HIGHER EDUCATION AS SOCIAL CHANGE IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

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The article begins with the research questions the thesis intends to explore: firstly, to understand how higher education institutions (HEIs) create social change through institutionalize social engagement (SE) programmes; secondly, to understand how such programmes influence the curricula and research activities of the institutions where they are located; and thirdly, to explore how programmes influence the non-curricular aspects of institutional culture and process which also contribute to student learning, referred to in this thesis as institutional-learning culture. Through an illuminative analysis across three distinctly situated case studies, this thesis looks for patterns in the creation and institutionalization of these programmes within their respective HEIs. As little empirical data exists around these questions, this research aims to shine a light of enquiry into this area generally, so that foundational aspects of this nascent body of knowledge can be developed. As such, the purpose of the study is not to compare these programmes against one another, but to aggregate experiences and learning from all three cases to generate a more complete picture of the institutionally enabling factors which create spaces for these alternative ways of working within HEIs and to understand to what extent such programmes catalyze outcomes *within* the HEIs themselves.

In this article, the author provide a brief overview of the current state of affairs in the higher education (HE) sector globally, suggesting how this research makes a contribution to the field. The chapter ends with an outline of the article 'structure.

Higher Education Sectoral Context

This research is timely and relevant as the role of universities is in the midst of being reshaped by a changing landscape of economic, social and political factors. As government financial support for HE has declined globally, most notably in North America, Europe and East and South Asia (Altbach, Reisberg et al. 2009, Pp.72), there has been a heavy push by policymakers toward the marketisation of universities, so that they become more adept at generating their own revenue. This movement toward a rent-seeking orientation for the sector has been heavily contested. At issue are not only the institutional cultures and structures within HEIs, but also larger questions about the future role of HE, of how HEIs should contribute to society and human development.

The idea of the-3rd stream for HEs, while originating within the marketisation paradigm, has opened up wider possibilities for those who believe that not only should Universities be engaged in the wider world economically but also socially, thus placing universities in deeper relationship with local communities and in deeper collaboration with the forces of civil society.

The Changing National and Global Contexts of the HE Sector

The overall context in which HEIs operate has shifted significantly over the past thirty years. The research -multiversity has lost the financial backing of governments it once enjoyed. The rise of neoliberal economic approaches in the early 1980s began to induce fundamental changes within HEIs as government subsidies began to decline. Over the intervening years, government support of HE has continued to diminish, leading countries like the UK to implement student tuition fees at universities for the first time ever in 1997-fees rates which are expected to triple in 2011 in response to a 40% reduction of government subsidies for teaching in British HEIs. Since most national HE systems are predominately populated by publicly-funded HEIs, such reductions in government support have resulted in drastic changes over the past three decades; changes that have placed HEIs in a state of ongoing financial instability, with universities expected to behave more like market-oriented corporations by taking increasing responsibility for generating their own funding. This marketisation of Higher education has had a tremendous impact both on the institutional cultures within HEIs and on their educational goals, significantly reducing their ability to function as social critics and change actors (Altbach, 2008). As a result, the relationship between HEIs and society is deteriorating (Olsen, 2000). Management practices such as-flexible labour has significantly reduced the number of full-time faculty, leaving many younger academics in non-career-track adjunct positions. Moreover, market priorities have begun to alter the relationship between HEIs and their students. Students have lost their unique roles and are increasingly considered fee-paying-consumers/customers.

Such practices are also deeply related to the-internationalization trend in HE. With declining public subsidies and rising fees, home-country students are often priced out of the market for public university education, particularly in the US and Europe. As a result HEIs increasingly promote themselves in international markets in order to attract additional full-tuition-paying students, with a result that universities are less focused on meeting the needs of students in their own countries and communities. International cooperation agreements which enable this kind of student mobility, similar to Europe‘s Bologna Process, are also now in place in South America, Africa and East and South Asia (Altbach, Reisberg *et al*. 2009). As government-managed HE systems become further unable to meet the needs of local students, private, for-profit HEIs are increasingly the most feasible route for lower-income students, particularly in the US context as Kamenetz has documented (2010).This trend is not limited to North America alone, however; Altbach *et al*. (2009) note that for-profit HEIs have become an easier entry point for students to HE in national contexts around the world, with these for-profit HEIs being the fastest growing portion of the global HE sector. However, educational goals for students in such institutions are seen to be shifting increasingly in an instrumental direction wherein the aim of learning is construed more and more narrowly as-human capital development, in preparing students for specific workplace roles rather than building students‘ capacities for critical analysis and life-long learning.

