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Universities and Their Changing Social and Economic Settings. Dependence as Heavy as Never Before?

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MAREK KWIEK

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1.

The present paper is divided into two main parts: the first part outlines transformations of wider social and economic contexts in which European universities operate, especially the Europeanization and globalization processes, transformations to European welfare state regimes and public sector reforms, both ongoing and envisaged for the future.[1] The second part focuses on ongoing and future transformations of universities as institutions heavily dependent on transformations already in progress in knowledge-driven economies. The paper forges a strong link between large-scale shifts and the small-scale (in this case, academic) shifts, assuming that universities as large-scale (academic) enterprises, requiring huge ongoing public and private investments, are not isolated islands unaffected by shocks resulting from wider social and economic transformations. More importantly, these shocks – called by various names in the last two decades (from global age to knowledge-economy to post-national society to second modernity to postindustrial welfare states, among others) may lead universities to unprecedented social prominence of which, as social institutions, they could not even dream of in decades past. Universities, embedded in changing social and economic settings, seem to be offered new opportunities today – but not without accompanying costs leading to farewell to (some of) their traditional "business as usual" modes of operation. New opportunities may also mean fundamental shifts in the way in which the academic profession views themselves, and is viewed by the society.

2.

Higher education has been largely publicly-funded in its traditional European forms and its period of greatest growth coincided with the development of the post-1945 welfare state. We are currently witnessing the growing significance of knowledge production, acquisition, dissemination and application in the emergent knowledge-based societies and economies on the one hand – and the still mostly traditional role of European higher education systems in

[1] The paper will be publishes in *Politiques universitaires, politiques de développement*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de Paris Sorbonne (PUPS). Ed. par Alain Renaut. 2011.

the (being restructured) public sector on the other. We have been witnessing in the last decade global pressures on both national policies with respect to the welfare state in general, and to higher education in particular, accompanied by the ideas of the "intelligent" or "minimal" state with smaller social duties than those taken for granted in Western Europe in the previous decades. We have been witnessing more general attempts at a reformulation of a post-war social contract which gave rise to the welfare state as we know it, part of which have been heavily expanding higher education systems – to the point of their massification.

The relationships between modern states and modern universities in Europe have been stable in the last two centuries, except for the last two or three decades when they have become more and more reinvented (see Neave and Van Vught 1991). Perhaps the most significant shifts in both the conceptualizations of the state and the conceptualizations of the university occurred under the influence of globalization and Europeanization processes, viewed often as changing the nature of both (Maassen and Olsen 2007). Historically, modern states came to be nation-states because they triumphed in war, were (relatively) successful economically and won legitimacy in the eyes of their populations and other states (Held 1995: 71-72). The sovereignty of the state meant also – in the European context – the sovereignty of national educational policies and full state support for modern nation-state oriented universities (from their inception in the beginning of the 19th century, especially in a German-inspired "Humboldtian" model, as modern institutions were closely linked to modern nation-states). The university, as Gerard Delanty stresses used to provide the modern nation-state with "a moral and spiritual basis" and professors were "the representatives of the nation" (Delanty 2001: 33). National education systems in Europe were created as part of the state forming process which established the modern nation-state. They were born when states based on absolutistic or monarchical rule gave way to the modern nation-states: the history of national education in Europe is thus very much the history of the "nation state in formation" (Green 1997: 131). National education systems contributed to the creation of civic loyalties and national identities and became guardians for the diversity of national languages, cultures, literatures and consciousness. The modern university and the modern nation-state went hand in hand, or were parts of the same wide process of modernization (Rothblatt and Wittrock 1993). Consequently, reconfigurations of the modern nation-state in Europe today – caused by both globalization and Europeanization processes – are affecting the modern institution of the university, both directly and indirectly. State-sponsored mass education has been the primary source of socialization facing the individual as citizen of a nation-state. European nation-

states were engaged in authorizing, funding and managing education systems, including higher education, to construct unified national polities.

Under the pressures of globalization (and European integration in Europe), the above historical assumptions no longer work, and the relationships between (public) universities and nation-states are changing. The reliance of both institutions on each other is no longer as evident as fifty or one hundred fifty years ago; universities are becoming increasingly financially self-reliant, and states no longer seem to be in need of large-scale nation-focused narratives, being much more concerned with global pressures to reformulate their tasks and priorities, including their funding priorities in social services provided within the welfare state. Traditional (largely) nation-state oriented and (mostly) welfare-state supported public universities are thus in new social and economic settings today: if reformulations to the state's roles and capacities, especially related to the provision of social services, are significant, so will be reformulations of the roles of universities, and so will be traditional state-higher education relationships. The university in Europe becomes radically delinked from the nation-state – and in the European context, new EU higher education policies are being developed which put lifelong learning (and the lifelong learner) in the center of the project of the integrated European Union. The focus on the EU education policy plane today seems to be on the de-nationalized European lifelong learner – rather than on the citizen of traditional European nation-states. References to nation-states in the Bologna Process, to give an example, are scarce; universities – within the European Research Area debates, initiated by the European Commission (see EC 2003) – are especially relevant to national and European economies and their traditional role as inculcators of national consciousness, so important to traditional nation-states, has been heavily diminished.

