

The Internationalization and Globalization in Central and East European Higher Education

Prof. Marek Kwiek
Center for Public Policy, and
Department of Philosophy
Adam Mickiewicz University
Poznan, Poland
kwiekm@amu.edu.pl

Published in: *Society for Research in Higher Education International News*, No. 47, November 2001, pp. 3-5

1.

I want to focus here on the public policy consequences of the emerging question of tense relations between internationalization and globalization of higher education assuming the perspective of internationalization as a possible response to worldwide-felt globalization pressures in higher education. Globalization of higher education (with its introduction of business culture and corporate ethos) and internationalization (with its focus on internationalizing curricula, developing exchange programs for students and faculty, interdisciplinary, international and team-oriented research etc) are manifestations of strong Westernization of Central and East European (CEE) higher education. The rationale of the two processes seems to be different, though: political and economic in the case of globalization of higher education, academic and social/cultural (following the Bologna Declaration - also increasingly political and economic) in the case of internationalization of higher education. Both processes are main challenges for higher education today: one as a catalyst, the other as a response. Central and Eastern Europe in this respect is not an exception to a worldwide trend.

It is important to distinguish between causes and effects, or between overwhelming globalization requirements directed to higher education systems in CEE countries, and adaptations to them by means of internationalization practices. It is also important not to underestimate the relation between the two: I take internationalization as a necessary and unavoidable reaction to the need of forming post-national-era, “globally-competent” students, future workers in the global, competitive, often hostile work environment. Huge changes brought about by globalization that are occurring in the outside world do affect and do transform higher education systems from the outside: internationalization gives a chance to adapt the academy in CEE countries to the requirements of rapidly changing external world by rearranging research, teaching and administration and to prepare it to global challenges.

2.

The internationalization of higher education performed under the aegis of various EU programs have already had tremendous effects in accession countries. At the same time, the move in funding further to the East means new opportunities for higher education in non-accession countries. A carefully worked out internationalization process can save higher education there from a globalization shock. Internationalization can be seen as a perfect response to the globalization challenge in higher education. For this reason it is of crucial importance not to confuse the two processes, and not to underestimate the role of them in higher education in the region.

The study of the concept of internationalization of higher education in a Central European context is of huge importance for the whole region: both globalization and internationalization practices are here to stay and the study of their relationship should reveal their background ideas and help both to better conceptualize current practical higher education activities and to produce a better public policy in higher education as well. After ten years of generally either failed or neglected higher education reforms, CEE countries must face globalization, market-driven, for-profit, value-for-money demands. It is important to know how internationalization of higher education helps it to cope with globalization pressures. As higher education institutions increasingly play a crucial role in the development of national economies in the global age, internationalization practices can both save the social and cultural status of them and contribute to the overall competitiveness of states and regions.

Thinking of globalization, I would like to analyze the issue under three separate categories: first, the collapse of the crucial role of the nation-state in current social and economic developments, with its vision of higher education as a national treasure contributing to national consciousness; second, the reformulation of the functions of the welfare-state, including a new scope of public sector activities to be funded by the state; and third, the invasion of the economic rationality/corporate culture in the whole public sector worldwide.

It is important to bear in mind that the Region is not unique in its problems with reforming higher education. Problems I am discussing are global, and global solutions are sought, by transnational organizations never before so much interested in higher education as such (WB, IMF, OECD or, most recently, WTO). Following the idea that higher education is no longer a unique part of the public sector in Central and Eastern Europe, it is interesting to ask who the competitors of public higher education institutions are. The competitors are of a twofold nature: they are, first, the newcomers in the field of higher education and, second, other public institutions and public services provided by the state today. Other educational providers are, for instance, private national institutions, private foreign institutions, national and foreign corporate certification centers, national and foreign virtual education providers and mixed education providers. They are increasingly for-profit. Most probably, in an increasingly market-oriented social environment of CEE countries, prospective students will be increasingly market-oriented as well. The unreformed institutions will not be able to face the pressure, and either will be reformed on a day-to-day basis suggested by economic rationality, or will lose its student body to other market-oriented higher education providers. The second group of competitors are other public institutions and public services such as, for instance, primary and secondary education, pensions and care for the aged, basic healthcare, social insurance, law and order institutions, prison systems, public administration etc. The competition with other sectors of the public sector is a zero-sum game, though: some sectors win, others lose. At the same time the general amount of the public money received in taxes is likely to be smaller rather than bigger, following the trend in many OECD countries.

What do globalization pressures, welfare state reforms and the weakening of the nation-state have to do with Central Europe? The linkage is, or in some aspects will be soon, very strong indeed. I would like to associate three different aspects of globalization processes with higher education in general.

