiting teaching staff and researchers on an increasingly global market, engaging in international research and institutional networks, developing international elements in institutions’ missions and profiles, or coping with competition and market-driven elements in the national and international higher education systems. Globalisation dramatically affects the environment in which higher education institutions and policies have to operate. Especially, the growing awareness of competition in

the academic arena seems to dominate current perceptions of university leaders (Immerwahr, 2002).

However, in many accounts of the current challenges with which higher education institutions currently are confronted, a too passive picture of the role of higher education is offered, as if it only can react to changes that have their origin elsewhere and as if these changes only are perceived as threats. Contrary to this, it must be stressed that in various ways higher education plays a vital role in the various processes of globalisation. The functions of higher education in many ways fuel the driving forces of the transformation towards a global knowledge society. Thus, a more 'constructivist' understanding of the role of higher education in globalisation is desirable. Such an understanding then also could nourish the idea that higher education has a certain capacity to steer and eventually to correct the direction of trends within globalisation.

The basic processes by which higher education contributes to the formation of the global knowledge society are situated as well in the research, in the educational as in the service functions of higher education. They include the following functions (when discussing each function the specific 'constructivist' role of higher education is stressed):

- ***The generation of new knowledge:*** It is clear that the scientific research system plays a vital role in generating the constant flows of knowledge and information and the scientific and technological innovation processes. There is substantial evidence that this in turn exercises a direct influence on national productivity, economic growth and living standards. Universities and linked research institutes are far from being still the only producers of knowledge; instead we see an increasingly distributed knowledge production system with a multiplication of knowledge production sites and modes (Gibbons e.a., 1994). However, the significance of universities in the field of fundamental scientific research still is very great.

Not only do universities provide the bulk of the research and information infrastructure and qualified manpower of a country, but they also still impose the dominant rules of the game of scientific discovery and progress (research methodology, the critical role of the peers, publishing, etc.). Although these rules, codes and practices increasingly are challenged by economic rationales and market forces (in intellectual property rights issues and their conflict with scientific publishing for example), universities try to defend the internal logic of the scientific system and see this as necessary to scientific progress and human development in the long run. Not only in the human and social sciences critical thinking, intellectual development and independent scholarship are seen as crucial values, even when they run counter to short-term economic profit or to dominant ideologies.

The science system since long operates at a global level; the globally integrated science system can be seen as one of the precursors and perhaps also motors of globalisation in general. In building the backbone of the global science system the universities paved the road for the development towards the global knowledge society.

- ***The application and distribution of scientific knowledge:*** Higher education institutions are not only active in the production of innovative scientific knowledge as such. Most activities of universities in the field of research and development can be counted as further expansion and application of innovative scientific knowledge in technological development, in situated problem-solving (medicine for example) or in adaptation to specific circumstances. Higher education provides the knowledge and information infrastructure that

is crucial for the problem-solving capacity of a nation or a region. Partly, universities and other types of higher education institutions themselves are active in the application of scientific knowledge in technological development, in consultancy, in product and process innovation, in policy development, in community development, etc., both on a commercial basis or from a service to society perspective. Partly, higher education offers the infrastructure of knowledge distribution to meet the problem-solving and innovation needs of other agents (in companies, the state, civil society, etc.), in the form of libraries, computer networks, internet service provision and other forms of access to knowledge.

Although in many universities this is done on a commercial and income-generating basis, other rationales such as the public role of serving the interests of a nation or meeting the needs of local and regional communities are equally important. The state, which in many countries contributes to the funding of these activities, sees this as belonging to the public functions of the university. Open access to information is seen as of crucial value in this. On an international level, universities assist each other, for example in projects developing libraries and information networks in institutions in developing countries.

This function is characterised by a balance between the global and the local, the general and the specific, but both must not be seen as antagonistic. Situated knowledge is as important to the development of knowledge societies than the universalistic results of fundamental research.

