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New Frontiers of HIGHER EDUCATION in

As a very long time insider of higher education on both sides on the “big pond” I have experienced and survived as many as four of them:

- Democratic revolution after the World War II gradually opening access of working class to higher education.
- Entrepreneurial revolution introducing entrepreneurial model of university.
- Technological revolution triggering massive use of information technologies in teaching, research and management of universities.
- Globalization revolution set in motion by sudden rise of students and faculty mobility as well as global scope of research projects and academic debate.

These revolutionary changes were not succeeding in the pace; one per generation, as Jefferson wanted, but in the last decades some universities were hit by all four of them almost

simultaneously. Are universities facing the next wave of turbulence right now?

New powerful drivers of change

As soon as COVID 19 crisis began to evaporate (October 2020) New York Times editorial announced that: “after the Pandemic, a revolution in education and work awaits”. In the years that followed Academia has been subject to new powerful drivers of change: dramatic massification and diversification of higher education worldwide due to a series of disruptive technological changes. Job markets analysis indicate that in the near future some form of higher education might become precondition of every full time employment contract. Percentage of global inflow of students accommodated by European Universities will be one of the key indicators of the relative “weight” of Europe in the world. Of course meeting this challenge will require abandoning the old dogma

of “free higher education” considered a part of the outdated XX century welfare state. Europeans will have to recognize that higher education is one of the fastest growing key industries of the future. Privileged position on this market is not given for granted, provided cut throat global competition. Attractiveness of diplomas and 3-5 years of full time studies is decreasing; skills are valued by leading employers higher than diplomas. From the brightest students’ perspective technology and markets change too fast; waiting 3-5 years, learning too many things they consider useless. That’s why so many college dropouts in big tech sector. European universities have to stand up and compete for the “crème de la crème” of global young generation.

Agility Revolution

The emerging environment of higher education calls for adjustment, which might transform itself

Thomas Jefferson
believed that
**EVERY GENERATION
NEEDS A NEW
REVOLUTION.**

It applies to higher
education as well.

EUROPE

into a “revolution of agility”, breaking traditional stiff structures and formalized procedures. These are new frontiers of higher education in Europe confronted with today’s US dominance and breath taking development of Asian Universities, Chinese in particular. Universities were born in Europe, and made Europe a global center of science and culture for centuries. In 1929, when my father received his Ph.D. from the Parisian Sorbonne this was the top of the academic world. Now it should be Harvard. Massive inflow of European academics and intellectuals to the US during the WWII was the game changer. Is Europe able to regain its competitive edge it enjoyed not so long ago? In my opinion it depends upon success of Agility Revolution.

New providers of the content reserved up to now for universities are on the rise. First, big tech companies are involved in training and development, and high quality corporate

universities are being created. Second, consulting and development companies offer on line wide range of carefully profiled and targeted courses. Universities are forced to respond by offering similar programs in the form of modules enabling students to build up their own curricula and set up their own timing, composition and cost. No university is capable, without reaching out, to instantly address market needs using exclusively its own resources. Alliances with business and other universities are needed. Building and managing such alliances is difficult for many reasons, mainly because of huge culture gaps. Bridging them is necessary and universities which are successful in this kind of game will find themselves on the winning side, particularly if they choose global leaders as partners. In Academia globalization always was and still is inevitable and irreversible even if in other fields it is on the reverse gear. Temporary hurdles and even regional wars cannot stop it worldwide, simply because science is global.

Alliances, partnerships and joint ventures

Network model of higher education is becoming prevalent. The scope of the network is global. Science develops through international platforms, alliances, partnerships and joint ventures. Dozens of thousands of universities are interlinked within the system producing science, knowledge, skills, competencies as well as human minds and souls. Universities worldwide compete for better places in the networks. To describe modern university one can use a metaphor of an airline hub with incoming and outgoing flights, symbolizing constant exchange of students, faculty, research projects, activities etc. on the common platform of “Global English” and state of the art science. Partnerships enable learning experiences as immersive and interactive as students want them. It is important because no matter whether we like it or not, even students of tuition free state universities are not grateful recipients of social assistance any more, but become demanding clients. The same “network effect” applies to research projects. International cooperation requires to design them as modules connectable with other modules in other universities in other countries. Such an arrangement puts the best of global resources at disposal of project leadership and accelerates knowledge creation and cumulation. Fortunately when physical mobility is temporarily limited by such factors as pandemics, political and military conflicts, recent

leapfrog in IT technology helps enormously.

