

Globalization of Higher education: What does it mean for EU-LAC relations?

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This paper provides an overview of globalization theory, focusing particularly on the field of higher education. It first introduces the basic premises of globalization, identifying the assumption that borders get blurred or might even disappear, before examining in more details the specific characteristic of globalization of higher education. The subsequent section focuses on the role played by universities which has become the main focal point for globalization of higher education. Last but not least, the paper explores the EU-LAC relationship, stating that higher education provides an opportunity for strengthen the relations between the two regions.

Keywords: globalization, higher education, European Union, Latin America and Caribbean

Introduction

The essence of education will never disappear. The complexity of the 21st century reveals that education is interconnected with social development, economic growth, human rights and dignity. The investment in education is fundamental to reshape the norms and policies for regulating public life in social, political or economic dimensions. Linking the issue of globalization with the question of ensuring qualitative higher education systems express the conviction that globalization is a phenomenon that affects also the academic world.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a series of observations on academic globalization, focusing on the relations between the European Union and the Latin America and Caribbean. Assumptions about people's quality of life imply academic and knowledge exchanges among universities, research centers, scientific networks

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and cooperation between these and the business world. As we are all aware, the idea of investing in the field of higher education, research and innovation for promoting growth, employment and sustainable development is well rooted in the international agreements, the Santiago Declaration being one example. As we shall see, in our globalized world, the dissemination of knowledge constitutes a significant gain to intercultural learning. When we turn to consider the issue of higher education at a global level, we should begin with the ties existing between universities and the economic environment. This is manifested in the way that universities are driving forces behind economic, social and political developments. In this new context, the higher education systems have to be open to international cooperation and academic mobility.

Finally, it must not be forgotten that the EU relationship with Latin America transits fresh horizon after the First Academic Summit EU-LAC, hold in Santiago in 2013.

Understanding Globalization

The academic literature notes that `globalization can be many things with various manifestations, meanings, connections an interrelated complexities`⁹⁷.

Paul Hopper argues that globalization implies a greater extent of global interdependences than have previously existed, noticed in mutual interests and commitments, in the apparition of global networks, transnationalism, deterritorialization, space-time compression and the speeding of daily life.⁹⁸

Setting out on the road to understanding globalization as `global interconnectedness constituted by numerous flows an processes`⁹⁹, we must take into consideration all the factors which can shape the experiences and the global contacts: local conditions, historical, cultural and political influences. As for the effects of globalization, these are the results of interaction between global and local

⁹⁷ Wallace Brown Garret, *Globalization is what we make of it: contemporary globalization theory and the future construction of global interconnection*, Political Studies Review, Volume 6, Issue 1, January 2008, p.43

⁹⁸ Hopper Paul, *Living with globalization*, Berg Publishers, 2006, p.4

⁹⁹ Ibidem, p.10

levels, Hopper talking about a `myriad of global-local connections and interactions`.¹⁰⁰

Looking at the position taken by Garret W. Brown, the process of globalization appears to be dialectic, having two contradictory sides: one promotes more interdependence, resulting in prosperous economic markets, democracy and peace, while the other promotes the possibility to foster the economic inequality, the inter-ethnic conflict and to fail to ensure that human development is safe. The essential feature of this definition is that the conceptualization of globalization as a negative or positive thing depends on one's perception of it.¹⁰¹

Globalization of higher education

In a broad perspective, globalization can be conceived as a phenomenon that `tends to assume that borders and national systems as such get blurred or might even disappear`.¹⁰²

When we look at higher education systems the inherent changes produced by cross-border flows of ideas, mobility and financing couple with developments in information and communication technology. The logical and likely consequence is that higher education drives, and is driven by, globalization. The creation of a highly skilled workforce and the development of research and innovation capacity are the core of higher education missions.¹⁰³

