An Analysis of Present and Possible Futures of Public and Private Mexican Universities:
Perceptions and Projections of Current Administrators

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Abstract: This study proposes to answer the question—What is and might be the present and future scenarios of higher education institutions in Mexico according to their leaders' perceptions? Special emphasis is placed on the differences between public and private institutions.

The study emphasized that leaders of private and public universities in Mexico look at their institutions as very different from one other. They recognize their own needs as well as their goals as particular to their own institutions. Both types of leaders identify the importance of their roles in the process of change and adaptation within their institutions. Getting close to the opinions of Mexican leaders in those institutions can help us to understand the present circumstances of higher education (HE) in Mexico, and get a deeper understanding of the complexity of HE in many developing countries, as well as begin to comprehend their future possible scenarios.

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Significance

The study of the leaders' perceptions and projections of public and private Mexican higher education institutions and consequently the changes to those administrators' roles serves to illuminate how the differences between and within those institutions affect the way their leaders face changing situations in these contexts. Contextual situations such as conditions of rapid population growth, low overall average family income in the society, an increase in student demand, and other situations are explored for their implications in higher education system development.

Introduction

The world is facing important and rapid changes with the advance of scientific and technological knowledge. Universities are recognized as both maintenance organizations because of their roles in the socialization of people and the transformation of culture, but also adaptive structures because of their roles in creation of knowledge (Katz & Kahn, 1978). In the case of Mexico, the university as well as other educational institutions can contribute to this scientific and technological transition, even though they are themselves in the process of change (Patlan, 1997).

The need for higher education institutions to better adapt to the demands of rapidly changing societies is recognized in many countries, especially in developing countries such as Mexico. Adaptation and change in higher education institutions could be facilitated by the presence of clear goals, where the assistance of higher education senior administrators can contribute enormously. Consequently, the achievement of organizational goals in higher education institutions depends greatly on the ability of administrators to work together effectively and professionally. Changes in society require a new type of professional higher education executive, one who is prepared to deal with rapid change.

This study is based on the perceptions, opinions, and interpretations of Mexican higher education senior administrators regarding how their institutions look and function in the present; what they will look like and how they will likely function in the future; and how their own roles have been affected by the changing situations they face in their own contexts. Special emphasis is placed on the differences between public and private institutions. Following the pattern of most of Latin America, the distinction between public and private higher education is more marked in Mexico than it is in the U.S. In Mexico, public universities are almost exclusively financed by subsidies from state and federal governments,

whereas private universities are almost completely funded from private sources and tuition (SEP, 1995). In the past, and because of their institution's charter, the state governors appointed most of the presidents of public universities; that situation produced an immediate political link and fiscal dependency between the universities and the state government. With the increasing autonomy of the public universities, a trend that started with the National University of Mexico in 1933 and was followed for the rest of the public universities through the rest of the century, that regulation changed once they became more autonomous; but, the ties between the government and the university administration still persist, mainly because of the financial dependency of the public university.

Theoretical Framework

There is no certainty that Mexican higher education institutions are prepared to move as rapidly as they will need to, in order to help to prevent the country from being left behind in the global economy. Higher education executives play a key role in their institutions in attending to the current demands that their universities face.

The University Today: Some Theoretical Perspectives

Morsy (1996) calls higher education today a "kaleidoscopic reality." He explains:

> Higher education throughout the world reveals a wide range of academic systems, from the highly centralized (China and France) to those which are almost completely decentralized (India and Canada); from federal systems (Germany and the United States) to systems where the private sector is in competition with the public sector (Latin America and Japan); from systems which, until quite recently –and even today—are fragmented, with numerous and overly specialized establishments (the former Communist countries of Europe) to systems that are virtually carbon copies of others (some countries in Africa and the Arab States). (p.ix)

The diversity described above is increased because of the broad array of contrasts that each country presents. Universities are among the oldest organizations in the world and have proven resilient over several centuries of socioeconomic and political change. Nevertheless, institutions of higher education around the globe faced unprecedented challenges as the new millennium approached. Among those are the extraordinary growth in enrollments, present lately in most Third World countries; the sanctity of autonomy, in its many facets and claims; and the gap between the knowledge and skills produced by higher education and

the needs of the societies around it (Morsy, 1996). Scholars and administrators have been cautioning about misfits between external demands and current responses to change (Sporn, 1999).

In her study, Sporn (1999) explains how successful organizational adaptation for college and universities requires new and innovative strategies to respond to the changing environment for higher education. She found a number of factors driving the requirement for change, such as:

(a) The increasing pervasiveness of technology in many different areas of public and private life. Throughout the world the use of computers is being extended for writing, accounting, learning, or playing; in addition, new patterns of communication and learning are emerging.

(b) The economy of many countries has forced state governments to reconsider how to allocate funds to higher education.

(c) Demographics are changing as well. The population entering universities and colleges now consists of increasing numbers of students from different age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and varied experiences prior to their entry into higher education.

(d) Globalization has led to the increased mobility of faculty, students, and staff and to a stronger need to standardize services and performances.

Consequently, these forces have led to an institutional environment dominated by claims for public accountability and more responsiveness on the part of institutions of higher education. These new environmental demands are triggering an internal response from universities around restructuring, because "a responsive campus is one where efforts at change are encouraged and implemented" (Tierney, 2000, p.20).

Higher education institutions recognize the urgent need for change, innovation, and reform; however, they keep facing barriers in this process. Five major obstacles for change are identified by Tierney (2000): (a) lack of agreement (on what changes are necessary); (b) unclear timeframes and structures; (c) lack of evaluative criteria; (d) inability to articulate changes to the rest of campus; and (e) cultural exhaustion and rigidification of the system. Tierney cautions us that not only is the identification of problems important, but also the understanding of how to overcome those obstacles, and how institutions with particular cultural realities plan to respond.

Higher education institutions around the world are facing these realities. Each has its own vision of how to address the problem. A broad explanation of the particularities of the higher education system in Mexico is presented next, to introduce an understanding of the system and how institutions are being affected.

The Mexican Higher Education System

Universities in many developing countries have usually been patterned on European models. The "eurocentric" system of university education has been hampering universities in these countries in releasing endogenous creativity and seeking their own cultural roots (Husén, 1996). Latin American higher education was organized during the period of independence mainly from Spain, in the early nineteenth century. Growing slowly for about 150 years, higher education went through a period of explosive growth in the 1960s and 1970s, and leveled off again in the 1980s. Those are the main stages in the development process of universities in Latin America (Schwartzman, 1996).

Historically, the Catholic Church was the founder of colleges in Mexico, as a part of the Spanish colonizing enterprise before independence in 1821. The struggle for political independence was manifested in ideals of secularism, appreciation for technical knowledge, and a general attack on the traditional university institutions (Schwartzman, 1996). Many of those colleges later were transformed into the current public universities in Mexico with the support of public money. The first colleges of Mexico were founded as an expansion of the Spanish universities during the Mexican colonization in the sixteenth century. The first university in Mexico, the Real Universidad de México, was created on September 21, 1551 by the authorization of King Carlos of Spain. The first courses started on June 3, 1553. The university started following the same statutes as the University of Salamanca, in Spain, and did so until 1645, when the university created its own laws and rules. The first library of the university was founded in 1761, with a gift of more than ten thousand volumes and manuscripts. With the Independence War in 1810 and many other social and political movements in the country during that century, the university was closed and reopened several times. It was not until September 22, 1910 that the Constitution Law of the National University of Mexico was approved by the Congress of Mexico (Silva-Herzog, 1999).

The subsequent university in Mexico is based on the French model, which influenced the autonomy movement in the university in the 1920s, pushing for a social education, meaning education for social welfare and the benefit of the society. The autonomy of the National University of Mexico was authorized in 1933, solidifyng the movement promoted by President Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Silva-Herzog, 1999). The initiative established that the federal government would provide financial support for the university, but that it would respect the institution's autonomy regarding its own internal governance and organization.