- ***The transfer of knowledge in education and training:*** Knowledge societies capable of engaging in a globalised world ask for high-quality and inclusive education and training systems that can equip large sections of the population with human and social capital. The important role of higher education in human capital formation is well documented, as well for the industrialised as for the developing world, and has received attention again in contemporary economic theory. The transformation of many countries' economies to knowledge-driven economies quantitatively and qualitatively changes the education and training needs of these countries. As well the private as the social and even fiscal return of investments in higher education in developed and developing countries is estimated to be rather high and still growing.

The most important contribution of higher education institutions to knowledge societies still lies in the awarding of credentials and degrees to high numbers of successful students at undergraduate and graduate level. Globalisation necessitates that these qualifications are internationally recognisable. Also the training of researchers and specialists at postgraduate and doctoral level is of crucial importance for the national and international research system. The knowledge economy increasingly changes the benefits of qualifications to human capital formation, by gradually replacing the paradigm of meritocratic credentialism with the paradigm of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning thus dramatically will change the educational and training functions of higher education institutions in a global knowledge society, not only by attracting mature learners and by regularly updating the competences of graduates in continuing education arrangements, but also by redefining the knowledge and skills valuable to a knowledge society. Also the operational ways in which higher education institutions fulfil their education and training functions are changing dramatically, with more and more importance given to ICT, new delivery modes and e-learning. But also in these innovative developments, universities attach great value to their specific approaches in defining the objectives of teaching and learning and the ways these are materialised in curricula and courses. It is clear that, although professional and labour market oriented training objectives still are occupying a central place, the educational and training functions are defined by

universities in a much broader sense. Besides labour market skills university students also must acquire social capital, competences related to nation-building, citizenship and international understanding, a capacity for sound ethical judgment, and elements of humanistic intellectual and cultural ‘Bildung’. The links between scientific research and university education and the intrinsic values of the academic system in the construction of curricula deeply influence the way in which higher education institutions define their contribution to the development of the global knowledge society in their educational functions.

It is clear that in this function the local is much more important than the global. Especially in their educational functions modern universities very much are a product of the nation-state and are responsive to domestic, sometimes even regional and local needs. It is no wonder then that it is precisely in this function that the impact of globalisation is perceived as problematic. Further in this paper we will investigate ways in which universities may be expected to adjust their educational function in the knowledge society to the dynamics of globalisation.

It is clear that in its three basic functions higher education has a vital contribution to the development of the global knowledge society. This does not imply necessarily that all manifestations of these functions refer solely to the global, nor that they should do. On the continuum from the local to the global, each of the three functions can be situated at a different point, as is represented in Figure 1.

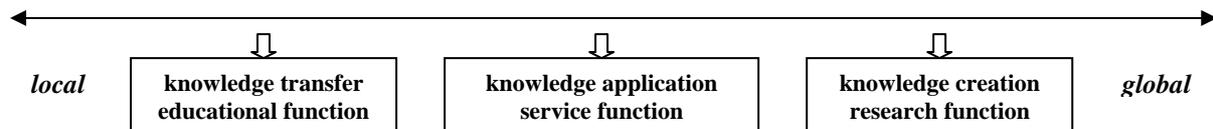


Figure 1. Position of the three basic functions of higher education on the local-global continuum

The international higher education community and its values

In this short overview of the functions of higher education in constructing the global knowledge society we have approached higher education not as a social subsystem mechanically fulfilling its functions in the global social system, but as a sector in its own right with its own values and preferences regarding the ways in which it carries out its social mission. Of course, this is a little bit exaggerated taking into account the many ties that link universities to their social environments and the limited amount of autonomy they often have in fulfilling their functions. Still, it is important to stress conceptually and politically the autonomy of the higher education system and the crucial importance of its own value-system. In practice this autonomy is result of a power game with fluctuating frontiers and balances of power (Felt, 2002).

