

EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

THE GLOBALISATION PROCESS AND THE UNIVERSITIES

OLD PROBLEMS AND NEW CHALLENGES

Introduction

Globalisation has become a catchword in the world of the outgoing 20th century. It is used extensively in the vocabulary of political leaders and businessmen, academics and journalists, but first and foremost, the people, working in and managing of the international organizations. In a way, there are certain similarities also in this context to the later parts of the 19th, and to the beginnings of the 20th century in the dilemmas about the world.

There are many new opportunities offered by the opening up of many economies, for global investments, trade and migration. There is also an increasing concern about an other "external" source of problems, related to globalisation.

Globalisation has always been a multidimensional process and it has developed in a highly unequal way throughout the 20th century, with important setbacks. In the world of the 1990s globalisation is developing at an uneven intensity in technology, economics, finance, trade and culture. The conflicts within the system not only retarded its progress, but reversed the process, as for example between the two world wars. The question, whether the globalisation and the integration of the global economy did reach or not the pre-1914 level in a number of areas, like for example in the openness of frontiers. Is not the right one to pose. The process must be related to the environment of the 1990s and not to the 1890s. The specific interests attached to globalisation also changed. From among the different dimensions and factors of globalisation, education has been playing a multiple role in the process. The increase of the educational sector has become a global trend itself, and the spread of knowledge and skills served as a crucial condition of globalisation in all its dimensions.

Regardless of the political ideologies and systemic factors, education is considered by people and governments as an essential element of human progress, economic and social development and international competitiveness. The countries of the world were spending about 4.8 per cent of the global GDP on education in the early 1990, about 1100–1200 billion US dollars, in current prices. It was 4.9 per cent in the developed and 3.9 per cent in the developing countries. The global volume spent on education, was however not too large, compared for example with spending on defense. It was somewhat higher than the proportion of the global military expenditure (globally 3.4 per cent, 3.4 in the industrial and 3.5 in the developing countries).¹

The general global interest in education is motivated by a number of factors

- A) Development is first of all a knowledge based process. Knowledge involves experience and learning and a definitive degree of awareness and consciousness.
- B) Education and knowledge are key conditions of the level of gainful employment which can be achieved by individuals. The labour market, which is evaluating the level of knowl-

1 UNDP: World Development Report. 1994. Table 15, 21. New York, 1994.

edge is a central part of national life. Gainful employment is an instrument for participation and education is a part of empowerment for gainful employment in the modern sectors of any economy.

- C) Modern production and services have an increasing knowledge content and international competition is more and more knowledge based.
- D) The development of education has been also a symbol of political prestige for many countries, especially higher education.

Due to its place and role in the different societies, education is exposed to the influence of most of the major demographic, political, social and economic changes within the countries and in the global system. The different general and specific changes in the societies, which are influencing the importance, the character and the functioning of the educational system are related either to the system as a whole, or to some specific aspects of it. Some of the problems can be related to the participation in the educational process on different levels: enrollment and dropout rates, the degree of access of the population to higher quality educational institutions. Other problems are related more to the harmonization of the educational system with the social changes (family, migration, urbanization) and also with the changing socio-economic needs of the modernization and transformation processes. There are changes which are related to the utilization of skills, provided by the educational system, to the qualitative improvement and the adjustment or adaptation to the new needs, to the capabilities and readiness of the given countries to finance the growing needs of the sector.

The main purpose of my introduction to the workshop is to deal with some of the main global challenges for the universities and with the role of these institutions in the globalisation process.

It has been generally recognised, that the different global changes influence much more strongly the universities, because of the international interconnectedness of science and technology, and the role of the universities in the training of specialists, the adaptation of the countries to the changes and the generation of new knowledge. The universities, much more, and much faster, than other educational institutions, are channeling the outcome of the globalisation processes into national cultures.