In Mexico, a college education is found in two and four-year options.

Undergraduate instruction in the so-called "Technologic Universities" (a system that opened approximately 10 years ago) offers a similar model to two-year community colleges in the United States. This option is aimed primarily at the workforce and designed according to the needs of the community. This system is public and fully funded by federal and state governments.

The second type of higher education instruction is the four-year model, and can be either private or public. The big difference between these last two types is in the source of their funding; private institutions do not receive any funds from the government. They are financed by tuition, projects, and funds from the Board of Directors. Public education, on the other hand, is almost totally funded by federal and local moneys. These institutions also received money from projects but usually from the Secretary of Education (SEP) or the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT)—which depends of the federal Government—, but rarely is any project funded privately. Tuition in public universities is most of the time "symbolic", based on Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution that says, "the education must be free". There is a tremendous amount of controversy today, because it is becoming impossible for the Government to support public higher education that is both expanding and desiring to maintain quality. Private education is based on market theory and other American ideologies; public education is based in the idea of a free and equal education for everybody. However, independent of the type of institutions, higher education in Mexico has been challenged by market pressures (Ireta, 2003).

The Mexican higher education system shares many of its singular characteristics with the rest of Latin American universities (Bond, 1997):

> Latin American universities, while sharing basic premises about the fundamental nature of the institution, carry out the academic activities in many ways. Many new, private universities have been established. Most institutions have reeled under the multiple assaults from continuing massification of higher education, instability of wider economies, insecurities associated with political upheaval, and increasing public demands for accountability and excellence. However, the specific ways in which the individual institutions have responded to these larger social transformations and those required of their own internal policies and practices differ. These differences are, in part, reflected in the participation patterns of women in higher education. (p.3)

The Context of Higher Education in Mexico

Rowley (1997) studied the importance of taking account of the context in which leadership is exercised. He recommended pursuing this kind of

research by geographic areas of the country, which can allow a better and deeper understanding of those institutions and their leaders. Rowley talks about the predominant administrative style of higher education because of its embedding in a given context.

In this section the focus is on a broad description of the situation that surrounds higher education in Mexico as a way of introducing the reader to the context that the participants from this study face every day in their institutions. Many factors influence higher education in Mexico; their actors, their processes, the institutions, and consequently the complexity in how they interact have become objects of study for many scholars (Rodríguez Gómez & Casanova Cardiel, 1994). In order to understand and analyze the current situation of higher education in Mexico, it is necessary to present some demographic, economic, political and social data pertaining to the Mexican context. As a developing country, Mexico experienced many changes during the last decade that still are impacting today's society: (1) economic changes such as the economic crisis in December, 1994; (2) commercial changes such as NAFTA in 1994, and the beginning of negotiations between the European Union and Mexico in November, 1999; (3) political changes such as the emergence of new political parties in the last local, state, and federal elections; (4) and technological changes. Even with all these changes, however, there is no doubt that many traditions, cultural customs, and norms from the past are present in Mexico.

Higher education institutions in Mexico are not indifferent to or untouched by this reality, and one thing is true, that these institutions are no longer the traditional universities that they used to be (Ibarra Colado, 2001b). Rodríguez Gómez (1999), discussing higher education in Mexico, claims "it has developed into a system in which its academic, social, and political functions became highly complex as well as diverse, given the variety of institutional options and professional development schemes" (p.53).

Gil-Antón (2003) describes some of the challenges:

> In the closing decades of the 20th century, Mexico experienced pressures at various levels of society from the need to ensure access to the global parameters of modernization, which frequently involved obtaining credits or financial rescue schemes and meeting the conditions contained in international commercial agreements. These developments have affected public spending and the logic followed for the allocation of fiscal resources. (p.28)

Two notable tendencies are present in these institutions: One is the increasing enrollment of students; two is the insufficiency of governmental funding to support higher education (Martínez Rizo, 2000).

In addition, it is important to understand one of the essential characteristics that differentiate these institutions in Mexico. Following the pattern in most of Latin America, the distinction between public and private higher education is more marked in Mexico than it is in the U.S. In Mexico, public universities are almost exclusively financed by subsidies from state and federal governments, whereas private universities are almost completely funded from private sources (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1995). The issue of public versus private education has its roots during colonization, and it is explained by Schwartzman (1996):

> In colonial times, the only universities on the continent were those organized by the Catholic Church, in close alliance with the Spanish Crown. Political independence, in the early nineteenth century, led to the establishment of secular higher-education institutions, usually based on the Napoleonic model of state-controlled professional "faculties" or schools. (p.123)

The context that Mexico has been facing during the last decades is "a country embarking on an overdue modernization and a society marked by great inequalities and deficits in basic services" (Gil-Antón, 2003, p.30)

Demographic and Economic Context

Demographic and economic data related to social and educational development in Mexico serve as the context to analyze higher education and understand its reality (Cuétara, 2001). According to the 2002 census, the Mexican population exceeds 97 million; it ranks eleventh among countries with the highest world population, and it is considered to be mostly young, with a median age of 15 to 19. The proportion of females in the population is above 50%. Another important piece of data is that the illiteracy rate in Mexico, in 2000, was 9.57% (7.48% male illiteracy vs. 11.48% female illiteracy).

Ireta (2003), based on information from the National Institute of Geography and History, presents a good overview of the economic and demographic context that shapes higher education in Mexico.

> At the time of 2002 census, the population of Mexico was 97.5 millions of whom 33.7 million were economically active. Three regions are the key to the national economy: the central zone, whose pillar is Mexico City, has seven states that contain 33.8 percent of the total population of the country; the west, represented by the city of Guadalajara, consists of four states with 12.0 percent of the population; the northeast, anchored by the city of Monterrey, has three states that make up 9.1 percent of the population. These three regions and their 14 states (out of 32) account for 68.2 percent of the official employment. (p.102)

Higher education student data say that the number of enrollees in Mexican universities was 1,627,340—875,824 of them males and 751,516 females. The great majority of the Mexican population, which is a "young" population, remains outside of the higher educational system. Only 16.64% of Mexicans between 20 and 24 years of age had access to it (INEGI, 2000).

Following the "zones" that Ireta (2003) describes, of the total 1,585,408 students studying for a bachelor's degree, the central zone has 39.3 percent, the west has 10.7 percent, and the northeast has 12.7 percent. Those students studied social sciences (49.8 percent), engineering and technology (32.4 percent) and health sciences (9.0 percent). Those three areas represented 91.2 percent of the bachelor's degree candidates.

That context creates significant but subtle differences in the way we understand the reality of these universities. ANUIES is the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions in Mexico; according to Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior (2003), only 20% of the population between 19 and 23 years attended higher education in the 2000-2001 academic year. These figures are low considering the standards set by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations; however, this compares favorably to the data from a decade before. In 1990, only 12.2% of the population in the 19-23 range was attending school.

According to the statistics of the Secretary of Public Education (SEP), about 68% of students were enrolled in public institutions and 32% in private in 2000. However, there are important differences between levels, for example. In undergraduate education, one could find that 68.6% attended public institutions and 31.4% attended private institutions; in teacher preparation, 60% were studying in public institutions and 40% in private; and in graduate school, 59.4% enrolled in public institutions and 40.6% in private.

As a trend, enrollment in higher education (and other levels) has grown steadily (even during the economic crisis years of the 1980s and 1990s). From 1950 to 2001 the enrollment in higher education (including associate degree, teacher preparation, undergraduate and graduate programs), public and private, grew 72 times (from 29,892 to 2,156, 470 students). One study (Martinez Rizo, 2000) showed that while in 1950 there were only eight private institutions in Mexico, in 1989 there were 327 and in 1999, one could find 873 institutions. The ratio of institutions (public to private) shifted dramatically, from an 80% public—20% private ratio in 1950, to a 43% public to 57% private in 1999, to a 31% public—69%

private ratio in 2002. However, this growth has not been even across public and private subsystems. From 1970 to 1995, private enrollment grew 10 times while enrollment in public institutions grew only 5 times. The biggest force behind this growth is the proliferation of non-university higher education institutions or low profile universities.