There are several empirical elements that can substantiate the claim to see higher education as a sector and, yes, also as a community. In most countries higher education is seen by the state as a separate sector. Nationally but also internationally higher education has its own associations, conferences, publications, etc. Higher education is seen as a specific field of professional expertise, even as a specific object of scientific disciplinary research. University leaders meet colleagues, exchange common points of view, support each other in the defence

of common interests and take positions in the public and political arena on the basis of their specific social role and professional competence. Academics worldwide share a common professional identity. To a large degree the global academic system still has its own rules and codes of conduct, still governed by rituals and symbols. Through the few monopolies universities still have, such as the capacity to award doctoral degrees, they control some very important elements of the global scientific system.

To some observers, this communality and autonomy are a thing of the past, despite being a very long and rich past. They substantiate this argument by pointing at the changing higher education landscape and the diversification of higher education institutions. The developments in 'borderless' higher education, as described by Middlehurst, are so massive and powerful that they seem to annihilate any commonality in the global higher education system. Many new providers, new qualifications, new delivery modes, etc. fundamentally challenge traditional approaches and practices in the old universities. An old hegemony probably will not be replaced by a new dominance; rather increasing diversity and heterogeneity will characterise the landscape of post-secondary education. Indeed, many changes within the higher education system as well as at its borders defy any attempt to define a common core. It will be of crucial importance whether, on the one hand, the new providers will define themselves as part of and belonging to the higher education community, and whether, on the other, external stakeholders, the state and the students still will acknowledge the value system underlying the unity of the global academic system even if its borders become less clear. For example, will employers and the state still value the specific ways in which universities fulfil their functions in the process of human capital formation? Will students define themselves solely as consumers of whatever educational service or will they still seek to be qualified as academic professionals and to engage themselves as partners in the academic enterprise? Of even greater importance will be the answers that the higher education community itself will be capable to give to these challenges. Will it remain strong and internally coherent enough to defend its common value system in an environment that makes its borders devoid of any meaning? Indeed, the answers of the higher education community to these questions will have to have their origins in the core of the academic value-system and will have to be open and universalistic, in order to sustain in a global knowledge society. Defending old traditions and protectionisms will not be sufficient.

To my knowledge, there is no systematic account and analysis of the value-system of the international academic community. Yet, there are several attempts by the academic community itself to formulate some basic tenets of its value-system. The Magna Charta Universitatum, signed by the European universities in Bologna in 1988, for example, is a great attempt to describe the shared core values of the universities. It puts a great emphasis on values of autonomy and academic freedom. More recently, American and European university leaders, meeting in Glion, Switzerland, in 1998, produced the Glion Declaration. This declaration stresses the core functions of the university in the knowledge society of the new millennium. It calls to imaginative boldness and responsible freedom; it underlines the values of creative research, independent learning and scholarship; it stresses the importance of civic obligations, ethical responsibility and public trust. While stressing these ancient values, it also calls for innovation, flexibility, new governance and management and the acceptance of accountability. In the eyes of the signatories, affirming the old while opening up to the new, seems to be the best strategy for guaranteeing the autonomy of the university and the solidity of its value-system. In mission statements of individual universities and associations of universities, many similar examples can be found of the ways in which universities describe their specific value-system.

Seen from the perspective of the development of the global knowledge society, many get the impression that this value-system somehow is outdated, closed and defensive. Many governments see the universities as conservative systems, difficult to move to positions that seem to be necessary to cope with the new challenges. Social partners and parts of the general public opinion perceive universities as bastions of old power and privilege. In many countries higher education policies are characterised by troublesome relations with universities. Also within the higher education community there increasingly are tensions over the traditional academic value-system and the openness of universities to respond to new demands. Entrepreneurial universities, new higher education institutions and certainly commercial providers and corporate universities offer major challenges to traditional modes of operation and values embedded in universities. In turn, universities perceive many developments as threats to their age-old traditions and values and therefore take a defensive stance towards pressures coming from outside. The political debate on autonomy and accountability, that has dominated higher education policy in many countries for years, centres on the question whether universities themselves will have a sufficient internal drive to be more responsive to change or whether they have to be forced or seduced to change.

