

A Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century:

European and US approaches

Bruno Aguilera-Barchet



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Executive summary

Traditionally, there have been significant differences between Europe and the United States in matters concerning higher education. Generally speaking, in Europe higher education is considered a public service, while in the US it is considered a private matter that is subject to market rules. The consequences of these different approaches are important. Higher education in Europe focuses more on instruction, and in the US on research, especially applied research. Higher education in Europe is more geared towards theory, for developing intellectual abilities, while in the US institutions of higher learning are more practical, and oriented towards job finding. European universities give their students a more broad-based education, while US higher education is more specialised, almost from the start. Lastly, in Europe most universities are public, whereas in the US many institutions rely primarily on private funding, as a result of which on average, higher education is more expensive than in Europe.

Which of the two systems is better? Traditionally, the answer might have been that each system was good and appropriate according to different cultural standards. However, this was before globalisation. Now universities are ranked, and international rankings, such as the QS¹ World University Rankings or the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities, seem to favour the Anglo-Saxon model, especially the US one.

¹ Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) is a company specializing in education and study abroad.

World university rankings might be a point of contention, as not all of their criteria are widely accepted as objective markers of quality. Nevertheless, such overwhelming differences do seem to indicate that Europe lags behind the US in terms of higher education. In any case, this seems to have been one of the objectives in starting the Bologna Process in 1999, as European ministers of education declared that Europe wanted to ‘match the performance of the best performing systems in the world, notably the United States and Asia’ (EC, Education and Training 2011).

In this paper, the author analyses, from a European and a US perspective, the strengths and weaknesses of both systems. The US seems to offer a wider and more diversified range of choice in higher education: on average, more Americans than Europeans attend higher education institutions (6.3% versus 4%), and US universities are usually more pragmatically focused on developing concrete abilities. Conversely, European universities are more intellectually oriented, and therefore European students of higher education generally are better equipped to analyse and adapt to new situations in a fast-changing world. From this point of view, instruction is at least as important as research, as far as educational performance is concerned. Public funding of the average European higher education institution also ensures that people with limited resources have access to advanced education. The author also examines ways in which institutions of higher education must adapt to an ever-changing world are analysed, looking at what Europe can learn from the US and vice versa.

Two approaches to higher education

European approach

Europeans view higher education as a public service. After primary and secondary school the most able students are offered, after a rigorous selection process, the possibility of studying in the public system of higher education for a specific career (medicine, law, engineering, business administration, biology, etc.). Taxpayers' money pays for a majority of the costs, and the university system is structured such that more general, theoretical topics are taught first, with the goal of educating students on a wide range of subjects and thereby developing their intellectual capacity. The general nature of studies then changes and gives way to a more practical approach. An important feature of the European system of higher education is that the programmes and courses are imposed and validated by a public authority, generally the ministry of education of each country. In the past, getting a job was something that students did afterwards, and in principle, job training was not part of university studies. A college degree was only a piece of paper confirming that one had the intellectual qualifications for the job. Learning 'on the job' was very much a reality for degree holders entering the workforce. The system worked, as it was fairly selective, and the number of students who actually earned a degree was relatively small. It still works like this in France, for instance, where students who get accepted into the elite institutions of higher education,

the 'grandes écoles' (including medical schools), have to pass an extremely difficult exam. Traditionally, research has not been performed at the higher education level but in specific public institutions such as the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique or the Spanish Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.

US approach

Traditionally, in the US after high school students do not choose a specific career but go through four years of general study at college. Only after graduation can they join a professional school (of law, medicine, engineering and so on) at the postgraduate level. Another important difference is that, although in the US there are public universities, higher education is generally more expensive for students than in Europe. The system used to work when a minority of high school alumni attended higher education institutions, simply because having a university degree was almost a guarantee for securing a good job. Less wealthy students could get a loan and pay it back quite easily after working for a couple of years. Paying for a college or postgraduate education was seen as a worthwhile investment. Nowadays, the exponential rise in the number of students who hold college degrees has caused a degree overload in the marketplace, and resulted in their devaluation. Even after paying a lot of money for an education, there is no guarantee of a good job, which makes it difficult to pay back the loans. Another important difference

is that, basically, higher education is not seen in the US as an instructional process; general or intellectual approaches are rather unusual, as students have to choose a specific course of studies almost at the beginning of their education. As a result, the courses of study are much more diversified in the US than in Europe. Though many US universities impose prerequisites that oblige students to study general subjects, such as art, mathematics, religion or history, before starting their main courses of study, as, for instance, do the most prestigious and expensive Ivy League institutions, US higher education institutions often place a greater emphasis on job preparation and training than on developing intellectual capacities.

