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The Modernisation of European Universities

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Introduction

Academic Responses to the Modernisation Agenda of European Universities

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The modern university in Europe over the last two centuries has been closely linked to the nation-state. With the advent of globalisation, and its pressures on nation-states, universities are increasingly experiencing a de-linking from the traditional needs of the nation-state (and from its financial resources). In Europe, the overall social and economic answer to globalisation has been a strengthening of European integration. European universities, as well as the governments of EU member states, find it useful to refer to new transnational strategies in redefining the role(s) of educational institutions under both globalisation and Europeanisation. Consequently, the last decade has given rise to substantially new ways of thinking about universities at the level of the European Commission in the European Union. Emergent EU educational policies were becoming increasingly influential as the university reform agenda was being viewed as part of the wider Lisbon strategy reforms, and recently, as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. The EU member states – national governments – were not only adopting the Lisbon strategy but also the social and economic concept of the university implied in it and consistently developed in subsequent official documents of the European Commission. The EU member states, for the first time in the more than fifty year history of the European Union, needed to balance their educational policies between the requirements of new policies strongly promoted by the EU and the requirements of their traditional national systems (in the first four decades, in general, higher education was left in the competence of member states; today it is viewed by the European Commission as being of critical importance to the economic future of the EU and in need of EU-level intervention). Additionally, national educational policies are under strong globalisation-related (mostly financial) pressures, as are all the other social services of the “European social model”. European universities and European academics are functioning in the midst of these large-scale changes at the level of European and national strategies. Their interpretations of, and responses to, what is termed “the modernisation agenda of European universities” is at the core of the present volume.

The reason for renewed EU interest in higher education is clearly stated by the European Commission: while responsibilities for universities lie essentially at the national (or regional) level, the most important challenges are “European, and even international or global”, as *The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge*, a

2003 Communication from the EC, put it. Recent years have seen intensified thinking about the future of public universities in Europe, from a distinctly supranational perspective. Regional processes for the integration of educational and research and development policies in the European Union add a new dimension to the nation-state/national university issue. On top of the discussions about the nation-state (and the welfare state), we are confronted with new supranational ideas on how to revitalise the European project through education and how to use European universities for the purpose of creating in Europe a globally competitive knowledge economy. For the first time in the 2000s new ways of thinking about higher education were formulated at the EU level – and were accompanied by a number of practical measures, coordinated and funded by the European Commission. Higher education, left at the disposal of particular nation-states in recent decades in Europe, returns now to the forefront in discussions about the future of the EU.

The book grew out of the Polish EU Presidency “Conference on the Modernization of Higher Education” organized in Sopot, Poland in 23-25 October, 2011. In his overview chapter, “The Growing Complexity of the Academic Enterprise in Europe”: A Panoramic View”, Marek Kwiek provides a background to the book and focuses on common themes in the current transformations of European universities. The chapter shows an increasingly complicated picture for the academic enterprise in Europe. The factors generating change in national higher education policies and in national higher education systems are viewed as multi-layered, interrelated and often common throughout the continent. Kwiek assumes that there are a number of broad features that add to the complexity of the academic enterprise. In general, they include the acceleration of national, European and global discussions; permanent renegotiations of the state/university relationships; universities functioning under permanent conditions of adapting to changing environmental settings; renegotiations of the general social contract providing the basis for the post-war welfare state and its public services; the tremendous scale of operations and funding for universities; the divergence between global, supranational, European and often national reform discourses as well as academic discourses about the future of the university; and the link between arguments about private goods/private benefits from higher education and arguments about public subsidization of higher education. The chapter discusses the three following major questions with reference to the coming decade: (1) Should European higher education systems, in general, expect more (quasi-) market mechanisms and more new income-generating paradigms?; (2) What is the role of new university stakeholders and how may teaching/research missions evolve in European universities?; and (3) To what extent is meeting the conflicting demands of different university stakeholders a major challenge to the European academic profession?

Maria Helena Nazaré in her contribution on “People and their Ideas: The Foundation for Inclusive European Growth” shows that during the last decade, the European higher education landscape has undergone tremendous alterations both at system and at institutional levels. She points out that many of these were directly linked with, or driven by, the need for effectively qualifying the workforce, within an appropriate span of time, and equipping it with the skills required by a globally competitive world market. Hence the Bologna higher education reforms which have brought about the restructuring of higher education degrees, new methodologies focused on the learning process instead of teaching-centred ones, increased mobility of students and staff, and the new importance of quality improvement and quality assurance within higher education. Nazaré reviews the impact these reforms had on institutions, namely in terms of the changes introduced to institutional autonomy and governance, and refers to the way institutions are prepared to face the challenges of the 21st century using the EU 2020 strategy and the modernisation agenda. In particular, she focuses on the aspects pertaining to the adverse demographics in Europe and the challenges these represent for higher education institutions in EU countries.