The perception of knowledge as a key for development is accompanied by the crucial role played by higher education in facilitating the production and the distribution of knowledge. This approach shows that is compulsory to expand higher education. What is more important is that, being done that knowledge is universal, the universities, as institutions producing knowledge, have universal appeal. This is why, knowledge transcends national boundaries. In this perspective, universities adapt their educational programs to market demands and get global in

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 139

¹⁰¹ Wallace Brown Garret, op.cit., pp.44-45

¹⁰² Teichler Ulrich, *The Changing Debate on Internationalisation of Higher Education*, Higher Education, 48 (1), 2004, p.7

¹⁰³ ***, *Educational Research and Innovation Higher Education to 2030*, Volume 2, Globalisation, OECD Publishing, p.13

their operation. A first line of analyzing globalization of higher education is focused on cross-border higher education. The providers, programs, course materials, teachers or students are therefore seen as surpassing the traditional boundaries.¹⁰⁴ Within this frame of mind, the great importance of the international level is attested by the process of harmonization of European higher education systems by way of Bologna Process and the consequences of it in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Following Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin¹⁰⁵, the apparition of worldwide university rankings and the media coverage which surrounds them is a signal for higher education field which is transforming the practices, the political decision-makers and the students of higher education institutions.

The relationship between globalization and markets shapes the universities in the sphere of teaching and in the sphere of research. Nowadays, the students want to study those programs that make them employable. Universities have to be prepared to offer courses for which there is a demand in the global market.

Analytically, globalization of higher education has some key effects for people and for countries¹⁰⁶:

1. the globalization of education has gathered momentum
2. the mobility of professionals has registered a phenomenal increase in the age of globalization
3. the reach and the spread of transnational corporations is worldwide

In the first case, another two dimensions have to be mention. Firstly, in the university world renown, the proportion of foreign students studying for professional degrees or doctorate is consistent. Secondly, there are some aspects involved which are important for developing countries: there, the institutions that

¹⁰⁴ Varghese N.V, *Globalization of higher education and cross-border student mobility*, International Institute for Educational Planning, Paris, 2008, pp.9-11

¹⁰⁵ Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, 'Cross-border Higher Education: Trends and Perspectives', in *Educational Research and Innovation Higher Education to 2030*, Volume 2, Globalisation, OECD Publishing, p.66

¹⁰⁶ Deepak Nayyarm, 'Globalization: What does it Mean for Higher Education?' in Weber Luc E, Duderstadt James J. (eds), *The globalization of higher education*, Economica, Glion colloquium Series No 5, London, Paris and Geneva, pp.11-13

provide higher education are increasingly adopting curricula pursuant to international patterns and standards.

At the same time, the increased mobility of professionals, especially the brain drain, indicates that people with high skills or professional qualifications can emigrate permanently, live abroad temporarily, or stay at home and travel frequently for business.

Shortly, the people with higher education are almost as mobile as capital across borders and can be considered globalized people because they are employable almost anywhere.¹⁰⁷

Following, Luc Soete¹⁰⁸, the agenda of global research for development is important for both the developing as well as the `developed` world because this will be an incentive for new research activities, coordinated in this context by international partnerships and consortia. The ability to combine the existing knowledge is developed during the academic studies and it constitutes the basis of innovation nowadays. Because of the complex global environments, innovations do not suggest to copy the developed countries, but to tap knowledge from global sources and use them to solve problems in local situations. This situation underlines two interdependent directions of globalization in higher education: the collaboration and the competition. The emergence of new poles of science will strengthen the academic research and the globalization of higher education because the available international funds will demand more international cooperation, mobility and worldwide competition.