Higher education in a globalised world

Globalisation is changing these features considerably. In Europe, especially after approval of the Bologna Process in 1999, the higher education system is clearly moving towards the US model. That higher education should be a public service is no longer a priority. Public authorities are reducing the funding they put into higher education and are trying either to get private financing or to introduce research programmes financed by states or by the European Union as part of university resources. Curricula are becoming shorter and more specialised and practical. They are not geared towards cultivating traditional intellectual and cultural forms of knowledge, but rather towards giving students practical tools to be more successful in the workforce.

In the US, some voices are beginning to express their discontent with the high cost of universities, preferring to see a reduction in the influence of markets and the private sector in many higher education institutions (Bok 2005; Hacker and Dreifus 2010; Taylor 2010). The idea of promoting a wider and more independent approach to higher education has been brought to the forefront, based on the consideration that changing circumstances are requiring more and more people to be increasingly dynamic and practical. Unfortunately, specialised education does not prepare students for these changes. It is rather significant that the best schools in business administration are currently incorporating courses in the humanities into their curricula. The Spanish Instituto de Empresa Business School, ranked the No. 2 business school worldwide, recently created a Humanities Department directed by Arantza de Areilza. Tony Golsby-Smith (2011) in the *Harvard Business Review* wrote on 31 March 2011 an article with an eye-opening title: 'Want Innovative Thinking? Hire from the Humanities'. Future managers are beginning to study, in addition to technical subjects, some philosophy, literature or history.

The Bologna Process and the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in June 1999, known as the Bologna Process, is clearly changing the educational approaches of the EU Member States, as it goes much further than simply ensuring more mobility among EU students and faculty. Following the principles stated in the Sorbonne Declaration of 25 May 1998, the European ministers of education convened in Bologna, the site of the first university to be founded in the West, in 1088, to create the European Higher Education Area.

The creation of the EHEA goes beyond European Union boundaries. At the last biannual conference for developing the Bologna Process, held at Leuven/Louvain la Neuve in April 2009, there were 46 European ministers of education and delegation heads representing 15 countries from Africa, North and South America, Asia and Australia. The Bologna Process affects not only higher education in Europe but higher education all over the world. Furthermore, it is changing educational habits, and not only at the higher level. Implications extend to the quality of education at the secondary school level, as indicated by the Comenius programme, which invests millions of euros every year to help schools adapt to the needs of the EHEA.

With the creation of the EHEA, the European Union wants, among other things, to compete with the best systems of higher education in the world, especially those in the US. This has made the Bologna Process a target for criticism in two respects. First, scholars and specialists accuse the EU education ministers of trying to simply ‘Americanise’ higher education in Europe, disregarding the long tradition of European education that has produced many original and outstanding approaches to learning. Second, many critics think that the Bologna Process tends to commercialise higher education in Europe. They believe it has too narrow a vision, and they express concern for a model of education which is mostly directed at the labour market, disregarding the fundamental purpose of education: the development of individuals as members of society in the European tradition.

EU Member States were given 10 years to adapt their systems of higher education to the EHEA. Steadily, they have been overseeing the implementation of the Bologna Process through biannual education conferences. The first was held in Prague in 2001, followed by those in Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007) and finally, Leuven/Louvain la Neuve (2009). In theory, by the end of 2010 all the States that had agreed to be part of the EHEA should have adapted their systems of higher education to the Bologna Process.

The spirit of the 1999 Bologna Declaration

The six basic principles of the Bologna Declaration are: (a) the adoption of a system of easily comparable degrees; (b) the establishment of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate; (c) the implementation of a common system of credits for promoting widespread student mobility, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); (d) the creation of a policy directed to overcoming obstacles and assuring mobility for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff; (e) the promotion of European cooperation to assure the quality of higher education through the development of comparable criteria and methodologies and (f) the development of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly through curricular development, inter-institutional cooperation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research (EHEA 1999).

It is still not clear whether a single European system of education has yet been established. Since some countries, such as Spain, completed their implementation as recently as 2010, it is too soon to provide an overall assessment of the European system of higher education. Nevertheless, one can attempt to clarify ideas about the EHEA by means of comparative analysis with the US system. There are two reasons why this is important. First, because European ministers of education consider it to be the best performing system of higher education in the world, and it serves as the preferred point of reference. Second, the US system of higher

education has been in operation for a much longer period of time than the new European system.