I share the views of the director general of UNESCO: "The universities are much more than centers of higher education: they represent the most qualified watchtower at the national level to ensure that the knowledge and lessons learned from the past will be applied for a better and freer future throughout the world"² but I would also add, that they play a crucial role in the process of globalisation.

Some lessons from past centuries

While Plato had established his academy in 388 B.C. and Aristotle the lyceum in 335 B.C. a Persian king, Husraw Anusirwan founded a medical school and other university type institutions in Gundi Sapur, East Persia around 530 A.D. and in Africa, evidence of the existence of universities dates back to A.D 965 (Fes, Morocco) and 972 (Al Azhar in Cairo) basically for Islamic studies.

² Dr. Frederico Mayor, Director General of Unesco. *Universality, Diversity, Interdependence: The Missions of the University in Higher Education and Society*. Opening speech at the Ninth General Conference of the International Association of Universities. Helsinki, 5 August, 1990.

The ancestors of the modern universities emerged in the medieval Europe and during their history. They had to adjust to the changing needs, problems, and values of the society. For centuries, those changes were slow and limited.

The European university system was born in the medieval Europe as a self constituted community of teachers or scholars. The meaning of the word "universitas" in that period was community. When it was employed in connection with education usually two additional words were added "magistrorum et scholarium".

In certain countries universities celebrated their 900 years anniversaries in this century. Italy, France, Spain, England and Scotland had Several Universities with a history of 6-700 years. In central and eastern Europe the first universities, Prague, Krakow, Vienna, Pecs, Buda etc. received their charters in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The medieval universities were in general conservative institutions within the framework of a commonly shared intellectual world: a common latin language and the catholic faith. They were originally created to educate an elite for the church and the state. They put strong premium on theory and "pure science" even to the extent of complete irrelevance. The great reformers were working in most cases far from the universities.

The curricula was dominated in the medieval universities by theology. Philosophy was playing a crucial role. Most of the universities grew and extended their curricula from those foundations. The separation of philosophy from theology was a major step in that direction.

The "international" character of education has been the consequence of the fact, that universities developed in a few centres of the medieval Europe. The migration of scholars and students in the medieval universities was more a rule than an exception. At the universities of Bologna and Paris for example, foreigners constituted the majority of the student body. International education was playing a key role in the dissemination of knowledge and also in the spread of the universities.

The major ideological trends especially the reformation and to a lesser extent the counter-reformation were considered as milestones in the development of the universities. They were the centers of the major ideological struggles of the given eras. The modern age for centuries could not change the elitist conservative character of the universities. After the industrial revolution, the development of the universities has been increasingly influenced by three factors: the progress and differentiation of sciences, the changing needs of the societies and the abilities of the given communities to sustain the institutions financially.

In most cases similarly to the early stages there were strong relations with the churches at the same time the development of scientific foundations resulted in also early confrontation with the churches. Some universities became important centers in the development and secularism and the scientific thinking (Leiden, Gottingen, Oxford, Cambridge). Others were playing an important role in the development of national awakening.

The industrial revolution, the progress of sciences the impact of the French Enlightenment and the emergence of the Westphalian order of secular states gave a strong incentive to the progress in higher education. From the medieval university system different models developed the British, French and German. The German model with its strong ties with the state and with its conservative and hierarchical structure had a strong intellectual and institutional influence on the universities in the eastern parts of Europe.

In spite of the relative institutional stability and inherent conservatism, the universities had to adjust to the changes in their societies. This took place with some delay and in many cases the tensions between the new needs and the adjustment capabilities of the universities developed into crisis.

The universities and the post second world war changes

After the second world war there have been especially fundamental changes in the global spread of the university system and in the socio-economic processes influencing enrollment, relevance and attitude to society, state and applied sciences.