Altbach and Welch have argued that this commercialization of HE in both public and for-profit universities threatens to undermine the sector, as degree qualifications lose their perceived value when they are seemly sold *en mass* as a means of revenue-generation for their institutions (2010).

The economic levelling of globalization has added yet another dimension to these changes as universities the world over increasingly imitate American HEIs. This homogenizing effect has been perceived as-institutional monocropping (Evans, 2004). Cary puts it more bluntly when he says-there is only one status ladder in HE; everyone wants to be Harvard (interview in Kamenetz 2010, Pp.57). International league tables tend to focus institutional energy away from local issues and priorities (Ordorika 2008; Taylor, Okail *et al*. 2008) where HEIs could have a more direct impact on social change.

Higher Education, Development and Social Change

Although the increasing marketisation and internationalisation of HE are attenuating the university‘s ability to engage with local issues and wider social issues, HEIs have a long history of engagement with society. Indeed, one of the earliest universities in the world, Taxila (located in what is now Pakistan) began operating in the 7th century BC with the motto ―service to humanity (Tandon, 2008). More recently, land-grant universities in the United States played a significant role in the massification of HE for working-class and rural populations (Silver, 2007; Altbach, 2008 and Menand 2010). HEIs in Latin America have played significant roles in SC through transforming the role and function of the university, most notably in Chile in the 1960s and 70s under Salvador Allende (M'Gonigle and Starke, 2006). Early participatory action research movements, originating in Latin American HEIs (Fals-Borda 1984), called upon universities and academics to play an active, engaged role with the people affected by the problems they studied as social scientists.

In international development, there were once high expectations that universities would be driving forces for change and modernization in the post-colonial era. Lauglo (1982) and others wrote extensively about the importance of building partnerships between HEIs in developed countries and those in developing countries. However, there was a distinct and unequal division of labour in this arrangement as Northern universities were expected to transmit existing ideas and technologies to developing countries while the Southern universities were-very much at the receiving end (Altbach, quoted in Lauglo 1982, Pp19), creating a-vicious circle of institutional inequality that many believe still persists (Groenewald, 2010). In the late 1960s, as the initial hopefulness surrounding international development dimmed, the contribution of HEIs faded somewhat (Lemasson, 1999). Lemasson (1999) suggests that only in the 1990s was there renewed enthusiasm for HEIs to engage directly in development. He says as a result there has been a -virtual explosion in these types of activities.

The first decade of the 21st century has seen the role of HEIs in development become an increasingly central issue in global debates. With the advent of the-knowledge

society, knowledge itself is increasingly viewed as the most essential driver of economic and social development (World Bank, 2002). Moreover, within-knowledge economies certain types of knowledge are valued and privileged, particularly knowledge which leads to scientific and technological innovation. Because universities have traditionally been the engines of innovation through research, HEIs have re-emerged as key players in global debates on development and change. Universities are again seen as potential drivers of economic and social development. As well, the beginning of the 21st Century saw the creation of the Millennium Development Goals, which has fuelled a global resurgence in development research, as countries and private donors have ratcheted up funding for research related to the Goals. These events have opened new spaces for universities to engage in hands-on development activities and research and to take part in a global conversation about the inadequacies of the current global system.

