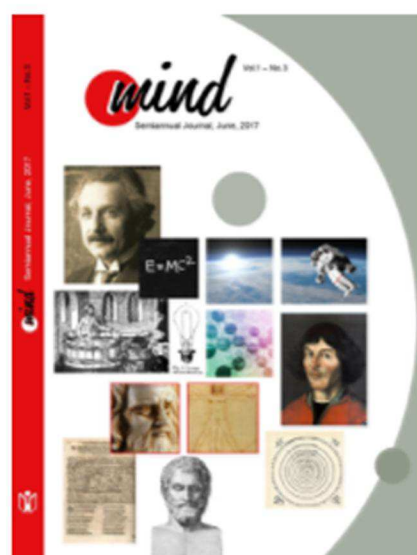


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GLOBALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

Higher education (production, transfer, and management of knowledge) is leaving the traditional environments of university systems, state organizations, and national economies. In globalization, players of all kind have not only multiplied but also are permanently mutating. This is not just about finance and market integration. A global reconfiguring, of higher education's roles in society, is unfolding at a pace never experienced before or even imagined. In Europe today there are millions of unemployed, and also millions of available jobs not taken because the unemployed lack qualifications and skills. Clearly something deeply systemic is not working. Some players did not do, or are not doing what they are now expected to do.

Traditional higher education around the world is under pressure in adapting to change, in realizing its mission, and it is now even facing the necessity to justify its very existence. The scenario is varied and articulated geopolitically. The crisis/decline of higher education being general, it is lower in America and much higher in other countries, especially those operating under a state's monopoly system of education. The novelty is the mushrooming, arising from the market (and rarely within the institutions) of new, innovative, unedited higher education forms that are transcending state systems, boundaries, bureaucracies, geopolitics and religions. Certainly, by all means, this is not to say that all is new, is also good. Quality comes with time and after a story of selective competition, aided by transparency from the beginning. The reaction to this phenomenon by national states is significant. Some (or many) have adopted containment-restrictive measures and policies. It is the case of Russia, other former Soviet republics, Greece, and other old and new states. Other states have allowed (deliberately or by omission) a "gray area" to grow, where undefined entities are floating under a surface of ambiguous standards and transparency criteria. This is the case, not surprisingly, of Italy, the country of mafia. As a general phenomenon, these educational entities are, in the present, young globalized forms. In the future, they may become strong globalizing forms of the order/chaos dyadic relationship proper to mutating globalization process. Process, not system, is the driver: the systems have to integrate with processes, not vice versa.

Demand

The global tertiary-enrolment ratio increased from 14% to 35% in the last twenty years, over 50 countries have a ratio of over 50%. In the world, the higher education offering presents two different and opposed university systems, both asymmetrically in relation to the knowledge economy and globalization. The older of the two, is the “European” model, based on state ownership, state financing, and almost always, state monopoly. It is highly bureaucratized and with a static structure, often generating parasitical environments, like in Italy. Within this system costs of tuition fees are absent or very low in principle, although recently availability has been eroded and costs added. The other system, newer, is the American model, based more on the market, with a balance of public and private players, in terms of ownership and founding. Grounded on competition, it presents a hierarchy of excellent, dynamic, well-founded and well-managed universities at the top, and much less so at the bottom. Anyway, many experts believe the system appears to retain value at all its levels. Independently from quality, tuition fees always apply, in both public and private institutions, accompanied by programs (generous at times) of scholarships and grants.

Globalization makes the winning system the American one. A winner in the sense of power-of-attraction: the number of international students in American colleges reached one million in the 2014-2105 academic year, about 5% of the total enrolled students, globally. It is the winner also in terms of expanding all over the world, now including contexts traditionally characterized by advanced welfare, and even authoritarian states. As a value system it is recognized by markets and desired by communities. If globalization means “knowledge economy,” it indeed implies advanced knowledge management to provide real value and achieve results. The top-level of the American system is marked by strong competition to maintain and increase excellence in education, resulting in an extended Ivy League club of elite universities, highly differentiated, and with strong “brand value”.

Brand

Students are looking for a degree that will guarantee immediate employment (or further academic degrees) after graduation. Companies are looking for immediate productivity upon hiring. Certainly a degree from an elite university may offer a better guarantee, being objectively a “brand value”. Because the few top universities cannot satisfy the global market, more universities are trying to join the elite club by increasing service culture rather than pursue the more difficult task of achieving high academic standards. In fact, universities of excellence can rely on their “brand value” as expression of their selectivity and scarcity.

Furthermore, they might not necessarily have incentives to produce more graduates for the market, preferring to focus on research and science (in order to access other types of investors). Finally, in a win-win game, graduates from “brand value” universities continue to constitute themselves instances of “living brand,” therefore perpetrating the “brand value” principle.