1. A great number of new universities were established in all countries, but especially in the developing world. There was a major expansion of the faculty of the universities and in the number of students globally. (On global level, the number of students increased from 10 million in 1950 to 60 million in 1990.) The expansion of the universities in Europe, North America, Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, India, China was based on the existing institutions, even though many new universities had to be established and important reforms had to be introduced. In Africa, there were much more limited traditions. The few universities established during the colonial era were actually parts of the system of the metropolitan countries, and even after independence, there was a predominance of the staff from the excolonial powers. The new universities, established after independence, were by and large the replicas of the European University system, concerning the curricula, organization and values.

2. The curricula had to be changed according to the new political and socio-economic needs, the scientific and technological imperatives of the scientific discoveries, the emergence of new disciplines etc.

3. Masses of professionals were needed in different areas of the socio-economic life from education, medicine, armies, business etc. So there was a much greater support available for the universities.

4. There was a strong popular pressure for the participation in the higher education, also as an instrument of social mobility.

5. The greater mobility of people, the easier access to the centers of modern sciences and the new needs of the developing countries promoted the spread of international education.

6. The elitist approach which dominated the philosophy of higher education has been increasingly replaced by the mass universities in many parts of the world.

7. The importance of the post graduate education has increased substantially from the point of view of the scientific potentials of the countries.

8. There has been an increasing demand for continual education and adult education in many countries.

9. In certain parts of the world "Research universities" emerged, concentrating major scientific capabilities and a qualitatively new relationship developed between universities, business and government agencies in research, financing and training specialists.

10. Education, and particularly higher education became an important issue on the agenda of many intergovernmental organisations, particularly of Unesco, and of the United Nations University. All the UN agencies have been dealing however with higher education, post graduate studies in their own specific field. Transnational University Networks and University Alliances emerged integrating different aspects of the higher education.

The universities and the globalisation process in the 1990s

The last part of the 20th century is characterized again by fundamental changes in the environment of higher education. Some people consider the events of 1968 as the milestone of the changes in the universities. It has started period of self examination, internal institutional

changes and reforms aiming at greater democracy, rationality and relevance. This process is far from being over.

The increasing role of science and technology in global competition made the universities especially important institution in influencing the competitive power of the countries.

The world is in the process of transition to a new technological era

The place and role, the gains and losses of the different countries are influenced by their position in the global ladder of knowledge and by their capabilities to use the accumulated knowledge efficiently in the different areas of their socio economic life. Important new qualitative requirements are formulated in this stage for the universities as research centers and educational institutions and also as major contributors to the increase of the cultural level of the society.

The society expects the universities to play a more active role in generation new knowledge and to help the society in its innovative potential. The universities as educational institutions have to take into account that the obsolescing of old knowledge and of the professional skills based on them accelerated and this process will not stop or slow down. This means that the needs for and practices of increased specialisation on the basis of functional differentiation must be harmonized with the requirements of strengthening capabilities for obtaining new knowledge. The general foundation of knowledge must be strengthened which require a continuing collaboration between the higher and secondary education, stronger theoretic foundations and a high degree of literacy in informatics. It is also necessary, that the channels of sources of new knowledge must be kept open especially for those professionals who are playing a key role in sustaining innovation capabilities. This requires much more than just an improved version of continuous education.

An other new imperative demanding changes in the curricula is based on the trans-disciplinary character of scientific and technological development. This factor requires the dismantling of the institutional walls between the different interrelated areas of knowledge and education and a structured cooperation between scholars and educators in those disciplines. The delivery of the courses must be also more flexible and students as self learners will have to be more active.

The internationalisation of science and technology, the needs of reducing the gaps in science and technology, the importance of the transnational firms and their needs and the greater mobility of firms researchers, engineers and other professionals require also major steps in the internationalisation of the curricula and the diplomas. This is much more than the traditional international agreements about the mutual recognition of diplomas and the establishment of different criterias for it. It is and will be increasingly necessary in the future to promote convergence in the curricula and establish in certain areas international centers for specialized studies and research, multilingual regional universities together with international fellowship banks.