Globalisation in particular is perceived to fundamentally challenge central elements of the academic value-system. The increasing role of the market ('marketisation'), growing competition, commercialisation of teaching and learning functions and market liberalisation are met with more and more scepticism and resistance in the international academic community. A clear case in point is the Joint Declaration, published in 2001 by the European, American and Canadian university associations in reaction to the inclusion of higher education in the GATS negotiations. While affirming the basic academic values and the capacity of universities to meet new demands of the global knowledge economy, universities see it as necessary to oppose themselves to the political translation of globalisation in proposals to liberalise higher education markets. In doing so, they turn the academic value-system into an instrument of defence, even of protectionism, and make themselves vulnerable to the allegation of conservatism. Some observers also see it as a little hypocrite in a context in which more and more universities take up commercial activities, especially in their knowledge application and distribution function. While it is true that some radical liberalisation proposals in the fields of higher education and intellectual property rights in their consequences could pose major threats for the functioning of higher education, the benefits of a supplementary role of the market in a publicly regulated system also must be acknowledged.

Departing from the constructive functions of higher education in the development of the knowledge society, a much more forward-looking and offensive role can be imagined for the international academic value-system. Instead of protecting the short-term interests of academic institutions, the international academic value-system should open up itself to new developments and should focus on its merits for the long-term sustainable development of the global knowledge society. An open, innovation-oriented and inclusive stance would make the academic value-system also more attractive to new providers and non-traditional approaches, that otherwise are forced to use the market in order to position themselves against the traditional universities. It also seems worthwhile to link the academic value-system to the more general public good perspective on higher education, but with acknowledgment of the potential benefits of open markets. A careful reassessment of the value-system of the international academic community therefore is necessary.

National and international dimensions of higher education policies

Not only the institutions and the international higher education community, but of course also the national and international policy levels are involved in developing constructive ways to define the roles of higher education in the making of the global knowledge society. The impact of globalisation on higher education policies asks for a careful reassessment of the public and private dimensions of higher education. The development of contemporary universities within the context of the nation-state has produced a public policy framework that stresses the public good of higher education. The state plays a very crucial role in the construction of the global knowledge society, not at least in its active public policies in the field of higher education and scientific research. This public good approach is supported by political ideologies and value-systems that support modern welfare states and that define access to higher education and learning as a basic human right. Universities are defined in their public roles, that go beyond their function in knowledge creation and human capital formation to include also functions in civil society, the building of democracy, critical debate, social cohesion, intellectual advancement and cultural participation.

There are several imperfections in this dominant account of the public roles of higher education. First of all, it is confined to specific space-time configurations: it is very much a feature of Western European welfare state regimes, while also features of it dominate public higher education policies in Canada and the United States. It is much less certain whether this public policy approach of higher education policy also is dominant in other parts of the world, especially in the developing world where the public higher education sector suffers from a major drawback and the state lacks the resources to really implement such a political perspective. It is even uncertain whether an exclusively public good perspective still has a long future in the industrialising countries that are in the process of rethinking their welfare state policies.

Second, recent developments have shown that an exclusively public good perspective does conflict to a certain extent with realities and is not capable of being the only answer to new needs and demands. As already mentioned, universities themselves increasingly take up activities on the market. A knowledge economy valorises knowledge, thus knowledge creation, application, distribution and transfer to some extent become also marketable activities. Universities are also invited to do so by the state, by taking up active roles in regional development, and the building of the knowledge and science infrastructure of national knowledge economies. Contemporary public universities already earn a significant part of their income on the market, especially in the valorisation of intellectual property rights, patenting and commercial activities in the field of technology transfer and consultancy. To some extent, universities – whether they call themselves entrepreneurial or not – behave like private businesses with public money. It is a matter of intense debate whether also in the educational function the market must play a role. The high private return on investment in higher education, especially at the level of postgraduate education and lifelong learning, in itself creates a market for commercial activity. Spending public resources on education that benefits more to the individual than to society, seems to be a counterproductive and not very re-distributive way of public investment. Still, many governments, supported in that by universities and student associations that defend a public good perspective, defend the democratic and open access to education, because of the social and cultural benefits that prevail over purely economic returns. However, states sooner or later will meet the budgetary and political frontiers of the public good approach in a

knowledge society and will have to define the framework in which the educational market can operate. This is already the case in many countries of the South, where many states simply don't have the capacity to build a public higher education system that meets the education and research demands of the developing knowledge society. In some of these countries, public policies are developed to open up markets for commercial provision of higher education within national regulatory frameworks.