Firstly, globalization can be seen as the theoretical and practical questioning of the relevance of the nation-state in contemporary world. The question that the state can be putting right now

might be formulated in the following manner: „Why should we finance public higher education?“, as – leaving aside all rhetorical devices – there is no more a nation-oriented, national-consciousness-oriented, nation-building kind of ideal of higher education (or of the University, as defined by the Humboldtian ideal, as the arm of the nation-state). Secondly, globalization can be seen as the decomposition of the welfare state (resulting in a worldwide public sector reform – reformulation of the scope and responsibilities of the public sector in general). The corresponding response of the state might be formulated like this: „We are (just) unable to finance public higher education (with its massification, if not universalization) anymore“. Just like we are - or soon will be - unable to finance public healthcare, pensions for the aged and other social services anymore. And, finally, globalization can also be seen as the economic rationality and the rule of the ideology of the market – the primacy of economy to politics, to the public good, to general/social interests. Thus, in the third sense of „globalization“, it is a neoliberal, market ideology accompanied by an array of practices drawn directly from the world of business and applied to other domains of social life. The corresponding response of the state would be like this: „Let us (still) finance public higher education (a bit), but on a new corporate-like basis“ (introducing the spirit of managerialism and/or accountability and/or privatization etc.). Obviously, globalization means also: new technologies in and for higher education but I am skipping this issue here altogether.

3.

As far as the worldwide decline of the nation-state is concerned, the (basically indirect) impact can be seen to different degrees right now in the Region; national identity seems still very important here, especially prior to the EU enlargement, although it does not seem to be produced/inculcated at the university anymore. Philosophically, this is probably the most important factor in describing the transformation higher education currently undergoes worldwide, especially considering two hundred years of the operation of the Humboldtian model of the university, and especially outside of the Region, in more advanced, especially anglophone, OECD countries.

As far as the decomposition of the welfare-state is concerned, a very strong impact can be observed and it is increasingly important in the Region (both directly and indirectly). The Region generally remains under a very strong influence of the biggest funders for reforms, of organizations it wants to belong to or already belongs. At the same time the IMF, WB and OECD's recommendations about the state and its functions for the whole world can be summarized in the following manner: to reduce the scope of the state responsibilities, to minimize its role and to privatize social services as much as possible and to put strong emphasis on deregulation, privatization, liberalization and marketization. It is not the same state – and therefore, among many other reasons, it will not be the same higher education.

Finally, as far as the economic rationality/corporate orientation/market and business-like practices are concerned, this aspect of globalization may have potentially tremendous, direct impact on higher education in the Region because of the mythization/fetishization of the idea of the „market“. „The market“ is one of the most fundamental categories in post-1989 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it is a key word in any social, political and economic discussion of the recent decade. „The market“ in the Region is non-debatable, inherently positive, and „Western“ in its overtones. From this perspective, the questioning of the „market orientation“ of higher education in the Region would mean the questioning of the very essence of post-1989 social aspirations.

4.

The question is whether the corporate culture, economic rationality and business practices will take over the major part of the academic world in the Region. The provisional answer to the above question would be – most probably yes, gradually, with the passage of time, they will. There is no reason to believe in the uniqueness of Central European higher education. It is following all global trends in terms of falling public trust, weakening public financial support, rapid universalization and new expectations of its main stakeholders. Here are three reasons to support a positive answer to the above question.

Firstly, worldwide trends meet right here (also owing to the intellectual and financial backup of supranational organizations) and the gradual „marketization” of higher education is already seen as a perfect response to its critical budgetary situation after 10 years of abandoned systemic reforms. The problems faced by CEE higher education are similar in nature, although different in degree, to problems faced in the Western world.

Secondly, to let (the major part of) higher education go „to the market” is for the state in the Region a relatively easy solution of the problem: as every deregulation, it requires tremendous institutional and systemic efforts at the beginning, and then the laws of the market/economic pressures begin to work. Polish lessons show that the state is very consistent in introducing strong market mechanisms in many domains of the public sector. And the dominating attitude in sectors already privatized is that of economic rationality. The unique character of higher education in general and of the university in particular in a set of traditionally public sector services is already lost, especially considering the rapid development of the private, for-profit and non-research institutions of higher education which changes radically the intellectual landscape in which public higher education is supposed to operate.

Thirdly, the times have changed: the abandonment of higher education public policy and leaving it merely at the mercy of market/economic forces would be unthinkable 10 years ago; in post-1989 countries higher education reforms were then generally left „to be done” soon. After ten years it is seen much more clearly that social and economic transformations will last for several decades and that higher education needs not only academic freedom and political autonomy but also huge financial support. Within a structure of ongoing social reforms, higher education is no longer a priority for CEE states. Now it may happen that – with shrinking public resources and other social needs growing – the corporate answer to the “higher education problem” could seem almost salutary to the majority of stakeholders.

5.

Finally, coming to conclusions, I would like to say that the academic world, most probably for the first time in its relatively short modern history, needs deep awareness of transformations occurring in the outside world as opposed to its traditional inward-orientation, commonly referred to as the “ivory tower” model. In periods of huge transformations the conceptions of one’s role, place and tasks in culture and society get questioned. In all probability, we are currently witnessing worldwide – together with gradual passage to the global age – the most turbulent period in higher education developments since the Middle Ages. At the same time, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, these transformations overlap with the passage from centrally-planned to market economy, which makes the identity crisis even bigger. We are living in the world in which neither the state, nor society, nor higher education are, and will be, the

same. Reflecting on changes in higher education policy in Central and Eastern Europe in the pre-globalization and pre-welfare state reforms context is only part of the job; the other part that I tried to sketch here briefly is much more useful in the long run, I suppose. The final directions of changes are not certain, but at least the awareness of the double, global and local, rather than merely local perspective in seeing transformations in higher education in the Region today seems of primal importance.