Political Context

Historical antecedents to the current political context of higher education in Mexico are described by Schwartzman (1996):

> In the early 1960s, the contrasts between the modernization drives of Latin American societies and the narrowness of their political regimes led to intensified political activism, followed by unprecedented levels of repression. Political repression came from the confrontation of students, and sometimes teachers, activism against the military regimes that emerged more or less at that time in many countries; not forgetting the massacre of students in Mexico City of 1968. (p.121)

The cycles of expansion, repression, and insurrection came to an end and opened the stage to more calm in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Mexico, as in any other country, many activities are undertaken because of politics and political realities. We can identify a specific action program in higher education for each one of the last presidential periods since 1970. Every Presidential period in Mexico (six-year term) produces different programs and activities, including those addressed to education and higher education. ANUIES, even as a non-governmental institution, is capable of being influenced by these presidential periods, for practical reasons such as budgets, planning, and elections.

The year 2000 represented a Presidential change for Mexico, and all those changes began to affect society and its institutions. This was a crucial moment for identifying the senior administrator that the new reality in the country requires.

> The feasibility and sustainability of these deep changes are related to political democratization and wider participation in the political system. The old higher education model was exhausted. The political and social environment has changed so much that the traditional *Partido Revolucionario Institutional* (PRI) lost the recent presidential election after many decades in power. The current administration may deepen educational change. As a matter of fact, the Fox political program does not call for a return to the past, but, rather, increased efforts toward modernization. In this context, it is likely that institutional diversification in higher education will be reinforced at the expense of the old academic models. (De Moura-Castro & Garcia, 2003, p.60)

Social and Cultural Context

In Latin American countries with "expansion of privatization, higher education remained homogeneous horizontally, but became increasingly stratified vertically. Expansion could be expected to lead to different institutions doing different things, responding to varying needs of different people" (Schwartzman, 1996, p.124). This tendency is checked and analyzed by different groups because it can become a way of discrimination by classism, a form of racism.

The literature is clear in its analyses, explaining how horizontal homogeneity has not led to more equality, but to increased stratification. In addition, Schwartzman (1996) explains how the society and the labor market are classifying degrees and schools:

> There is little incentive for less prestigious careers like teaching and technical work, and extremely high rates of failure and frustration in the competition for the most prestigious degrees, now supposedly accessible to all. Where in the past, a secondary-school diploma was an achievement, today anything less that a four-year university degree is a failure. (p. 124)

Because of these situations, society demands more and more higher education institutions. Many Latin American authors support this phenomenon, with the idea that in the end, education supports the development of democracy, the preparation of society, and the economic development for the population (Rosales, 2000).

Research Question

This study proposed to answer the question—What might be the present and future scenarios of public versus private higher education institutions in Mexico according to their leaders' perceptions and projections? The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of trends, constructions, and cultural understandings from current administrators of their own institutions, public and private, where they are living the process of change.

Research Design

The methodology used in this study was primarily exploratory and qualitatively descriptive. The sample consisted of twenty senior administrators from eight Mexican higher education institutions. The researcher visited each of those campuses during three trips between June 2001 and March 2002. Purposive sampling was used to identify senior administrators in Mexican higher education institutions from ANUIES's

directory. Respondents from public and private universities in Mexico were interviewed and asked to suggest other potential respondents, thus creating a loop of purposive "snowball" sampling that identified participants who otherwise might have been overlooked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data came from three sources: interviews with respondents; observation of participants during the interview sessions, likewise prior to and after the meetings; and analyses of records and documents. The human as instrument was used in this study for data collection purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study used an exploratory naturalistic inquiry approach. An exploratory data analysis has been described as a "method for discovering unforeseen or unexpected patterns in the data and consequently [for] gaining new insights and understanding of natural phenomena" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 197). Data collected (interviews, observations, and document reviews) in this study were primarily subjected to qualitative analysis. With a naturalistic paradigm, the design emerges as a result of a continuous data analysis and is determined by the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data, including perceptions, forecasts and constructions, were collected via unstructured interviews. Unstructured, and later semi-structured interviews elicited responses that were most likely to identify the respondent's actual thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences involving higher education in Mexico and their projections. Each interview ended with an informal member check in which the participant was asked to verify, amend, and extend the constructions, reconstruction, and speculations offered. Most interviews lasted an hour and half, although two lasted more than two hours. Interviews were carried out in Spanish. Interview responses were audiotaped, and informed consent was obtained prior to each interview.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), refined later by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and adapted to content analysis, which includes unitizing data, categorization, and identifying patterns. Glaser and Strauss described the constant comparative method as a means for deriving (grounding) theory, not simply a means for processing data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patterns imply recurring regularities in the data, themes that occur frequently enough to suggest a shared reality (one or more). Names of individuals and institutions units were removed from the analyses in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents.

Data analyses interacted with data collection: after the first interview, collected information was used to guide the collection of information from the next respondent. During the development of this study the perceptions and experiences of each participant were crucial in detecting and building

future scenarios that allowed the researcher to organize elements by different criteria. This is why the use of content analysis and constant comparison of the findings were necessary for the study (Holsti, 1969).

A Note about Cultural Translation

The analysis of data and the presentation of the results are a huge endeavor for any researcher who hopes to make certain that the local reader understands and makes sense of the data from foreign or international participants. The process involves a translation, not only of the language, but also and mainly of the culture. Spradley (1980) presents a very clear explanation of this situation:

> A translation discovers the meanings in one culture and communicates them in such a way that people with another cultural tradition can understand them. The ethnographer as translator has a dual task. For one, you must make sense out of the cultural patterns you observe, decoding the messages in cultural behavior, artifacts, and knowledge. Your second task is to communicate the cultural meanings you have discovered to readers who are unfamiliar with that culture or culture scene. (p. 161)

One of the clearest markers for a globalized but decolonized academic research will be the production of scholarly work (including dissertations) which are not univocal, but rather multi-vocal, and which are not English-only, but rather bi- and/or multi-lingual simultaneously (González y González, 2004). For social scientists to reach across cultures and work democratically with local groups, the results of research must be available and accessible, as well as usable, locally and indigenously (González y González & Lincoln, 2005).

Anzaldúa (1987), in her social studies about the Mexico-U.S. border insists on presenting them in Spanish, in English, and in many cases as a mix of both languages. This conveys the social phenomenon of two cultures bordering each other, and invites the reader to understand the "language of the border" where bilingual texts exhibit great power. The influence that language can have in the analysis of data has to be considered, since "the primary function of human language would be to scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and institutions" (Gee, 1999, p. 1). In the present study, the authors had to consider the presence of multiple audiences with different data needs. This situation created the need for the authors to make special arrangements regarding language in order to ensure that audiences would be able to understand the data and ultimately the results of this study.

Results

Having a clearer idea of the current situations that executives face in HE institutions in Mexico and of the future scenarios that they anticipate for their institutions makes it easier to acknowledge differences in the type of executive required by their institutions.

Table 1 provides demographic data collected during campus visits and interviews. For example, in the case of Institution #1, the visited campus is 25 years old; however the institution in Mexico is 60 years old. These institutions are good examples of different kinds of higher education institutions: One of the institutions is the second largest public university in Mexico; four of the institutions are very widely recognized private universities; and the rest of the institutions included in the study are public universities very representative of their regions. It is important to mention that the two big public universities included in the sample are the exception to the rule of all public higher education institutions in Mexico and only cases of institutions supported with federal funds are those that still maintain a huge student population in comparison with the rest of the public institutions. Public and private universities share particular cultural symbols because of their similar contexts, but they also present unique and individualistic features.