Several policy models will coexist in the global knowledge society, but it is certain that all of them will incorporate a mix of public and private elements. Like many other fields of social services, higher education policies will develop into mixed public/private regulation systems. What is interesting, but also cause for concern, is that the public/private mix is different on the national and on the international policy levels. Public higher education policies are the preferential domain of the nation-state. Apparently, the nation-states are unwilling to transfer real political competences towards the supra-national level. The role and impact of supra-national intergovernmental organisations and policy levels, such as the European Union, on public higher education policies therefore is limited. However, there is a lot of policy transfer, exchange and convergence through the work of for example OECD or the World Bank. Supra-national entities such as the European Union seek ways to circumvent these limitations by taking specific initiatives, in promoting mobility for example, or to address education policies via regulations in fields over which they have much more competence, such as the regulation of professions. There also is an increasing willingness among nation-states to develop policies of policy convergence, a clear case in point being the Bologna process in Europe. However, these international public policies have their roots and their political legitimacy in the national level.

Some countries have developed policy frameworks to open their markets to for-profit provision of higher education and to include these provisions into the national higher education system. However, it seems that the private dimension in higher education policy is the privileged domain of international policy-making. With the recent and somehow brutal advent of the GATS discussion in higher education policy, and comparing it with the difficulties in making progress in developing public policy frameworks on the international level, it has become clear that the most effective international higher education policies are focusing on the private dimensions of trade liberalisation and open markets. This can partly be explained by the fact that 'public' often is equated with 'national', which implies for example that public universities developing activities in the field of transnational education become 'private' in other countries. The whole field of internationalisation and transnational higher education thus easily could be incorporated in a trade oriented policy perspective, as university leaders to their astonishment have realised when they understood that the old practice of student mobility, developed out of completely different rationales than economic ones, under the GATS merely becomes a mode in trade in educational services.

There is a risk in recent higher education policy developments that we come into a situation in which the public perspective is situated at the national level and the private dimensions are the domain of international policies. This imbalance is illustrated in Figure 2. What seems to be missing is the development of public policies on the international level. Clearly, this is the weakest part in the overall development of higher education policies. There is little against international policies that liberalise markets and free them from dysfunctional protectionisms, if they are accompanied by policies that depart from public policy considerations at the international level. Public good approaches in higher education policies need not to be restricted to the level of the nation-state, even if the nation-state still is the strongest form of

democratic political organisation and if the international community has not yet developed strong political institutions that fully could fulfil the same functions in the international domain. Seen against the context of the development of the global knowledge society, it is counterproductive in the long run for defenders of public good approaches to confine – and sometimes also to retreat – themselves to the safe haven of the own nation-state. This only leads to new protectionisms as in the case of Greece or South Africa. There is an urgent need for the development of the notion of global public good. In other fields of public policy, such as environmental protection for example, successful attempts have been made to develop powerful policy frameworks on an international level, based upon notions of the common good of global mankind. There is also need for such policy frameworks in the domain of higher education. The global knowledge society implies that the benefits of public good increasingly are going beyond the borders of the nation-states. It thus has to be recognised that higher education as a public good needs to be re-conceptualised at the global level (Van der Wende, 2002, pp. 24-25).