Thus the traditional link between the modern nation-state and the modern university has been broken; moreover, higher education in the EU context has clearly been put in a post-national (and distinctly European) perspective in which interests of the EU as a whole and of particular EU member states (nation-states) are often juxtaposed. The reason for the renewed EU interest in higher education is clearly stated by the European Commission: while responsibilities for universities lie essentially at national (or regional) level, the most important challenges are "European, and even international or global" (EC 2003: 9).

The present paper assumes an indirect impact of globalization on European universities (via reformulating the role of the nation-state in the global economy and via opening the discussion on the future of welfare state regimes in Europe), and a direct impact

of Europeanization – as a regional response to globalization – on European universities (via new EU-level discourse on "the changing role of universities" in the knowledge economy, parallel to discourses developed by other supranational and international organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD in the last decade). New educational policies promoted at the EU-level are viewed here as de-linking the nation-states and public universities. There are complex and often contradictory relationships between globalization as a process affecting the nation-states, changing national educational and social policies, and changing EU-level educational and social policies – which all transform the future role(s) of European universities. National governments are responding to both globalization and Europeanization: policies and strategies they produce, instruments they use, and contradictions they cope with are best seen in this double context of two interrelated processes. The impact of globalization on EU-level educational policies and strategies, and increasingly on ensuing national policies and strategies, is substantial. Globalization, indirectly, for instance through Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs (currently under reformulation into the *Europe 2020* Strategy), fundamentally alters the lenses through which universities' operations are viewed, performance is assessed, and outputs are measured. Its most evident impact on universities is through the overall sense of EU-level policymakers that universities in Europe need profound transformations if Europeanization is to be a successful response to globalization.

But as the reforms of the welfare state in general progress in most parts of the world, social contracts with regards to these (and possibly other) areas of state benefits and state-funded services may have to be renegotiated. The major shift of concern by today's states is towards economic and global concerns, at the expense of social and domestic ones, which makes the current state different from what Bob Jessop called "Keynesian National Welfare State" (Jessop 1999). What it may mean in practice is shifts in both public spending patterns and national monetary policies. Universities are already affected by these shifts: despite generally (in the OECD area) increasing public funding for both teaching and research (both in higher education and in the corporate sector), more financial self-reliance from universities is expected. Burton Clark's "third-stream funding" (Clark 1998) is becoming more important than ever before. But new funding patterns change organizations' behaviors and reach to the core of their mission: marketization, privatization and commercialization processes (Bok 2003, Teixeira et al. 2004) lead to the "paradox of the marketplace" (Geiger 2004).

The most general, structural policy issues with regard to public universities (as presented in the European Commission, OECD and World Bank documents of the last

decade) do not seem substantially different from structural policy issues discussed with reference to other segments of the public sector. Also the political economy of reforms is similar (see OECD 2009). The major difference – namely, the widely acknowledged fact that European universities have more options open to diversify their income than European healthcare systems, and these options are socially acceptable – may lead to viewing universities as even more financially self-reliant than before, and potentially being much more open to new funding patterns. New patterns favor co-funding with the corporate sector, third-stream funding and, generally, new non-core non-state income, see Shattock 2008. The policy challenge at national levels is to what extent particular countries are willing and able to accept global thinking about the future of public sector institutions in general (and of public universities in particular), called sometimes the "global script", and to what extent responses to this new way of thinking about public services can vary between the countries. Surprisingly, the worldwide reform agenda for universities already in the 1990s, as observed by D. Bruce Johnstone, was remarkably consistent (Johnstone 2006).

The economic space of the nation-state and national territorial borders no longer coincide. Consequently, John Gerard Ruggie's postwar "embedded liberalism compromise" – the social contract between the state, market, and labor – does not work anymore as it was designed to work within relatively closed national economies (Ruggie 1997, see Scharpf 2002, Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). At the time, however, when major European welfare state regimes were being constructed, it was not fully realized how much the success of market-correcting policies depended on the capacity of the territorial nation-states to control their economic boundaries. Under the forces of globalization, though, this controlling capacity was lost. The social contract which had allowed the nation-states in advanced capitalist countries to be accompanied by a welfare state originated after the Second World War. With the advent of globalization, it is eroding, though, to different extent in different countries (see Slaughter 2004).