The next chapter, “System Diversity in European Higher Education” by Peter Maassen presents the underlying assumptions that more complex and competitive economic and technological global environments require rapid adaptations of national economies to shifting opportunities and constraints; that higher education is expected to play a central role in this adaptation, since, as the main public knowledge sector, it is assumed to link research and education effectively to the needs of society and industry. Maassen points out that this expectation has been used as a rationale for reforms aimed at stimulating universities and colleges to develop more relevant and effective institutional strategies, and professionalize their leadership and management capacity. He views the Lisbon summit and the subsequent Lisbon 2000 Agenda as important drivers in the promotion of this vision in Europe. Making Europe the most dynamic knowledge economy in the world by 2010 was argued to be dependent on urgent reforms to its higher education systems and institutions. This was clearly expressed in two reform agendas published by the European Commission in 2006 and 2011. He focuses on the 2011 agenda and its aim to contribute to more effective system diversity in higher education and discusses, amongst other things, the consistency of the arguments underlying the Commission’s claim concerning its contributions to this.

Maria Hulicka in her contribution on “External and internal sources of financing for universities. The practice of good governance” stresses that in a time of knowledge-driven transformations to the economy, only universities with high quality teaching potential and strong research resources have the capacity

to play an important role in shaping a development strategy for regions and countries. Therefore, she sees one of the most important challenges facing higher education is the creation of an innovative type of university that is characterized by inter-disciplinary teaching and research; involving the best academics, most creative employees and leading research groups. The other urgent issue she points out is the need to limit the ever widening gap between the best universities and those which do not keep up with the changes. This requires the investment of additional funds, but also a marked improvement in the efficiency of spending such funds invested in higher education by the introduction of modernized styles of university financial management. The purpose of this chapter is to study the key factors influencing the amount of funds that universities have at their disposal and to recognise the basics regarding the financial standing of a university. Hulicka stresses the need for a concentration of spending as well as diversified, pro-innovative funding evaluated according to quality and certain achievements in selected activities. The aim of the chapter is also to present the close relationship between the efficiency of university financial management, and especially the search for internal sources of income, and its influence on financial results. She shows how all aspects of financial management can be greatly supported by integrated information systems.

Dominik Antonowicz in his chapter entitled “Europe 2050 New Europeans and Higher Education” focuses on the growing demographic challenges that must be addressed by both national governments and higher education institutions in Europe in the coming decades. His major claim is that European countries in 2050 will be characterized by smaller, older and more diverse populations, and that without a net migration the population of Europe will fall sharply. With such a demographic drop, gradually decreasing with a rapidly ageing population, the European economy as a whole will not be able to close the distance between it and the American economy and it will probably be overtaken by the Chinese and Indian economies. Therefore, in his view, the EU27 should show more interest in a growing population of immigrants in order to use them differently than simply manpower in the industrial sector. These so-called “New Europeans” will have to take some responsibility for the European economy, not only as a cheap labour force for the manufacturing sector but also as a well-educated workforce who will make a critical contribution to the European knowledge economy. According to Antonowicz, education systems in most EU countries must respond to external conditions and changing social demands. This raises all sorts of huge challenges; including for European governments that are responsible for both the development of a post-industrial economy and for social cohesion. New Europeans are, as human resources, an important asset that can no longer be ignored or wasted.

Ben Jongbloed and Harry de Boer claim in their chapter on “Higher Education Funding Reforms in Europe and the 2006 Modernisation Agenda” that to explore the extent to which the various European higher education systems have implemented funding reforms and to learn how these reforms compare to the suggestions included in the European Commission’s 2006 Modernisation Agenda, it is useful to present an overview of higher education funding arrangements in 33 European countries, as well as the reforms in such funding mechanisms. They discuss governance reforms in higher education, summarize the 2006 Modernisation Agenda, and present a *Funding Reform Scoreboard* that shows the situation for the year 2008, as compared to the year 1995, for 33 European countries with respect to six items: (1) the autonomy that higher education institutions experience in decision-making on financial matters; (2) the share of third party funding; (3) the share of revenues from tuition fees; (4) the degree of performance orientation in the mechanism that allocates public funds to universities; (5) the share of competitive research funds in the university sector; and (6) the portability of student grants. Comparing the situation between 1995 and 2008, they conclude that the scoreboard shows that the extent to which European higher education systems have incorporated the funding-related aspects of the Modernisation Agenda has increased in respect of all six items.