The private institutions that participated in this study present a vision of smaller changes in the future, more like a vision to continue the institutions' previous successes. These institutions are very well known in their own States and in the rest of the country. Their authorities, however, are worried about maintaining their institution's recognition via the delivery of different services to the community.

The main campuses of the public universities in the sample are located in their State capitals and they receive financial support from State and Federal funds. Most of the buildings in the public institutions are very similar, because they are generally built with Federal funds and by the same contractor. This physical aspect is one of the common characteristics among public higher education institutions and more so among those that are State universities. The common physical characteristic is not significant, however, in comparison with other common situations that most of these institutions share. One senior administrator commented that living the situation of one public university makes you understand situations that most of the senior administrators face in State universities throughout the country.

Table 2 compares the number and range of academic degrees offered at each institution.

Interviews were conducted with twenty senior administrators in

Table 1.
Demographic Profile of Participating Higher Education Institutions

#	Location of the Institution in Mexico	Type	# Years Old	# Full-Time Faculty	# Part-Time Faculty	# Staff	Under-grad stud.	Grad. stud.
1	Center	Private	25 (60)	85	350	100	1900	250
2	Center	Private	55	220	1200	200	4,500	800
3	Center	Public	65	14,219	N/A	N/A	93,763	5,894
4	Campuses distributed throughout the country	Public	10	5,760	N/A	N/A	144,000	N/A
5	Southeast	Private	18 (63)	270	400	N/A	7,300	700
6	Center	Public	52	400	950	957	8,000	1,600
7	Center	Private	28 (60)	300	150	N/A	4,000	280
8	Northwest	Public	30	470	900	580	9,700	1,500

eight higher education institutions in Mexico. Demographic data for the participants, including age, gender, and educational level are presented in Table 3. Participants were coded in order to identify them with their institutions. The first numeral represents the institution number; the second is the number of the interviewee from that institution. For example, the code of the first participant is 1.1, signifying that he was the first interviewee from the first institution visited in the study. Interviews were carried out in Spanish.

On May 2001, a confirmation of the appointments to do interviews in the first institution was received for the interviews held in June, 2001. During the second data collection trip, four additional institutions were scheduled following the same process as in the first trip. During the last research trip, three more institutions were visited; in this case, limitations in time made it difficult scheduling interviews with more senior administrators in those three institutions, but collection of data through observation techniques completed the data collected from those last three institutions. However, we understand that additional interview data collection would provide an even more complete and richer picture. Of the 20 senior administrators participating in the study, 18 were male and two were female. Their ages ranged from 37 to 80 years. Six of the 20 senior administrators held doctoral degrees, and seven held masters' degrees. Seven participants hold only a bachelor's degree, although some of them are pursuing or intend to pursue a master's degree.

Table 4 compares the participants' positions and length of service.

Table 2.
Number of Degrees and Academic Areas in the Institutions*

	Undergraduate Programs	*Masters Programs*	*Doctoral Programs*
Institution # 1	(16) Business, architecture, engineering, & liberal arts	(6) Business, architecture, engineering, & liberal arts	
Institution # 2	(13) Business, political sciences, economics, engineering, & computer sciences	(12) Business, political sciences, & economics	(1) Economics
Institution # 3	(57) Engineering, Social sciences and administration, & medicine and biology.	(62) Engineering, Social sciences and administration, & medicine and biology.	(25) Engineering, Social sciences and administration, & medicine and biology.
Institution # 4	(24) Electromechanics, business, agroindustrial & food sciences, information technologies, environmental technologies, and chemistry		
Institution # 5	(39) Business, social sciences, sciences, liberal arts, and engineering.	(22) Business, social sciences, sciences, liberal arts, and engineering.	(2) Computer sciences & economics
Institution # 6	(33) Arts, natural sciences, social and political sciences, business area, law school, nurse school, philosophy, computer sciences, engineering, languages, medicine, psychology, & chemistry	(23) Arts, natural sciences, social and political sciences, business area, law school, nurse school, philosophy, computer sciences, engineering, languages, medicine, psychology, & chemistry	(4) Natural sciences, law school, engineering, food sciences
Institution # 7	(20) Architecture, industrial design, computer sciences, electronic engineering, business, agriculture area, food sciences, communications, liberal arts, & mechanical engineering	(17) Business area, engineering and technologies, & education	(1) Educational technologies and innovation (online)
Institution # 8	(44) Agriculture sciences, sciences, biomedicine, design and construction, business, social sciences and liberal arts	(29) Agriculture sciences, sciences, biomedicine, design and construction, business, social sciences and liberal arts	(5) Agriculture sciences, sciences, business, social sciences and liberal arts.

* Space limitations for this paper prevented a broad description of the institutions.

These data include their current position, the level of the position in the institution's organizational structure, the number of years in the institution, and the number of years in their current positions during the interview time.

The number of years the senior administrators have been in their universities ranged from two and a half years to 35 years. The senior administrators from public institutions tended to have greater longevity.

Table 3.
Age, Gender, and Educational Level of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational Level
1.1	45	Male	Masters
1.2	40	Male	Masters
1.3	42	Female	Bach.
2.1	52	Male	Ph.D.
2.2	41	Male	Ph.D.
2.3	40	Male	Ph.D.
3.1	80	Male	Bachelors
3.2	47	Male	Bachelors
3.3	74	Male	Ph.D.
3.4	52	Male	Masters
4.1	Unknown	Male	Ph.D.
5.1	38	Male	Masters
5.2	37	Male	Masters
5.3	40	Male	Masters
5.4	57	Male	Bachelors
6.1	45	Male	Masters
7.1	39	Male	Ph.D.
8.1	45	Female	Bachelors
8.2	56	Male	Bachelors
8.3	53	Male	Bachelors

Their time in their current position, however, ranged from mere days to 10 years. For example, senior administrator 8.3 had 20 years of experience as a senior administrator, and currently is a former senior administrator. His last position, as Dean, lasted three years; prior to that, he served six years as Provost, and before that, 11 years as Director (2nd level position). Many of them held the title of "Director", which can indicate different position levels in the organizational structure of each institution depending on the organization and internal regulation of the university. For instance, readers will find that a senior administrator that held the title of "Director" could occupy the position of provost, chief executive, vice-president, or some other administrative position that can be compared with a senior administrative position in an American university.

In addition to previous reflections about culture and context, it is important to consider that "culture is not a single undifferentiated phenomenon; it varies by socio-economic class, by ethnic community, by region, and even by gender" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 13). Consequently, in addition to quantitative and factual data, the researcher included observations from the senior administrators that represent hallmark characteristics of the participants. These characteristics were not always the

Table 4.
Positions of the Senior Administrators

Participant	Position	Number of Years in the Institution	Number of Years in the Position
1.1	Rector (President)	20	3
1.2	Director General Académico (Provost)	15	3
1.3	Directora del Centro (3rd)	2.5	2.5
2.1	Director División Administrativa (2nd)	9.5	Days
2.2	Director Centro (3rd)	4	1.5
2.3	Director División de Derecho y Econ. (2nd)	8	6
3.1	Srio. Tec. De la Com Des. Curr (Former President)	42	1
3.2	Director General de Coord. De Vinc. (Former, 2nd)	15	4
3.3	Jefe de la Div. De Inter. Acad. (Former, 3rd)	35	2
3.4	Director del Centro (3rd)	30	5 months
4.1	Coordinador General de la UT (System President)	10	10
5.1	Director (3rd)	14	3
5.2	Director (3rd)	14	4
5.3	Director (3rd)	14	10
5.4	Director (3rd)	11.5	9
6.1	Director (2nd)	20	2.1
7.1	Director (2nd)	16	2
8.1	Past Director (2nd)	20	6
8.2	President (Past, former)	28	3
8.3	Past Dean & Former Provost & Former Director (2nd)	29	3

same. Senior administrators from public and private universities share particular cultural symbols because of their similar contexts, but they also present their own peculiarities and characteristics.