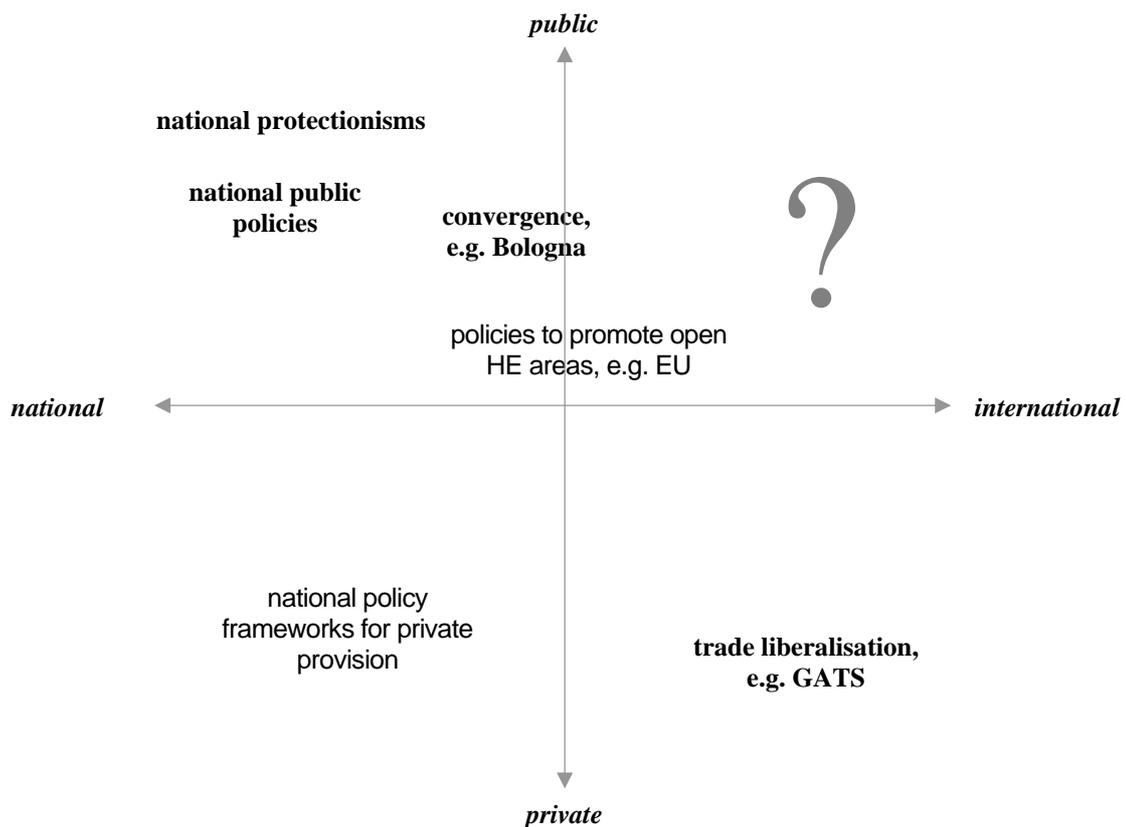


Figure 2. Public/private and national/international dimensions in higher education policies

Towards a policy framework for the role of higher education in the sustainable development of the global knowledge society

Thus, there is an urgent need for an international policy framework integrating private policy dimensions into a public policy approach. The UNESCO Global Forum has the potential and the ambition to be the platform for developing such a framework. As I have argued in other papers, there are great risks in not developing such a framework. On the international level, there is then only the GATS-like trade liberalisation policies aimed at opening national higher education systems for foreign and for-profit providers. National policies will find it more and more difficult to resist to such policies or will develop regressive policies resulting in new protectionisms. As argued before, there is a huge risk in founding public policy perspectives solely in the nation-states.

This also is of crucial importance to the higher education sector itself. As the value-system of the international higher education community puts a great emphasis on the public good dimensions of higher education, there must be a solid political basis for a public policy approach on the international level at a moment in which the development of the global knowledge society brings the functions of higher education to the global level. If we look at the current work of international associations of universities, we see a strong will to formulate a shared value-system on the international level and to strengthen the international higher education community itself in this way. Thus, an international ‘civil society’ of the higher education community is created. When lacking a strong political counterpart however, these voluntary associations will find it very difficult to uphold their international value-system, when confronted with the atomising and disintegrating effects of the market. One of

the results could be that in the long run the only real monopoly of higher education, namely the awarding of trustworthy qualifications, could disappear. Higher education qualifications embody and represent the academic value-system in its approach of high-quality academic formation. The market itself doesn't need such qualifications, but is merely interested in the production of competences that are valuable on the labour market.