European higher education in the world market

The Bologna Process has received a great deal of criticism, some of which is justified, because of the overwhelming subordination of higher education to market needs and the shortening of the number of years that European students stay in higher education. But from one point of view, Bologna is already undeniably a success. The creation of the EHEA is impelling European higher education to be competitive at the world level.

Since 1999, more non-Europeans have begun to enrol in institutions of higher education across the EU. Getting a diploma from a European university is starting to be seen as an option for international students all over the world, including students from the US, and it seems that credit is due largely to the Bologna Process.

According to Brookes and Huisman (2009), the number of international students is growing faster in Europe than in the US. In 2006 international enrolment grew 17% in the US, but in the same period it went up 29% in the UK, 46% in Germany and 81% in France. Economically speaking, this is good news for the European economy, as the Institute of International Education has calculated the economic impact of

the international student market at approximately \$14.5 billion, most of which goes towards tuition and living expenses.

Why is it that foreign students are increasingly coming to Europe instead of going to the US? In order to understand this shift, it is useful to examine, from a European perspective, why many have considered the US system of higher education as a model.

The attractiveness of US higher education

A more diversified, wider choice

Numerous authors (Bowen 1999; Perkin 2007; Thelin 2007; Trow 1999) identify characteristics that set US higher education apart from other systems, including expansion, diversity and responsiveness. That means that in the US, there are a greater number of higher education institutions per habitant than anywhere else in the world. They are more diverse and they adapt more quickly to new realities and trends. Individuals find more diverse course offerings and have a much broader choice. US students have an incredible range of options in pursuing higher learning, and therefore feel more motivated to fully participate in their educational experience.

There are more than 4,000 state universities, private colleges, and technical and community colleges operating in the US today. Higher education is socially more widespread in the US than in Europe. Approximately 64% of US students enrolled in higher education attend four-year colleges, and the majority (83%) attend higher education full-time—meaning they take at least three to four classes per term on average. Additionally, the student body is predominantly female (55%). The general starting age of a college student is 18, and 49% of 18- to 19-year-olds reported being enrolled in some sort of education

past high school (US Census Bureau 2010). According to the Carnegie Foundation (2010), in the United States today there are 33 different types of higher education institutions (both private and public).

Thus, 19 million Americans are enrolled in some sort of higher education institution. For 300 million Americans, this represents a high proportion of higher education institutions per capita. Europe also has around 4,000 higher education institutions with approximately 20 million students enrolled. However, as this number is for 500 million people, considerably fewer options for higher education are available to the citizens of the EU member states than to those of the United States. That means 6.3% of Americans attend higher education institutions compared to only 4% of Europeans.

Better financial support

On average, US universities have much bigger budgets than those in Europe. Considering Ivy League schools, the differences are astounding. The total operating revenue of Harvard University, the richest US institute of higher education in 2010, was \$3.725 billion (\$3,725 million; Harvard University 2010, 3) for 19,500 students, which amounts to \$191,000 per student. The amount of spending at US public universities is much lower however. The average total cost to educate a student in 2006 was \$13,819. This consisted of a median state subsidy of \$7,149 and an average net tuition of \$6,909 (Delta Project, 2011, 22).

European universities have considerably less money. For instance, the largest and one of the best-known Spanish universities, the Universidad Complutense of Madrid, in 2010 had €595 million (\$776 million) for 85,505 students—that is, \$9,075 spent on each student, some 30% less than the average public university in the United States.

US university students usually pay much more for higher education than Europeans do. The next section focuses on the cost of higher education in light of the public interest and the demands of the market.

Higher education, the market and the common good

Paying for higher education

There are two reasons students of higher education pay less in Europe than in the US. First, public financing of higher education in Europe is the rule, not the exception. US students, however, are used to paying for their education with private resources. Second, the cost of education is much higher in the US than in Europe, and it has doubled in the past 20 years. On average, students attending college in their home state (and residing on campus) pay around \$14,000 per year at a public university and \$40,000 at a private institution.

If, traditionally, US families are used to paying a lot more for education than Europeans do, it is because higher education in Europe is considered a public service. Europeans are generally used to having an affordable education system. As tuition fees represent only a small part of the real cost of education, taxpayers in Europe are the main source of revenue for higher education. For example, in Spain a public university student pays €1,000 in tuition fees on average, but the actual cost to an institution to educate that student is tenfold, around €10,000. Therefore, the state pays 90% of the cost of every university student. And in France and Germany, the share of public financing is even greater.