Indeed the rapidly changing landscape of the higher education sector globally has stimulated much reflection about the role of HE in society. The breakdown of the dyadic relationship between the state and the university is historically significant, signalling a seismic shift for the future of universities. Although the origins of universities reach back to the middle ages, where they were initially ecclesiastical institutions, since the late 17th century, universities have been strongly allied with governments. According to M'Gonigle and Starke, -The university began to shift from a religious mission to one oriented to building the emerging nation-state (2006, Pp.27). This linkage between the university and national governments has endured for some three centuries, but has weakened substantially over the past four decades. Conventional wisdom argues that the future of universities lies in the private sector, that their survival requires the adoption of profit-oriented business models, in becoming more like international corporations which prize efficiency, innovation and quality. Such conventional wisdom largely ignores the role in social change that universities have played in the past and leaves little vision for such a role in the future. Write Gaventa and Bivens, Knowledge production which is driven by motivations of efficiency or market value is unlikely to be transformative or contribute to social justice. Space and time have to be left for iteration, relationships and imagination (2011, Pp24).

Universities occupy an important and unique space that lies at the cross-roads of the market, government and civil society. Rather than become purely creatures of the market, it is important for universities to maintain this intermediary space, particularly to counter-balance the power of the market by supporting the voices and knowledge of civil society and social movements. SE engagement is an important mechanism through which universities can advance this counter-balancing role, enabling academics to engage with the wider currents in civil society, thus finding a way to off-set the polarising pressures of marketisation, which often pull researchers away from local and social issues. SE provides institutions and academics with histories of supporting social change spaces to continue their work under a new nomenclature.

In many instances SE itself is a form of resistance to the commercialisation of knowledge that the global knowledge economy has created. As certain disciplines are privileged, others are marginalised or eliminated. In particular, extramural and continuing education programmes that have traditionally allowed universities to engage with their communities have been scaled back or cut entirely (Hall forthcoming). Writ large, as HEIs lose their perceived value to their communities through the elimination of these kinds of programmes, they also lose perceived value as ―public goods that should be supported by the state. Greenwood (2007) has argued that SE is an important mechanism through which universities can resist marketisation and redefine themselves as visible contributors to their communities and society as a whole. Likewise, Hall (2011, Pp.13) argues that many working in universities hold an axiological position that-the benefits of [academic] knowledge production, as a point of public morality or public accountability need to benefit society.

These diverse sectoral currents and tensions have become drivers which have created broader interest and opportunity for universities to innovate with various forms of SE.As such, the SE programmes discussed in this study should not be seen as isolated programmes. According to a recent paper by Hall (2011, Pp.5), Community-university engagement is one of the strongest trends cutting across our university campuses these days. There has been a veritable explosion of writing on community-university engagement in the past five to six years. Thus the programmes in this article are representative of this much broader trend.

While financial necessity has forced HEIs to engage more with private sector forces, these very same changes have also created parallel opportunities for universities to engage with communities and the public more broadly and have opened a space for HE to redefine itself as a vital component of the public sphere. The discourses which are driving sectoral changes toward marketisation also leave some room for maneuver and response. Concepts such as the ―3rd stream open up spaces for collaboration with actors beyond the university. The 3rd stream is premised around HEIs generating income from new collaborations with the business community, in addition to government-funded research contracts (1st stream) and student fees (2nd stream). The dominant idea here is one of encouraging and persuading universities to engage with a wide range of business organisations to assist in technical innovation (Watson 2007, Pp.13).

The Higher Education Funding Council for Asia institutionalized this concept in 1999 when it created the-Higher Education Reach Out to Business and the Community Initiative. Increasingly, the 3rd stream is becoming a central pillar of the British HE sector, accounting for more than £3 billion of revenue in financial year 2008-9 alone (Lea, 2010).

However, the 3rd stream can also be interpreted as applying to community and civil society actors, not simply businesses. Early on, communities were noticeably absent from this policy. More recently community initiatives have not been completely excluded from this discourse (Watson 2007, pp. 49). However, the low priority granted to community benefit has been sharply criticised: Any conceptualization of the third stream 'project is

incomplete without a social dimension beyond business-but equally the term community 'has also typically seemed an afterthought (Laing and Maddison, 2007, Pp.13).