Summing up, the universities have to adapt in these complex times because globalization gives a new emphasis to opportunities, but they challenge in that there is questioning the ideal of the public domain and common good. The traditional academic values like autonomy, academic freedom, research, students' work, assessment are kept, but they should be analyzed within the perspective of

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, p.12

¹⁰⁸ Luc Soete in Han Aarts and Heinz Greijn, `Globalization, knowledge and learning: Developing the capacities of higher education institutes` , in Teferra Damtew and Greijn Heinz, *Higher Education and Globalization: Challenges, Threats and Opportunities for Africa*, Maastricht University Centre for International Cooperation in Academic Development (MUNDO), Netherlands 2010, p.10

global education. The international relations and academic exchanges with foreign countries are essential for the role of contemporary university, deeply rooted in the international dimension of its work. As some authors point out, the result of globalization of higher education is the borderless nature of contemporary knowledge.¹⁰⁹

Perspectives on Globalization of Higher Education and the EU-LAC relationship

Higher education is considered to be a major driver of progress because is the basis of economic growth and competitiveness. Taking into consideration the global challenges nowadays (climate changes, human security, sustainable development, health, food security, financial crises, movement of people¹¹⁰), higher education is a key to tackle these types of challenges. At the heart of the wealth of nations and the well-being of humankind thesis lies a particular conception of knowledge. In the 21st century, it is obvious that knowledge remains a very powerful concept in the process of economic growth and social progress.

At the EU-LAC level, higher education provides an opportunity for strengthen the relations between two regions and it is a matter of priority to raise cooperation between countries of the European Union and the Latin and American countries.

The promotion of a `EU-LAC Knowledge Area` dates back to 2004¹¹¹, when the universities of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean undertook to establish a set of common objectives and targets for creating `an integrated area, which may encourage the compatibility and comparability of the higher education systems and

¹⁰⁹ Francisco López Segrera, `Trends of higher education worldwide and in Latin America and Caribbean`, in Francisco López Segrera, Colin Brock, José Dias Sobrinho, *Higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean 2008*, UNESCO-IESALC, Caracas, 2009, p. 13

¹¹⁰ Cooper Andrew F., Heine Jorge, Thakur Ramesh, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, OUP, 2013, pp.12-13 !

¹¹¹ Declaration of Guadalajara,
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/eurolat/cumbres_ue_alc/guadalajara_2004_en.pdf,
accessed February 24, 2014

thereby achieve greater mobility of students, teachers and administrators that will generate a broader common culture and stronger ties between the new generations¹¹².

The history of EU-LAC relationship offers an interesting perspective of what a strategic partnership mean for higher education globalization. The Strategic Partnership between the EU and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1999¹¹³ was constructed on a shared conviction that both regions benefit from working together and have common interests in the present world characterized by interdependence.

Taking into consideration that universities were the forerunners to globalization¹¹⁴, in this context of a strategic partnership, they build interconnections and linkages with their exchange programs and their gatherings (conferences, symposia, workshops, etc.). These support the free exchange of knowledge and ideas, higher education being an area of bi-regional interest for EU and LAC.

As we can see before, globalization expands and transforms the role of universities, which become actors in the international system, the same as they are today companies, NGOs, regions and local governments. For integrating the phenomenon of globalization of higher education, the strategic partnership between EU-LAC gives an example in this regard by developing projects with the purpose of increasing innovation, research and academic mobility. All of this aim to improve the competitiveness and to create jobs in an interconnected world.

Over time, the EU has created a series of projects in the field of higher education that have underlined the universal appeal of the universities and have

¹¹² Declaration of Guadalajara of the universities of Europe, Latin America and the Carribbean, http://www.eua.be/typo3conf/ext/bzb_securelink/pushFile.php?cuid=2122&file=fileadmin/user_upload/files/EUA1_documents/Guadalajara_declaration.pdf, accessed February 24, 2014

¹¹³ Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament follow-up to the first summit between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union, COM/2000/0670 final, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2000:0670:FIN:EN:PDF>, accessed February 25, 2014

¹¹⁴ Wayne C. Johnson, 'Partnering on a Global Scale', in Weber Luc E, Duderstadt James J. (eds), op.cit., p.29

showed that knowledge could transcend national boundaries. Here, we can mention the Alban program, launched with the purpose of providing postgraduate scholarships to enable students and professionals in Latin America to study in the European Union, ALFA program aimed to promote cooperation between higher education establishments in both regions and Erasmus Mundus program that had like objectives to improve the education and to train human resources, as well as to promote partnerships and institutional co-operation exchanges between Higher Education institutions¹¹⁵. For 2014-2020, the EU has substantially increase their budgets for programs in science, technology and academic mobility through Erasmus Plus and the Horizon 2020 initiatives.