Respondents' Perceptions
of the Changing Context of HE in Mexico

The context presents significant but subtle differences in the way we understand the reality of these universities and the senior administrators who run them. An understanding of the cultural, political, social, economic, and technological context of the different types of institutions might make differences clear to the reader. An understanding of the

context of HE in Mexico can help in the analysis, perception, and understanding of the reality behind the data.

Respondents' Perceptions of the Social Context

During the interviews, senior administrators referred to the social context in Mexico, which presents some peculiarities. The senior administrators began explaining how a changing world provokes a changing environment in their communities, and, as a consequence, a demand for a new organizational structure for the HE system in Mexico.

"The importance of preparation is brought to light." *(La importancia de la formación se vá dando mas a la luz)* [30]. "The challenges and the opening up of the world imply a stronger preparation; then we understand the larger worldview is changing." *(Los retos del mundo y la apertura implican una formación muy fuerte, entonces aquí se van cambiando esta percepción)* [32].

"Our social context at a local level is changing, from an exclusively business city, to a city with wider complexity, with more cultural development." *(Nuestro contexto social a nivel local va cambiando, de una ciudad netamente de negocios, va creciendo a tener más formación, mas desarrollo cultural)* [27]. But one also noted that higher education's development had not grown apace with the cultural complexity: "The deficit of education that we have as a nation demands an impressive effort in higher education." *(El déficit de escolaridad que tenemos como país, reclama un esfuerzo impresionante en educación superior)* [309].

Private senior administrators also looked at the social context and realized the lack of value and recognition that society holds regarding different higher education institutions. This opinion was a common point among public and private senior administrators. When they refer to the proliferation of entrepreneur (for-profit) institutions, they believe society has not yet realized the lack of quality offered by those entrepreneur institutions and the difference between those and the education provided by recognized private and public institutions such as theirs. They also believed that they have made many efforts to improve their institutions and keep improving the education that they offer, and sometimes society does not realize this either. They commented that:

"In some ways, the education market in Mexico is not giving value to a solid education, as they should." *(De alguna forma el mercado de educación en México, no está valorando una educación sólida, todo lo que debería)* [554]. "In the United States, a stronger social value and recognition is given to someone who graduated from a recognized school. The labor market recognizes it as well." *(En Estados Unidos, se dá un valor*

social muy fuerte en sueldo y reconocimiento a alguien que es egresado de una escuela dura, el mercado de trabajo lo reconoce suficientemente) [556]. The president speaking here held an extremely sophisticated comprehension of the "brand name marketing" of high-prestige, high-profile institutions in the U.S. To some extent, he regretted the inability to market his own institution as one of these labor market preferences.

In addition to the problem of the proliferation of entrepreneur institutions in which the quality of the education that they offer is questioned by the interviewees, some public senior administrators also addressed the social problems of higher education. "Higher education is getting selective and the number rejected is growing." *(La educación superior se está volviendo selectiva y el número de excluidos va aumentando)* [786]. The National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education in Mexico (ANUIES) estimated in 1999 that the number of students demanding higher education in Mexico in 2020 will reach five million, but that only 50% of this demand will be met. The estimate for 2006 is for 30% coverage of the demand, and the actual percentage of demand met in 1999 was 18% (Martínez Rizo, 2000). These data illustrate the deficiency in higher education capacity that results in a high rejection rate. It is important to point out that even with the questionable offerings of entrepreneur institutions, the problem still exists.

One of the proposed solutions by one of the interviewees is the option that Technologic Universities provide. One senior administrator from this institution explained that these institutions offer options that students not only are looking for, but also that business and industry are requiring. Such institutions increase job opportunities for students after graduation.

> Two-year programs are thus a relatively recent and daring innovation, contrasting sharply with traditional Mexican higher education. The number of students increased to more than 29,000 by 2000, and the number was projected to increase to 37,750 the following year. The model of Mexico's technological universities is the U.S. community college; the idea behind the schools is to diversify institutionally and provide quick job access, contributing to local business development. The institutions are public, decentralized and linked to state government through agreements with the central government. (De Moura-Castro & Garcia, 2003, p. 59-60)

Other interviewees focused more on the peculiarities of the social context, including a sense of changing environment at the Federal and local levels. One of the reasons for this is a social movement, which had its origins in the political movement around the country; another reason is a consequence of a changing world. Some of their opinions that illustrate the previous statements are:

"In Mexico, people feel more confident; they feel that they can make decisions. We feel democratic, and this is very valuable. It is a different Mexico; then taking this as a starting point, educational purposes and focus also have to change." *(En México, la gente se siente con mucha mas confianza, se siente que puede tomar decisiones, nos sentimos democráticos, eso es muy valioso. Es un México distinto, que partiendo de esta base, tambien tienen que cambiar los enfoques y propósitos educativos)* [1059]. With the request for change expressed during the last Federal and local elections around the nation, Mexican society is demanding changes today. "The social environment is favorable toward making substantive changes in the Mexican educational system." *(El entorno social es muy favorable para que haya cambios sustantivos en el sistema educativo mexicano)* [1063]*.*

In the context of the propitiousness of the social environment is the emerging responsibility that the university has to society. Higher education senior administrators expressed that their institutions, by "cooperating in the solution of social global problems is contributing to the change in education." *(Cooperar en la solución de los problemas sociales globales está contribuyendo al cambio de la educación)* [827]*.*

Now, because of this shifting context, senior administrators expressed the need to be better prepared. "I notice senior administrators with much more interest in becoming more current and better prepared, understanding that we are in a more competitive environment." *(Yo noto directivos con mucha mas inquietud para actualizarse y prepararse mejor, entendiendo que estamos en un entorno mucho mas competido)* [1064]*.*

Respondents' Perceptions of the Political Context

Part of the political context is political appointments, which influence the nomination and appointment of many senior administrators in public institutions. Frequently these appointments are made without consideration for administrative or higher education experience. Consequently, what happens in the political context many times affects profoundly what happens in the universities, especially in public institutions. One senior administrator alluded to this situation when he said: "These positions are very political in many respects." *(Estos puestos son muy políticos en muchos aspectos)* [162]*.*

Because of these political appointments, one public senior administrator explained the need for professionalism: "Our senior administrators are traditionally designated by the President or the Governor, and the appointed men are not always the better trained to accomplish the important function of managing an institution of this nature." *(Nuestros*

directores han sido tradicionalmente designados toda la vida por el Presidente o el Gobernador, y no necesariamente se designa al hombre que está mejor capacitado para cumplir una función tan importante como es el dirigir una institución de estas características) [1098]. It is important to mention that this situation changed in many public institutions once they became more autonomous; but as was mentioned previously, the ties between the government and the university administration still persist, mainly because of the financial dependency of the university. This is a striking difference between U.S. and Mexican public institutions, since in the U.S., senior academic officials are hired by Boards, and/or senior executives. Senior administrators from private institutions, on the other hand, usually tend to be those with administrative, business, or corporate experience in management.

Respondents' Perceptions of the Economic Context

In a developing country such as Mexico, discussion of the economic context can affect how any aspect of the country is analyzed. Higher education is no exception. The following comments from interviewees advance an understanding of how the economic context affects higher education in Mexico:

"The challenges are enormously demanding, and we do not have the capacity to respond because of the economic situation." (*Los retos nos están demandando grandemente y no necesariamente tenemos la capacidad de respuesta por la misma situación económica)* [51]. The demand for higher education is growing rapidly but the budget that government assigns has decreased, leaving the institutions with an enormous and increasing need for resources.