The argument in favour of a public policy framework on the international level is not necessarily opposite to policies of trade liberalisation. On the national and on the international level there is need for a mix of private and public elements in higher education policy. There are strong arguments in favour of improving trade opportunities in educational services and to pull down protectionist barriers and monopolies. It should be a very weak position of higher education if it would put its trust solely in protectionist policies of nation-states. For example in Europe, the full support of the higher education community to the Bologna process and the creation of an open space of higher education involves as well elements of liberalisation as development of public good considerations on an international scale.

On the other hand, it will be interesting to see whether for-profit providers and other forms of higher education operating at the other side of the 'border', will be ready to accept public policy considerations and international regulatory frameworks built on them and, thus, to integrate themselves into the public higher education sector. The higher education system in the United States shows that for-profit providers still consider themselves to be part of the public dimensions of the US higher education system and in some cases also belong to the higher education community. If national policies, international public policy frameworks and the international higher education community itself make a appeal to non-traditional institutions to integrate themselves into the public policy dimensions, there should be no reason why they should refuse this. I think – and I hope – that there is much room for sharing the public good agenda between public and private providers.

What then could be the essential elements of such an international public policy framework? I will only discuss a few possible elements:

- It could be worthwhile to formulate a set of core values that are shared by the global higher education community and that define its fundamental value-system. Seen from the perspective of the constructivist contribution of higher education to the development of the global knowledge society, these values have proven their significance and sustainability. More in particular, I point to the values related to the rules of knowledge creation, such as independent and critical research, the open nature of the scientific research system, the epistemological and methodological principles of sound research, the notion of scholarship, etc. There are sufficient examples that illustrate that these values need a solid basis in order to be capable to resist the disruptive power of the market. The auto-control of the global scientific community and the academic system as a necessary instrument in safeguarding these rules and principles also needs political support. Closely related to this are values defining the essence of academic education. Although the higher education community underestimates the appreciation of the labour market for key competences such as critical thinking, communication skills and even cultural attitudes – the knowledge society increasingly will reward those key competences and higher education institutions themselves frequently do not pay sufficient attention to them –, there certainly is a risk that the market in itself would lead to a too technocratic notion of academic education.

- The growing importance of ‘borderless’ higher education has provoked a discussion on the definition, and the need to protect such definition, of some basic characteristics of the global higher education system. More in particular there is a debate on the definition of the concept of ‘university’ and on the question whether the other providers (the ‘pseudo-universities’ in the words of Philip Altbach) deserve to use that label in the public realm. Although this easily could lead to unfounded protectionism, there are good arguments to regulate internationally the use of this label by accepting a common definition of what a university actually is. This will bring about a confrontation between inclusive approaches opening up the definition to all tertiary education providers, for-profit institutions and even corporate ‘universities’, on the one hand, and approaches that depart from the ancient characteristics of the traditional institution called ‘university’, on the other. Given the high symbolic capital attached to them, also labels such as ‘professor’ and ‘doctor’ could be subject to international definition and protection.
- Of more relevance to the learners worldwide, is a set of common concepts to define the basic levels of academic qualifications. The global knowledge society calls upon the international higher education community to produce degrees and credentials that are recognisable in the international labour market. We need a common frame of reference – not necessarily synonym with a homogeneous and elaborate ‘qualifications framework’ – to strengthen international transparency and comparability of the basic qualifications delivered by higher education institutions worldwide. The three basic levels of academic qualifications, namely the bachelor, master and doctoral degrees, need a common understanding to uphold their relevance in a global knowledge economy. The scope of this ambition, crucial for example in the Bologna process, should be enlarged to cover the whole world. There certainly is a danger, also apparent in the Bologna process, of purely formal definitions of qualifications, based for example on quantitative measures of input of time or study-load. This danger must be overcome by definitions relating to the substance of levels of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be expected from holders of these qualifications.
- An important domain for international public policy in higher education is the regulation of the supply side of the educational market. In the same way as for example the transport over public roads of chemical and nuclear waste is regulated, there is also a need for a set of quality criteria for licensing providers that may offer their educational services – on a commercial basis or not – in the international public domain. These licensing criteria must be flexible enough to include all kinds of new providers and new delivery modes and to foster innovation. Recent codes of conduct for transnational provision can be very inspiring here, but should be expanded to cover all kinds of educational delivery. International procedures of registration of providers of educational services, as is known also in other kinds of regulated markets, and clear rules dealing with accountability and consumer-protection also must be developed.
- Public policy approaches in higher education attach a great importance to education as a basic human right and, hence, to the social equity aspects of access to higher education. A great deal of national higher education policy-making is devoted to issues of access and their consequences on funding and student support for example. Given the large variety in these national policies, linked to the capacity of the national higher education systems and the budgetary capacity of the state, there is little room for international convergence in policies dealing with access. There are also great economic and cultural differences among nations – and among social groups within nations – in the readiness to invest privately in higher education, even when high private returns can be expected. Commercial provision of course