In his contribution on “Ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in the higher education modernisation agenda”, Andrzej Krasniewski assumes that quality is central to the competitiveness of European higher education and is at the heart of the Bologna Process reforms. He focuses on the quality assurance issues addressed in several EU-level policy documents, in particular in the recent Communication of the European Commission on the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems. This chapter presents an analysis of the recommendations made by the Commission, pointing out that some key issues related to quality enhancement are not addressed satisfactorily in the Communication. These issues include the reorientation of the education process towards learning outcomes and moving from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning; first of all in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance – a fundamental document underlying the recent developments in quality assurance within the European Higher Education Area. Krasniewski discusses how policies and regulations at the system (national) level can support the development of a quality culture in higher education institutions. He stresses the importance of providing higher education institutions with a high level of autonomy and introducing a national qualifications framework. His discussion is illustrated with an example showing how system-level regulations introduced in the process of modernising the higher education system in Poland support the de-

velopment of an institutional quality culture and the reorientation of higher education to make it more relevant to the needs of the labour market.

The next chapter on “Social Dimensions of Modernizing Higher Education. Czech-Dutch Comparative Study on Student Funding and Equality” by Petr Matějů, Simona Weidnerová, Tomáš Konečný, and Hans Vossensteyn explores the possible effects of student funding on the development of inequalities regarding access to higher education. Though it is recognized that financial issues like tuition fees and student financial aid are only some among the many factors that influence student choice and access, the authors stress that financial policies are an important instrument that can affect student choice. The aim of the chapter is to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of financial restraints on the participation in higher education of students from different socio-economic backgrounds by comparing the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, two countries with important similarities as well as differences in their education systems, student funding and participation patterns in higher education. The chapter shows that the context of steadily increasing tuition fees, accompanied by an efficient student support system (as is case in the Netherlands), does not generate an increase in inequalities of access (the results indicate rather a decrease), whereas a system of free tuition accompanied by mainly indirect (parent-based) student support did not lead to a reduction in the high inequalities of participation after the fall of the communist regime in the Czech Republic (the analysis reveals rather a steady increase in inequality).

The next chapter, “Effective Universities: some considerations regarding funding, governance and management” by Paul Temple, examines various aspects of university funding, governance and management in Europe in the context of the European Commission’s September 2011 Communication on university modernization. It considers how these issues are inter-related, and suggests that there is evidence that European higher education is changing quite rapidly in the direction of creating what the literature calls “entrepreneurial universities”. Temple claims, though, that these changes will give rise to tensions, both between universities and their national governments, but also between universities and students, who are likely to enter into new financial relationships with their universities. The chapter argues that managing these tensions effectively means understanding both the nature of higher education markets and the distinctive organizational character of universities. These characteristics need to be taken into account in the governance and management of universities.

Pavel Zgaga in “The ‘Global Strategy’ 2007 – 2011: The external attractiveness of the EHEA and its internal uneasiness” investigates the implementation of the strategy “The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in a Global Setting (2007)” during its first four years. He stresses that this is only a short period

and there has certainly not been enough time for strong developments in this area. Further, there is not much sound data yet; however, the Bologna reports in combination with other surveys give some insight into the main trends. Using the national reports to BFUG, Zgaga designs a comprehensive table to present the implementation activities in five policy areas defined by the strategy. By far the most frequent type of activity in implementing the Strategy during its first two years seems to be, rather surprisingly, bilateral and multilateral contacts and agreements between the EHEA countries. In general, non-EU countries, both to the West and East, appear less frequently in the table than EU member states. He corroborates the assessment of the 2009 *Bologna Stocktaking* report that “most countries seem to promote their own higher education systems internationally and very few promote the EHEA” by using other surveys and reports. Zgaga reconfirms and, in the concluding part of the chapter, comments on its relationship to the concept of the “attractiveness of the EHEA”.

Georg Winckler in his chapter on “The European debate on the modernisation agenda for universities. What has happened since 2000?” points out that the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda triggered a European debate on modernising universities. As part of the “Hampton Court follow up” (2005/2006), the EU Commission produced a document which asked for the greater effectiveness of mass higher education and for the greater mobility of students and staff. In addition, more “real” autonomy and accountability for universities across Europe, better governance structures, more excellence at the top, and a funding target for universities of 2% of GDP were demanded. Yet, he stresses that member states did not appreciate these comprehensive demands by the Commission. In its recent communication on this issue in September 2011, the Commission is viewed as retreating from these extra demands; although, in the meantime, a Europeanization of national systems has already set in due to Bologna, ERC and other factors. Winckler concludes that despite member states’ responsibility for universities, European programmes on research and cross-border mobility may create a European space for universities; and so enable them to better contribute to a research-based European knowledge society if universities can act autonomously, are strategically oriented and overall funding at the European level is sufficient.

The book presents also two recent documents by the European Commission, published during the Polish EU Presidency, which were major points of reference. There are two chapters: “Communication from the Commission: Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems” and “European Commission staff working document: Supporting growth and jobs: an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems”. Finally, the concluding chapter, “European Strategies and Higher Ed-

ucation” by Marek Kwiek, discusses EU-level developments in policy thinking in the area of higher education, training, and labour markets based on the analysis of a major large-scale strategy promoted by the European Commission in the 2000s, “Education and Training 2010”.¹

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