"On the economic side, we have large deficits; with a population in a strong poverty situation; this is a challenge for all of us, how to make this situation turn around." *(En lo económico con grandes deficiencias, con una población en pobreza muy fuerte, es un reto para todos nosotros, como revertir esta situación)* [43]. It is however, not only the public sector which is affected: "Because of the [more general] economic growth, the private education sector has not grown as fast as we had hoped." *(Debido al crecimiento económico, la educación privada no ha crecido en una forma tan rápida como era de esperarse)* [546].

"Maybe because of the increase of poverty, student attrition is growing." *(Quizás por el avance de la pobreza, la decersión está aumentando)* [791]. Students abandon college not only because of the cost of school, but also because they have to go to work and help support their families. The economic situation seems both to contribute to the current difficulty of

higher education in Mexico and to suggest part of the solution to the problem. "It is becoming clear that education is the way to continue with the development of the country." *(Se está viendo que sólo con educación es uno de los puntos de poder seguir adelante con el desarrollo del país)* [1303].

Respondents' Perceptions of the Technological Context

Technology in higher education has different implications: (a) how faculties teach and how students learn; and (b) how institutions react to adopting new technologies, not only for academic functions, but also for administration. The interaction between these two very different functions is demonstrated in the following respondents' comments:

"Technological development is ruling the market, and consequently education." *(El desarrollo tecnológico esta mandando al mercado y consecuentemente a la educación)* [75]. "Technological elements are affecting the situation of having a better administration." *(Los elementos tecnológicos estan afectando la situación de tener una mejor administración)* [45]. Senior administrators from public and private institutions recognize technology as a part of their institutions that has come to stay, and as a result they see a need for professional development in the skills that make them get prepared to work with the changing technology.

Senior administrators are sure that technological changes affect and will affect higher education institutions and ultimately how they will perform their roles, but the impact of these changes is still not very clear for them. "The technological revolution still has unknown impacts…" *(*Toda la revolución tecnológica tiene impactos todavía desconocidos…*)* [550]. "We still do not know well the implications that it is going to have; it is a new paradigm to learn and we are just kind of waiting…" *(todavía no sabemos bien que implicaciones va a tener, es una nueva forma de aprender y estamos un tanto a la expectativa…)* [551], "[Technological changes]… all this is a motive to study." *(todo esto es motivo de estudio)* [810].

Data from the responses of private senior administrators were analyzed separately from the responses of public senior administrators. HE senior administrators in private institutions did not delve very deeply into the discussion of social transformation and change. They emphasized strongly that they already started working in the direction that they need, and that they do not really need to change the present situation in their institutions. Instead they will likely continue the processes already initiated.

On the other hand, in public institutions the senior administrators interviewed do believe they need to change. They talked about the challenges that they face. Among those challenges is considered the slow

dynamic or pace of change. Many public senior administrators recognized that they are in a transition period where resistance is strong, although incremental change is beginning to occur.

There is a consensus between public and private senior administrators about whether the senior administrators in their institutions are prepared to change. They both agreed that they are not, or at least not fully prepared, but they also insisted that in their institutions, a concern to reverse this situation is in place, and many measures have been put into practice. For higher education senior administrators, adaptation is the result of an implementation of change. In general, there is consensus among the participants in this study that they do not feel fully prepared to change, even when they recognized the importance of it.

Most of the answers concerning an adaptation process were related to the idea of adapting as a response to the situations that surround and consequently affect the institution. Besides that, adaptation was barely addressed by the respondents, except for the times when it was considered to be the consequence of change. The senior administrators expressed their willingness to adapt, even if they are not fully prepared, or even if they do not know what changes will be demanded of them.

Present Perceptions of Private and Public Higher Education Institutions

Private Higher Education Institutions

◆ *The Institution*

The interviews yielded extensive, detailed data about the perceptions that private senior administrators hold concerning the present circumstances of private higher education. Private senior administrators described their institutions as small institutions that make possible high levels of interaction where everybody knows everybody else. They consider their institutions "young" institutions with a "young" faculty population. In addition, they understand that their institutions are involved in a very competitive environment, which has promoted institutional change. One of these institutional changes is the way they conceive their institutions:

"To have a research university rather than just a teaching one, is precisely the idea of offering a complete academic project. It is not just necessary to have faculty well prepared as very good teachers; more than that, we need to have faculty on the cutting edge of knowledge." (*Tener una universidad de investigación más que de docencia, es precisamente con la idea de poder ofrecer un proyecto académico redondo para este tipo*

de formación, donde no vasta tener en la facultad gente que esté bien preparada y que sea buenos docentes, sino más bien necesitamos tener a la facultad en la frontera de los conocimientos) [702].

◆ *Their Faculty*

In these institutions, phenomena like hiring faculty from outside of the country, having senior administrators (including the president) teaching, and searching for chief senior administrators (including the president) from outside the institution, are the result of the institutional change already taking place in the private higher education institutions that participated in this study.

◆ *Their Administration*

When they talked about their administrations, one of them pointed out how independently they manage their campuses in relation to the rest of the campuses in the system, which makes it easier from an administrative and decision making point of view. Senior administrators from private institutions see their institutions thus: "We have a clear, simple, and fundamental strategy… this is what we do, we try to do it the best, and that is all." (*Tenemos una estrategia clara, sencilla, fundamental… esto es lo que hacemos, tratamos de hacer lo mejor que podemos y se acabo*) [611]. They consider their institutions not at all bureaucratic.

◆ *Their Students*

Half the private participants talked about their institution's concern for an integrated and high-quality development of their students. They talked about preparing students not only as professionals, but also as persons. These institutions look for personalized preparation of the student, including extracurricular participation in sports, the arts, and the like where those institutions provide resources like sports scholarships, and financial support. One of the private senior administrators mentioned that they are looking for the student and his/her family to view the university as their home. In private institutions, programs that emphasize the presence of former students (alumni) are very important.

◆ *Education*

They described the education that they provide as very solid because the majority of their faculty come from American universities, most with master's degrees, and many with doctoral degrees. One private senior administrator commented: "What we understand about education is that we need to continue offering a very formal, rigorous, and demanding preparation." (*Lo que nosotros entendemos por una educación, es seguir ofreciendo una preparación muy formal, muy rigurosa, muy exigente*) [701]. One senior administrator reported his institution's faculty com-

position by degree level as 35% doctoral, 55% masters, and 10% baccalaureate. Because they are in areas like the arts, baccalaureate degree holders must show many years of experience rather than formal education.

◆ *Outside of Their Institutions*

Their perception of the external context of the university was that, on the one hand, they are surrounded by a demanding society, with expressed needs that are brought to them in order to find solutions. On the other hand, they felt that society still does not recognize how "good" their institutions are. An important element of these institutions is the commitment that they have to their communities. They mentioned activities geared toward their local communities such as legal support, municipal projects, literacy projects, and support to industry in specific projects where they have identified needs.

◆ *Their Public Peers' Opinion*

Senior administrators from public institutions recognized that the well known private higher education institutions in Mexico are growing, but at the same time, they expressed their concern about the academic quality of those private institutions that are just emerging: "But look at those institutions that nobody knows. There are many, and they have a great market but with doubtful, very doubtful, academic quality." (*Pero "hechale una mirada" a las instituciones que "en su casa las conocen" y si las sumas, te "vas para atrás" del crecimiento de mercado que están atendiendo con una dudosa, muy dudosa calidad académica*) [872]. This concern is shared also by senior administrators of well-known private institutions. One of them mentioned, for example, that "in our State, there are 130 institutions of higher education, but only six are worth it" [1436].

Public Higher Education Institutions

◆ *Their Institutions*

When senior administrators from public institutions expressed opinions about the present condition of their institutions, they concurred when they discussed the problems, barriers, and challenges that they face. In addition, they agreed about the enormous <u>efforts</u> that their institutions have made and continue to make in order to overcome these situations: efforts to create interdisciplinary programs, new technologies such as distance education, efforts to keep them in force, and overcoming a campaign of discredit. Despite these barriers, they see the role of public higher education as very important for today and the future.