Jobs

“To prepare students for jobs they don’t exist, yet!” This is in fact the essence of the challenge on the agenda. We could say this is about a mission to invent goals, identify ways of thinking, at present difficult to conceptualize. The implications are profound and not easily understandable (acceptable) by the dying world of traditional higher education. There is a need to change the approach from the traditionally structured “silo” university into something much more complex, liquid and globally integrated. This objective can hardly be accomplished by existing players characterized by weak leaders, bureaucratized staff, legalistic norms, passive (when not parasitical) faculties, and a mercenary army of adjunct lecturers. Different and new players need to take charge. The challenge appears too difficult for fossilized systemic organizations, it is complex: preparing the students to quickly become autonomous and productive in profession as much as in life, while skillfully navigating uncertainty at their own risk.

The jobs of the future demand possession of deep knowledge within a discipline and even more, the capability to intersect with other kinds of professions and cultures. Specific skills quickly acquired such, as basic coding, social media communication, and web design, will count. Also important is the ability to merge in full the regular training in hard skills with differently acquired soft skills. Very recently, more leading thinkers are emphasizing the very imminent role of robots in supplanting jobs typically done by humans. In the near future sectors of major growth will be healthcare, personal, and social services. In the future a permanent demand will continue to exist for graduates in science, technology, and engineering. The market is demanding “skills hybridization”, an increasingly untraditional combination of skills, in continuous change. A permanent feature will continue to be the demand for jobs that contain skills requiring complex human interaction.

Skills

Hard knowledge (science) only is not the question, or at least not here. Graduates have now to prove to possess a plurality of different skills: to think clearly, to exercise critical

reasoning, to handle information efficiently, to manage technology individually (“personal technology”), and to appropriate, possess, and maintain knowledge, all in addition to understanding that this process is endless (life-long education).

Formal (traditional?) higher education does not necessarily meet what the market requires: real skills, immediate productivity, ability to think quickly, clearly, and critically. Employers are no more looking just at the academic curriculum, they are looking for added values such as: talent to communicate, openness to take criticism, readiness to overcome multiple failure, easiness to interact with different peoples. Employees want different typologies of individuals and cultures. All this, in addition to the capability to work in teams and show leadership skills.

Hard and soft skills need to be more integrated. The hard skill of engineering is not sufficient for the global market. Philosophy also can contribute to bringing new ideas and approaches that lead to innovation. Learning to make things is experiential, learning about things is cerebral. Thus it is uncertain that the typical American liberal art college education model is delivering on these different fronts. We can note that the success of college education also depends on outside factors: personality of the student, pre-college education, social and cultural background. Often the student’s success in creativity, communication, and achievement, is really based on a whole life education that preceded the college experience.

Cost

The current \$1.2 trillion of American student debt (higher than credit-card debt) is the best representation of the escalating cost for higher education, both public and private. Costs for public college amount to around \$20,000, a private college costs from \$45,000 to over \$60,000 per year. In addition to absolute indicators, the “money for value” question must be considered. It appears that something is not working well in the market of higher education, or better the market in the globalization era. The high cost of a good college, not just the elite ones, is today an indicator (guarantee?) of quality? In turns, by maintaining expensive tuition good universities can achieve revenue and prestige, in other words: “brand value”.

The question of “money for value” remains complex and strategically relevant in higher education. A cluster of factors, such as technology, automation, pedagogy and knowledge management, complicates it. Students have become more and more “clients”, because of the sustained cost of the degree; they are demanding tangible and intangible value in return for investment. To academic activity, colleges now have to add convenience, efficiency, comfort, safety, customer satisfaction, and an escalating plurality of services done

on campus, off-campus, and even in the larger region. In relation to costs, but not only, there are ongoing attempts to reshape programs and degrees. So-called “nano-degrees” are intended to insert students directly into a precise profession. These degrees are shorter, and focus on delivering quick, intense, precise skills, and niche knowledge. The so-called “micro programs” shrink teaching to only essential directly-related to major/certificate courses.

Technology

The prevalence of information is impacting the student’s desire to learn. The process of knowledge management includes knowledge acquisition, possession, and use. Students might not clearly identify and distinguish the “possession of knowledge” location: is location in their minds or in their smartphones? Consequently they may perceive no need to know/learn that (i.e. the knowledge) which is perceived as already being possessed (in their smartphone). Continual outsourcing one’s knowledge base to Google, is not learning.

Online quick access to information and knowledge is considered a great advantage, with caveats. Online action takes seconds (instead of minutes/hours necessary for accessing a book), although this is still much slower than the operational speed of a well-functioning human brain. Furthermore, if quick and effortless recalling of information is essential, understanding is crucial. The human brain is better than the Internet in terms of creating contexts with speed. The Internet does not contextualize, in fact contextual knowledge develops in the brain. Reading comprehension and speed facilitate the flow of understanding, a process that results compromised by continuous interruptions or detours into hyperlinks. Hyper-fragmentation has a negative impact on understanding. Thinking styles become contaminated by habits of chronic and obsessive segmentation driven by the illusion of making things (smartphone screen-sized chunks of information) easier to grasp.

Now more than before, profound language competence (lexicon, precise meaning of words, foreign idioms, writing skills) constitutes a discriminating factor, necessary to search, distinguish, select, and finally appropriate knowledge. Knowledge in the human brain, not knowledge in the Internet, is the real signal of possession of knowledge. The issue of knowledge also expands across different areas outside academy. In social and political terms we can now observe a debate on “right to knowledge” contextualized within the broader thematic of civic and human rights.