Another big difference from the US is that in Europe the cost of tuition is fixed by law in most of the education systems; it is also relatively low. In France, for instance, in 2009 students paid €174 (\$241) per year for undergraduate studies and €237 (\$328) for postgraduate studies. French universities cannot raise these publicly fixed prices, and there are very few private universities, with some notable exceptions. The business administration school HEC Paris, though a rarity, costs around €8,000 (\$11,000). In Germany, tuition fees in public universities are also very low; a full-year registration costs around €100 (\$140). Some countries have started to raise tuition fees, and their students pay €500 (\$700) per semester. In Italy, the tuition fees of Bologna University are €600 (\$832) for undergraduate studies and €900 (\$1,250) at the master's level.

In other European states, higher education is a little more expensive. In Spain, for instance, tuition fees for public universities range from €500 to €1,400 (from \$700 to \$2,000), and a private university charges an average of €10,000 (\$14,000). In the UK, public universities cost around €3,700 (\$5,000) for EU students. It is significant that the Conservative government of David Cameron wanted to double the 2012 tuition fees, a proposal that has caused violent riots and much furore. Europeans, simply put, do not want to pay more for higher education.

Europeans pay less for their education. This is certainly more attractive an option for students in the short run. However, some critics argue that paying for a service makes it more valuable.

European students who attend a public university may not realise the contribution taxpayers make on their behalf. They may take for granted their right to study and not recognise the substantial financial effort made by the community. From this point of view, the US system might be more fair and motivating to the students - especially to those who are paying the tuition themselves, as opposed to those who are being supported by their parents.

The debate is nevertheless open, as some consider that Europe should not give up the idea of higher education as a public service, and that more consideration needs to be given to the European notion of supporting the common good. Others believe that European governments should seek ways to allocate money in public education more efficiently, that is, giving public financial aid only to the students who cannot afford to pay. In the next subsection, the debate regarding market forces and higher education is analysed.

Market forces and higher education systems

Both US and European education experts have begun to debate the role of market forces in higher education. In Europe, after the implementation of the 1999 Bologna Process, it was expected that competitiveness among universities would increase, resulting in higher-performing institutions. The idea behind Bologna was to encourage institutions to respond to new trends by diversifying curricula and increasing the number of universities.

In the US, the idea that market forces influence higher education has been prevalent since the 1960s. Historically and to date, institutions that want to survive and thrive must be able to respond to a diversity of opinions on the goals and aims of higher education. People believe that higher education institutions are places to achieve and advance knowledge, but they also think that there must be a purpose or use for that knowledge. This is why today US institutions of higher education—as is also the case in Europe—must walk a fine line between individual and collective educational goals (Bowen 1999). It remains open whether a college education should be primarily focused on enabling students to obtain jobs, or whether education should also enable people to contribute to the greater good of society. The question arises whether a graduate should be a well-rounded individual who can contribute to civic life, or one who is specialised in his or her own area of choice. While an institution may produce graduates who are capable of getting jobs, whether those jobs will contribute to the economic viability of the nation as a whole is not clear.

As there is no centralised university system in the US, the institutions themselves must compete ‘in a series of markets for students, support, prestige, and faculty’ (Trow 1999, 12). This, in turn, requires the university to weigh competing opinions. Not just students, but policymakers, community residents (i.e. voters), politicians and business leaders all become consumers of university-made products. ‘Markets threaten the “cultural integrity” of cultural institutions by

increasing the power of consumers as over against producers —that is, as over against the people who are presumably most competent to supply some given kind of cultural entity, whether it be a performance of music or higher studies in philosophy or physics’ (13).

The example of Lawrence H. Summers² is quite significant. As Charles Ferguson, winner of an Oscar for Best Documentary in 2011 with *Inside Job* (2011), made clear, Summers was one of the key figures implicated in the 2008 financial crisis. Summers was influential in deregulating the financial sector (especially in the deregulation of derivatives contracts), due to his obvious and lucrative connections with Wall Street. As a consequence, he was forced to resign as president of Harvard in the wake of a no-confidence vote which occurred after he was found to have been responsible for making faulty investments of up to \$1 billion that Harvard will have to pay over the next 30–40 years.