Embedded-theories of change (TOCs) have been much debated in recent years in the field of development (Eyben, Kidder et al., 2008; Ortiz-Aragon, 2010). The non-linearity premised by soft systems/complexity thinking represents a major shift in the conceptualization of human development and social change processes. Indeed the major conceptual model that underpinned much of the early phases of the global development project was Rostow's-economic stages of growth (Rostow, 1960). From this model's perspective, all that was necessary for countries in the South to become developed was to engineer a few preconditions-widespread education, development of a banking/finance systems, the emergence of entrepreneurs-and the economy of the country would -take off and, after progressing through a predetermined number of stages, arrive at economic modernity as exemplified by Northern countries. This assumption that societies are basically machines and can be engineered to achieve desired outcomes is at the heart of most Enlightenment thought and science.

This epistemic perspective has influenced the development of modern social-science disciplines, which in many ways attempt to mimic Newtonian scientific methods (Rostow explicitly describes a Newtonian worldview as the dividing line between-traditional and modern societies (1960), seeking to discover dependable principles about society which can then be used to change society in what are perceived to be beneficial ways. Embedded in much of this thinking is a consistent belief in a linear TOC, that once principles have been derived they can be applied in such a way that they will achieve consistent outcomes. Much government policy and planning is rooted in these assumptions. Likewise, development interventions are often constructed around a-logical framework which is premised around generating smaller intermediary outcomes which will lead directly to larger more substantial goals. As Snowden (2000) has acknowledged, linear planning is quite effective in working with-complicated systems, such as airplanes or information technology networks. While these are intensely sophisticated systems, they responded in a predictable fashion. The same input or action will lead to a consistent result. Snowden distinguishes these from-complex systems, which inherently include human systems.

In complex systems, there is no one-to-one correlation between an action and outcome. Because people are inconsistent in their behaviors, because they can learn and manipulate systems, there is no linearity or predictability. Thus the non-linear theory of change which is implicit in soft systems/complexity thinking does not look for fundamental answers or solutions. Rather it looks for patterns, multiple varieties of solutions that may emerge from complex human systems responding to similar phenomena. As such this thesis does not attempt to advance an overarching claim about its findings being definitive or transferable to other institutions. Instead these findings offer some insights into the kinds of activities which may be generated by and flow from the development of SE programmes within HEIs. Each institutional context will be unique, though there may be some overlap

and resonance with the cases elaborated upon in this study.

Several other systems and complexity concepts have also been key components of this study, particularly during the analytical phase.

Conclusion: A Systemic Conception of Power

The systems/complexity lens adopted in this article implies not only a non-linear theory of change; it also implies a poststructuralist view of power, what might be described as a Foucauldian conception of power. Such an understanding of power focuses more on relationships than structural impediments to action and freedom. According to Foucault,-Power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society (1980, 236). From such a perspective, power is not static, but rather understood to be continually in flux, generated through social relationships and impacted by continually shifting human aims, actions and patterns of behaviors. Whereas more traditional views of power may attribute power to certain individuals or certain institutional structures which may block action, the poststructuralist view does not see power as a thing, a noun, but instead as a process-exercised from innumerable points in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations (Foucault 1990, Pp.93-94).

Because systemic analyses are likewise focused on relationships rather than structures, the systemic conception of power is implicitly relational and congruent with the Foucauldian perspective. Therefore a systemic theory of change is underpinned by a systemic conception of power. Critical systems theorists such as Midgley (2000) maintain that systemic research always involves issues of relational power. Likewise, complexity writers such as Stacy (2003) argue that all organizational cultures, patterns and habits are a reflection of embedded power relations. Thus through a systemic analysis, the power relations/dynamics of particular system/institution can be surfaced and better understood.

As such, the exploration of power in this article does not seek to locate static institutional blockages which impede social engagement by HEIs, although such barriers obviously exist and have been cited in the literature previously. Rather the thesis seeks to explore how such blockages have been overcome by institutional actors by shifting power relations within their HEIs. Such an analysis will illuminate how certain collaborations and strategic actions within the universities have led to the convergence of multiple capillary streams of power which have influenced institutional practices and norms in such a way that new spaces and opportunities for social engagement have been created.

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