The art of building and managing networks calls for elimination of some of the “academic red tape” and endless collective decision making processes. Response time plays a key role. Attractive partners have no time to wait and waist. This might require some adjustments of traditional academic governance systems with full respect of autonomy and democratic soul of the European universities. Open minded debate about academic governance is needed. It should touch upon such delicate issues as: autonomy vs. state bureaucracy, democratic procedures,

Network model of higher education is becoming prevalent

collegiality and traditional, ceremonial side of academic life.

Imperative of “Agility Revolution” concerns both “mass retailers” and elite universities, but in somewhat different ways. Even if they are located under one roof and one academic brand name, they represent different units and types of activities. Mass retailers educate young people in accordance with internationally recognized professional profiles. They should be able to adjust their portfolio of programs to changing markets and enroll large numbers of preferably international paying students. International alliances should enable them to use other institutions’ resources (faculty, program modules, facilities) either directly or on line in exchange for making available their own. Agility is a precondition of such activities. Benevolent international accreditations and rankings provide sufficient degree of quality assurance for participating institutions.

Elite universities a source of new ideas

Elite universities are predominantly research driven. They are a source of new ideas, new science and provide unique platforms for academic debate. They educate small groups of elite students and through doctoral programs faculty for the whole global system of higher education and knowledge industry. In Europe role of elite HEIs has remained more or less the same since centuries. What has to change is more open access, providing opportunity to all talented young people

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regardless their social profile and economic status. Nevertheless highly selective recruitment processes have to be maintained. These are universities for the most gifted few: the future elites. Such elite institutions are often under attacks pointing out at “inequality effect”, in spite of the fact, that European top universities are much more open and have more diverse student populations than American “Ivy league”. I happen to agree with such authors as FT’s Jemina Kelly, who published recently a piece untitled “In defense of Oxbridge” ending as follows “Not everyone, even those who work incredibly hard at it – can get into Oxford or Cambridge, but these institutions nevertheless benefit us all”. I am scandalized by the French government’s decision to close down ENA, the best Public Administration school in the world in response to “yellow vests” demands.

Both research universities and “mass retailers” have to cope with the same sets of problems:

- Skyrocketing costs of higher education;
- Quality and strength of scientific input;
- Intellectual and moral profile of students worth striving for;

Mass retailers are typical market players. Their products: skills, competencies and more or less prestigious diplomas are offered on the markets (local, regional, global) for a price (tuition fee). Provided globally rising demand for that kind of education, such players should be in black and turning profits if they are properly managed. Governments are able to secure additional financing aimed at faculty development through research. Government or industry sponsored

scholarships, student vouchers and loans etc. should and could open the gates of academic mass retailers to the entire populations of high school leavers.

Quality of research output by faculty members is measured by publications in peer-reviewed academic journals. Such a system is focused on methodological correctness and entrenchment in relevant literature. Some negative aspects of it have to be taken into consideration as well. First, peer reviewers rarely support original ideas and innovative methodologies, they request manuscripts based directly on recognized well established science. Innovative ideas seldom get published. Second, The whole plethora of “fake science” emerged around this assessment methodology in order to “beat the system” (including predatory journals and “cooperatives” of scholars quoting each other). Third, measuring scientific work only by journals articles is against European academic tradition highly valuing monograph books and academic textbooks. The best universities develop their own systems of contribution valuation and

academic success measures. Leaving it in the hands of bureaucracy jeopardizes “big science creation”. Agility is needed.

Universities shape hearts and mindsets of students

To what extent universities can and should shape hearts and mindsets of their students ?. Imposition of any kind of ideology or value system is hopeless. Sermons will not be heard, restrictions will not be observed. The only realistic way to influence young people’s souls and mindsets is indirect: through the way university operates and role models it creates. Agility is needed here again, because young generation of Europeans values freedom of choice above all. That’s why coexistence of a wide range of different ideas, schools of thought and ideologies is so important, provided that meritocratic academic debate takes place without any limits of academic freedom. Otherwise forbidden fruit tastes the best. That’s why, due to “spirit of contradiction”, under communism Polish universities graduated generations of devoted anti-communists.

Pluralistic education based on free debate and confrontation of different opinions leads to highly heterogenous cohorts of graduates. Most of them, however, will to different degrees share some common characteristics such as: openness and respect of other people’s opinions, acceptance of the use of scientific arguments in disputes and conflicts solving, proneness to compromise and to cooperate. This is in my opinion what civilized European society is all about and what universities should nurture and disseminate.



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