The transformation of global politics and economics will have also important consequences for the university system. Their role as sources of new ideas, new knowledge and contributors to the better understanding and management of the changing world made the universities especially significant social actors. Issues, like sustainable development, multi-lateral cooperation, global governance and the comprehension of global social changes require high level intellectual inputs into societies and the international organisations.

Important changes are required however in a number of areas in the educational, and particularly in the university system.

The global educational sector in all its dimensions is characterised by major imbalances: reflecting not only the global inequalities and problems, but the attitude of different societies and cultures as well.

About 75 per cent of the global educational expenditure is spent on primary and secondary educational globally.

The development of primary education is still considered as a top priority in the majority of the developing countries, as a source of functional literacy. Enrollment is high almost everywhere. The key problem is not getting children into school, but keeping them there. Almost half of the children leave before completing four years, which is considered as a minimum for functional literacy. According to the evaluation of UNICEF, after decades of rapid progress, primary education is in crisis. Spending has been cut back. Policy and strategy are in the doldrums. Progress towards universal education is faltering.³

Secondary education has a very important role to play in a number of areas. It is preparing the foundation for university education. It is providing the bulk of knowledge and skills to the population, taking into account the fact, that vocational and technical institutions belong also into this category. Its role is especially important in the era of information revolution. It is building up the foundations of "computer literacy" in many countries. The quality of education on secondary level is a key determinant of the knowledge base in the development process. Between 1970–1990, secondary enrollment almost doubled in the developing countries, from less than 20 per cent to over 40 per cent. (In 1990, the global level secondary enrollment ratio was 55 per cent. In the developed countries it was 88 per cent.)⁴ The fast expansion of the secondary enrollment ratio was not accompanied by the commensurate increase in the quality of the education, well trained teachers and efficient management. The gap increased between the relatively high level private and public institutions. In the public secondary schools budgetary constraints resulted in many countries a deterioration in the quality of education and technical equipment.

Higher education has been accorded a high priority almost everywhere in the world. It has been recognized that without a good system of higher education it would be impossible to overcome the impediments, hindering socio-economic and technological development. Higher education is playing a crucial role in teacher training, curriculum development and methods for primary and secondary education. And also in the development of national cultures. The tertiary enrollment ratio increased in the developed countries from 30.8 to 37.9 per cent, in the developing countries from 15.6 to 16.4 per cent during the 1980's.

The specific problems of the universities differ of course in the world. There are however some more general problems and demands, related to the global changes.

1. The lack or slow adjustment in the relevance in the content of the curricula, and structure of higher education with respect of the needs of the countries taking into account the technological, economic and social changes. The society expects the universities to play a more active role in generation new knowledge and to help the society in its innovative

3 Over 90 per cent of the developing world's children start primary school. Due to the high drop-out rates there are globally about 100 million children aged 6 to 11 not in school. Two thirds of them are girls. The target is a basic education for all children and the completion of primary school by at least 80 per cent. (The Progress of Nations. UNICEF, 1993, pp. 26–29.).

4 UNESCO Statistical Yearbook. 1990. Tables 2.11 and 1.16.

potential. The universities as educational institutions have to take into account that the obsolescing of old knowledge and of the professional skills based on them accelerated and this process will not stop or slow down. This means that the needs for and practices of increased specialisation on the basis of functional differentiation must be harmonized with the requirements of strengthening capabilities for obtaining new knowledge. The general foundation of knowledge must be strengthened which require a continuing collaboration between the higher and secondary education, stronger theoretical foundations and a high degree of literacy in informatics. It is also necessary, that the channels of sources of new knowledge must be kept open especially for those professionals who are playing a key role in sustaining innovation capabilities. This requires much more than just an improved version of continuous education.

2. An other new imperative demanding changes in the curricula is based on the trans-disciplinary character of scientific and technological development. This factor requires the dismantling of the institutional walls between the different interrelated areas of knowledge and education and a structured cooperation between scholars and educators in those disciplines. The delivery of the courses must be also more flexible and students as self learners will have to be more active.