They have worked hard to implement changes for their institutions, but it has not been easy. Positive and negative issues faced by their senior

administrators in order to implement institutional reform were described by one of them:

"—Changes—were accomplished in a context of much difficulty, of very hard political opposition. Then, there were very difficult moments, the response to attacks, etc. And there were very interesting moments, of accomplishing things, of seeing things happen." (—*Cambios— se hicieron, en un contexto de mucha dificultad, de una oposición política, muy fuerte. Entonces hubo momentos que fueron muy difíciles, el tratamiento de ataques, etc. Y hubo momentos muy interesantes, de terminar cosas, de ver que se dieran cosas*) [1889].

◆ *Political Liaisons*

Perceptions that public executives have concerning the present circumstances of their higher education institutions were also in this case very extensive and detailed. The word "politics" often arose in reference to public institutions. Senior administrators of public institutions explain the association between these entities—between politics and higher education—sometimes as positive, but many times as negative. In this aspect, private senior administrators often expressed an opinion similar to that of the public senior administrators.

One public senior administrator made the following comment: "—The institution—preserves some aspects of its established origins, one of which is to have a very strong link in order to support the Government in the development of the country." *(—La institución—conserva algo de lo establecido en sus orígenes, el tener una liga muy fuerte de apoyo al Gobierno, para apoyar el desarrollo del país*) [819]. The same senior administrator, however, also said, "I believe that it must be modified –the 'Organic Law'. Obviously for this to happen there are political risks. But a study of the change and of the strategies must be made in order to make it happen." (*Yo si creo, que se debe modificar—la Ley Orgánica—, obviamente para esto hay los riesgos políticos, se tiene que hacer el estudio del cambio, y las estratégias para llevarlo a cabo*) [823]. Public senior administrators insisted on change, partly to give them have the freedom to respond faster to social problems.

Variations in public higher education such as the technologic universities are clear government initiatives to find solutions to problems that higher education faces in Mexico. The authorities of these institutions are satisfied with the actions of the government in this sense. One of the senior administrators believed: "What higher education in Mexico is today—is due to the policies of the different regimes, and actually those policies are followed for the present government." (*México lo que es hoy –en educación superior—, es gracias a las políticas de los diferentes*

régimenes, y actualmente esas políticas se han continuado por el actual gobierno) [1173].

◆ *Outside of Their Institutions*

Another concept that repeatedly appears associated with public universities is that of "service" and their responsibility to the broader society. Public senior administrators stressed this aspect of the mission of their institutions through different activities. Among those actions is the support that the institution provides to small business through services such as consulting. This is one of the present concerns for their institutions. One of the public senior administrators in charge of a center commented:

"We are looking to be a liaison body, because we try to provide service, because we want to connect better with the society, with the environment that we have, and overall with this liaison we expect to serve our institution in order to improve it." (*Buscamos ser un ente vinculador, tratamos de dar servicio, pues nos tenemos que vincular mejor con la sociedad, con el entorno que tenemos, y sobretodo poder servirle a nuestra institución para que mejore*) [1025].

◆ *Their Private Peers' Opinion*

Some private institution senior administrators expressed their opinions with respect to public institutions. One comment addressed the deteriorating image of the public university because of the problems they have faced. However, public senior administrators are optimistic and see a better future based on recent achievements. Among those are greater effectiveness, administrative changes, a reduction of authoritarianism, and in general, more transparency in their decision making.

The words of one of the public senior administrators illustrated how they see their institutions today:

> The university has an important function, the historic function of orienting the causes of knowledge on behalf of society, diminishing as much as possible the inequity margins. If we can put it in just one word, it is the challenge of having both equity and sustained development. The university has to assure equal conditions of access to different people; this is a demand of time. We need to open its doors to sectors with fewer possibilities and resources." (*La universidad tiene la gran función, si hablamos de una función histórica, de orientar las causas en beneficio tanto del conocimiento como de la sociedad, reducir en lo posible los grandes márgenes de inequidad. Si lo pudieramos resumir en una palabra, es el reto de la equidad y el desarrollo sustentable. La universidad debe asegurar condiciones iguales de acceso a gente desigual, eso es una convicción de tiempo. Abrir sus puertas a sectores con menores posibilidades y recursos*) [1687].

This commitment embodies the very real sense of altruism which has

begun to pervade institutions, as they see their future linked with a new era for Mexico.

Future Scenarios of Higher Education Institutions

Private Higher Education Institutions

The future scenarios for private universities were also well described by the participants from these institutions. Most of the future scenarios that senior administrators mentioned are also current challenges for their institutions. They want to make their institutions academically stronger, institutions of vanguard stature and prestige, but they anticipated that their institutions would stay roughly the same size. With regard to their student population, they expect to attract the best students from Mexico and from other countries; in the same sense, they want to be a real option for the larger society, which has not been possible because of the cost of tuition. They envision the inclusion of innovative teaching technologies, including distance education. In addition, they see their institutions taking care of local problems, touching the reality of their communities, and being totally adaptable to changes. They anticipated an increase in interdisciplinary areas of teaching and research, becoming very research oriented, and being increasingly service oriented.

Public Higher Education Institutions

Public senior administrators do not see their institutions growing in the future. On the contrary, they want to make them smaller in order to diminish the problems inherent in large institutions. They anticipated evaluations of their institutions by national authorities, then likewise by international entities. They foresee many changes in their institutions; they envision, over time, very different institutions emerging.

In anticipating future scenarios for their institutions, they envision the implementation of different strategies, e.g., universities taking more care of their former students (alumni), and maintaining contact with them in order to receive feedback through them from society. In addition, they contemplate a closer connection with the productive sector and attending to the country's needs and requirements. Senior administrators from public institutions recognized the challenge that they have in regard to the social responsibility they acknowledge.

They look for strategies for creating more flexible and interdisciplinary programs, and utilizing innovative technologies. One senior administrator concluded: "I think we have all the ingredients in order to have in 10 years a very good public higher education."[2020]

Data regarding the present and future perceptions of both types of institutions have been examined. Differences between them are easier to identify, and it becomes easier to understand why the type of senior administrator required in each type of institution differs. Senior administrators from both types of institutions emphasized additional areas to which they have been started to be attentive, and where they have specific goals and plans.

Challenges for Higher Education in Mexico

During the interviews, most of the senior administrators from public and private institutions discussed the challenges that their institutions face. Private senior administrators focused on their concern for opening different options to the student. Quality is one of the biggest concerns among private senior administrators. They detect a growth in the private higher education offerings, but not at the level of quality desired within their institutions. Private senior administrators discussed competencies being developed from new options in the country and from foreign institutions, sometimes through distance education. Senior administrators from private institutions believed that their institutions are doing their job, but society still has not recognized the value of their academic preparation. Nevertheless, with further analyses, they may find other challenges that the institutions face. One of those challenges is the lack of efficient and timely answers to society's demands.