To avoid extreme situation such as this, modern colleges and universities must make changes. In some ways, an identity crisis has arisen, as colleges try to ‘be all things to all people’. As a result, institutions grew dramatically in size and scope in the twentieth century—to the extent that former University of California president Clark Kerr (2001) called the modern institution a ‘multiversity’.

It is useful to look at the issue of quality in cases where an institution tries to cater to everyone. In the latest study of

² Chief Economist for the World Bank from 1991 to 1993, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States during the Clinton Administration (1999–2001), President of Harvard University from 2001 to 2006 and Director of the White House National Economic Council in the Obama Administration.

attitudes towards higher education (Immerwahr and Johnson 2009), a majority of people polled had a negative outlook on higher education. The authors note

Six out of 10 Americans now say that colleges today operate more like a business, focused more on the bottom line than on the educational experience of students. Further, the number of people who feel this way has increased by 5 percentage points in the last year alone, and is up by 8 percentage points since 2007. . . Together with other recent trends, these findings suggests that many Americans are becoming more sceptical about whether colleges and universities are doing all that they can to control costs and keep tuition affordable. It may also indicate that Americans will be increasingly less receptive to the argument that higher education institutions need more money to continue to provide high quality services ('Introduction').

What universities do with their resources is also problematic (McPherson and Winston 1999). For example, it is difficult to judge, based on the varied missions of US universities, whether an expensive private institution is worth the cost in comparison to a less expensive state institution. This brings up a third issue, according to the authors, and that is perception-of-quality criteria. For example, an 18-year-old new student may want to see new dormitories with maid service, and better food service options, whereas a student about to graduate may want access to professors and job fairs. Their parents, community leaders or politicians may all have different

priorities too. This point also alludes to the interplay between cost, quality and the oft-stated phrase ‘the cost for a year of college education’. Whether the cost is judged as reasonable or exorbitant will depend on one’s view of appropriate educational priorities.

One fact is that all institutions, regardless of size or history, will contend with some major issues in the coming years, in great part due to the global economic crisis. The next decade is projected to see some of the largest numbers of students matriculate to higher education, and with the growing changes in US demographics, universities will also see the greatest student diversity. Undergraduates will not only come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but from a variety of financial ones as well. Such numbers will require resources that may be hard to come by, especially for state-funded institutions.

From the state perspective, it’s not as if states are not extremely sympathetic to higher education. But when money gets tight, you’ve got a lot of things the money needs to go to—and a lot of questions are going to be asked about the performance of higher education. Like everyone, higher education will have to demonstrate more efficiencies’ (Wolverton 2008).

A recent report by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2009, 1) discusses the issue of affordability and public opinion: ‘The American people, according to recent public opinion research, believe that college access is declining;

that maintaining college opportunity and affordability is a crucial issue; and that colleges and universities will drive up tuition and spending rather than look to better ways to spend the money they have.’

The economic crisis may put universities in a double-bind—states will not be willing to provide additional resources, but at the same time will expect the economic engines of higher education to help pull the economy out of the recession. Wolverton (2008) quotes James J. Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan:

Aging populations are rapidly shifting the priority for state tax dollars away from education and toward the needs of the elderly. It seems quite likely that most public research universities will see stagnant or declining state support for as much as a generation. Yet they will also be expected by their states to expand enrolments to meet work-force needs and build competitive research programs to stimulate regional economic development. Oh, yes, they will also continue to be preyed upon by wealthy private universities attempting to raid their best faculty and students.

Should higher education be meritocratic?

In Europe, especially after the ‘French Revolution’ of May 1968, ‘egalitarianism’ has become the great principle in higher education. Egalitarian education does not mean that everybody

should be given the opportunity of having public education, but that everyone should be treated equally. The consequence of this principle is that elitism and meritocracy may be the most politically incorrect words in the European vocabulary. This is why some scholars complain that starting in the 1970s, the need to increase the number of students by all means has in many respects lowered the quality of universities.

One of the strong points of the US system is that it remains largely meritocratic. Colonial colleges began as very elitist institutions, and to be sure, there is still a degree of elitism in many institutions, especially those referred to as the Ivy League—many of which were the original colonial colleges. These are private institutions that have the highest requirements for admission, as well as the highest tuition fees.

