

Part 5

Educational Development Strategies in Different Countries and Regions of the World: National, Regional and Global Levels

Стратегии развития образования в различных странах и регионах мира: национальный, региональный и глобальный уровни

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ESTABLISHING SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS IN A GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Abstract

The paper written in the form of literature review is devoted to the analysis of the latest educational manuscripts by Laura M. Portnoi et al and Robin Sakamoto et al and provides a critical overview of possible partnership interactions in the actively globalizing sphere of world higher education.

Contemporary world is dynamically developing under the influence of globalization. On the one hand it stimulates a rapid progress of knowledge economy, free-market system, commercialization of all life locuses and on the other hand provokes a sharp necessity of solving global issues destructively influencing human life and even contravening the possibility of the whole planet's future existence and sustainable development. The latter has become one of the highly discursive subjects by the public at large mostly focusing on the necessity of perceiving environmental, economical and social dimensions in interdependence to address global challenges and being an urge able to serve a background for positive transformations in various spheres when achieving sustainability. It is not surprising that such nonstandard situation requires extraordinary changes in the sphere of higher education, mostly associated with universities, which should provide a first-class teaching and service to the society in the new conditions catalyze the formation of innovative 'sustainable' world outlook and optimistic global education climate.

Both volumes under review demonstrate a strong interest of international educators to the recently occurred complex organizational shifts in higher education

having led either to the reinforcement of some specific phenomena like competitiveness or complication of the existing ones as in case of cooperation transformed into partnership as a result of contemporary economic, political and cultural changes and characterized by a more universal level of functioning – across borders. The trends chosen by the editors as the key ones seem acute and provide a rich ground for their critical consideration within global sustainability context.

It is correctly noted by Laura M. Portnoi, Val D. Rust and Sylvia S. Bagley that modern university environment being under a serious neoliberalistic and economical influence made a step towards academic capitalism characterized by the presence of entrepreneurially oriented educational institutions and perception of knowledge more as a commodity than a public good or in the terms of the General Agreement on Trade in Services ‘an internationally tradable service’ (Portnoi et al, 2010, p. 212). This pure adjustment of universities to the market needs provoked their unprecedented competition not only on the domestic level but also across the globe for ‘research funding, the ‘best and brightest’ international students, and ‘star’ faculty members’ (Portnoi et al, 2010, p. 2) what is vividly demonstrated both in the national league tables and in the mostly reputable global university ranking systems like Shanghai index or the Times Higher Education World University Ranking. The institutions’ competition is really tough as indicators in each ranking system are varied, more often than not hard to achieve and sometimes questionable presenting a very subjective view of different actors like governments, international aid agencies, individual institutions and publishers. Summarizing the contributions by Lynn Ilon, Simon Marginson, Francisco O. Ramirez, Anthony Welch it may be concluded that the k-economy and the rise of global ranking mechanisms have led to the Emerging Global Model of the elite university (offered by Kathryn Mohrman, Wanhua Ma, and David Baker in 2008) which seems too rationalized, commodity oriented and market-driven – a Model for ‘mimicking’ implying its exact imitation by the institutions from the ‘knowledge periphery’.

It is obvious that nowadays the whole globe is in a rush for the key positions in the global university rankings judging from the country case studies presented in the volumes: Argentina, Kenya, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Nepal, Vietnam, Tanzania, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Australia and the countries of Europe. Yet, each following its own strategy from the introduction of cross-border programs (Hong Kong) and formation of the hybrid system of higher education (Oman, the UAE) to the shift from ‘aid to trade’ (Europe and Australia) or from traditional pedagogical modes to the student centered social constructivist pedagogy (Malaysia).