Universities' missions today seem highly influenced by the two decades of reformulations (both in theory and in practice) of the role of public sector services; in wider terms, the university, as other public sector institutions, is increasingly viewed in the context of economic competitiveness of nations, global pressures on national economies, and global pressures on national welfare states. For public universities, these are absolutely new contexts; they are new to academics as well. The consequences of this shift are far reaching: for just about a decade and a half, international and supranational organizations and bodies have been involved in the re-production of new university missions and re-invention of their

futures (both the World Bank, European Commission and OECD became systematically interested in the university sector only in the second half of 1990s, except for a few reports published earlier). Their influence on policy thinking and policy making has been tremendous all over Europe, though: they seem to be providing major concepts in which university futures are currently being discussed among policymakers, and the economic spaces increasingly seem to converge with the academic spaces in ongoing policy discussions. The question "what kind of university for what kind of society" (Maassen and Olsen 2007: 25) rarely emerges. A substantially more "economic" space in which public universities are currently discussed (at the expense of the traditional "academic" space of the discourse on its roles, missions, and futures) affects institutions, academics, and students alike. As in the case of other major public services, healthcare and pensions, the economic dimension of functioning of universities comes to the fore, especially in the transition countries. Students in massified systems increasingly view themselves as consumers and view academics as providers of educational services; institutions increasingly want to view individual academics as part-time knowledge workers rather than tenured professors making use of academic freedom in their quest for truth, as in traditional university models, and academic collegiality is gradually being pushed out of European institutions by new managerialism and business approaches; societies increasingly view higher education as a private good and are more inclined to pay for this good from their pockets (especially in those transition countries where the private sector is large and the public sector is still restrictive and elitist); finally, governments view universities as bedrocks of knowledge-based economies whose functioning is vital for national economic growth. Both hasty criticisms of European higher education (e.g. by national governments and the European Commission) and hopes cherished by policymakers for economic returns from reforming higher education systems seem highly exaggerated, though.

The welfare state in its traditional postwar European forms, and its services, including public higher education provision, seems to be undergoing substantial transformations in most parts of Europe. Lines of these changes and argumentation in support of them (whether by the European Commission, OECD or most national governments) point in a similar direction, which is more financial self-reliance of public universities, rethinking the introduction of student fees in the context of more equitable access to higher education, academic entrepreneurialism leading to more non-core non-state income etc. (even though the actual concepts and vocabularies used may be different in different systems). The end-products of these experimentations are still largely hard to predict.

3.

What is the impact of the above large-scale social and economic processes on the academy, including the academic profession? All above outlined dimensions of transformations to the state, both nation-state and welfare state – social and economic alike – are translatable into a single academic dimension: changing attractiveness of higher education institutions, shifting roles of academics as internal stakeholders in higher education, growing emphasis on the institutional financial self-reliance and market forces, stronger managerialism in university organization, and increasing diversification of academic institutions and academic profession, as a result of the universalization of higher education. The larger social and economic picture outlined briefly above (and developed in much more detail in Kwiek 2005, Kwiek 2006, Kwiek 2009b) is viewed here as strongly determining the smaller, academic picture, also only briefly outlined here (but developed more extensively in Kwiek 2009a).

In general, both public and private institutions are under multi-faceted pressures to change today, with various intensity in various parts of Europe. These institutions include governmental agencies, institutions of the corporate world, institutions of civil society and the core institutions of the public sector. We are experiencing the shattering of a stable world governed by modern institutional traditions, and in this context universities are increasingly expected to adapt to the changing social and economic realities. Educational strategies for the next decade need to take into account the growing complexity of the academic enterprise and the powerful role of traditions of the modern European university which may be acting both as inhibitors to changes and as their activators. Educational strategies need also to take into account the irreconcilable differences in the senses of attractiveness of higher education in Europe shared by its major stakeholders, and growing tensions between major stakeholders expected in the next decade. It is clear that expectations from higher education on the part of the state (still the major funder in European countries), students, the labor market, and academics cannot be easily reconciled. The academic profession in the next decade will be in the eye of the storm. And knowing the storm is coming, the academic profession can be better equipped to face it. Universities as institutions have an opportunity to become as important to both society and the economy as never before in their history – but all their major stakeholders need to understand the forces of change and to see how to reconcile their increasingly conflicting interests.