Further, in the collective consciousness, the egalitarian notions of the US still hold in the mythic collective consciousness that anyone can become a billionaire, regardless of the institution he or she attended. However, others will be quick to point out that the same doors do not open to a graduate of a community college that open for one from Harvard. An analysis done for this paper showed that 78% of the CEOs of the Fortune Top 50 companies were educated at institutions classified as having a high or very high research focus, and of those, 17% were also Ivy League graduates (four were educated outside of the US). There are great differences in access and quality that cannot

be separated from sociocultural factors such as class level, race, linguistic difference, family legacy and educational preparation at the precollegiate level. Elitism is tempered to some degree by competition and by the aforementioned market forces, as well as the incredible diversity of types of institutions available to students, such as community colleges and vocational schools, and various forms of financial aid. In addition, there are federal, state, local and college-based programmes that attempt to help students make the transition from high school to college and to provide support services that will enable them to graduate, including Upward Bound, a federally funded programme providing tutoring and other support for first-generation, low-income students.

In part to ensure better access and equity for all, the past decade has seen an increase in federal involvement and oversight (but not necessarily federal funding) in higher education, and there appears to be no sign of it letting up. For example, the *Student-Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act* of 1990 required colleges and universities to report data on campus security policies; crime statistics; procedures for allocating financial aid; student athletes assisted by aid; graduation rates; cost of attendance, including tuition, fees, books, supplies, room and board, and travel; and standards and services for students with disabilities. *The Higher Education Opportunity Act* of 2008 required universities 'to set annual cost reduction benchmarks, report their reasons for tuition increases, list textbook costs for each course, report their use of endowment funds to reduce the cost of

their programs, and provide a web-based calculator that allows the public to estimate the annual and total costs of college.’ The government did not, however, give the states any money to offset the costs of compiling all of this information (Cohen and Kisker 2010, ‘Finance’).

Nevertheless, the tendency to extend higher education for all is not only European. It has also affected to a large extent higher education in the US, with the perverse effect that, as more people attend university, higher education degrees may be less valuable in the labour market. College students pay a large amount of money, oftentimes borrowed, because they think that they will earn more with a university degree and that they will easily pay back their loans. Workers with a bachelor’s degree can expect to earn \$20,000 more in annual salary than those with only a high school diploma. However, in many occupations, real rises in wages may now require a master’s degree, due to the proliferation of undergraduate degrees.

One possible solution is to push ‘technical education’ after high school. Trade schools in the US are an attractive option to students who do not want to spend four years in college to get a job. On average, technical schools in Europe lead more easily to a job than do universities. Government efforts should therefore try to orient more and more students towards alternatives to university education only, with less cost, immediate integration in the labour market and the possibility of later joining classic higher education institutions, if they so wish.

The purpose of higher education

One of the reasons elite US Ivy League and top-tier universities, those leading the Shanghai rankings, have more money to spend is that research is often the highest priority, and this can lead to lucrative federal, state or private foundation grants. However, a focus on research can lead to short-changing the importance of instruction and other educational goals. In this sense, the former president of Harvard, Derek Bok (2005), contends that there needs to be improvement in a graduate's ability to critically think and write, and that students should direct their curriculum to the need to interact and think 'in a world in which their country will be increasingly influenced by other countries and cultures' (312).

European universities have been traditionally more focused on instruction. This may be construed as a problem insofar as the instructional side of the university is most oriented to satisfying the demands of the labour market. Higher education should obviously enable students to have good jobs, but instruction is a much larger notion. It should aim to form individuals with a clear vision of themselves and of the society they are living in. However, this is not the direction that the Bologna Process is taking, as the only goal that it is concerned with so far is integration into the labour market. If this is the case, in a relatively short period most higher education students in Europe will be 'uneducated.' As Newman (2000, 6) suggests, 'the dominance of this reading of European higher education leaves limited space for alternative understandings of higher

educational objectives, such as non productive research, socializing studies “to the life of the mind”, personal enrichment and the simple satisfaction of curiosity.’

So, it can be said that at this point there needs to be a balance. Students need to leave university with the ability to look at reality and to analyse it, while adapting to new situations. Higher education should also help individuals to become more reflective and better able to adapt to new realities, in addition to learning how to deal with adversity.

Discussion and recommendations

Since 1999, European Union educational authorities have striven to make the European system of higher education homogeneous and competitive worldwide. They want students from all over the world to study in Europe, as they have been doing in the US for quite some time. This view assumes that globalisation is creating a world market for universities and that Europe should be part of it.