According to Alejandro D. Jacobo, Héctor R. Gertel et al quality assurance seems to be one more point guaranteeing the top place in the rankings and eventually a worldwide profile and prestige. That’s why today universities seek internationally recognized assessment criteria, internationalize curriculum and programs, involve international evaluators for the assessment of their activities thus implementing the practice of policy borrowing from developed to developing countries. The example of that is vividly demonstrated in the contributions by Hana Ameen, David W. Chapman, and Thuwayba Al-Barwani represented in each of reviewed pieces about Oman’s practice of accreditation outsourcing that in spite of large success echoed negatively the development of the national accreditation

system. Nevertheless, the utopian idea of worldwide quality assurance label and global open accreditation system offered by Westerheijden in 2003 and expressed in the chapter by Isaac Ntshoe and Moeketsi Letseka seems possible and presumably just a question of time.

The contributions by a distinguished scholar Jane Knight also included into both reviewed volumes seem mostly conceptual and serve a peculiar bridge between two discussed phenomena – global competition and cross-border partnerships – that look opposite at first sight. The author alongside with Patricia W. Croom and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin directly addresses various aspects of internationalization. She clearly states that internationalization in higher education previously connected with ‘cooperation and solidarity among nations, improving quality and relevance in higher education, or contributing to the advancement of the research for international issues’ (Portnoi et al, 2010, p. 208) has been conceptually modified by the impact of global competition and commercial agenda characteristic for globalization. At present it is of dual character i.e. ‘internationalization at home’ (campus-based) and ‘cross-border education’ (off-campus) which is fully commercialized and represented by the following phenomena debated in the essays of the volumes: branch campuses (Patricia W. Croom, Jason E. Lane), franchises (Jane Knight), and joint/double degrees (Peter Fong, Gerard Postiglione, Jane C. Shivanan, Martha N. Hill). It should be noted here that many countries have already faced the second generation cross-border education connected with the introduction of ‘regional education hubs, economic free zones, education cities, knowledge villages, gateway, and hot spots’ (Portnoi et al, 2010, p. 214). The author is sure that such transformations follow the scheme where development and cooperation in higher education (pure internationalization) are followed by the academic partnership (cross-border education) and crowned with the commercial competition (ranking) that is a measurable outcome of globalization raising a fare question of whether high ranking always means high quality. One more point here worth discussion is the student mobility called by the contributor ‘a highly competitive international recruitment business involving income generation’ (Portnoi et al, 2010, p. 213) because a very noble aim of ‘brain train’ usually fails as countries compete aggressively for qualified workforce guaranteeing their sustainable development.

A special accent on inclusive education and education for sustainable development on the regional and cross-border level is done by Ko Nomura, Yoshihiro Natori, Osamu Abe and Jouko Sarvi who concentrate their attention on the role of international networks (ULSF, COPERNICUS, GHESP, ProSPER.Net etc.) and regional development organizations (Asian Development Bank) in the ‘implementation of joint projects based on member’s interest and expertise’ (Sakamoto & Chapman, 2011, p. 223) in the discussed spheres. Obviously such partnerships help ‘higher education to lead the way’ (Sakamoto & Chapman, 2011, p. 12) in the promotion of sustainability ideas and new forms of partnerships at different levels.

The essays leave a feeling that the basis of all recent cross-border partnership initiatives is a commercial interest of different actors defining the choice of international academic partners for the better market effect and superior competition results. For example, increased commoditization of education has led to the refusal from bilateral university collaboration in favor of competitive knowledge networks

providing not only sustainable development but also sustainable funding. Such an approach might lead to the growth of social instability, lessen mutual understanding and readiness to solve the issues of global concern. However generalization of the reviewed materials demonstrates that contemporary educational partnerships are multifaceted, and their sustainability is also largely dependable on the skills of the partners in global forward-looking, strategic leadership and sufficient share of flexibility. Obviously future developments in global higher education partnerships will be positioned in the vector of smoothing contradictions on the local level aimed at the maintenance and integration of the key elements characteristic for the national culture and identity, historically established systems of domestic higher education into the new educational models.

Thoughtful reading of the volumes allows to recommend them to the university staff and students, policy makers in the sphere of higher education and a wider audience mediating upon the sustainability degree of university partnerships being formed and developed in the peculiar conditions of growing tension of globalization consequences.

References

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