Automation

The full meaning of automation is still waiting to be understood within traditional higher education. Artificial intelligence, computers, robots continue to impact and redesign higher education, and the entire human life. This is not simply about technological change, manufacturing, farming or eliminating jobs. The transfer of intelligence from human brains into mechanisms has already advanced at a fast pace. Soon many routine tasks will migrate to automation, jobs will be replaced by robotics whenever the results mean cheaper in-house costs compared to human labor. Needless to say, the impact on the labor force, especially the non-or-low skilled, will be critical. Polarization will develop between the high-skilled non-routine jobs at the top and low-skilled routine jobs at the bottom. Probably and unfortunately, a more significant polarization will be transferred to the social structure with consequences difficult to envision.

The implications for higher education are not yet clear. Experts see a future in retraining labor for new jobs and new professions, possibly all kinds of labor and all kinds of professions. New categories will be (already are) fast-training, short-training, instant-training, and continuous-training. Certainly the reality of the so-called “non-traditional students” in American colleges is emerging at a fast pace and becoming more sizable. These students, if on one hand they may represent individuals willing to spend money and expecting a degree as a successful purchase, on the other hand they represent individuals looking for knowledge, desiring to expand their minds, to interact, and to engage. Colleges have to rethink their hard and soft structure: degrees, programs, courses, up-to-the-minute “bite-sized” training, and knowledge transfer. We can expect exponential change and continuous disruption effecting both students and educational institutions.

Personal Technology

“Personal Technology” can be defined as process of technology transfer from the external educational entity to the inner individual entity. Teaching (and pedagogy) will be progressively and increasingly impacted by individualized technology. The impact will cause reformatting of classroom structure, academic facilities at-large, and a redesigning of academic professions. It will allow proper “filtering knowledge,” and better interactions in and outside the classroom, on and outside the campus proper. It will expand the range and depth of interacting with external instances and counterparts everywhere. The “smart classroom” will revolutionize practices and processes.

Among other things, the articulation of knowledge through students' "hands on" approach in learning will become prominent. The professor in the classroom is becoming merely one of the converging factors: a maieutic facilitator. Verification of knowledge acquisition will have to happen differently from current verifying of knowledge regurgitation. In other words, students will need to acquire more of what they should bring to the market and to their life: a higher degree of creative problem-solving skills and rational speculation.

Global Education

The world needs more international higher education, not less. Internationalization means integration into the global context. Higher education is not immune from this process, but is itself a factor of hyper-connection. Currently the process is unfolding along major lines: cross-border inter-institutional partnerships (collaboration, twinning, franchising), export of educational services (global course delivery, study abroad courses), and implementing global dimensions (curriculum internationalization, learning experiences). Cultural competence acquisition becomes fundamental, it is redefined as intercultural competence, or better expressed as: "global cultural competence".

Internationalization for a higher education institution is not merely expansion, in whatever form, across the world. It is, more importantly, the internal general reformatting of all features: programs, courses, faculty, staff, in addition to language and communication. Adopting advanced technology, automation, advanced management, and the principles of liquidity and ubiquity, will all result in what we can define as, better than internationalization, "Global Education".

Conclusion

Higher education is facing the need to reconfigure and reinvent itself because of globalization. Universities "think" in terms of degrees, the market does not. Academics will benefit from moving toward a more integrated relationship with vocational training, adopting a mission of filling the gap between training for work and learning for life. Navigation and communication across different disciplines is a worldview that should be acquired in college. "Experience education" should not be just a generic goal, but an actual and structured teaching philosophy and practice. Rethinking higher education with new approaches results in providing the market with skills and knowledge required in the era of liquidity, an era increasingly defined by uncertainties, including a chaotic present and future. This perspective on the other hand, also produces results for the young individual, now remolded into a global

one; liberated from tradition, more individualized than ever, more in charge, strongly projected into the pursue of happiness, here and now!

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Abstract. *A global reconfiguring of roles in society is unfolding at a pace never experienced before, or even imagined. Higher education is leaving the traditional environments of university systems confined by national boundaries. Universities are facing the need to reinvent themselves in the globalization era. Colleges think in “degrees”, markets do not. Academics in general, will benefit from moving toward a more integrated relationship with vocational training, adopting a mission of filling the gap between training for work and educating for life. To navigate and communicate across different disciplines is a skill that should be acquired in university. “Experience education” should not be just a generic principle, but an actual and structured teaching philosophy. The world needs less national, and more international higher education. Powerful hyper-connection is a distinctive feature of higher education. Intercultural competence becomes fundamental, creating in fact a “global cultural competence.” Internationalization for higher education institutions is not merely expansion, in whatever form, across the world. It is also the internal general reinvention of its self. Adopting advanced technology, automation, advanced management, and the principles of liquidity and ubiquity, higher education will result in what we define as “Global Education.”*

Keywords: *globalization, knowledge transfer, higher education, brand value, personal technology, international college, private university, global education*

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