In fact, Europe's presence in the world's higher education market should be of major interest to the US educational authorities. Pragmatic Americans are aware that the new goals of European higher education will give Europe a competitive edge. Therefore, they are very interested in tracking the development and, more importantly, the results of this new model. Hartmann (2010, 213) makes a poignant remark about this and explains the importance of the Lisbon Convention for the Americans:

The major framework of the Bologna process to facilitate mutual recognition of higher education qualifications is the Convention for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the European region, which was signed in Lisbon April 1997 (hereafter the Lisbon Convention). Through this convention, a joint effort between UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the parties tried to develop common standards in the higher education sector

without delegating further competence to the supranational framework of the EU. The interesting part is that the convention has also been signed by the USA, Canada and Australia. The choice for UNESCO has introduced a transatlantic dimension into the European recognition regime. Something even more extraordinary if we take into consideration that the US at the moment of the signature of the Lisbon Convention in 1997 was not a member of UNESCO, as President Reagan forced the withdrawal of the United States from this organization in 1983. The signature of the USA in 1997 indicates the clear interest of Americans in being part of the European higher education reforms.

In light of the above, it is clear that the European and US system of higher education can become educational reference points at the international level.

The final sub-section sums up the strength and weaknesses of both systems. It looks at what Europeans can learn from the US experience and vice versa.

What Europeans can learn from the American system of higher education

- **Deciding what to study, or, how to motivate university students:**

Traditionally, Americans do better than Europeans in terms of the percentage of the population that goes to university. Nevertheless, Europe has improved a lot since the 1968 revolution. In Spain, for instance, the number of university students per capita rose from 1% to 4% of the overall population in 30 years (from 360,000 in the academic year 1970–1, from a population of 34 million people, to 1,580,000 in 1999–2000, from a population of 40.5 million). In France, figures are similar, as the number of university students rose from 300,000 in 1968 to 1,515,000 in the academic year 2001–2. After implementing the Bologna Process, what European universities tend to do is not so much increase the number of students but try to diversify academic offerings, to avoid having an ‘excess’ of diplomas provoke a devaluation of university degrees.

If traditionally more Americans than Europeans go to university, this is in part due to the fact that in the US higher education starts with four general years of college. Choosing a profession is often done at the postgraduate level. Additionally, ‘taking a year off’ before starting college

is never frowned upon as a means of gaining real-world experience. This 'one-year gap' affords students the opportunity to mature and to consider if and when they may want to pursue a college degree. As a result, in the US system of higher education it is easier for students to find a motivating higher education option, according to their interests and capacities.

European higher education should strive to increase the level of motivation for university students. Having to choose an occupation right after high school is often bad for motivation, as most young students do not know what to choose as their career when they get to the higher education level. Adopting the US model of higher education would enable the European higher education system to improve considerably in this respect.

- **Realising the cost of education:**

In Europe, higher education is still largely considered a public service. According to welfare state principles, public opinion, and therefore politicians, still holds that a public higher education system is good, because it is socially fair; the criteria for admission to a university ought not be based on financial status; intellect is what counts. Public education nevertheless has the inconvenience that most European students take for granted that they have 'the right to study'; in many cases they become 'perpetual students', as there are no time limitations for graduation, and it does not cost them much to remain at university. In fact, many do not realise the real cost of the higher education that taxpayers

are providing, and are therefore less motivated to complete their studies than if they had to pay the whole cost of tuition themselves. This is why they often do not 'give it their all', instead taking advantage of the fact that public money is being used to support their education. Students who have to pay for everything involved in earning a college degree are likely to put greater effort into studying. They are usually more motivated and consequently work harder. European higher education authorities should be more concerned about spending public money wisely and effectively and making students share, even moderately, the cost of higher education, as a way of motivating them and of reducing the public deficit.

- **A more interactive and effective education:**

Traditionally, US higher education has been more concerned than European education about connecting higher education with the labour market. This is why US higher education professors have the reputation of better motivating their students. If studies remain too general, students may disconnect from reality, especially if professors tend to repeat the same ideas and the same methods every year during their careers. In terms of 'keeping with the new', US professors have done much better than their European counterparts. It is quite common for them to change subjects and prepare new courses several times over a teaching career. Being concise and making a class relevant to the world of the students is more motivating and encourages students to learn more efficiently.

There is, therefore, a need to preserve the idea of a general approach to teaching, while infusing it with more practicality and motivation. It is auspicious that one of the main points in the Bologna Declaration concerns finding a way of achieving a more creative and interactive teaching approach, based not on general lectures but on the Socratic and case method.