With the growing relevance of the market perspective and increasing financial austerity for all public services (accompanied by growing competition in public expenditures), strengthened by globalization and internationalization processes, European higher education

institutions are expected to be responding to changing financial settings basically by revenue-side solutions: by seeking new sources of income, largely non-state, non-core, and non-traditional to most systems. They may include various forms of academic entrepreneurialism in research (consulting, contracts with the industry, research-based short-term courses etc.) and various forms and levels of cost-sharing in teaching (tuition fees), depending on the academic traditions in which the systems are embedded (and the relative scale of their underfunding, see Johnstone 2006, Shattock 2009, Williams 2008, Kwiek 2008).

Attractive European higher education systems will be able to make sure that academia still retains at least major characteristics of postwar higher education systems and retains its traditional attractiveness as a workplace and a site for a professional career. Globalization brings about direct competition between business and non-business models of organizations, and in the case of public institutions the competition between more traditional collegial types of university management and new business types of management – known so far in Europe mostly from private higher education institutions – can be expected. In the times of the imminent reformulation of current welfare state systems in most parts of Europe, attractive academic institutions and systems will be able to balance the negative financial impact of the gradual restructuring of the most generous types of welfare state regimes in Europe on public funding for higher education. Higher education in general, and top research-intensive universities in particular, as opposed to healthcare and pensions sectors, are perceived by European societies as being able to generate their own additional income. Ironically, the more successful public entrepreneurial universities are today, the bigger the chances are their growing financial self-reliance is becoming unavoidable in the future: universities of the future can be "punished" for their current ability to help themselves in hard times. Along with the efforts to introduce market mechanisms in pension systems (multi-pillar schemes instead of traditional pay-as-you-go ones based on intergenerational solidarity) and healthcare systems (privatized systems based on additional, private, individual insurance policies, see Powell and Hendricks 2009, Kwiek 2007), especially but not exclusively in European transition economies, the most far-reaching consequences of this marketization/privatization trends can be expected for public funding for higher education and research. Growing limitations to, and growing conditionality of, public funding (with more accountability on the spending side and more competition on the receiving side) is perhaps the most important single aspect of changes in the rules of the academic game. The key is not less funding, it is rather different funding (although an important 2010 OECD/IMHE international higher educations conference is indeed about "Doing More with Less").

Another expected development is the promotion across Europe – as a mostly new and reasonable policy solution to the current problem of underfunding and financial austerity of European universities (both underfunding and financial austerity being relative concepts) – of a more substantial inflow of both private research funds from the business sector and of more private teaching funds from student fees. Trends in European demographics (especially the aging of European societies) will be affecting directly the functioning of the welfare state in general, but only indirectly, through the growing pressures on all public expenditures in general, will it be affecting universities. Strong higher education institutions will be able to steer the changes in funding patterns for higher education (following changes in funding patterns for public services in general) in their countries rather than to merely drift with them.

The possible redefinition of higher education from a public (and collective) good to a private (and individual) good is a tendency which may further undermine the idea of heavy public subsidization of higher education. In Guy Neave's "stakeholder society" (Neave 2002), the fundamental relationship between higher education institutions and their stakeholders is always "conditional". The economic rationale for higher education is changing, and the rates of return from individuals' investments in higher education and closely measured worldwide.

In the last half century, despite an immense growth in enrollments, public higher education in Europe remained relatively stable from a qualitative point of view and its fundamental structure remained unchanged. The forces of change worldwide are similar and they are pushing higher education systems into more market-oriented and more competitive arenas (and towards stronger state regulation combined with weaker state funding) – which may lead to qualitative changes: privatization in higher education has become globally pervasive. For centuries, "the market" had no major influence on higher education: the majority of modern universities in Europe were created by the state and were subsidized by the state. Today market forces in higher education are on the rise worldwide: while the form and pace of this transformation are different across the world, this change is of a global nature and is expected to have a powerful impact on higher education systems in Europe. Market forces determine the behavior of the new providers and, more importantly, increasingly reformulate the missions of existing traditional public higher education institutions (towards more business-like organizations, which emulate business organizations' behaviors).

In European higher education in the next decade, the role of new (and previously significantly less important) stakeholders is expected to be growing. Universities under conditions of massification will be increasingly expected to be meeting not only the changing needs of the state but also changing needs of students, employers, labor market and the

industry, as well as regions in which they are located. The expected developments may fundamentally alter relationships between various stakeholders, with the decreasing role of the state (especially in funding), the increasing role of students and the labor market for the more teaching-oriented sector of higher education, and the increasing role of the industry and the regions for the more research-oriented sector of higher education. The role of academics in both types of institutions, either teaching-focused or research-intensive, can be expected to be relatively weaker, with the role of external stakeholders growing steadily.