3. The new trends in the evolving global system require important changes in the curricula in handling the better understanding of the forces of globalisation, the character of the globalisation process, its carriers, stimulating factors, consequences, limitations and implications for national cultures. In this context they must help the better understanding of the complex interplay of continuity and change, the accommodation of universality of certain processes and the diversity of the different cultures and civilizations, the harmonisation of relations between the needs of specific disciplinary competence and "comprehensive high level literacy" in terms of languages, computer literacy and the exposure to a broad range of major disciplines and issues.

The above changes are of more general nature, influencing the higher educational in all countries. In the developing countries some additional needs are formulated, like:

- How to increase the confidence on part of the middle class and the key production sectors of the economy in the local institutions of higher education and in their "output";
- How to improve in qualitative and quantitative terms the matching between the output of the higher educational system and the capacity of the labour markets to absorb it;
- How to meet better the increased expectations of students concerning better and more up-to-date knowledge, jobs and social mobility;
- How to improve the financial conditions and the quality of higher education and the management of the universities at a faster rate.

In central and eastern Europe the political changes are the most important system specific factors to which the universities have to reach. This includes relations between the state(governments) and the universities, the curricula and the social role of the universities.

The universities and the individuals in the changing (globalising) society

The globalisation process created new challenges also for the individuals in many ways. The importance of education increased in the value system of the individuals as an instrument of getting more knowledge and information and as a key condition of social and spatial mobility.

The modernization of the societies demands more people with higher education in the future everywhere.

Are there sufficient direct incentives and possibilities for the individuals to continue their studies on "tertiary" level?

The demand of an individual for higher education has two basic dimension. The first dimension is the justification: why to study on higher level, the second dimension is the selection: what to study. Career and employment opportunities are the most important factors in motivating higher learning. There is of course an other dimension: the study for its own sake has always been present for some people, stimulated by talent, prestige, family traditions. It also depends on what the institutions of higher education can offer.

The termination of the free university education especially in poorer countries would on one hand put such a burden on the population, which would discourage the children of lower income families even to try university education. International experiences proved, that the system of fellowship could redress inequalities only at a limited scale. The children of the high income families capture usually the bulk of the financial support. The "other side of the coin" which is serving as an argument for the tuition fees by those who go beyond the economic difficulties as basic causes for ending the era of free university education, is of course the lack or low level of the motivation of the students for greater learning efforts. They argue, that different schemes can take care of the social problems, but even those who receive assistance should feel the economic pressures for better performance.

In principle, qualitatively better and more relevant universities could offer of course a much greater possibility for the individuals. They may have a greater individual choice and also easier access to international education. If however restrictive financial measures will be adopted, most of those facilities will be open only to a more limited number of students especially from the poorer parts of the society than in the past.

An other important question of the future how the higher education for adults will be influenced by those anticipated measures. What will be the consequence of the changes in the system for those who could not study after high school or who want to upgrade their existing knowledge. Will it remain open and accessible or even its partial transformation will practically exclude those people. This is not only an issue of obtaining new skills. Adult education is also an important instrument for the increase of the general cultural level of the societies and as such it should be left open to everybody.

Finally, there is the problem of the brain drain, reflecting more or less the global trends, influenced by the degree and quality of employment of graduates in the native countries, by the overall demand for highly qualified people globally, by the specific demand for skills in certain countries and by a number of other factors, like international education, the attitude toward foreigners in the host countries. Brain drain became somewhat less important than it has been in the 1970s and 1980s. This may be a temporary phenomena still, it is an important change, which may have long term implications for the educational system.

This article is dealing only some of the specific areas of the above mentioned problems. I am convinced however, that the future of the universities must be looked in a global framework of interconnectedness and interactions. The future issues of higher education should also be related to different global processes, which are not only important sources of the changes in their structure, but in many ways influenced by them.

MIHALY SIMAI