is dependent on the willingness of consumers to pay for educational services. The regulation of the demand side of the educational market therefore to a high extent will remain the domain – in the long run perhaps the most important domain – of national policies. However, there is a debate, stimulated recently by the Open Courseware initiative of MIT, on what aspects of the educational service issues of access and commercial delivery relate to. The important value of open access to knowledge and information, too many of crucial importance in the sustainable development of the global knowledge society, could call for initiatives such as the MIT Open Courseware initiative.

- In an open global higher education space quality assurance and accreditation will become the most important regulatory mechanisms. Strong quality assurance arrangements are seen as crucial to steer the global higher education system and to safeguard its constructive potential in the development of the global knowledge society. In other papers (Van Damme, 2002a, 2002b) I have extensively discussed the development of international quality assurance and accreditation arrangements. There are many promising developments, mainly starting from the national quality assurance agencies, at convergence, trans-border cooperation, mutual recognition, meta-accreditation, etc., but progress is slow. Even within the stimulating context of the European Bologna process, international approaches of quality assurance and accreditation seem to be the most difficult part of the agenda. Lack of comparability in quality assurance systems could jeopardise the capacities of the higher education system in the global context. Crucially important in this, is the development and worldwide acceptance of a common definition of what quality in higher education actually means. Many approaches to the difficult question of defining quality either are too relativistic to the specific context, the specific demands of consumers ('consumer protection'-approach) or the specific objectives of the institutions ('fitness for purpose'-approach), or are far too rigid and elaborate in their quality dimensions, focusing too much on input characteristics. Opening up quality assurance arrangements to cover also new providers, transnational provision and new delivery modes (such as distance education and e-learning) hopefully will result in a definition of academic quality that can sustain in very diverse contexts. Such a definition will have to depart from the essentials in the value-system of the global higher education community and will have to focus on the critical outcomes in knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be expected from bachelor, master and doctoral qualifications. Simple and effective quality assurance arrangements, limiting the burden of bureaucracy and costs to institutions, have to be developed out of this definition of quality.

- Finally, the well-known issue of the international recognition of qualifications equally is of crucial importance. It makes very little sense to award qualifications for a globalising professional labour market if higher education cannot guarantee the validity of these qualifications in the international context. This is not only a technical, but also a moral issue and a huge political challenge that only seems to be solved when it is brought fully to the international level. Not being capable of addressing this important issue will result in the development of policies on the labour market that circumvent academic qualifications (internationally standardised competence assessment procedures for example) and that in the long run will make academic qualifications and credentials superfluous. Academic and professional recognition arrangements both need to be strengthened and to be simplified. Decisive steps forward, building further on existing frameworks and conventions but also breaking with their voluntaristic nature on the national policy level, have to be taken.

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