Public senior administrators expressed concerns for their institutions' ability to address social-problems. As one senior administrator explained:

> The institutions of higher education should be models for the development of the country, where development implies the social dimension, the growth, and the solution to social problems." *(Las instituciones de educación superior deberían ser modelos para el desarrollo del país, donde el desarrollo implica el aspecto social, el crecimiento, la solución de los problemas sociales.)* [828]

Public and private senior administrators mentioned throughout the interviews the challenges that higher education in Mexico faces in general, in a national context. Many of the comments focused on the need for resources, and for a different legal framework for the institutions, one that permits evaluation, as well as diversification in funding. This response illustrates many of their ideas:

> —The challenges of higher education in Mexico include—(1) demographic changes and the concentration of the demand for higher levels of education; (2) the inability to attend to the demand; (3) the response time in the school under the conventional model is very slow and it is not

possible to respond in a timely manner to the impact of the technology revolution." *(—Los retos de la educación superior en Mexico incluyen— (1) La tendencia demográfica y de concentración de matrícula en los niveles superiores, (2) la incapacidad para poder atender como lo requiere la demanda, (3) el tiempo de respuesta de la escuela bajo el modelo convencional es tan lento que no alcanza a responder al impacto de las revoluciones tecnológicas).* [1620]

Consequently, they believe there is a need for higher education senior administrators with new characteristics, executives who are constantly attentive to what is happening inside and outside of their institutions. As one senior administrator put it:

Nowadays we are asked to be many things. We have to be visionaries, intelligent, winners, experts in education, and many additional things in order to carry out our roles; in addition, there is the dynamic of change. As a result, we are going to have the challenge of how to create the senior administrator for the new scenarios" *(Ahora nos piden que seamos muchas cosas, que seamos previsores, inteligentes, ganadores, expertos en educacion, y que seamos muchas cosas adicionalmente para atender [este rol]; sumado a esta dinámica de cambio. Entonces si va haber el reto de como formar al directivo para los nuevos escenarios.)* [422]

Additionally, the interviewees referred to the need for an administrator with a broad understanding of the national situation, and knowledge of the government's educational initiatives, having therefore the elements to make changes in their own institutions.

They also suggested that the universities themselves become objects of study, in order to produce concrete proposals to address those needs. While they anticipated a need for change in some organizational structures of their institutions, they also recognized resistance to such changes.

Once senior administrators start considering the competencies that they may need in order to carry out their responsibilities, they may wonder: What is the next step? What do we do now? No specific interview question addressed this issue; however, through the data analysis some suggestions did emerge.

The identification of future competencies illustrates the idea of a professional with these characteristics, understanding subsequently that such an individidual can only be developed by professionalizing higher education senior administrators. All the participants, public and private, concurred with the idea of professionalizing their roles. But, senior administrators from both public and private institutions identified barriers inside of their institutions to carrying out the idea of professionalizing their positions.

Private senior administrators did not identify many barriers. Among

the few, they see the lack of formal development programs, and how they have prepared themselves only via practice (usually private sector or corporate). In public institutions, barriers that were mentioned include the large size of the institutions that make it difficult to implement any change; second, is a previous inefficient administration that new administrators must deal with when they assume senior administrator positions. One public senior administrator described the need for teams, where their members enhance the groups with different skills, abilities, and qualities. Finally, some of the attitudes in public education toward the professionalism of their senior administrators encompass the lack of conviction and motivation for this effort.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study presents one of the most salient issues in the emergent field of globalization studies: how higher education can meet the challenge of tremendous change. Getting closer to the opinions of Mexican HE leaders helped to understand the present situation of public and private HE in Mexico, to anticipate their futures, and to appreciate the complexity of higher education in many developing countries with similar systems.

Policy Implications

One of the differences between public and private universities are the policies that every type of institution follows, in aspects such as research funding, and general funding. Policies for accreditation are also different. In many cases, private institutions possess more flexibility vis-a-vis authorization to work, to open programs, and to give diplomas more easily than public institutions, which are closely supervised by the Secretary of Education.

The current situation that public and private Mexican universities face has strong policy implications for the federal government in higher education issues; similar to this situation is the one that the United States faced in the late 50's with a critical need for higher education admissions. At that time the U.S. situation demanded a strong policy reform. A similar situation can be anticipated during the rest of this decade with the end and beginning of federal administrations in Mexico.

Increasing Student Demand

Leaders of private and public universities look at themselves in very different ways. They recognize their needs and goals as particular to their own institutions. Because of the specific context of each institution, it is

important to evaluate first the present situation with all its unique elements, then to create potential future scenarios, based on solid analysis and planning, for then the scenarios can be more accurate, and have a higher probability of success.

Leaders of private and public higher education institutions agreed regarding the need to address of the increasing demands that they will face in the near future, without forgetting to monitor the quality of education. Both agree that this last aspect has been overlooked in some cases for both private and public institutions because of the overwhelming demands.

Private senior administrators expressed concern about the current situation of HE in Mexico:

> At some point, there are expectations that are not going to be fulfilled. There are expectations regarding job offers after graduation, but the reality is otherwise." (*En algunos puntos se pueden generar expectativas que no se van a cumplir. Expectativas de que cuando salgas tienes un empleo, cuando la realidad es otra.*) [1305]

> There is a strong pressure stemming from a larger demand than the one that has been traditionally had. This is because of the change in the demographic profile of the population, but also because of the changes that have happened in the lower levels in the education system." (*Hay una presión muy fuerte de demanda mayor que la que se había tenido tradicionalmente y esto es por un lado por el cambio del perfil demográfico de la población, pero por otro por los cambios que ha habido en los niveles inferiores del sistema educativo.*) [1890]

During the 70s and 80s, Mexico experienced strong growth in some demographic categories. The growth rate decreased during the following decades, and as a result of this plus the efforts of the Government to cover the educational needs of elementary education in most of the country, the population currently in educational need is the one ready to go to college. This is one of the current pressures that higher education in Mexico is facing. One senior administrator concludes: "And what society requires more is a spectrum that goes from technicians to post-docs. It is not enough to have bachelors. This is a very strong change." (*Y lo que requiere cada vez mas la sociedad, es toda una gama que va desde técnicos medios, técnicos superiores, hasta post-docs. Ya no basta sacar la licenciatura. Esto es un cambio muy fuerte*) [1891].

Quality of Education

Private senior administrators referred to a lack of quality and a lack of regulations in some private institutions. Some of their comments on

these issues are: "Some years ago, licenses were given the right to open universities without control… where the academic level was not as good as could be… generating in some ways more unemployment." (*Hace unos años se dieron licencias para abrir universidades a "ton y son". Donde el nivel académico deja mucho que desear… generando de una forma mas desempleo*) [1308].

The private interviewees felt that their institutions are giving options to the student population. "But we in higher education institutions, we are really giving alternatives." (*Pero nosotros como educación superior, estamos dando realmente alternativas*) [1435]. "From 120 to 130 universities, I tell you; between 5 to 6 are the only ones who are worth it." (*De 120 a 130 universidades, te digo, entre 5 a 6 son las que valemos la pena*) [1439].

Regional Development

Public senior administrators seem even less optimistic about their own institutions. They see problems concerning the way regions are developed, and the consequent increase in the demand for educational spaces, not just in number but also in the number of fields (majors and specializations) and levels. They explained the situation this way:

"The knowledge is regionalized; it will not exist in general while regions are being taken care of in different ways." (*Hay una regionalización del conocimiento, no hay tal sociedad del conocimiento, mientras se atienden de manera diferenciada las regiones*) [1628]. The educational needs from the North of Mexico to the South has been attended to in different ways. The States of Chiapas and Oaxaca for example, are still far below the average for the rest of the country and their educational needs are still not met (Martinez Rizo, 2003). In order not to impose one way of doing things on the whole country, it is needed to devolve the development of education largely on to the regional or state level, because what may be suitable in the center of the country may not be appropriate in Chiapas or Monterrey (Gil-Antón, 2003).

Change and Adaptation

Both types of leaders identified the importance of their roles in the process of change and adaptation of their institutions. In the case of private university leaders, they believe that they have already started their involvement in this process. Public university leaders believe that they face more difficult situations in their institutions in order to adapt and change. Even though they recognize the need for change and adaptation, the present situations that public university leaders face do

not help them in this challenge; however, public executives are optimistic and see a better future based in the achievements that they are having in the present.

Looking to the Future

The literature, the participants, and the researchers end up concluding that the problems of the university will start getting solved when the vital problems of Mexico start being faced (Silva-Herzog, 1999). The study of Mexican higher education institutions, public as well as private systems, serves to illuminate how their own differences affect the way difficult situations in those institutions are faced. It will be definitive to take advantage of the political changes in Mexico and to establish a popular consensus on the role of higher education in the future of the country (Gil-Antón, 2003).

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