REFORMING THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SECTOR FOR THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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Introduction

Transformation of the world concerns also Europe!

- Globalization, scientific and technological progress
- Increased competition and mobility
- Aim of the Council of Ministers of EU countries (Lisbon 2000): *Europe should become the most competitive economy in the world by 2010 thanks to the development of the knowledge economy*
- For HiEd&R, strong acceleration over the last 4-5 years: main lines of political discussion and action:
  - Improve the competitiveness of Europe thanks to the promotion of knowledge (mainly under EU leadership)
  - Improve the efficiency of the sector and of each institution
  - Reaffirm the central role of universities for the creation of new knowledge, the transfer of knowledge and the training of researchers (main university preoccupation)
Content

- THE REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SECTOR
  - Characteristics of Europe
  - Main reforms
    - The European Higher Education Area (EHEA)
    - The European Research Area
  - Main related reforms
- CHALLENGES AND PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES
  - Threats and opportunities for Universities in general
  - Threats and opportunities for research intensive universities
  - Strategies for research intensive universities
THE REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH SECTOR
Characteristics of Europe

- European political organization:
  - Council of Europe: 45 States (out of approx. 50) and 800 millions inhabitants

- Characteristics of European HiEd&R
  - Binary and unified systems
  - Nearly exclusively public institutions in the west; more than 1000 private institutions in east and central Europe
  - Basic research in universities and/or research centers
  - Size from 100 to more than 100’000 students (one “research” (?) university for 500’000 inhabitants)
  - Over Europe, teaching in more than 20 different languages
  - Numerous barriers to mobility
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Main reforms

- Two political initiatives in HiEd&R
  - (1) European Higher Education Area (EHEA) without border in 2010
  - (2) European Research Area (ERA): Council of Ministers of EU in Lisbon (2000)
The European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

- **The Bologna process**
  - Launched in 1998 by the Ministers of 4 countries (F, UK, D and I)
  - Confirmed in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration (29 countries)
  - Follow-up ministerial conferences in:
    - Prague, 2001, enlarged to 33 countries, and
    - Berlin, sept. 2003, enlarged to 40 countries

- **Aim:**
  - Create a transparent higher education space
  - Promote the mobility of students and teachers
  - Develop the European identity
  - Improve the attractiveness of Europe for “overseas” students
Tools:

- Creation of a transparent system based on a bachelors and masters system and, since Berlin, doctorates (PhD)
  - Bachelor: preparation to a professional career and to further university studies
  - Master: specialization (academic and vocational)
  - Doctorate (PhD) (link between EHEA and ERA)
- Generalized introduction of a credit transfer and accumulation system (improvement of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)): BA 180-240 credits, MA 90-120 credits, with a total of 300 ECTS for the MA; PhD level still open
- Development of the Diploma supplements
- Promotion of the recognition convention of UNESCO-COE)
Difficulties:

- The process is extremely decentralized, as it is applied in 40 sovereign countries by one thousand more or less autonomous universities
- There is no leader: succession of leading countries and uneasy role for the EU
- Each country, and even each university, and even each department, is implementing the Bologna declaration with its own interpretation
- Many universities do not realize that it is a fantastic opportunity to revise the programs’ pedagogy: in particular move from teaching to learning
The European Research Area (ERA)

- Idea launched in 2000
  - European council meeting, Lisbon 2000: *Europe should become the most competitive economy in the world by 2000 thanks to a knowledge economy*
  - Tools: create a European research area without border
    - Integrate the EU and the national research programs
    - Improve the EU Framework Programs (FP6)
      - Networks of excellence
      - Integrated projects
  - Accompanying measures
    - Reduce the barriers to the mobility of researchers
    - Promote the transfer of knowledge (European patent?)
    - Clarify the ownership of the intellectual property rights
    - Find new ways to finance research (and higher education)
    - Develop a set of rules to secure a fair collaboration university-industry
Other efforts (EU communications)

- On research (2001)
- On research effort: research should reach 3% of GDP (2002)
- On the career of researchers
- Create a European Research Council, mainly to finance fundamental and curiosity driven research at a European scale
Difficulties

- European paradox: the level of fundamental research is excellent, the transfer of knowledge is lagging behind
- The EU support to research
  - Only 5% of total research expenditure in the member countries (agriculture has a much higher priority)
  - Does not attract some of the best researchers
  - Bureaucratic and not always quite transparent
Main related reforms

Promotion of a culture of quality assurance

- The quality of teaching and research has become one of the most important issues (necessity to create trust and improve accountability)
  - Governments or university associations are setting up accreditation or evaluation agencies
- Frequent confusion between
  - Accreditation (of institutions or programs and minimum standard or specified standard)
  - Evaluation, ranking
  - Quality assurance
- However, many countries made unsatisfactory experiences (UK)
- Strong position of EUA;
  - System should be based on
    - Autonomy and the missions statement of each university
    - Trust
    - Subsidiarity
    - Pay due respect to the complexity of teaching and research
    - Avoid bureaucracy
  - Universities should be responsible for evaluating quality internally and evaluation agencies should control how they are doing it. These agencies should be themselves accredited

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Autonomy, governance, leadership and management

The changing environment, budget shortage and increasing dissatisfaction on the part of the political proposal force institutions to streamline the decision process and to make decisions. This concerns mainly

- Secure University autonomy (implies accountability)
- University governance, in particular creation of boards
- Leadership
- Management
General agreement on trade in services (GATS)

European Universities accept the internationalization of higher education, but defend the following position:

- It should be a public responsibility (provision and/or regulation)
- Institutions should be recognized and have a culture of quality
- Equal access based only on merit (not on money!)
- Public funding should still be possible and no obligation should be made for the State to subsidize private universities
Other objects of reforms

- Promotion of learning
- Use of information technologies
- Life-long learning
- Underrepresentation of low income social classes
- Quality of pre-college education
- Relationship of universities with their community
- Unionization (variable degree)
- Political correctness
- Replacement of the teachers who are leaving
CHALLENGES AND PROMISING STRATEGIES FOR THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES
Most important threats and opportunities for universities in general

- Increasing competition
  - Institutions will be forced to better profile and position themselves
  - This raises a multitude of strategic issues

- Secure enough funding
  - Quality research will continue to become more expensive
  - Teaching will continue to be labor intensive

- Regaining trust from the public authorities and the population
Threats and opportunities for research intensive universities

- They could lose students
- They could also be threatened by small or specialized organizations
- They are expensive
- They are affected by the present public and political mistrust in science
**Strategies for research intensive universities**

- Recruitment policy: Continue to apply with great rigor one policy which has been key to the success of the best ones.
- Revising their missions: search for the right balance between
  - Curiosity driven research and research that tries to be useful to society
  - Research-led teaching programs and programs more labor-market orientated
- Better profiling and positioning (strategic thinking)
  - Best institutions had in general a policy of “laisser-faire”; will such a policy be sufficient in the future?
  - What will be the impact of the Bologna process; how to secure a critical mass?
Strategies for research intensive universities (continued)

- Increased autonomy
- Strong management and governance, as well as strong leadership are essential to run a more determined strategy
- Develop a culture of quality
- Secure the necessary financial resources
Useful websites