For the EU-LAC relationship, these new programs emerge as a central issue on the both region agenda partly because higher education may lead to strengthen the partnership existing between them. The opportunity for Latin American students to study in Europe is a mark of the mobility of professionals that has registered a phenomenal increase in the age of globalization.

These developments are especially important because, in the present globalized world, the role of universities is increasing, since these are the ones that create goodwill, that contribute to the professional growth of young people who have become part of the globalized labor market.¹¹⁶

Also, in today world, both the EU and CELAC are going through a period in which the financial, economic, political and social crises intermingle. It is therefore more vital than ever for the countries of both regions to come together for maintaining an important influence on the international stage. To achieve this objective, the universities can contribute by producing and disseminating universal knowledge. Due to the dual characteristics of the universities – national and international- the knowledge promoted is also national and international¹¹⁷ and

¹¹⁵ Country Briefing Regional Co-operation Program, Program Review 2013, European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/latin-america/regional-cooperation/documents/regional_coooperation_programmes_-_general_review_2013.pdf, accessed February 26, 2014

¹¹⁶ Bărbulescu Iordan Gheorghe, El papel de las universidades en el desarrollo de las relaciones UE-CELAC, Revista Europea de Estudios Latino Americanos, Vol. 1, No. 2, Bucharest, 2013, p.19

¹¹⁷ Varghese N.V.,op.cit., p.10

ensures that humankind is the beneficiary of the great cross border education. So, the Action Plan EU-CELAC 2013-2015¹¹⁸ is seen as one of the principal axes of the `Joint Initiative for innovation and research` which involves close cooperation between universities and centers of both regions. Alfredo Moreno, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, has underlined these aspects during the First Academic Summit EU-CELAC¹¹⁹:

„ We are convinced that a closer and more effective cooperation between universities and research centers on both sides of the Atlantic can help to make a qualitative leap in the modernization of education systems, providing synergies with vision and future prospects, as well as the development of our human capital, in order to create more qualified companies to address the complex challenges of the XXI century, more prosperous, more just and democratic.”

Conclusion

The argument sketched in this short paper is that globalization process has an enormous effect of higher education. In this context, it was shown that globalization was changing the ways in which knowledge is produced, applied and disseminated. Universities as the most important institutions in the organization of research and higher education are crucial for better management of today world challenges. So, they need to adapt their roles and develop their abilities to anticipate and respond to these issues.

Taking into consideration that both EU and LAC are facing the same problems, today, more than ever, it is necessary to deepen the EU-LAC relationship, strengthen the academic cooperation and ensure better quality of workers. The programs in the field of higher education developed between two regions are important in order to promote the regional collaboration. At the same time, both EU

¹¹⁸ EU-CELAC Action Plan 2013-2015, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/la/summits/docs/2013_santiago_summit_eu-celac_action_plan_en.pdf, accessed February 27, 2014

¹¹⁹ Speech of Alfredo Moreno, <http://www.cumbreacademica-alcue.cl/noticia9.html>, accessed February 28, 2014

and LAC needs to enhance their international role. The driving force for this should be the higher education systems and the principles established in the framework of the Strategic Partnership.

Special emphasis was placed on the Erasmus Plus and the Horizon 2020 initiatives, as on the EU-LAC Action Plan 2013-2015, in order to enhance the relations between EU and LAC in the academic field.

Finally, the universities are important elements in the EU-LAC relationship for stimulating cooperation and deal with common issues.

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