Considerations about Differentiation of Higher Education in a Globalized Context

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ABOUT CIVILIZATIONAL ATTRACTION

- A zone of civilizational attraction is where “culturally impressive activities go on, which attract attention”
- People living away from them refer to them, and often travel there (for study, work or visit)
- The zone of civilizational attraction sends out missionaries or teachers who make their careers carrying civilizational culture to eager recipients on the periphery
- A key ingredient in creating this attraction is the intersection of several competing positions or schools of thought, meeting at a common centre, which becomes a place of intellectual conflict and a crucial node in the network of social action

DEFINING WORLD-CLASS IN TODAY’S WORLD

- Higher Education is affected by structures whose nature and meaning have been institutionalized over centuries and now apply throughout the world
- The university has monopolized some central steps in the implementation of Western models of progress and justice
  - Progress ➔ excellence theme
- The environment provides the blueprint
  - Differentiation to fit this model ➔
  - Rankings as epitomizing this idea: in a homogeneous world, rankings make sense: they measure how in line a university is with the ideal model
THE WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITY RHETORIC (I)

- Building world-class universities has been the dream of generations of Chinese …
- …not only for pride, but also for the future of China
- The government wants a national innovation system in which universities and research organizations attract the best minds to conduct world-class research, fuelling the innovation system with new knowledge and ideas

THE WORLD CLASS UNIVERSITY RHETORIC (II)

- Top level research to make Germany a more attractive research location
- Place France among the highest ranking international universities
- A country should have at least a small number of WCU. So, first of all, it is the necessity! (from a paper in Romania)

WHAT IS A WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITY?
SO WHY WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITY POLICIES?

What is expected? Spill-overs to the system

- More investment in research
- More research output
- Better educated labour force
- Promote knowledge transfer

It is about being globally competitive as a system and improving national wellbeing

REFLECTING ON THE EFFECTS OF WCUPs

- World-class universities owe their status to high private paybacks of higher education and are thus very attractive
- Governments that invest in WCUs expect high public returns and externalities

They expect world-class universities to make the higher education system better

MANY INITIATIVES AROUND THE WORLD

- Examples (among others)
  - China: 985 and 211
  - Finland: Aalto merger
  - Germany: Excellence initiative
  - ...
  - 6.4% of the overall Chinese education budget is put additionally into excellence (compared, e.g. to 1.7% provided through the German Excellence Initiative)
  - In China 94% increase in publications mentioned (Lixu, 2004)
  - But is China more attractive to the world for students?
POSSIBLE SPILL-OVER EFFECTS ON THE SYSTEM (I)

- Increased exogenous resources
  - Additional staff, students and research funding from outside the country/ higher education system which spill-over to other higher education institutions

- Increased private endogenous resources
  - Resources that would have either not been spent in the country’s universities, or gone to other universities, go into the sector, which spill-over to other higher education institutions

POSSIBLE SPILL-OVER EFFECTS ON THE SYSTEM (II)

- Higher education system and produces more efficient use of public resources
- New products
  - by creating new globally competitive higher education products (such as Graduate School trajectories), the sector is more competitive in export terms, attracting more students as a whole
- Reputational benefits
  - All national universities benefit from a higher external awareness/ reputation from the presence of one or more world-class institutions in the system

DIFFERENTIATION AND ATTRACTION

- Do these (expected) spill-overs make a country’s higher education really more attractive?
- Does supporting “world-class” fill the knowledge gap?
  - Can it help the periphery become more attractive?
- Does a country become thus a zone of prestige?
A “DIFFERENT” DIFFERENTIATION VIEW?

- We need an “all encompassing quality”
- Match student/program
- Access and success
- Close interaction teaching and research (both in academic and professional education)
- Must be internationally attractive

Therefore: Differentiation
- In structure (e.g. binarity)
- Profile (not only focus on research to be top-X ranked)
- Variety of provision

DISCUSSION

What about a world-class higher education system?

- About horizontal diversity and pathways within the system
- System permeability
- Heterogeneity of student body
- Does money do it all?
- Does reputation do it all?
- About aligning optimally private and public returns of higher education
- …

CLOSING MOTIONS

Vertical differentiation is the best way to enable a country to become a “zone of prestige”, with its world-class universities attracting talent (and fees &c.) worldwide. Moreover, it is the only way weaker and peripheral countries can shun the indignity of being disregarded by more powerful countries.

Vertical differentiation does not yield more talent. It reduces the proportion of students who can access higher education with negative effects on baccalaureate production. On the contrary, differentiation in the system should be multifarious. It should cater the needs of a varied student populace and enable them to find their best match in the system. Rather than plundering the public purse for WCU policies, governments should disburse more scholarships for in country or to send students to existing WCUs abroad (e.g. with incentives for their return home)
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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