On a more general plane, massification of higher education is tied with the growing significance of those new external stakeholders. At the same time, in the midst of transformations and adaptations, in order to flourish, which means to be both attractive and competitive, universities also need to continue to be meeting (either traditional or redefined) needs of academics. Academics are, and will always be, the core of the system. Increasingly differentiated student needs – resulting from differentiated student populations in massified systems – already lead to largely differentiated systems of institutions (and, in a parallel manner, a largely differentiated academic profession). The expected differentiation-related (or stratification-related) developments in the next decade may fundamentally alter the academic profession in general, increase its heterogeneity, and have a strong impact on the traditional relationships between teaching and research at European universities. The main characteristics of current European university systems – the combination of teaching and research as the core institutional mission – may be strongly redefined. Consequently, implications of the Bologna Process (clearly teaching-focused) at both European, national, institutional and individual (academics') levels seem still not fully realized.

The social, political, cultural, and economic world is changing, and so are changing student populations and educational institutions (increasingly compelled to meet their changing demands). Higher education is subject to powerful influences from all sides and all – new and old alike – stakeholders: the state, the students, the faculty, employers, and industry, and on top of that, it is becoming very costly. The expected development for the next decade is that external stakeholders may increasingly have different needs from those they traditionally had, and their voice will be increasingly taken into account. Institutions are expected to transform themselves to maintain public trust (and to use public subsidies). The role of the market in higher education (or of government-regulated "quasi-markets") is growing as the market is reshaping our lives as humans, citizens, and finally as students/faculty. Never before has the institution of the university for so long been under the changing pressures of different stakeholders; never before has it been perceived by so many,

all over the world, as a failure in meeting the needs of the students and the labor market (higher education and labor market mismatch). Therefore the question in which directions higher education systems will be taking while adapting to new social and economic realities in which the role of the market is growing and the education received by graduates is increasingly linked to their professional and economic future seems to be open.

Following transformations of other public sector institutions, universities in Europe – traditionally publicly-funded and traditionally specializing in both teaching and research – are under powerful pressures to review their missions in view of permanently coping with (relative) austerity in all public sector institutions and to compete for financial resources with other public services heavily reliant on the public purse. Public priorities are changing throughout the world. The consequences of the growing competition for public resources for universities, and especially for the teaching/research agenda at universities, are far-reaching.

Massified educational systems (and increasingly massified academic profession) unavoidably lead towards various new forms of differentiation, diversification and stratification. Universities in most European countries seem still quite faculty-centered and their responsiveness to student and labor market needs is low. But students are increasingly being reconceptualized as "clients" or "customers" of higher education The broadening of the debate of universities with employers, students, parents and other stakeholders about graduates employability can be expected in the next decade. Differentiated student populations in Europe require also increasingly differentiated institutions, and (possibly, consequently) different types of academics. This may mean the decline of the high social prestige of higher education graduates (counted today in millions) and of the high social prestige of most academics (counted today in hundreds of thousands in major European economies). The universalization of higher education is already having profound impact on the social stratification of academics, especially in those countries where the expansion in student enrolments was especially significant.

4.

The larger picture presented in the first section of the paper leads the smaller picture presented above: the university is an institution under enormous multi-faceted pressures, as other public sector institutions, and as a corporate sector, and the pressures in general are linked with the passage to what some call the global age, others call knowledge-driven economy or post-industrial welfare state. I fully agree with Johan P. Olsen's institutional analysis when he writes, without reference to the university, though, that "there are also situations where an

institution has its raison d'être, mission, wisdom, integrity, organization, performance, moral foundation, justice, prestige, and resources questioned and it is asked whether the institution contributes to society what it is supposed to contribute. … An institution under serious attack is likely to reexamine its ethos, codes of behavior, primary allegiances, and its pact with society" (Olsen 2008: 18). The institutionalist's description seems to fit perfectly European universities under current pressures: they are institutions heavily dependent on their changing social and economic settings, increasingly called to rethink their current modes of functioning. What perhaps counts most in this context is a historical phenomenon that universities are highly adaptable institutions which tend to thrive under ever-changing circumstances. There is a plethora of nationally-specific and culture-related choices to be made by both policymakers and academic institutions, and the effects of these choices are still largely hard to predict. New policy contexts in which state-subsidized public universities will be operating in Europe in the next decade are in the making; therefore being conclusive in a world that is changing faster than ever before, and in which the role of contingent events grows, is difficult. What we do know is that social and economic settings in which European universities are embedded have been changing substantially; what we can assume, based on the traditional heavy dependence on universities on contexts in which they are operating, is that university transformations will be gradually, and unavoidably, reflecting wider changes European societies and economies are undergoing.

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