- **Connecting instruction with research:**

One of the reasons that American professors of higher education are able to motivate their students better than European professors is that they tend to be good researchers. One of the main differences between US and European universities is that, in the former, research constitutes the greater part of their activities. In Europe, things are slightly different. Following tradition, European universities' main objective is still instruction. Research has not usually been done at universities. It has been conducted by private companies or national programmes, or been publicly financed, as occurred in France during the de Gaulle years (1958–69), when the state paid researchers in key areas such as nuclear energy, the military and the aeronautical industry.

Things are nevertheless changing, and research is now becoming part of higher education, first, because an increasing share of the university income comes from research through programmes financed by the European Union, and second, because research is becoming the only way to get tenured as a professor. This is a positive development, as professors who do not

participate in research activities lose touch with the novelties and progress being made in their field of study. Teaching well requires being aware of the changes occurring in the field of instruction, and this is where research plays a key role.

What Americans can learn from the European system of higher education

- **Vocational training as an alternative to higher education:**
If the majority of young Europeans still does not attend university, it is because Europe has developed a system of good vocational training that directly prepares high school students to enter a trade or occupation. France, for instance, has vocational schools (lycées professionnels) that enable high school students to join the job market as plumbers, carpenters, salespeople and artisans. Two-thirds of 14-year-old high school students in France initially choose vocational training. Some of these workers choose to attend university later, after some years of job experience, and they become highly motivated students.

In the US, the high cost of university studies and the fact that a college degree no longer guarantees a job help to explain why old 'trade schools', also called vocational or career schools, are becoming increasingly an option in America for students who wish to be trained in an occupation outside of academia.

- **Keeping higher education as a public service:**
In the United States, higher education is largely a private matter. Students are expected to finance most of the cost of education, but this financing is considered an investment, as higher education leads students to better jobs than for

those who have not been to college. Higher education definitely has a commercial value. A private approach to higher education is good, as long as students are aware of the costs and motivate themselves accordingly. But the total privatisation of the educational sector would create serious problems. Financing the cost of higher education through loans puts more and more young professionals in a difficult position, as it becomes harder and harder to pay college debts. This is why the US public is now less convinced that it is worth spending a lot of money on education. Having a lot of debt during a period of recession can cause problems for the individual in question. The other risk of private higher education is that it easily becomes essentially a business in which the only aim of universities is to make money.

It is essential to have access to private funding without compromising the liberty inherent in teaching and learning, as often happens when private money is involved. Universities should work with the private sector, but not as commercial entities that play solely by market rules. Universities should be independent of economic powers, maintaining the goal of instructing students as thinking persons and not only as consumers. The logic of the market should not determine the essential principles and aims of higher education. This why public—and therefore more affordable for students—education is becoming a more attractive option in the US. Undoubtedly, it is important to keep the doors of institutions of higher learning open to bright, low-income students. State and

public authorities should be able to help these students financially, through direct funding (grants) or soft loans with low interest rates.

- **Developing the student's intellectual capacities:**

The European model of higher education was, for a long time, the Humboldt model of university education that started in Berlin and spread through Germany from the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1930s, when Hitler took power. According to this model, learning and teaching in university were done essentially through a general and theoretical approach that was aimed at developing the intellectual maturity of students. Practical aspects of job finding came after college, and usually, specific training was accomplished by employers. Education served also to rank students, to select the good ones, giving thereby a reference for one's career. In a fast-changing world, this university model is again becoming extremely useful, as helping students to develop their intellectual capacities and broaden their cultural references and framework enable them to critically analyse the world around them and to face unexpected obstacles and challenges.

- **Connecting research with instruction:**

As research becomes a substantial part of the activity of university professors, the emphasis on instruction may be lost. Universities are obsessed with fundraising, and professors know that if they want to be tenured they have to spend most of their time doing research. Professors

no longer want to teach, as they do not earn credits for teaching. The lack of research focus is aggravated by the fact that applied research is becoming disconnected from the real needs of the economy. If traditionally this kind of research was conducted by large companies that were willing to spend a great deal of money on new technologies to increase their market, this is no longer the rule, now that the productive economy has been displaced by a virtual economy. The aims of research have therefore changed completely. Now, it is oriented towards objectives defined by companies, according to their marketing strategies. The danger is that this kind of research is not always connected with reality, and therefore the teaching value of research disappears.

Research should play an important part in higher education institutions, but instruction should still be the cornerstone of teaching. Again, general values and principles of higher education should not be dictated by the market. It is becoming more important to also improve the intellectual abilities of students in order to facilitate their understanding of the fast-changing world.

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